

Introduction to Charcoal

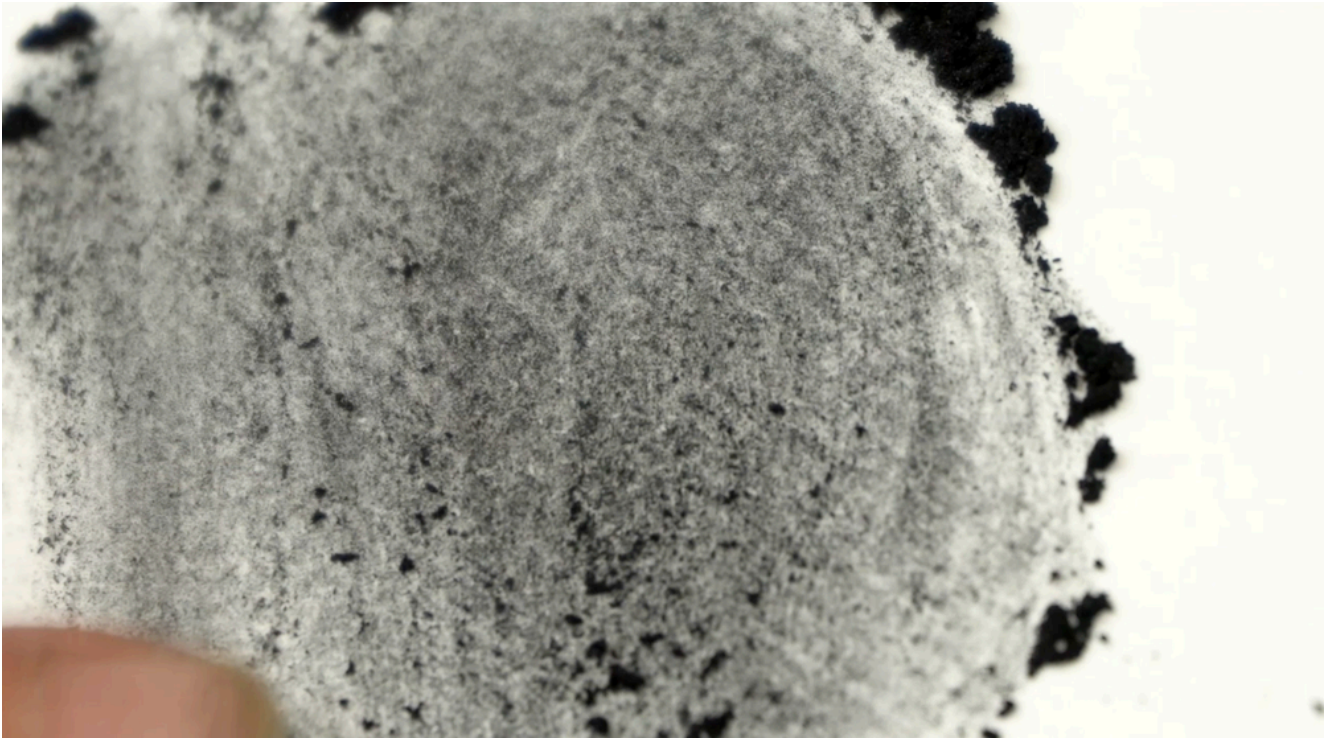
By [Lancelot Richardson](#)

