

Introduction to Charcoal

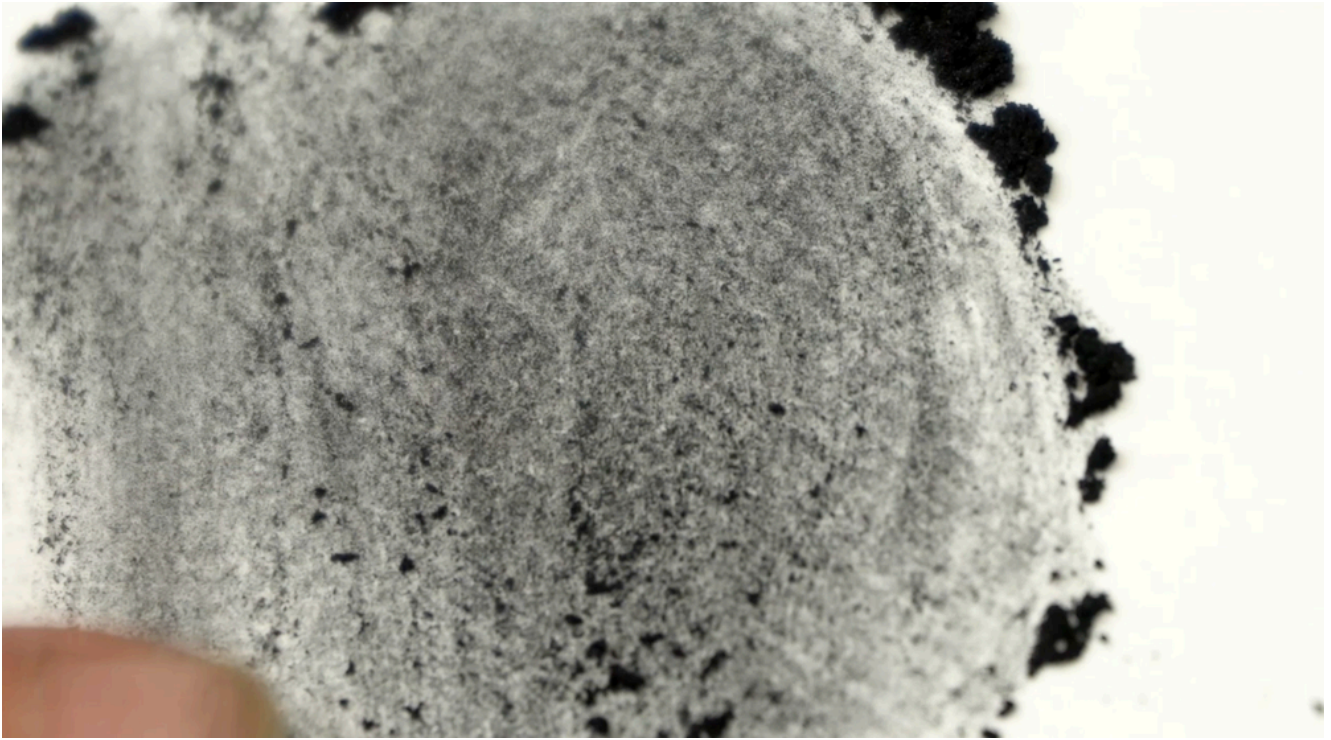
By [Lancelot Richardson](#)

In this video artist and tutor Lancelot Richardson takes us through three types of charcoal: Willow, compressed and pencil. Watch this video to find out how different types of charcoal have different uses and can achieve a range of exciting and dynamic marks.

Charcoal is a black media made of carbon from burning wood and it comes in a few different forms. Common forms include willow charcoal, compressed charcoal, and charcoal pencils. (Left to right)



Charcoal does come in other forms, such as powder or inks.



Charcoal is made by burning wood in a way that preserves its structure. This is done using a special kiln. Charcoal is one of the oldest drawing mediums and simple forms of charcoal have been found in cave art at around 30,000 years ago.



Rabah Al Shammery on Unsplash - Cave paintings from Ha'il [northwest of the Arabian Peninsula]

It has been used for drawing and creating sketches ever since, like this little sketch of a cup.



