

Exploring A Midsummer Night's Dream Through Art: Ancient Greek Dress Portraits

By [Rachel Thompson](#)



This series of six sessions explores Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream through art and is aimed at upper KS2 children (Years 5 and 6) although could be delivered to younger age groups with some simplification in terms of the use of text. The aim of the series is to introduce children to the work of Shakespeare in a fun and creative way.

In this first of six resources on Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, we look at the opening scenes where we meet the Athenian court. Using Ancient Greek dress as a starting point,

the children will begin by making observational drawings of fabric before moving on to drawing a more finished portrait of one of the characters.

The aim of this session is to introduce the children to the play, and develop skills in drawing fabric both on and off the figure. We recommend leaving the finer details and approach open for the children to interpret.

Session One: Exploring Portraits with Ancient Greek Style Dress

Warm up: 15 minutes

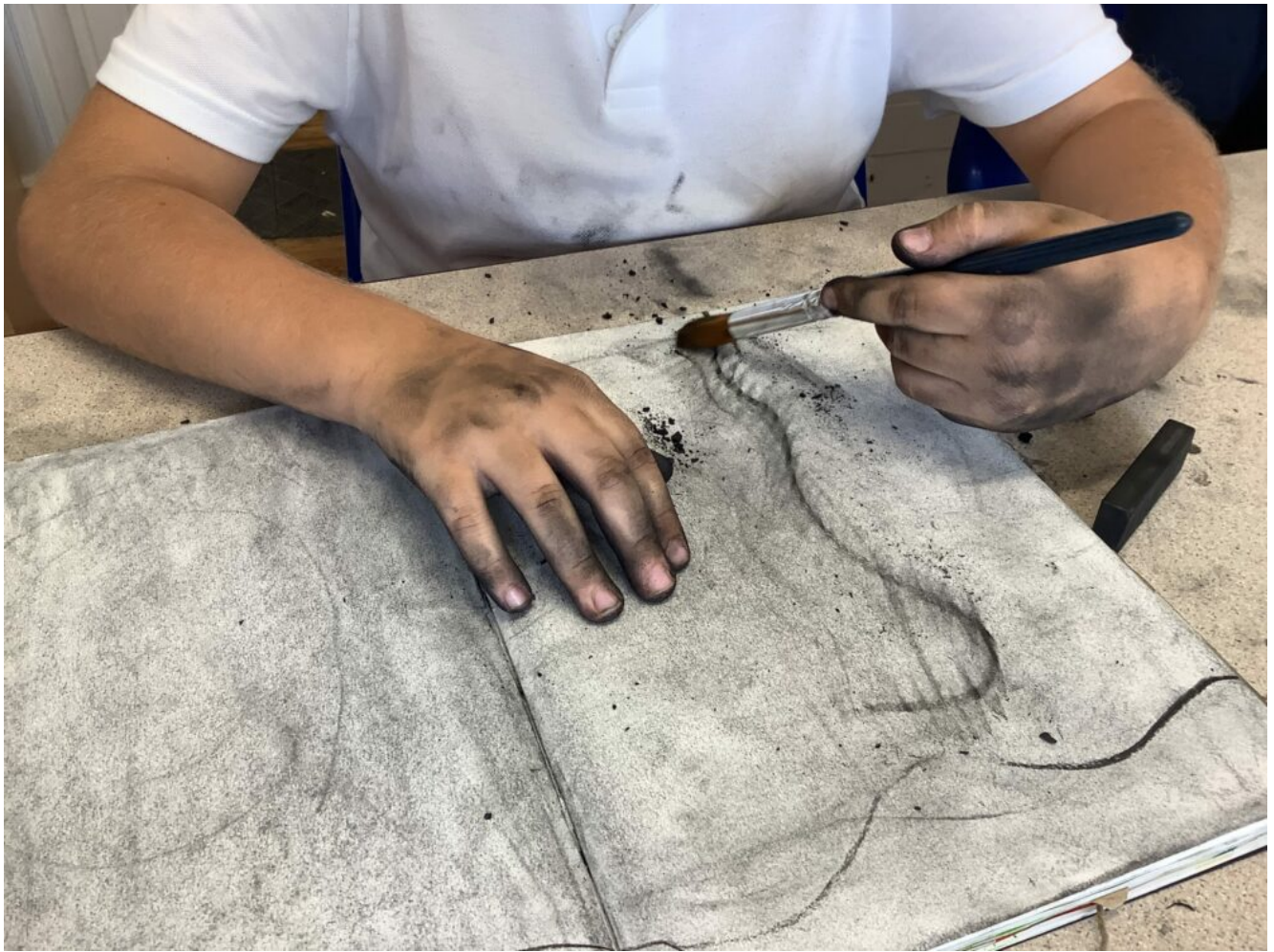
Main Activity: 45 Minutes

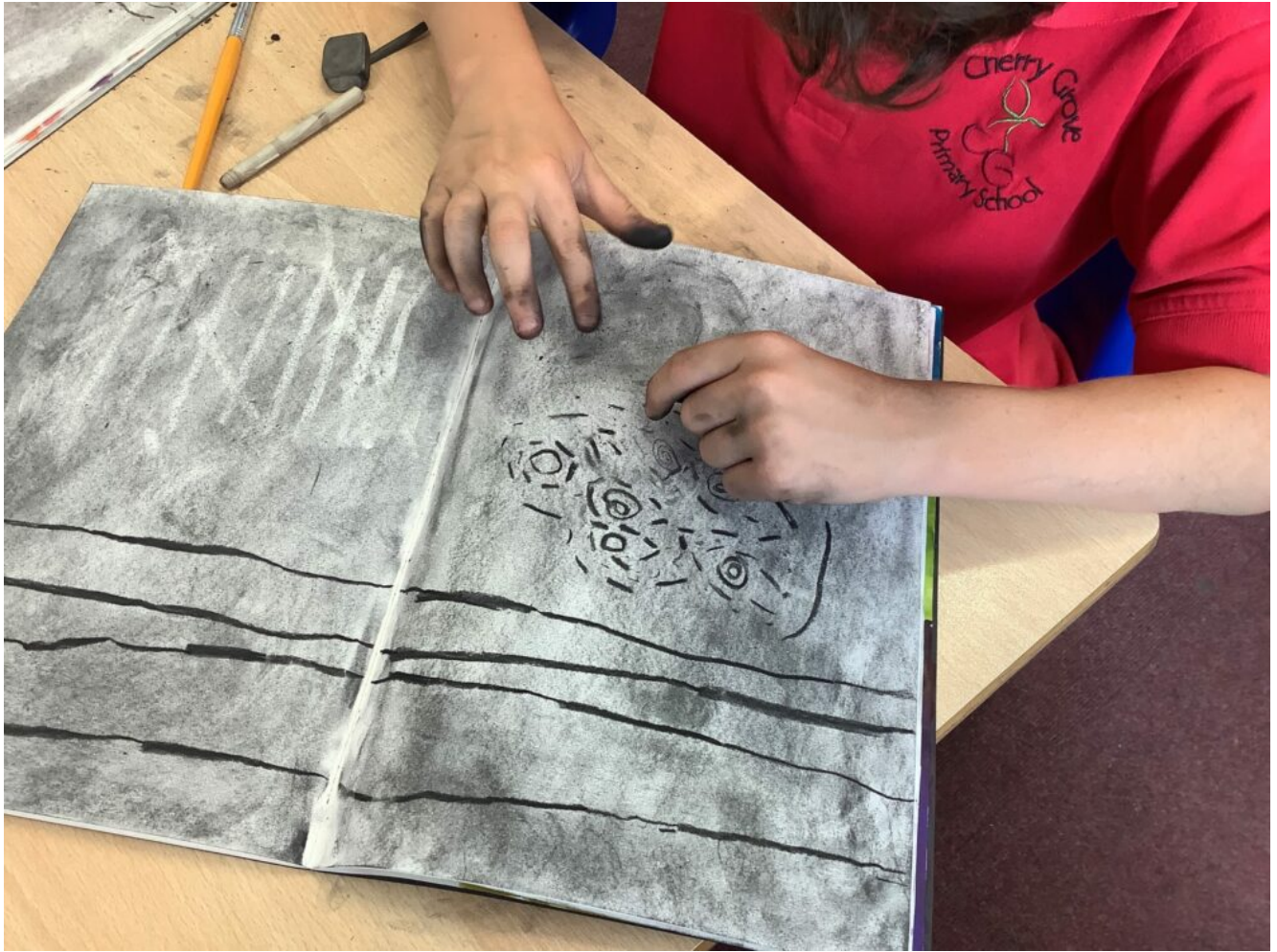
Materials needed: A2 or A3 cartridge or sugar paper, newsprint, sketchbook, drawing pencils, coloured pastels, erasers, fabric or sheets. (If possible, ask the class in advance to bring in some fabric or sheets from home).

Focus Theme: Discord and Order, Status

Time to Warm up! Observational drawing of fabric folds

Before you begin the observational element of this warm up - it's a good idea just to spend a few minutes familiarising the children with charcoal and how to use it. Invite them to play around on some paper - making lines, smudging, dotting, spiralling, blending with dry brushes etc. It's a good way to lead into some more careful observational work.