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

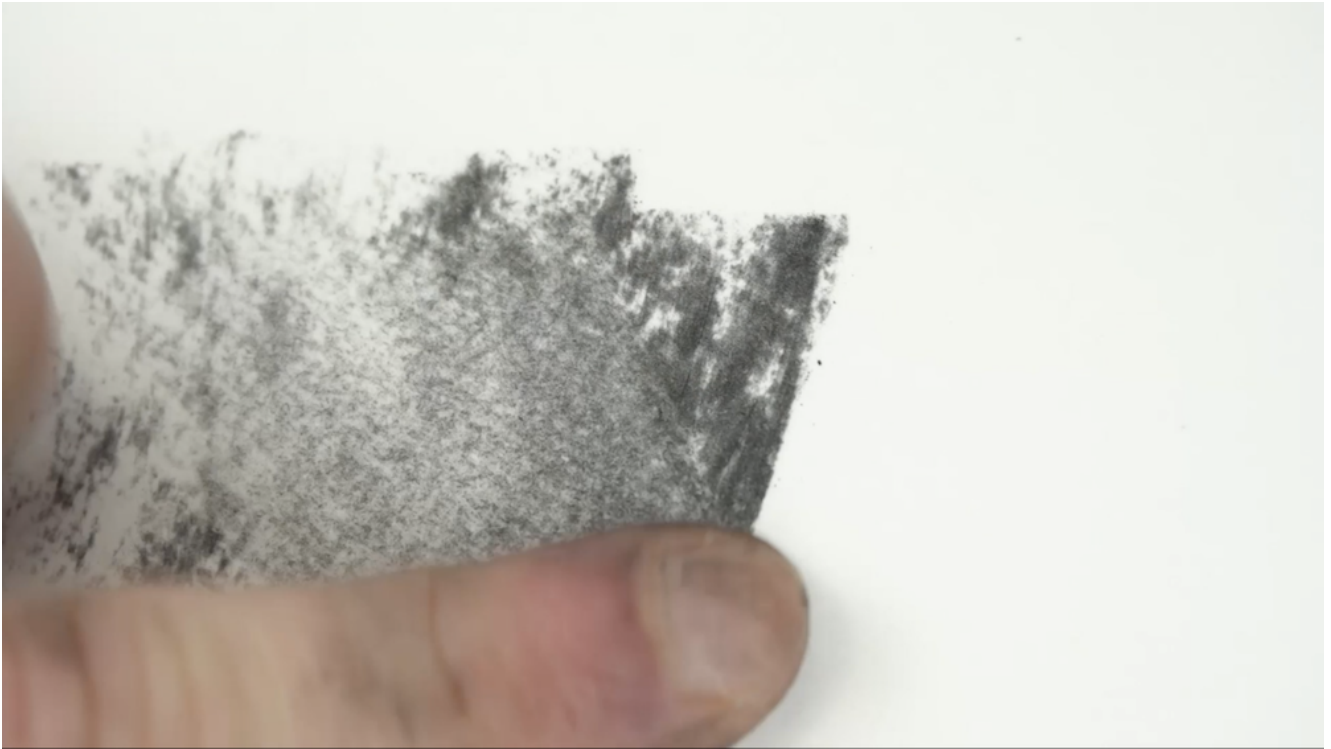
The three most common types of charcoal are willow charcoal, compressed charcoal, and charcoal pencils.

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.