Wolfgang Huber - Eight-Sided Cup (1513) – Cleveland Museum of Art

Charcoal is very versatile. It can make many different marks. It's very malleable. It can be used for sketching or for bigger projects, like producing large drawings or creating planning sketches for our work.



This planning sketch for a painting shows it is easy to change or add and remove elements. It will leave pale marks when it's erased. Charcoal can potentially make really large marks and

suits medium and large drawings in particular. It is also very dark, so it creates great contrast.



Elephants in Combat (early 1800s, India (Rajasthan, Kotah)) – New York MET



Louise B. Maloney - An Italian Hilltown, Anticoli, Italy (1930) - Cleveland Museum of Art

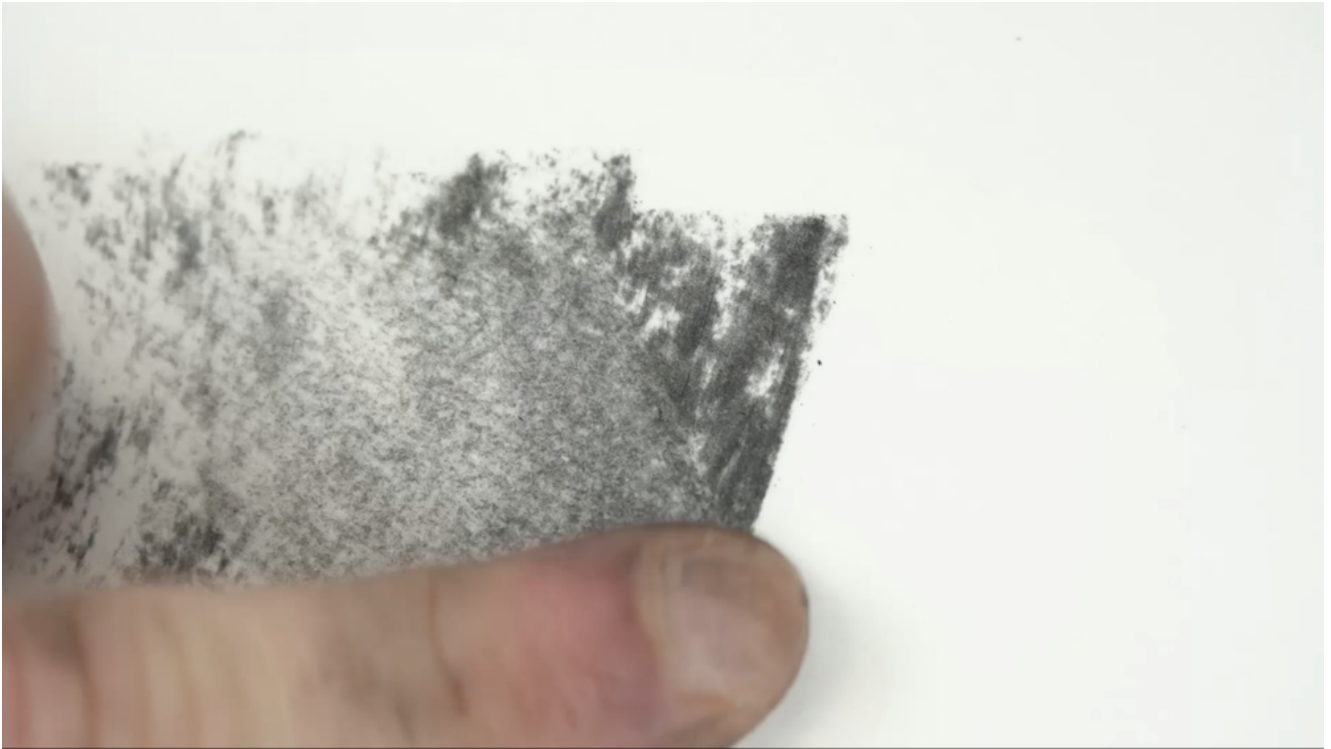
The three most common types of charcoal are willow charcoal, compressed charcoal, and charcoal pencils.

Willow Charcoal



Willow charcoal is made from sticks from the willow tree that are burned incompletely. We can sometimes still see it's like a stick. It is very soft and malleable, so it's really good for a wide range of uses, especially sketching. It's much darker than a pencil, but it's less dark than other forms of charcoal. We can create a lot of different marks with it, such as by using the tip, turning it on its side, and smudging as well. Because it's made from sticks, it comes in lots of different thicknesses.