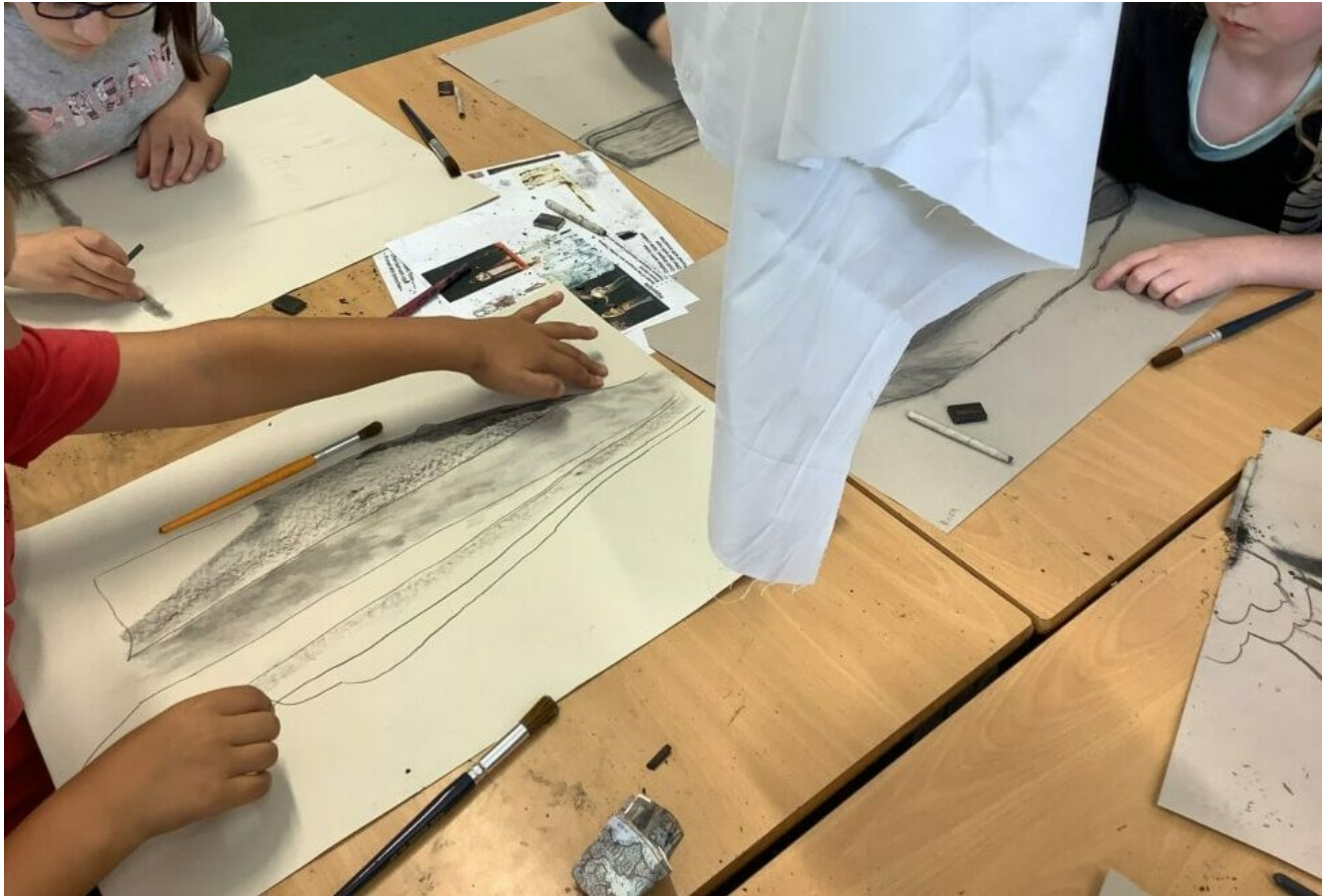






Next, drape a selection of fabrics over some books or other objects on a table. You could even hang some from a hook or other high position.

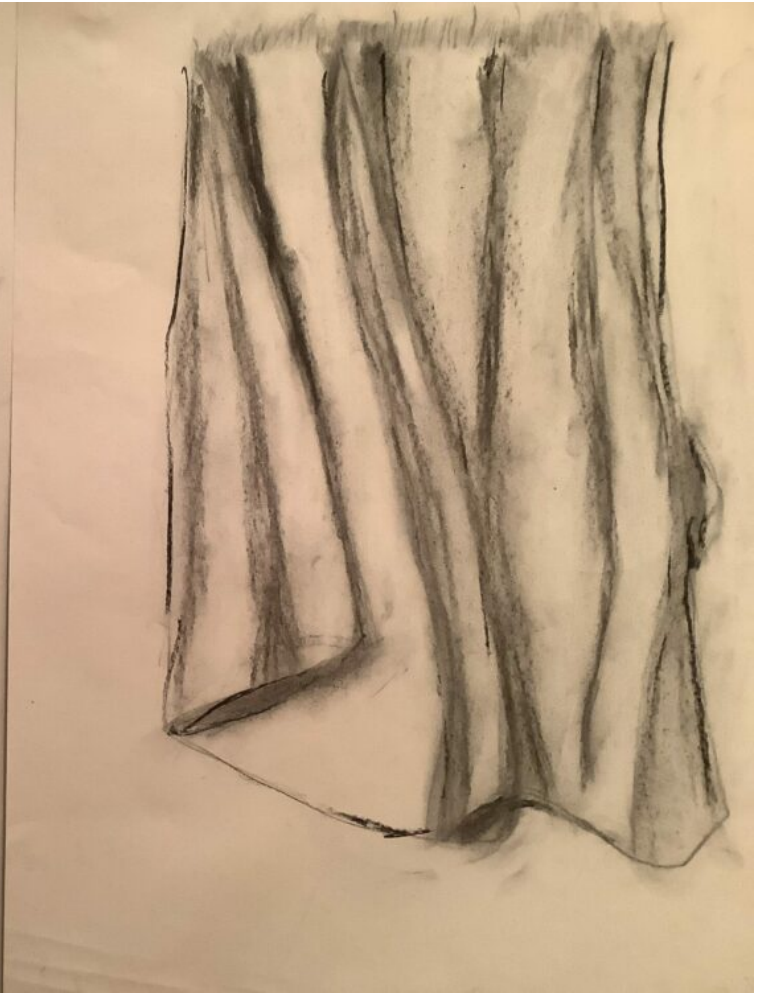
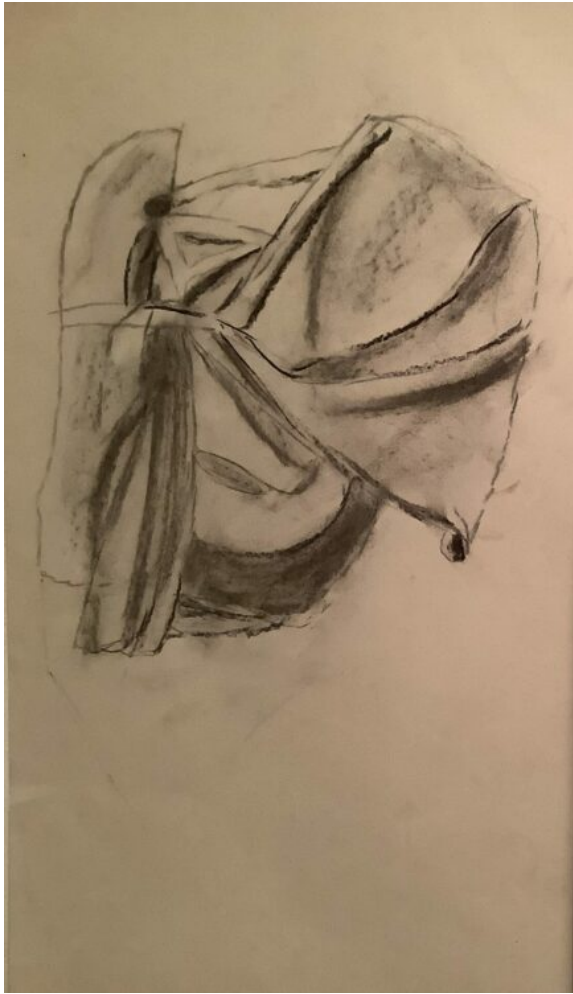
Take a moment to observe the fabric and the lines and soft angles that are created by its drapery. Using some A3 cartridge, newsprint, sugar paper or a sketchbook and your charcoal, begin to loosely mark out some of the folds you see. Work quite quickly without thinking too much and trying to keep your eyes off the paper as much as possible.

