

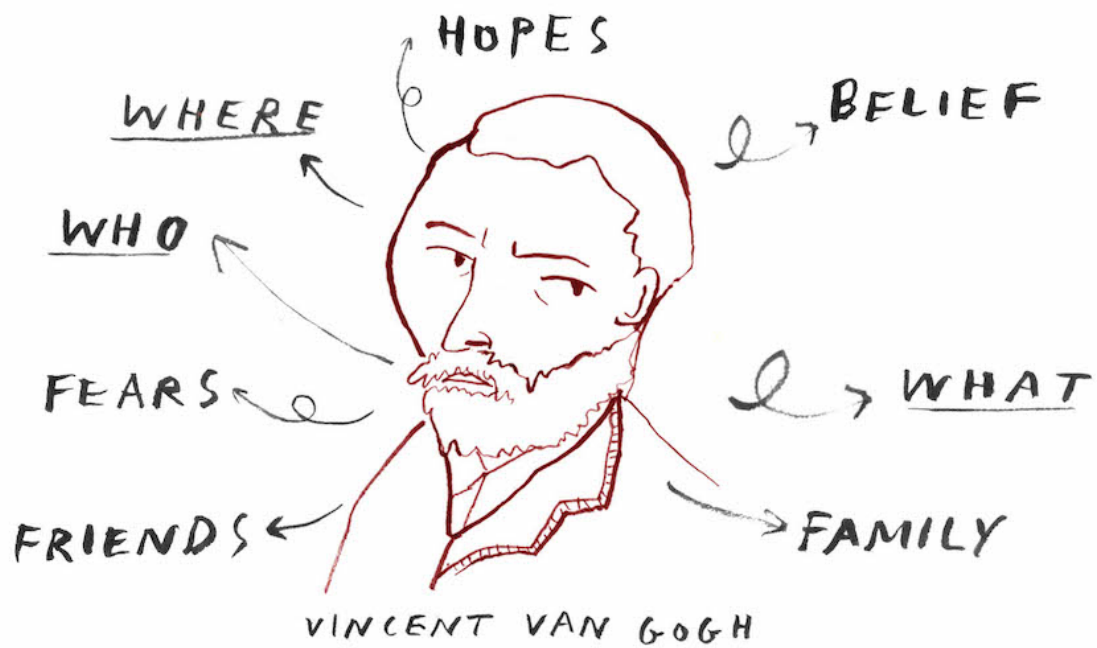
How Do We Use Artists in Schools?

We can learn technical skills by looking closely at the work of artists, but we do not look at artists so that we can recreate their work. Why would we?



When an artist creates an artwork, a whole load of experiences come together in its creation. The experiences are unique to the artist: who is the artist? what is their background? Where are they from? What are their interests and beliefs? Who are their friends and family? What are their hopes and fears?

This totality of experience is rarely shared by the pupil, who will have their own experiences, often separated by era, geography, culture, background, or belief.



When we ask children to look at an artwork, it's important to remember that it's a partnership: a dialogue, a meeting place, between artist, artwork and viewer, and the viewer's role (in this case the child) is just as central, arguably more so, as the artists'. So, inviting the child to make a copy of the artist's work is not appropriate. How was Van Gogh feeling when he painted those sunflowers in the hot Mediterranean sun? How does the pupil feel painting their sunflowers in their classroom? Did they eat different meals? Meet different people? Start their day differently? Of course. So, their artwork will be different.



Neither do we study artists in Primary School so that we can learn facts and dates – the birth or the death. This knowledge can be of interest, and easily “taught,” but is usually incidental to what the child needs to be inspired and is a misunderstanding and mixing up of what can be seen as “art history” and “studio practice”.