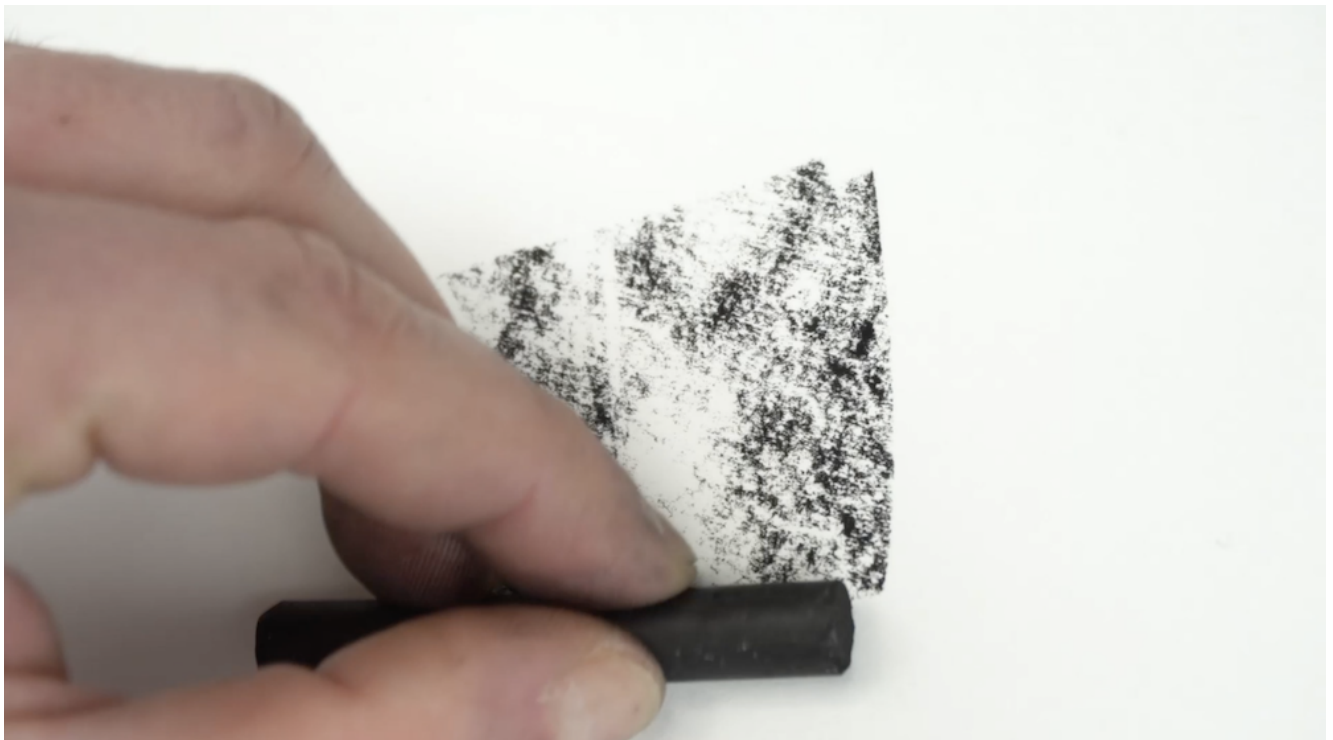




Compressed Charcoal



Compressed charcoal uses charcoal that has been ground up and it's mixed with something to bind it together and then compressed into a stick or block. It is firmer and much darker than willow, with a very similar feel to chalk. It is great for making very dark black tone and produces really bold marks. You can draw different marks with the tip and the sides. It's more permanent than willow charcoal, but it will still smudge a bit.