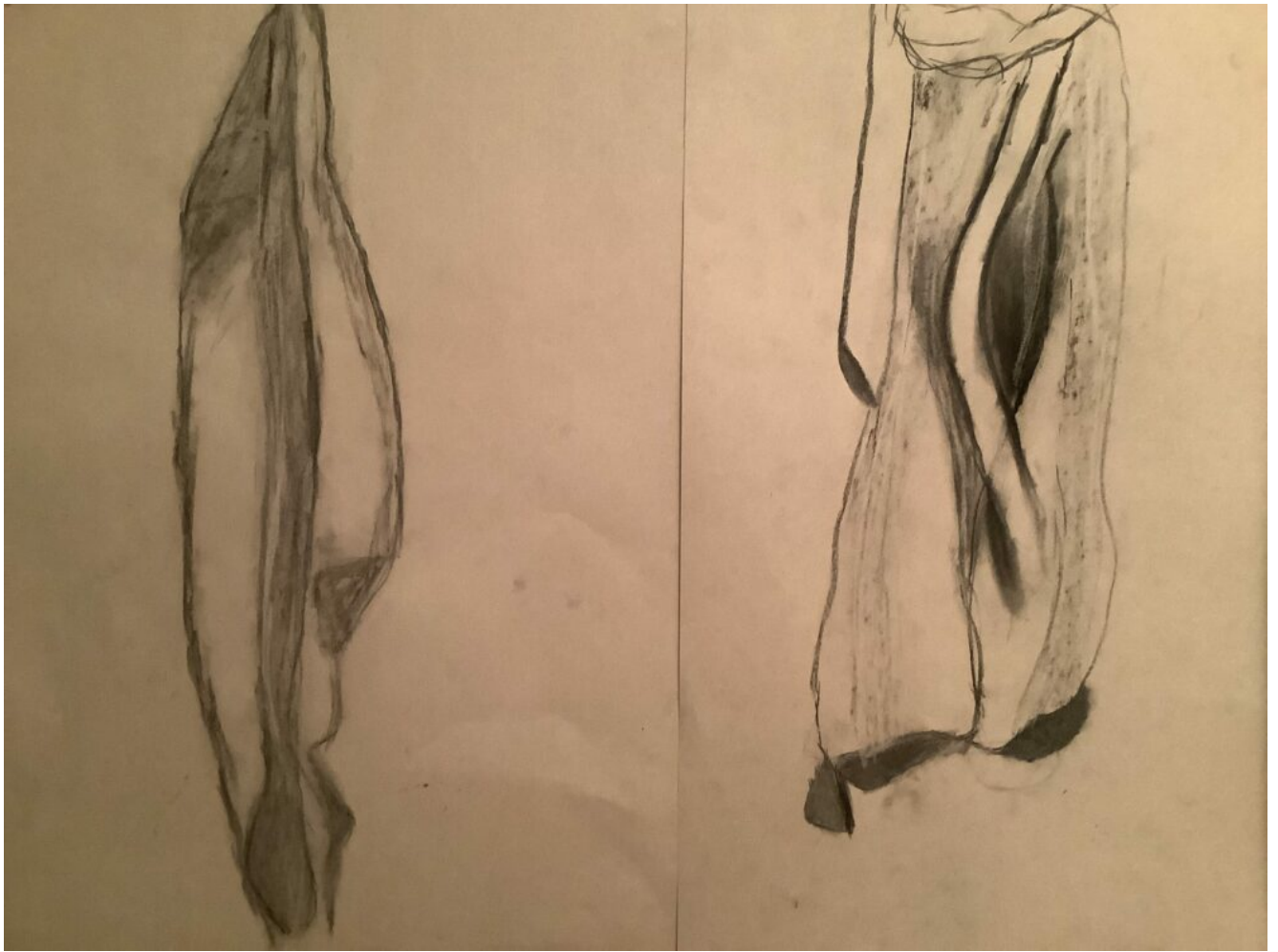


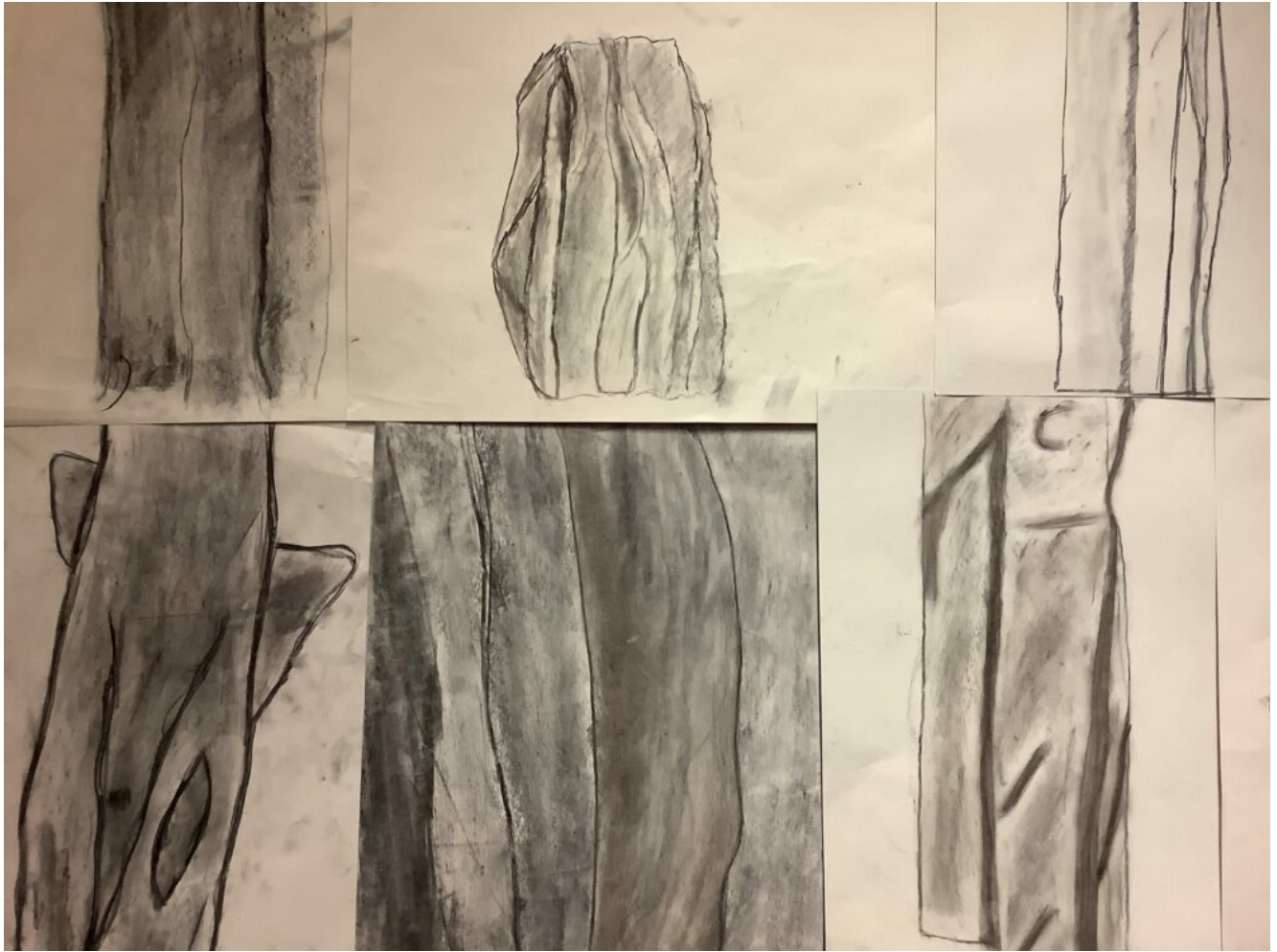
Take notice of where the shadows fall and use charcoal to work the shadow in, smudging it with your finger to create soft shading.



Enjoy being able to layer drawings over one another or draw a series of small studies – draw how you feel works for you. This is not about creating a perfect ‘study’.







If you have time, add some colour. The wealthy elite in Ancient Greece would have had plenty of gold jewelry and rich colours in their clothes.

Starter Discussion:

The play begins with the Duke of Athens, Theseus, planning his wedding to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons.

Egeus, a courtier and Hermia's father is a very strict and stern man and wants his daughter, Hermia, to marry Demetrius. Hermia is in love with Lysander however, and the two decide to elope to a nearby forest. In doing so, Hermia goes against her father's authority.

Context:

The Elizabethans believed that order was important. Respect for the law and authority was highly valued and they believed that the balance of the world was upset when order is disregarded, resulting in terrible consequences.

Egeus's attitude towards Hermia might seem a bit outdated to us today, but it would not have been so for an Elizabethan audience who would have understood that a wiser and older man would know better than anyone else, particularly his daughter.

Shakespeare explores the themes of discord and harmony – or chaos and order in A Midsummer Night's Dream. The Athenian court, with its rigid systems and principles, represents this order and the forest containing the fairies (which we encounter later) represents chaos.

How do some of the words spoken by Theseus and Egeus tell us about them as characters?

Egeus, upon complaining to Theseus that his daughter Hermia has fallen in love with Lysander despite him commanding her to marry Demetrius:

*'I beg the Ancient privilege of Athens.
As she is mine, I may dispose of her -
Which shall be either to this gentleman
Or to her death – according to our law
Immediately provided in that case'*

Theseus, when advising Hermia not to go against her father's wishes in her marrying Demetrius:

*'Be advised, fair maid:
To you your father should be as a god,
One that composed your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax,
By him imprinted and within his power
To leave the figure or disfigure it'.*

Main Activity: Athenian Portraits

You're going to assign a 'model' or partner up and take it in turns to dress up like the characters from the Athenian Court. You are mature, have authority and are wealthy – can you show this through your posture?

In Ancient Greece, clothes were worn loose and draped and often tied with rope or pinned with brooches. You may have already studied the Ancient Greeks in your topic work – can you remember seeing images of clothes from that era?