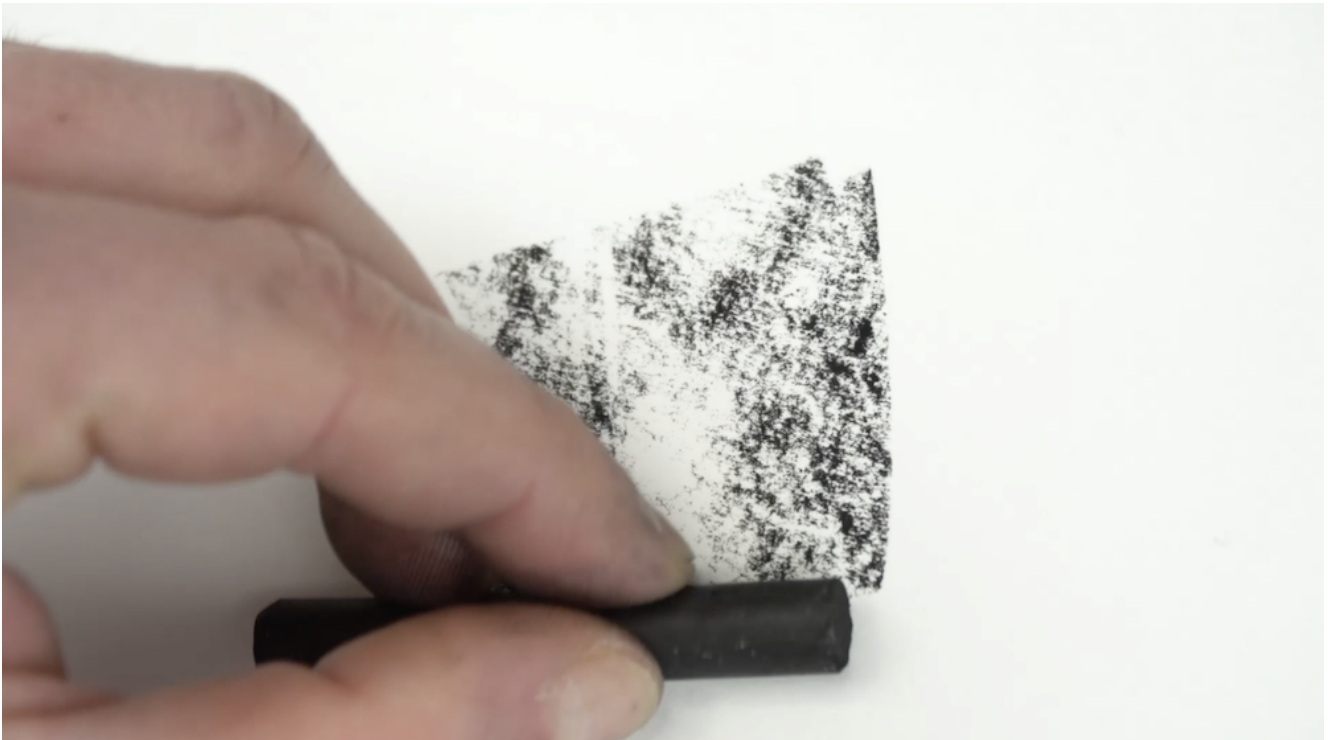




Compressed Charcoal



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

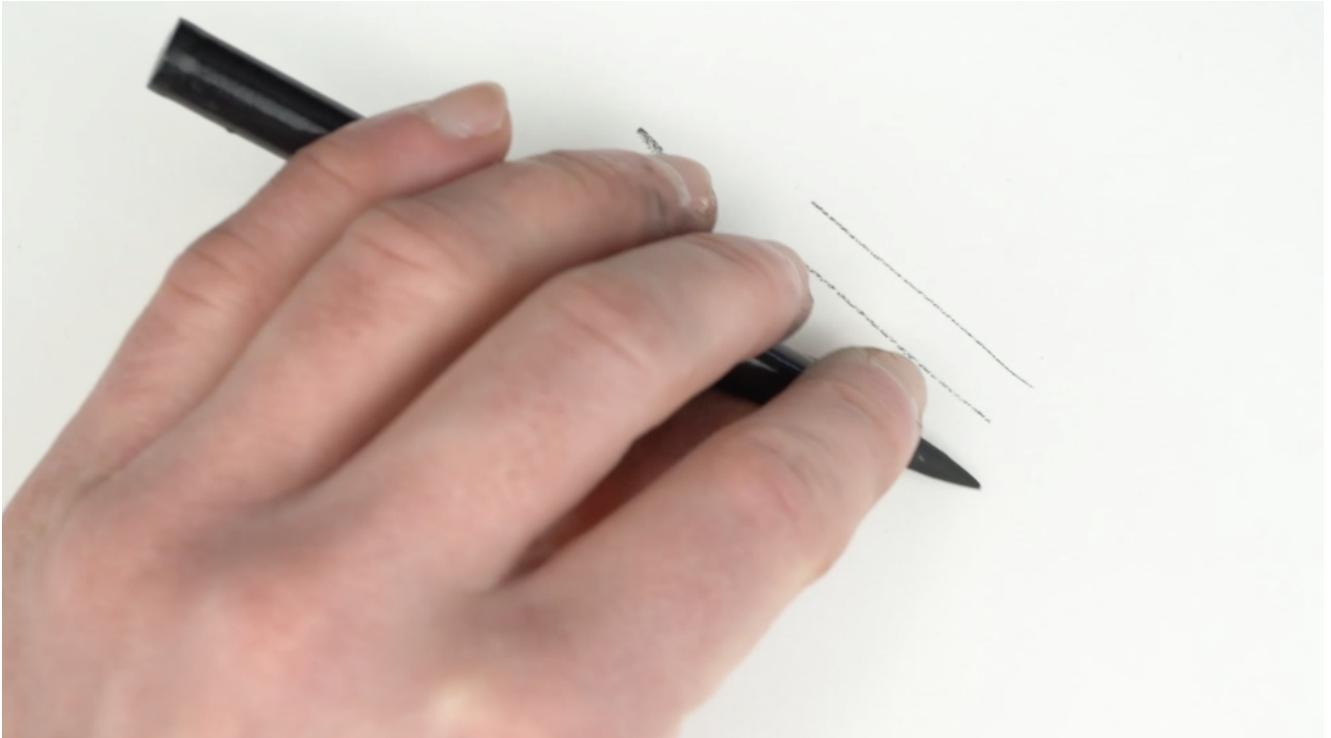
Pencils



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,