Charcoal

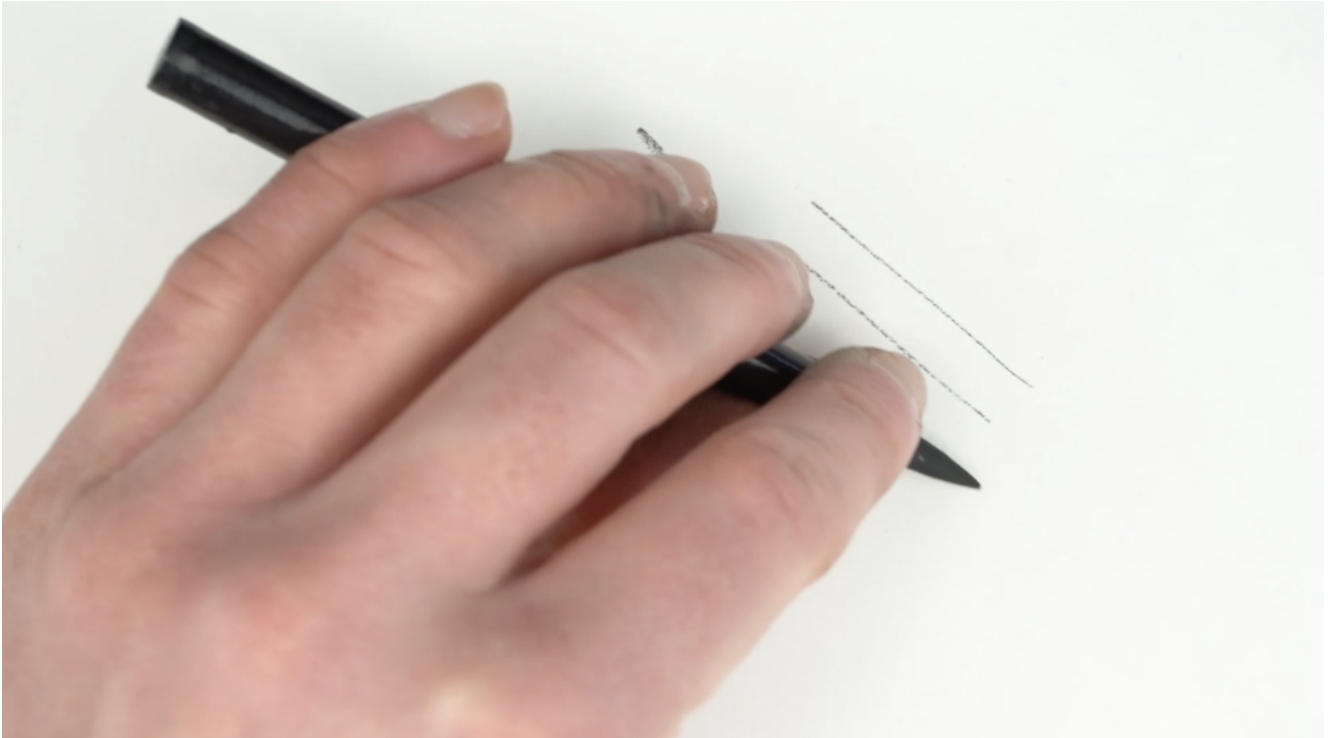
Pencils



Charcoal pencils are similar to compressed charcoal, using ground up charcoal mixed with something to hold it together and it's now bound up into a pencil as well. Charcoal pencils are firmer and quite dark. They're good for making thinner, more precise, or detailed marks, but you can create a lot of different marks by using the side of the pencil too.



Try to experiment by holding the pencil in lots of different ways, such as holding it like a drum stick or holding it sideways. This allows us to make different marks.



Charcoal readily combines with other drawing or painting media. With other dry media, one option is to layer it on top and it can also draw very well on anything that's dry as well,