Quick context note: Shakespeare wouldn't in fact have visited Greece himself, but he would have had a good knowledge of the myths and legends from Ancient Greece and this inspired some of the events and characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

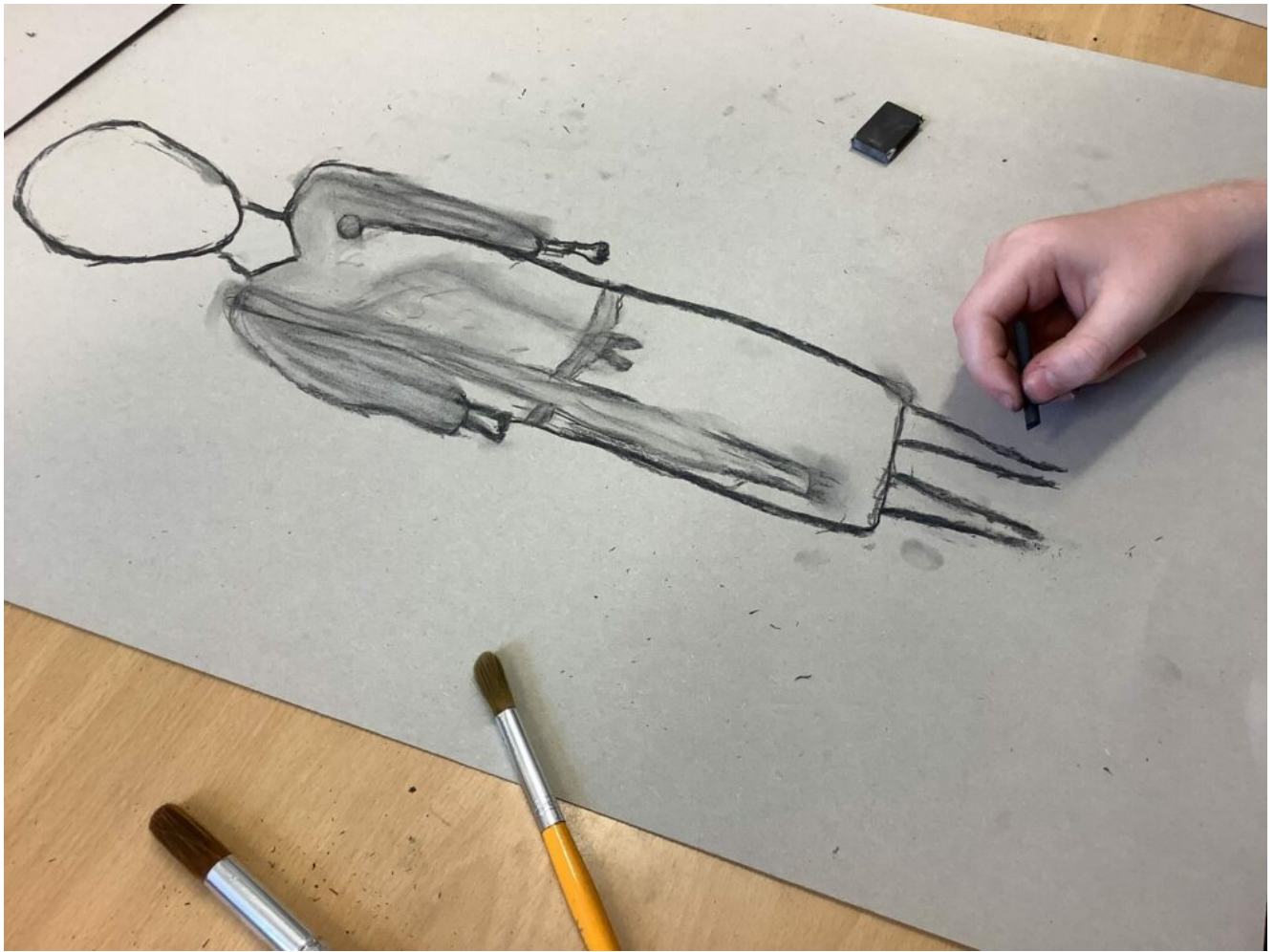
Take some of the fabric you used in the warm up. It doesn't matter if it isn't enough to create a whole 'outfit' but try and drape it over your shoulders. Now it's time to channel your inner Theseus, Egeus or Hippolyta!



Given what you know about these characters, how might they stand? Would they hold their head up high or look down on others, where do their hands rest?

Try not to get caught up with details as soon as your pencil hits the paper. Begin by looking, then gently marking out the basic form of the figure. Move around fluidly and try and use the full height of the paper.





Thinking about how you used fabric in the warm up, can you look closely at the fabric on the model and how it falls over the shoulders or arms? As you channel your inner Athenian think how might they be holding their heads, where their arms fall, and where they are looking.

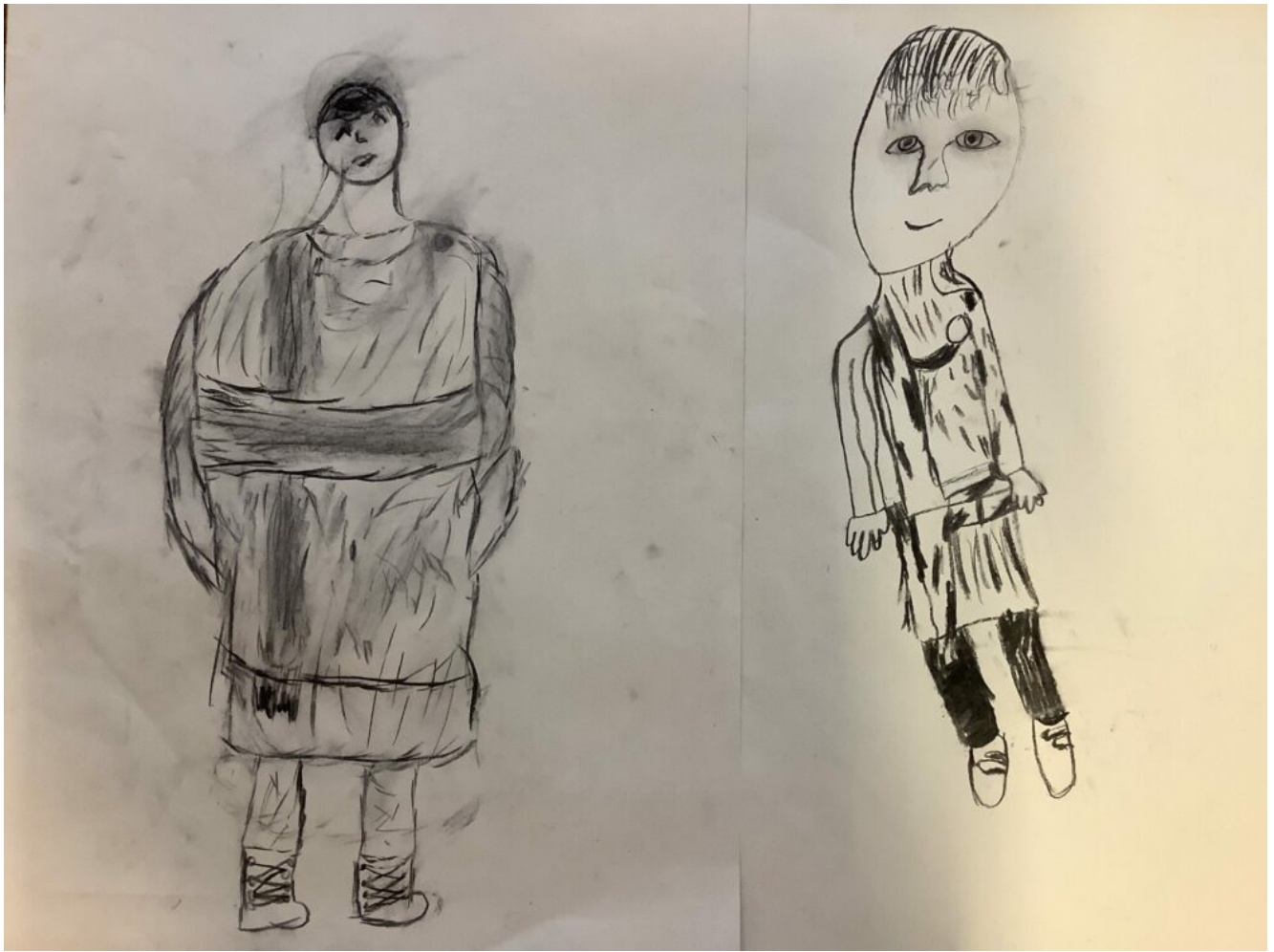




Think back to when you were warming up with the charcoal and using dry brushes to blend into the paper.