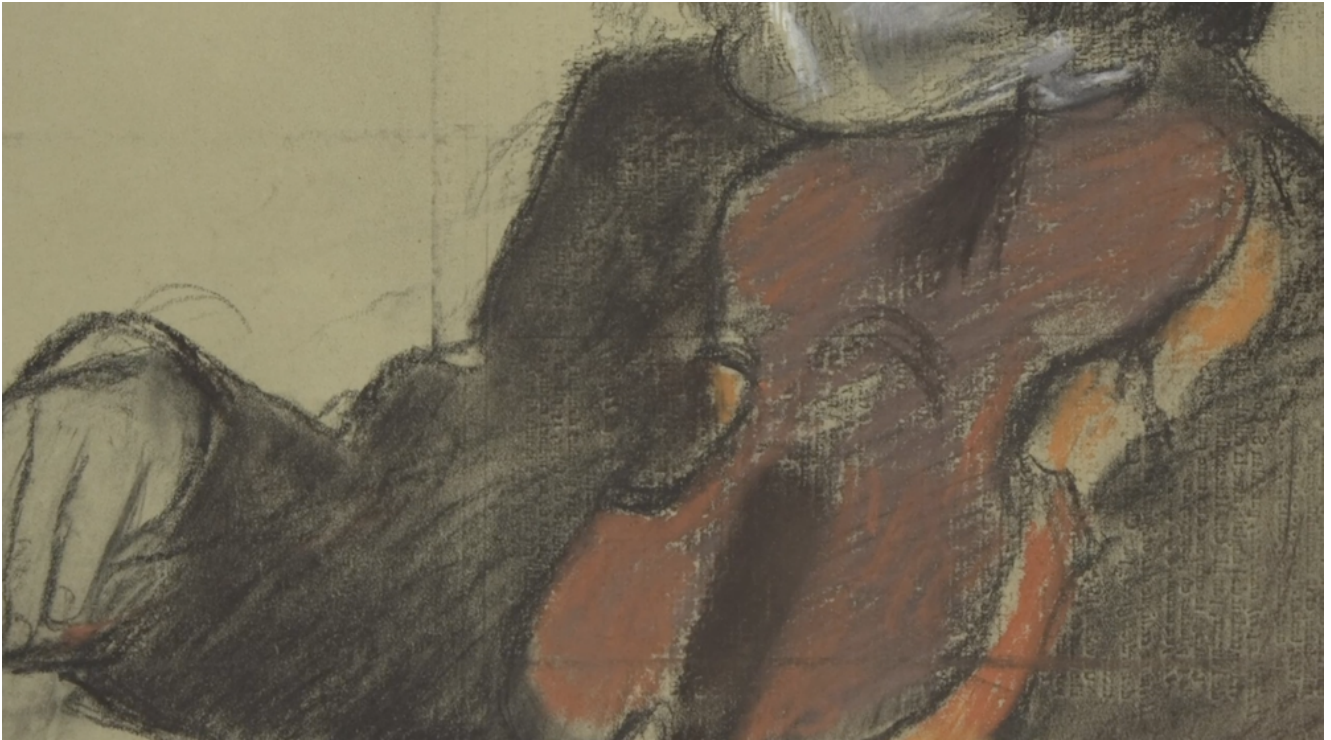
like ink or watercolour that's dried out. Charcoal can also be rubbed into the paper and layered with lines and other marks on top.