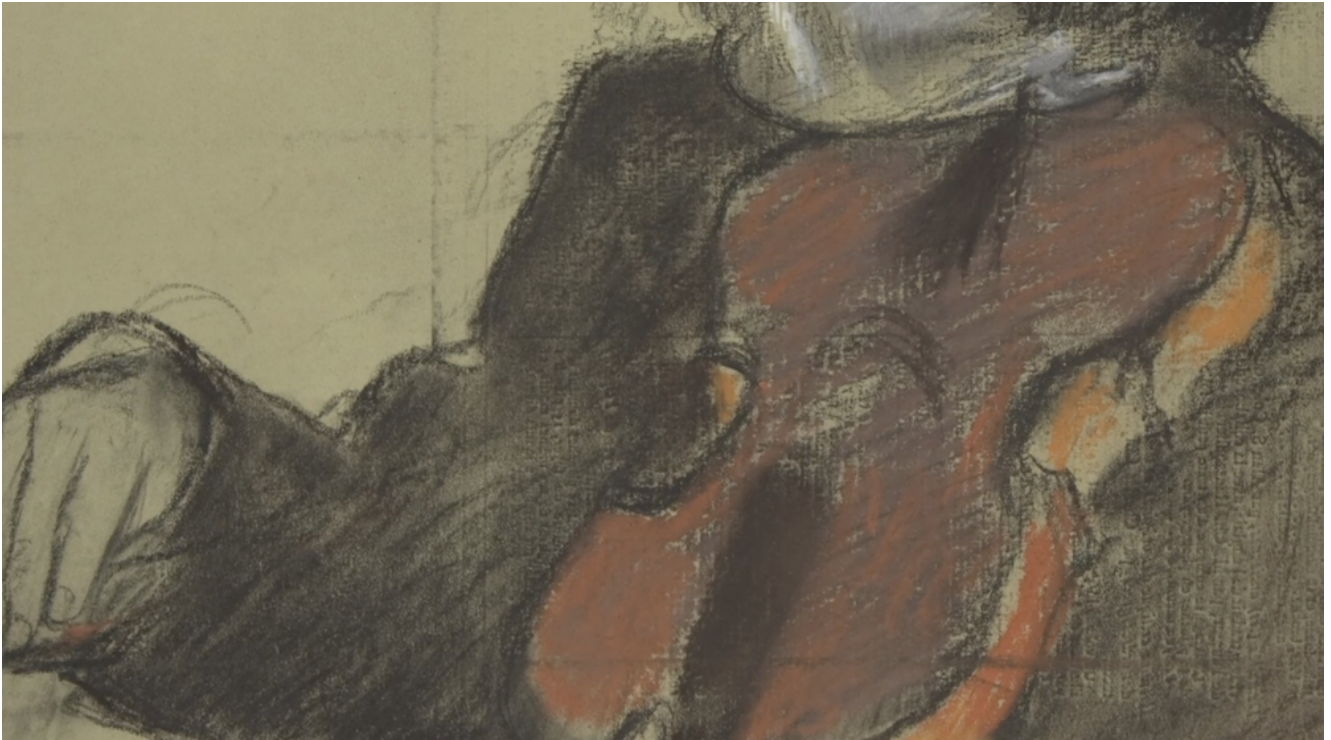
like ink or watercolour that's dried out. Charcoal can also be rubbed into the paper and layered with lines and other marks on top.



This example by Degas uses pastel on top of charcoal that has been rubbed into the page. Charcoal goes particularly well on coloured papers, especially with a little bit of white chalk or paint.



Edgar Degas - Violinist, Study for "The Dance Lesson" (1878-9) New York MET



If charcoal gets wet using water or ink, it can bleed and is good for expressive effects.



Have fun experimenting and enjoy your journey of charcoal!

This is a sample of a resource created by UK Charity AccessArt. We have over 1500 resources to help develop and inspire your creative thinking, practice and teaching.

AccessArt welcomes artists, educators, teachers and parents both in the UK and overseas.

We believe everyone has the right to be creative and by working together and sharing ideas we can enable everyone to reach their creative potential.

How To Assess Creativity: Part One

How To Assess Creativity: Part Two

Green Thumbs

**Which Artists: Andrew
Amondson**

Which Artists: Tatyana Antoun

**What We Like About This
Resource...**

“The research phase of a creative project can be presented in many different ways, and can even be an art form in itself. Here, Tatyana demonstrates how her sketchbooks became a medium through which she expressed her thoughts, refined her ideas and

explored materials. We believe sketchbooks to be a powerful tool for children to take ownership of their ideas and travel on their own creative journey, without necessarily knowing the destination. Take a look at our [sketchbook journey](#) for more sketchbook inspiration” – Rachel, AccessArt.