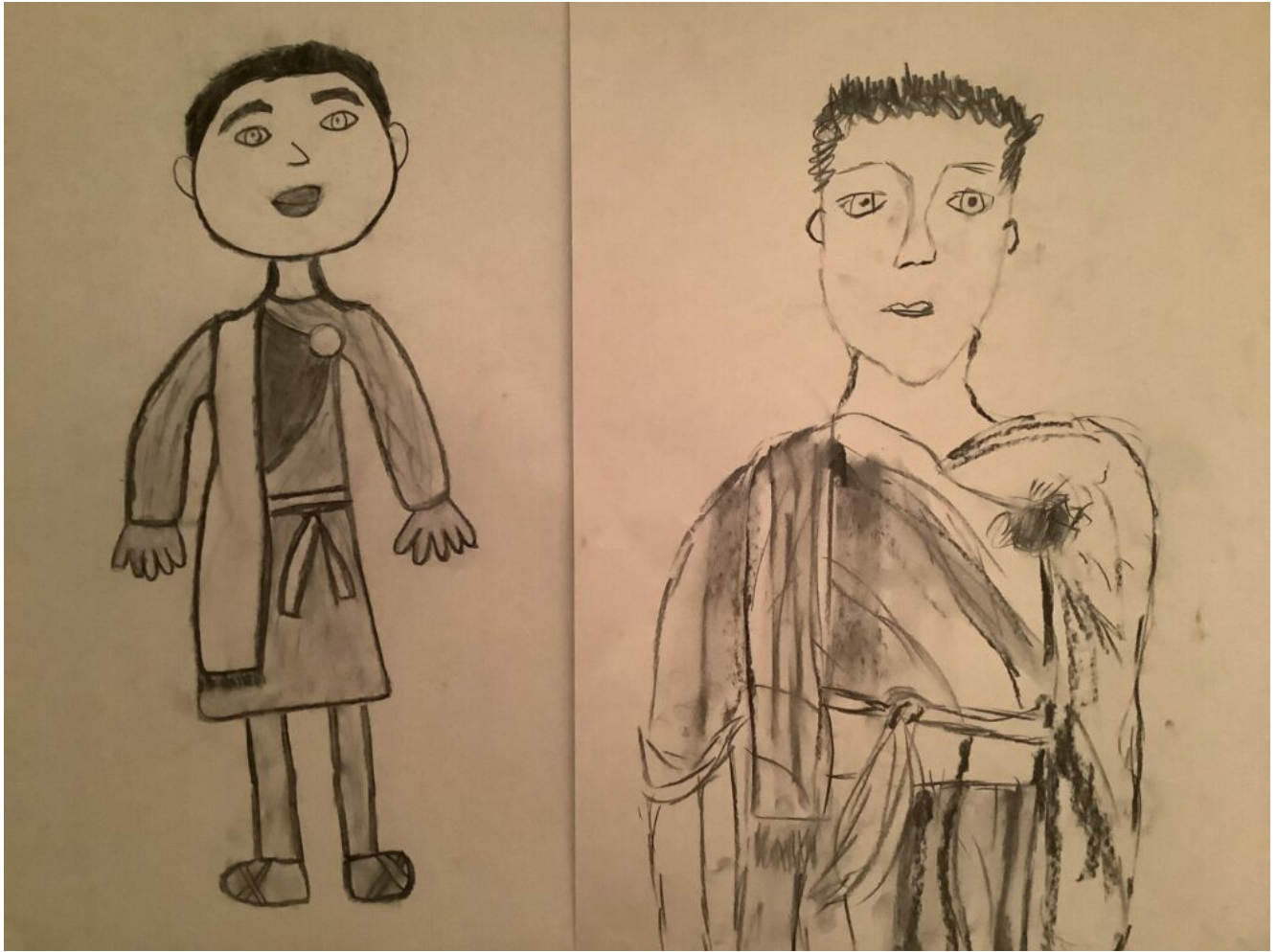
Use different marks and strokes with the charcoal to convey texture in the fabric.

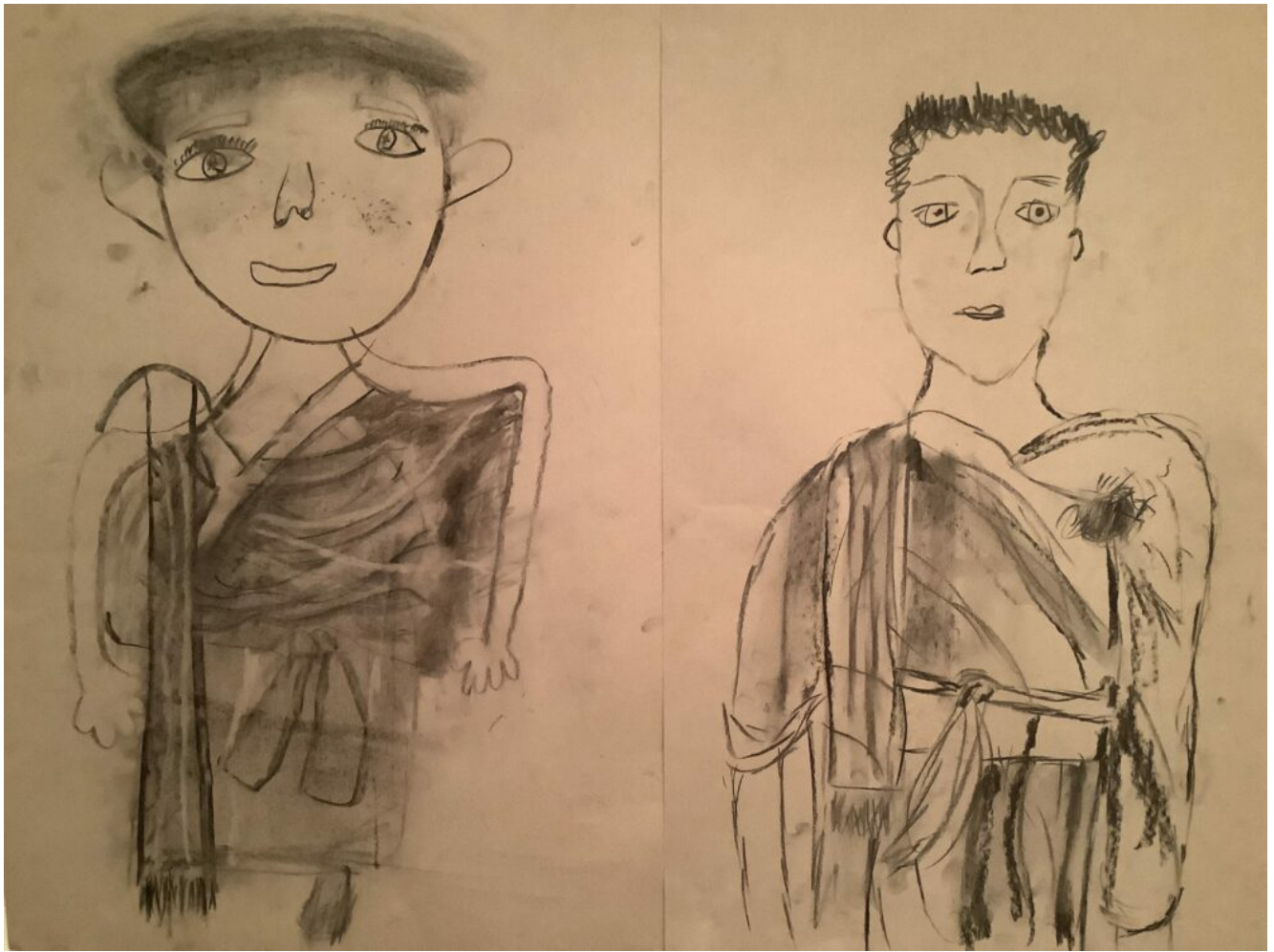


If you've partnered up and taken it in turns to model, swap round when you have drawn for about 15 minutes and have the main information down on the paper. If you have one class model, swap them round for someone else so everyone has a chance at drawing. Try and drape the clothes in the same way as on the previous model.

Keep working on your drawings and begin to add some finer detail. You may even want to begin to use your imagination and create some patterns on the clothes, or design them a brooch or sandals.









Reflection:

Pin your drawings up on the wall or hold them up.

What can we learn about the characters through how they are standing and what they are wearing?

Can you recap the key character traits of Theseus, Hippolyta and Egeus?

What did you find most challenging about drawing from life?

Did you prefer being the portrait artist or posing as the characters? Why?