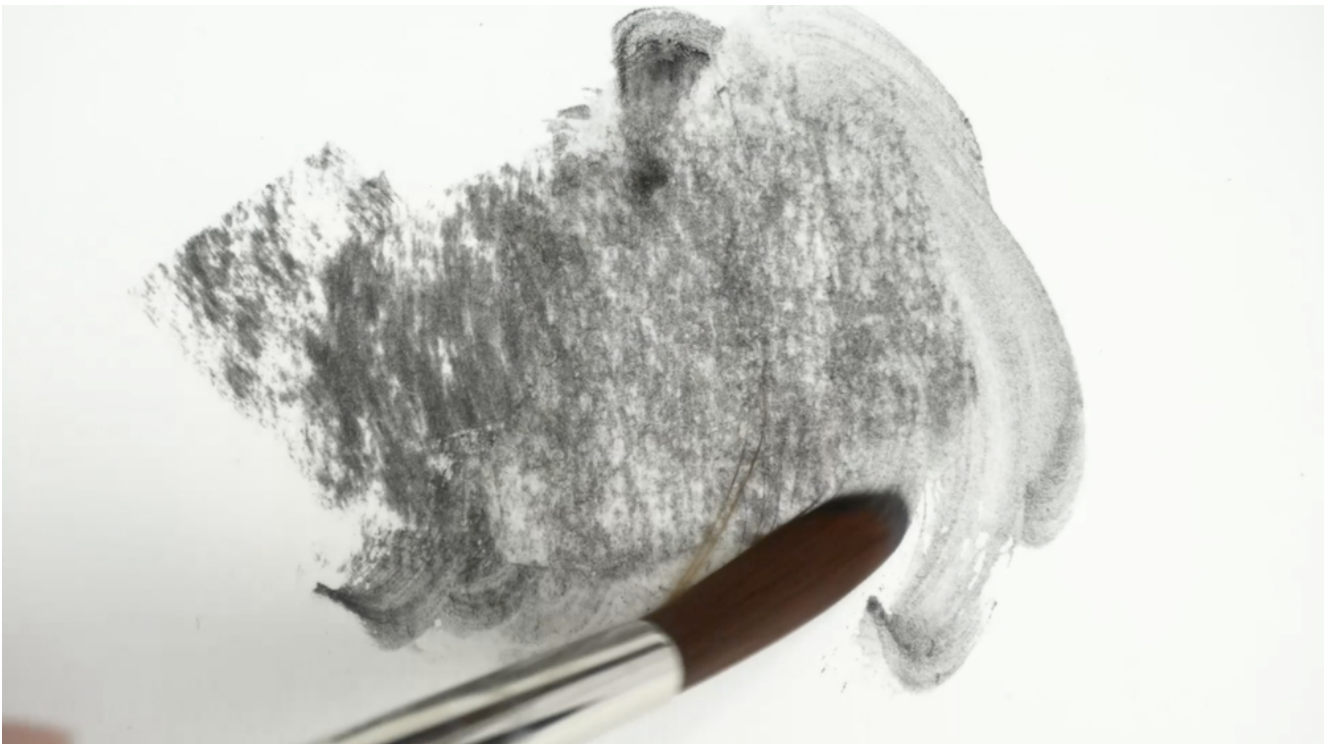
This example by Degas uses pastel on top of charcoal that has been rubbed into the page. Charcoal goes particularly well on coloured papers, especially with a little bit of white chalk or paint.



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!