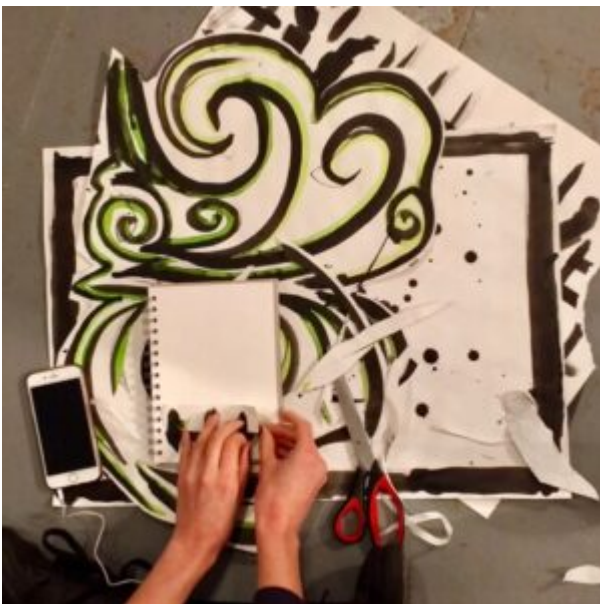
You Might Also Like...



[Sketchbooks and Thinking Skills](#)



Sketchbooks for Designers – an Introduction for Children



Using Sketchbooks to Take Ownership of Ideas

Which Artists: Merlin Evans

What We Love About This Resource...

So often, we hear talk of the distinction between science and art, and no more so when teenagers proceed through their education and they are encouraged to choose one route or another. In reality, creative thinking helps scientific understanding and a scientific approach can inform and inspire art.

It's so refreshing to read and see Merlin's experience and understand how she works between these two areas – in her words *"mixing subjects, and seeing how they work and intersect is where inventions take place!"*

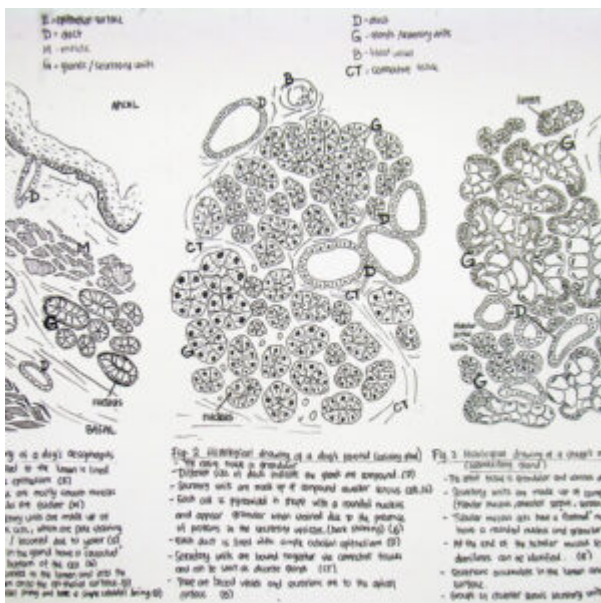
We also love the way her work embraces the *felt* world of being human, as well as the *known* world. We're sure many young people will find Merlin's work of interest and reassuring when they are pressured to choose *"art or science"*.

You May Also Like...

Drawing for Learning



Drawing as a Way of Understanding



Drawing as a Way of Understanding



Home Made Inks

Printmaking By Scarlett Rebecca

How I Use Sketchbooks & Drawing

Kitchen Lithography

See This Resource Used In
Schools...







**How Do We Look At
Contemporary Sculpture: Meg
Klosterman**

**How Do We Look At
Contemporary Sculpture: Mel
Woo**

**How Do We Look At
Contemporary Sculpture:
Victoria Rotaru**

Creating Repeat Patterns With

Rachel Parker

What We Like About This Resource...

“This is a great activity for really tuning into colour and shape. The process is ultimately quite a refined one (ie making a pattern balanced and repeated ‘correctly’) – but there’s plenty of scope for exploring pattern in a more experiential way prior to the refinement page. Try one of the recommended resources below to introduce pattern and begin with some open ended activities to build skill and confidence.” – Andrea, AccessArt

You Might Also Like...