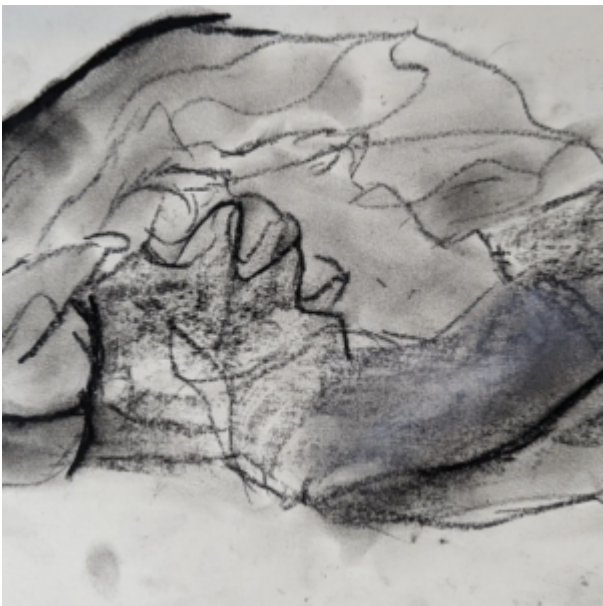
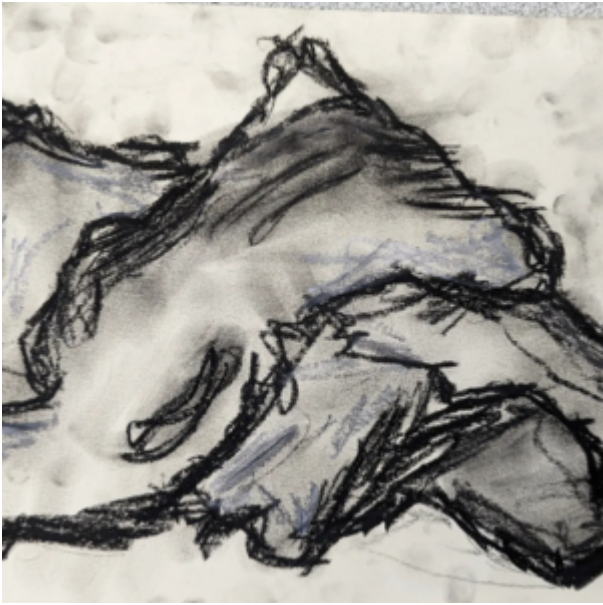
Move onto session two [here](#).

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.

See This Resource Used In Schools...





Introduction to Chalk Pastels

Analogue Drawing

What We Like About This Resource...

“This activity highlights how visual communication can be used to convey emotion. When artwork is relatable in a human and emotive way it can be really powerful. Learning how to translate feeling into mark-making is a really important skill and can help children break down the essence of a range of their own emotions, and communicate it to others. Explore colour and a range of materials to enrich this experience.” – Tobi, AccessArt.

Drawing with Sticks

What We Like About This Resource

“This is a great activity to get students to think about drawing in a different way. Extending reach and accepting a lack of control can lead to really exciting and energised mark-making. It’s great to see that this resource has also been used in SEND settings, demonstrating its accessibility.” – Tobi, AccessArt.

Exploring Macbeth Through Art: Storyboards

Exploring Macbeth Through Art: Out Damn Spot!

Exploring Macbeth Through

Art: Light and Dark Posters

Exploring Macbeth Through Art: Macbeth Portraits

Exploring Macbeth Through Art: Heath Landscapes

Introduction to Graphite

Drawing Source Material: Orchestras and Instruments

A collection of imagery and sources which

you can use to prompt drawing in schools and community groups.

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Orchestras and Instruments

Use the film below to enable children to explore orchestras and instruments. Try to create a sense of momentum – for example you might pause the video 4 times and ask the pupils to make a 1 minute, 2 minute, 3 minute and 4 minute drawing at each pause.

Encourage close and slow looking by talking as they draw – use your voice to attract their

attention to different qualities.

Try the same exercise using different materials, ie handwriting pen, ink and nib, pastel, watercolour...

How might you invent your own instrument? What instruments might you combine? Is it self playing?

This Source Material Is Used In...

Pathway: Music and art



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

using sketchbooks to make visual notes



Show me what you see



Using Sketchbooks to Make Visual Notes

See This Resource Used In Schools



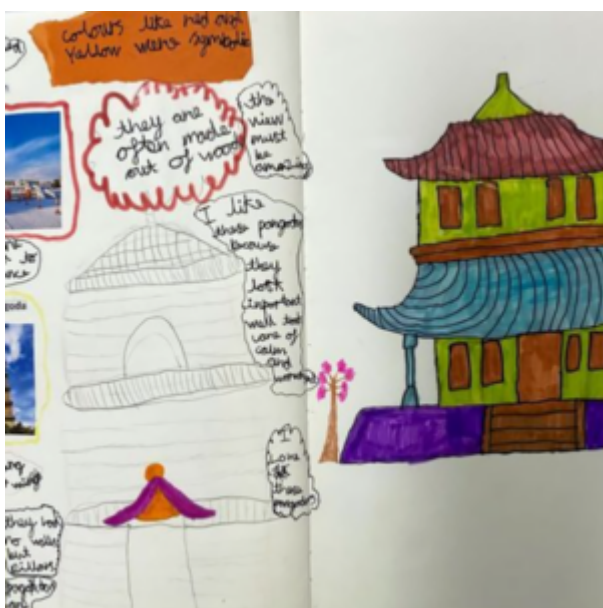


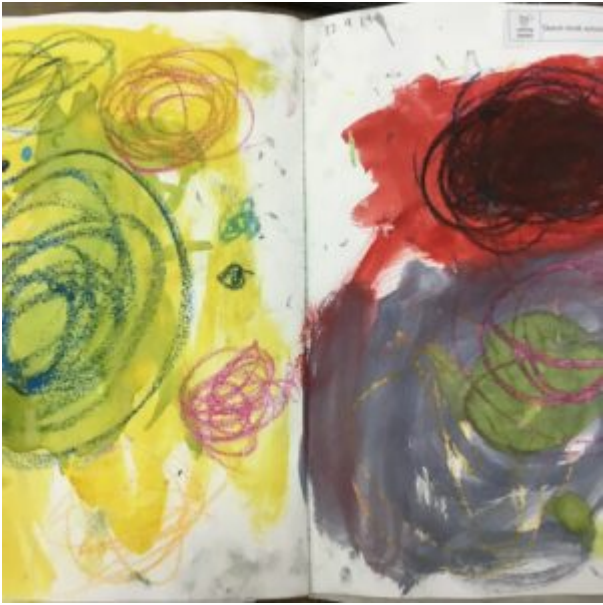


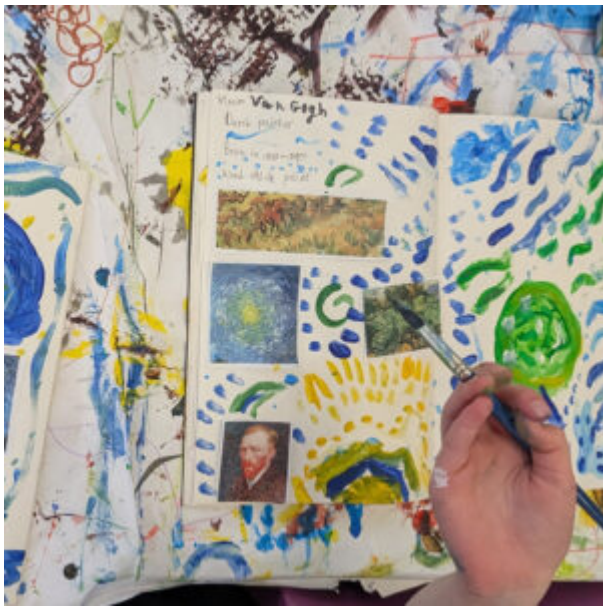












Drawing Source Material: Shells & Spirals

A collection of imagery and sources which you can use to prompt drawing in schools and community groups.

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Shells

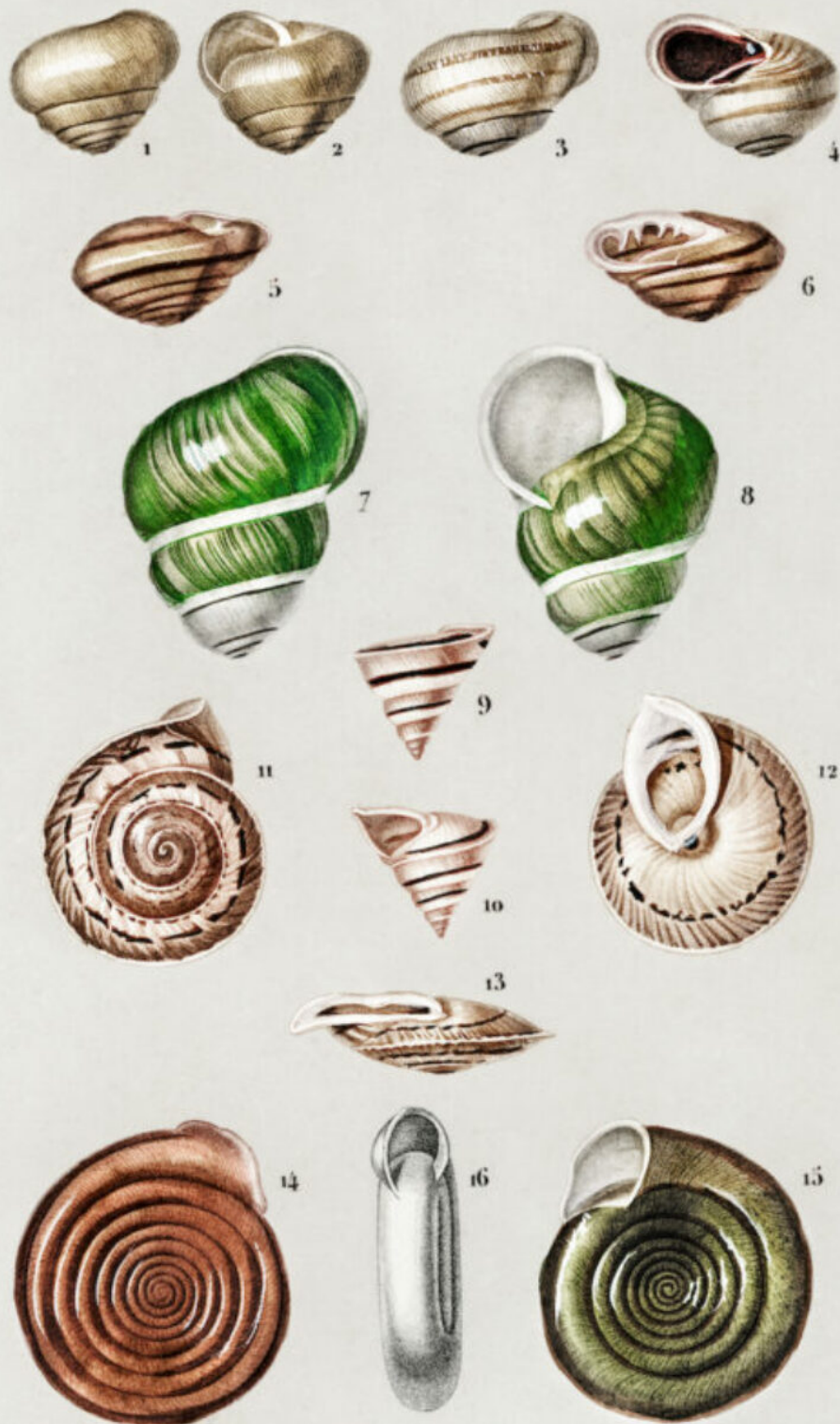
Use the films below to enable children to explore