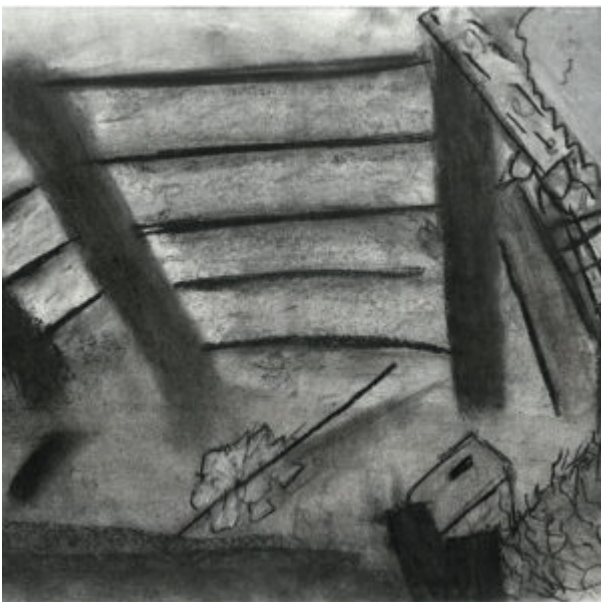
This is a sample of a resource created by UK Charity AccessArt. We have over 1500 resources to help develop and inspire your creative thinking, practice and teaching.

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.

World War 1 And The Work Of Paul Nash

See This Resource Used In Schools...





Home Made Inks

The AccessArt Drawing Journey for Primary Children: Aims and Intent

Key Concepts for Primary Schools in Drawing for ages 5 to 7

Key Concepts for Primary Schools in Drawing for ages 7 to 9

Key Concepts for Primary Schools in Drawing for Ages 9 to 11

What Is A Drawing Tool?

What Is The Purpose of Drawing?

What Is Drawing?

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
Cezanne

Points: Paul



talking points:
Contemporary still life



talking points: **Flemish**

and Dutch Still Life Painters



World War I Mail Art

What We Like About This Resource...

“This project links poignant subject matter with meaningful art processes and local history. What we learn about the re purposing of materials, (in this case spent ammunition) re affirms how we can use what is around us as a starting point to making and creating. You could extend or adapt this project by looking at broken pottery, re purposing that into new sculptures that link with Roman or other local historical cultures” – *Rachel, AccessArt*

You May Also
Like...



Henry Moore's Shelter Drawings



Remembrance Day Soldiers



For Remembrance Day

Which Artists:
Claire Harrup

What We Like About This Resource...

“We really enjoyed reading about the process of creating art work according to a design brief and how the experience of this differs to when an artist begins with their own idea or concept. That’s not to say an artist can’t approach a brief with their own individual style and ideas, but what this post shows us is that there can be a balance between the two. This would be a great resource to show older KS pupils who may be beginning to consider their options beyond Primary School”.

– *Rachel, AccessArt*

You Might Also Like...