Pathway: Exploring pattern



[This is featured in the 'Exploring Pattern' pathway](#)

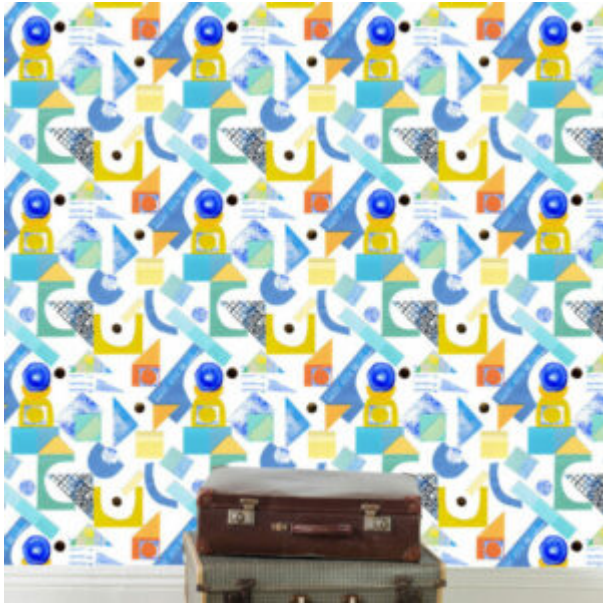
Talking points: Andy Gilmore



talking points: Louise Despont



Inspired by Rachel Parker



Teachers Explore Pattern, Shape and Texture



Block Printing Repeat Patterns



AccessArt's Prompt Cards for Making

You Might Also Like...

Pathway: Music and art



[This is featured in the 'Music and Art' pathway](#)

Pathway: Playful Making



[This resource is featured in the 'Playful Making' pathway](#)

Manipulating Paper



Cardboard Sculptures



The Chair and Me



Still Life Compositions: Inspired by Cezanne

What We Like About This Resource...

"This activity walks through a number of different processes and taps into multiple skills. This provides a rich exploratory project for children to fully immerse themselves in. Cezanne was the focus artist for this project, but other contemporary still life painters could be used as starter inspiration. We actually advocate showing the work of more than one artist as this builds

knowledge of how approaches to painting, drawing etc differ. This also helps children move towards a personal response rather than creating a 'copy' of one particular artist's work" – Rachel, AccessArt

You Might Also Like...

Pathway: Exploring Still Life



[This is featured in the 'Explore Still Life' pathway](#)

Talking Points: Paul Cezanne



talking points: Contemporary still life



talking points: Flemish and Dutch Still Life Painters



Remembrance Day Peg Soldiers

What We Like About This Resource...

"It's great to see a different approach to thinking about remembrance day. These peg soldiers are a refreshing alternative to artwork inspired by poppies. The processes involved encourage children to focus on fine motor skills: wrapping embroidery thread around the peg and creating small detailed clothes and helmets. These dolls look particularly effective when standing as a collection and would make a poignant alternative to a standard display board" – Rachel, AccessArt

See This Resource Used In Schools...



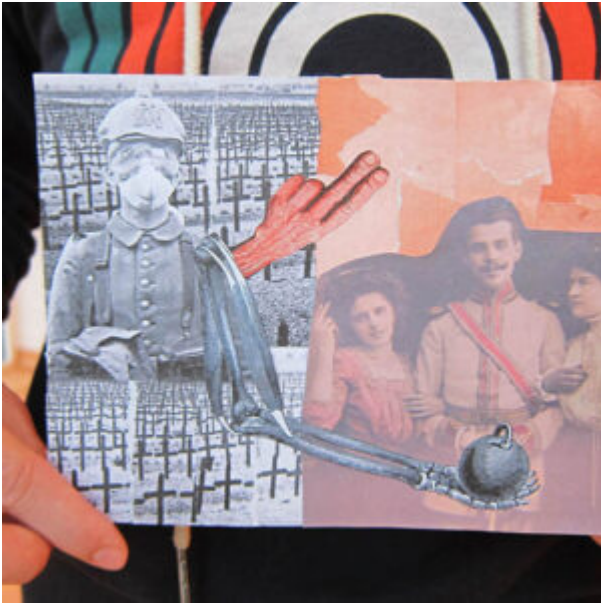
You Might Also Like...



An Exploration of Paul Nash



For Remembrance Day



World War 1 Mail Art

Make First

Making A Banner At Woking College

What We Like About This

Resource...

Working collaboratively towards a shared aim provides an alternative experience to working on individual projects. Creating together encourages listening, peer feedback and creative problem solving – all of which are hugely valuable in all areas of education” – *Rachel, AccessArt*

You May Also Like...



[Animal Habitat Mural](#)



Collaborative Public Mural



Mural and Workshop Project