drawing shells. Try to create a sense of momentum – for example you might pause the video 4 times and ask the pupils to make a 1 minute, 2 minute, 3 minute and 4 minute drawing at each pause.

Encourage close and slow looking by talking as they draw – use your voice to attract their attention to qualities of the shells.

Try the same exercise using different materials, ie handwriting pen, ink and nib, pastel, watercolour...

Charles Dessalines



Leveillé, Paris.

Fournier, 30.

- 1, 2. *Helix trochiformis* (*Helix epistylum*, Mull.)—3, 4. *Helix macrostoma* (*Helix citata*, Mull.)
 5, 6. *Helix sinuata* (*Helix sinuata*, Mull.)—7, 8. *Helix multicolor* (*Helix polychroma*, Sowerb.)
 9, 10. *Helix pyramidella* (*Helix Pyramidella*, Sowerb.)—11, 12, 13. *Helix de Lister* (*Helix Listeriana*, Gray.)
 14, 15, 16. *Helix papyracea* (*Helix papyracea*, Sowerb.)

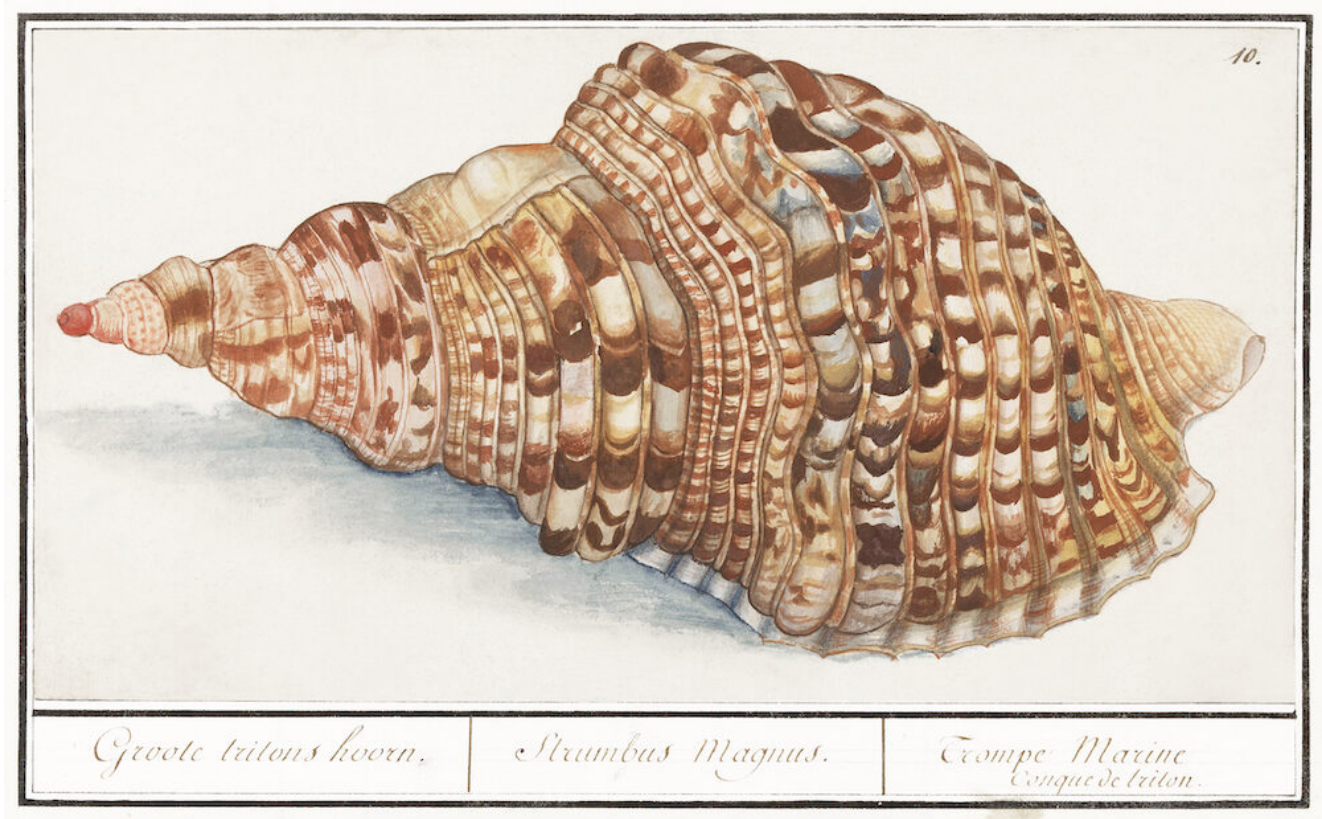


Prêtre, pinx.

Legrayet, sc.

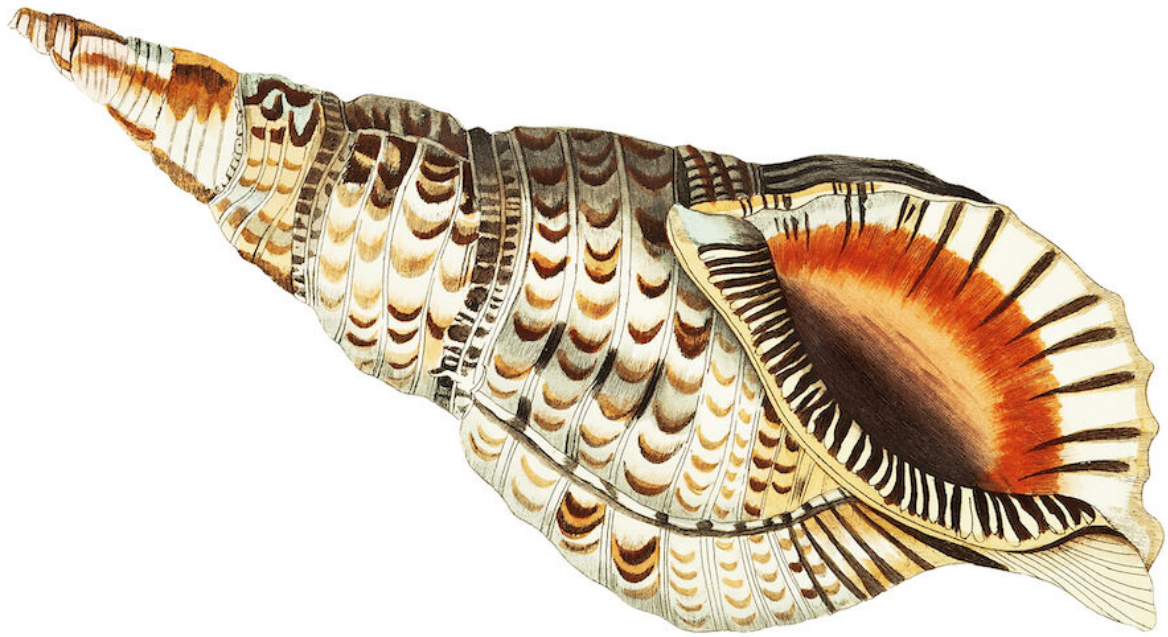
1. *Neritina tuberculosa*. (*Neritina nodosa* Ag.) — 2. *Cerithium chenille*. (*Cerithium aluco* Zoug.)
 3. *Turbinella picea*. (*Turbinella pyrum*, Lamk.) — 4. *Cancellaria obtusa* Red.
 5. *Pustus longirostris*. (*Pustus longirostris*, Red.) — 6. *Murex palus de Rosier*. (*Murex palus roseus*, Lamk.)

Anselmus Boëtius de Boodt



Common Triton Horns, *Charonia tritonis* (1596-1610) by Anselmus Boëtius de Boodt. Original from the Rijksmuseum.

George Shaw



**Tritonian murex or Sea trumpet illustration from
The Naturalist's Miscellany (1789-1813) by
George Shaw (1751-1813)**

You May Also Like...