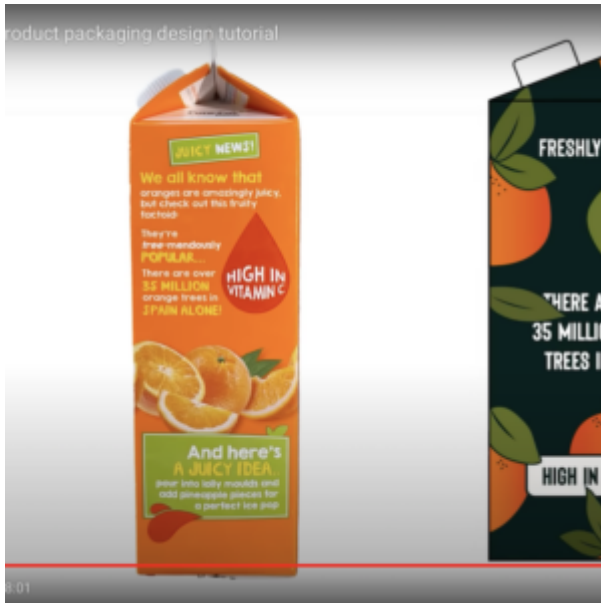
Pathway: 2D Drawing to 3D Making



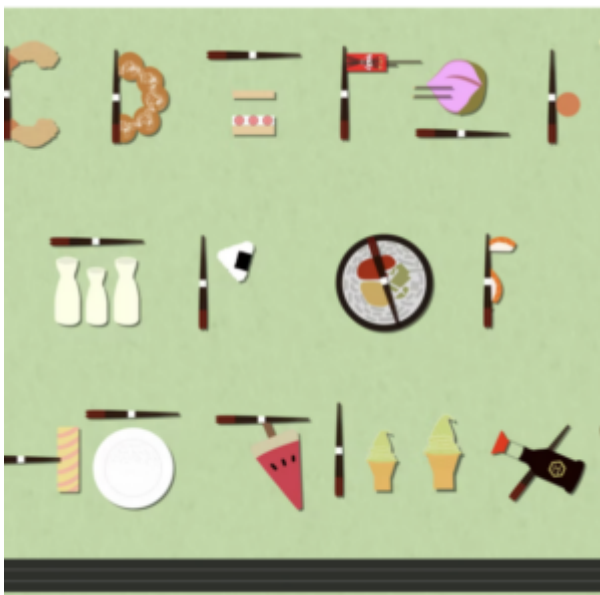
**This is featured in the
'2D Drawing to 3D Making'**

pathway

Talking Points: Packaging Design



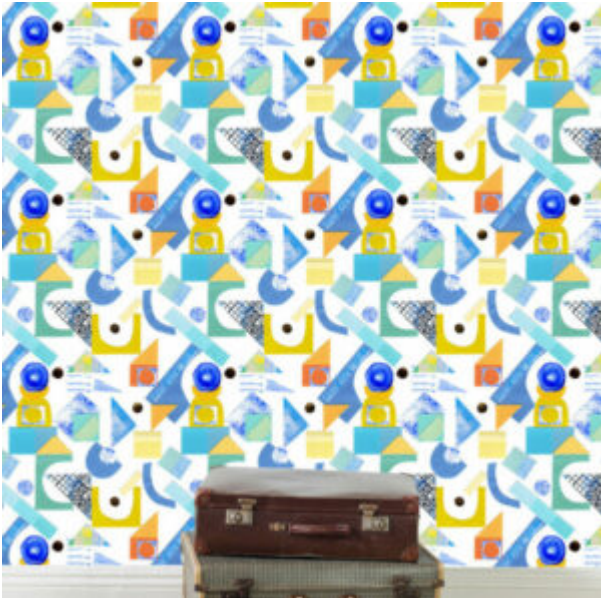
What is Typography



Which Artist: Rachel Parker



Repeating Patterns



Block Printing Repeat Patterns



Which Artists: Ava Jolliffe

Sketchbook Journey At Haslingfield Primary School

**Which Artists:
Jason Line**

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

**“It’s always so inspiring to
hear how different artists work**

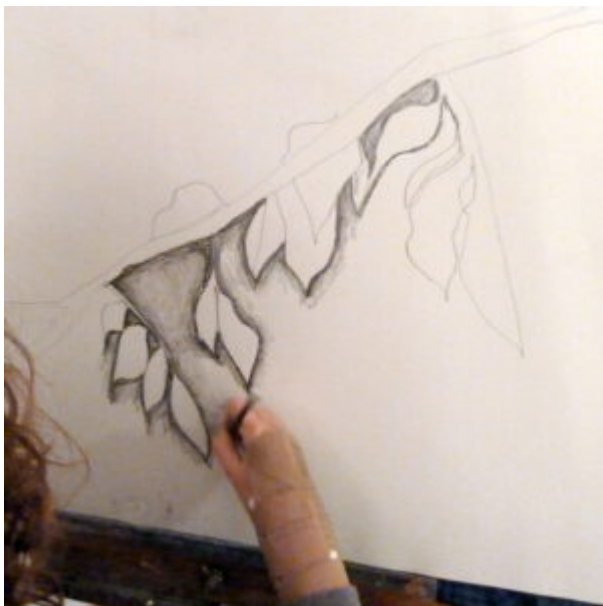
and we particularly like the detailed references Jake makes to his process – marking out the composition using neutral tones; adding and taking away compositional elements and gradually building in more colour and detail. Delivering a still life session in a classroom could begin with this process and encourage the practice of looking at positive and negative space. Some suggested resources below also touch on this". – *Rachel, AccessArt*

You Might Also

Like...