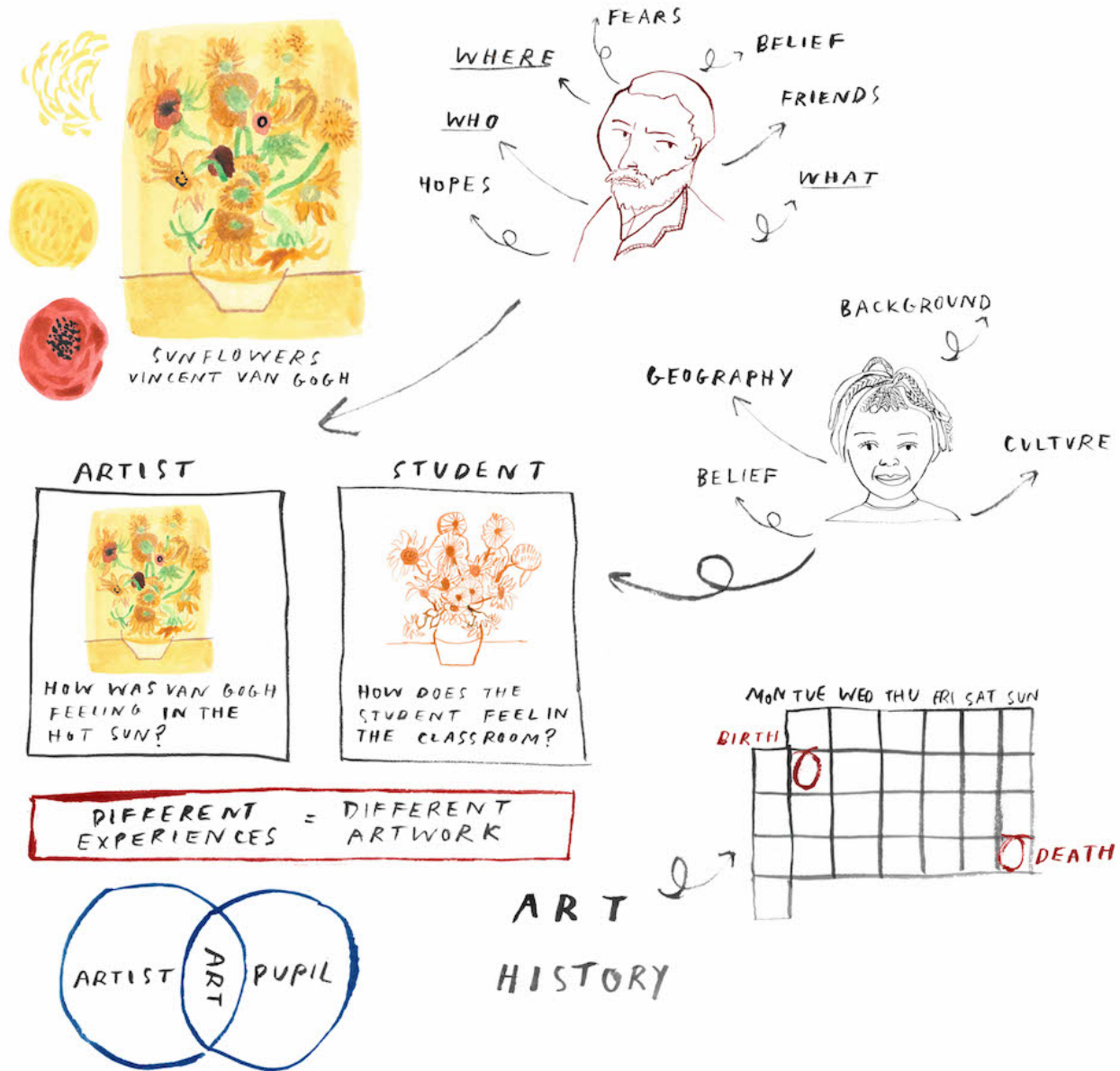
So how do we use artists in schools?

Our main goal when looking at artists in the classroom is to let artists challenge and widen our own thinking and learning. We learn from the way artists see the world, and their creative response to what they see, and we can allow those new ideas to widen our understanding of what is possible.

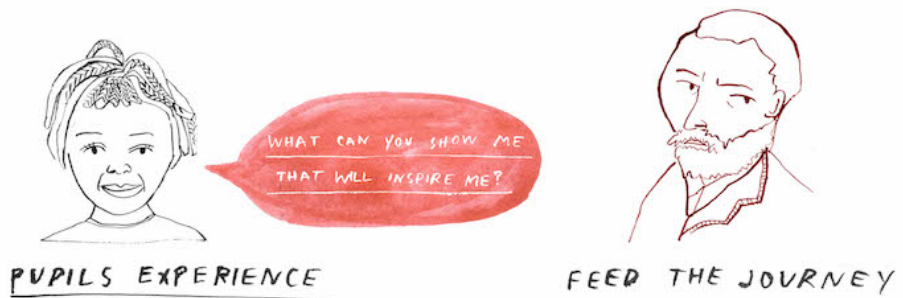
It’s also important to remember, that we don’t need to separate out looking at the work of artists and our own making as two distinct stages. Instead, where possible, the act of looking, searching, discovering, and talking about other artists’ work should be woven into the pupils’ own making journey. In practice, that might mean that rather than start a project by looking at artists, you enable pupils to start with their own experience and then discover artists along the way to feed their creative journey.

So rather than look up to other artists and emulate their work, enable your pupils to look the artists in the eye, and ask "What can you show me that will inspire me? What have you got for me today?"

HOW DO WE USE ARTISTS IN SCHOOLS?



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