Tackling Still Life for Children



Drawing Negative Space



Visual Arts Planning: Still Life

**Dropped
Sculptures**

**Cone
with**

Julia Rigby

What We Like About This Resource...

“There’s a really fun element to this activity which is you can imagine all children really enjoying! The idea of food on large scale is a great starter for a sculpture project and an early exploration of working in 3D. What’s really positive to see in this project is how the children used their sketchbooks to design their ice creams prior to working in 3D. They then had

the opportunity to re visit and refine their ideas as they worked. This provides a solid foundation for the concept of design development and design through making- both of which underpin any visual arts or design project or profession. For more support on how to develop sketchbook practice in your setting please see our [Sketchbook Journey](#)" – *Rachel, AccessArt*

**You Might Also
Like...**



Art Club Cafe



Communal Drawing: Summer Picnic



Redesigning Food Packaging

Portrait Club

What We Like About

This Resource...

“We’re really grateful to Jake from Draw Brighton for sharing this activity which became so well received during lockdown 2020.

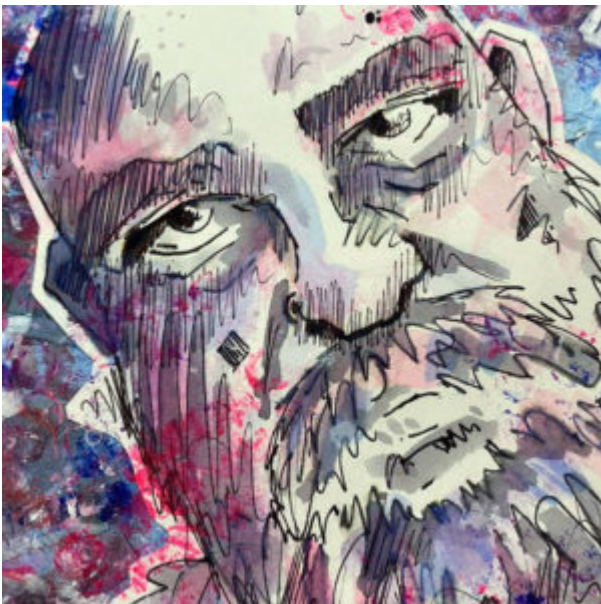
This is the perfect reminder that wherever we are in the digital or physical world, we have our eyes, hands and faces, and drawing provides a wonderful opportunity to come together in small groups to make sketches of each other. Use this activity as an ice breaker before a workshop, or as a transition activity between classes or events. Thank you Jake!” Paula,

AccessArt

**You Might Also
Like...**

**Pathway:
Identity**

Exploring



**This is featured in the
'Exploring Identity'**

pathway

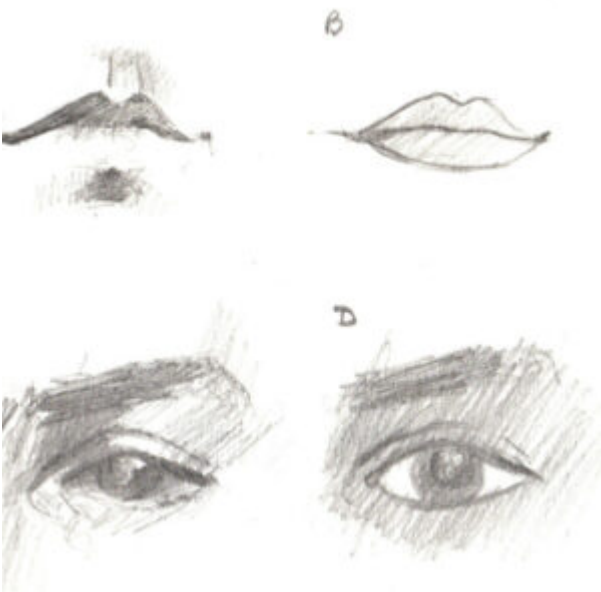
Talking Points: Njideka Akunyili Crosby



Making Physical or Digital Layered Portraits



Introduction to Portraits



Exploring Portraits in Graphite, Collage and Clay



Connecting With Nature Through Art

Lino Printing
Inspired by
Gestural Drawings