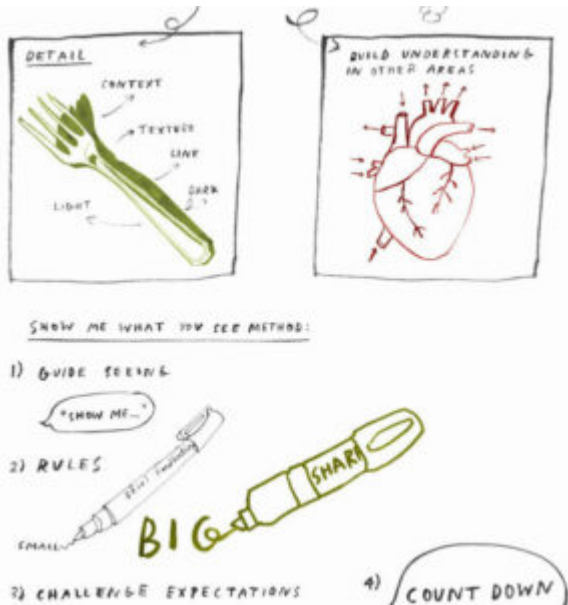
Pathway: Spirals



This is featured in the 'Spirals' pathway
using sketchbooks to make visual notes



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Drawing Source Material: Moving Water

A collection of imagery and sources which you can use to prompt drawing in schools and community groups.

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Water

Use the film below to enable children to explore drawing water. Try to create a sense of momentum – for example you might pause the video 4 times and ask the pupils to make a 1 minute, 2 minute, 3 minute and 4 minute drawing at each pause.

Encourage close and slow looking by talking as they draw – use your voice to attract their attention to qualities of the water.

Try the same exercise using different materials, ie handwriting pen, ink and nib, pastel, watercolour...

This Source Material Features in...

Pathway: Cloth, thread, paint

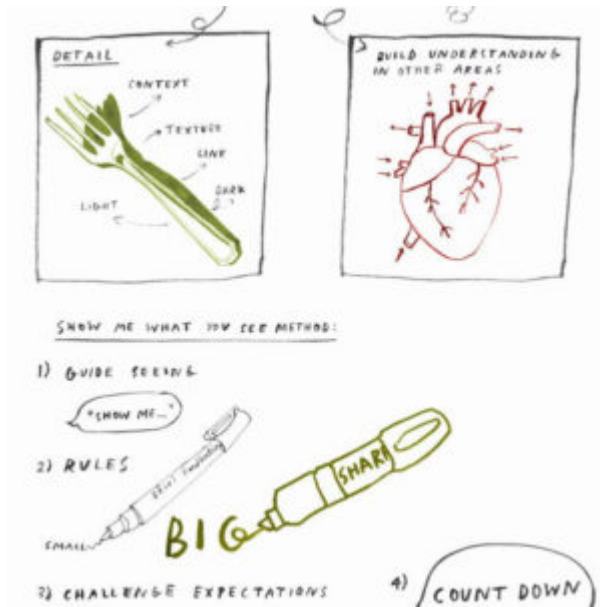


This is featured in the 'Cloth, Thread, Paint' pathway

using sketchbooks to make visual notes



Show me what you see



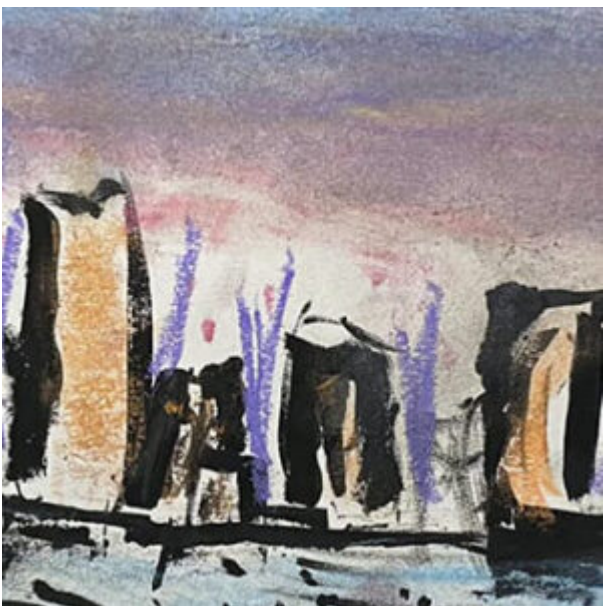
Mixed Media Landscape Challenges

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You May Also Like...

Pathway: Mixed Media Land and city scapes



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Talking Points: Vanessa Gardiner



Talking Points: The Shoreditch Sketcher



Talking Points: Kittie Jones

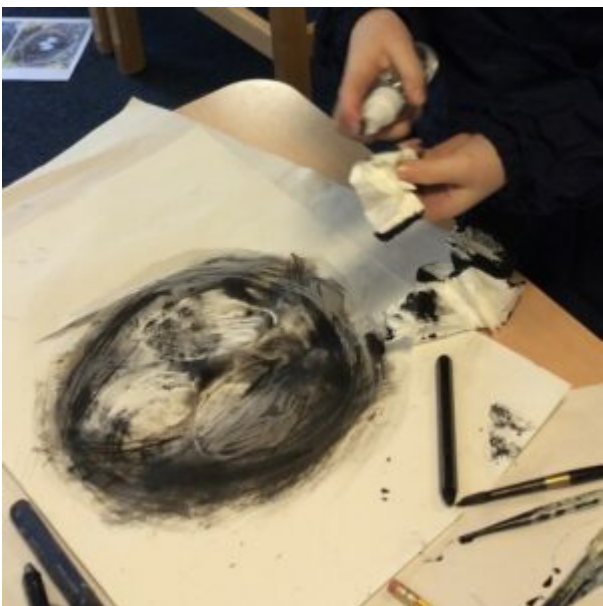
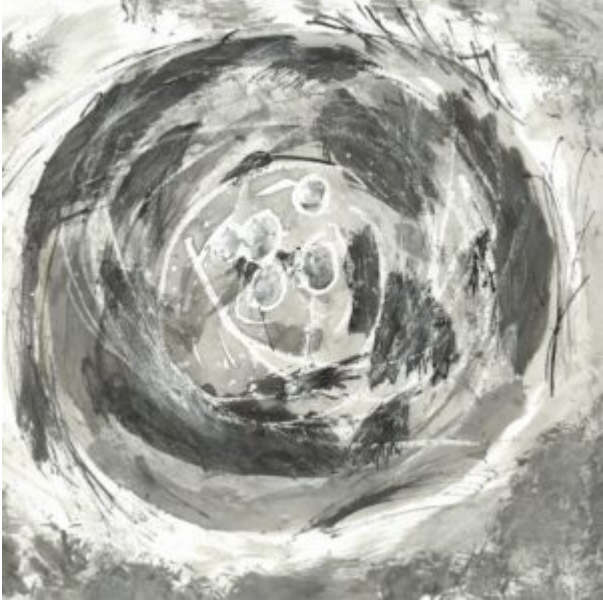


Nests: With Dry and Wet Media

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Pathway: Sculpture, Structure,
Inventiveness & determination



This is featured in the 'Sculpture,
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Talking Points: What can we learn from birds



Drawing source material: nests



Nests: Observational Ink Drawing

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Pathway: Sculpture, Structure,
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Talking Points: What can we learn from birds



Drawing source material: nests



**Nests: Materials, Tools
Testing and Sketchbooks**

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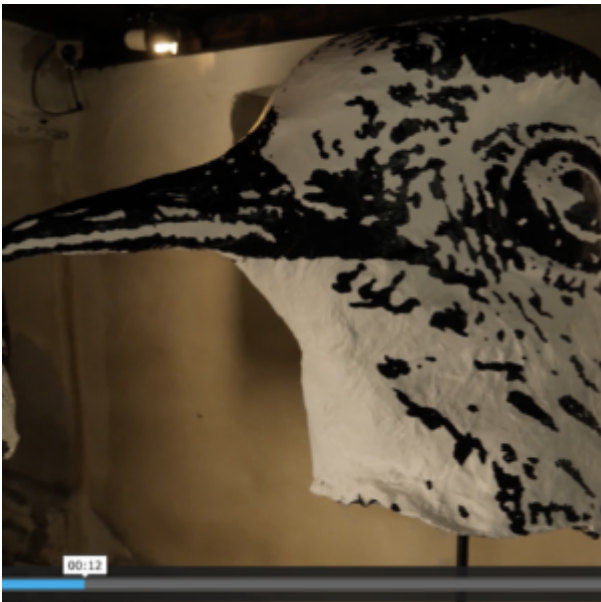
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Pathway: Sculpture, Structure,
Inventiveness & determination



This is featured in the 'Sculpture, Structure, Inventiveness & Determination' pathway

Talking Points: What can we learn from birds



Drawing source material: nests



Drawing Source Material: Egyptian Artefacts

A collection of imagery and sources which you can use to prompt drawing in schools and community groups.

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Egyptian Artefacts

Use the film and imagery below to enable children to explore Egyptian artefacts. Try to create a sense of momentum – for example you might pause on an image or the video 4 times and ask the pupils to make a 1 minute, 2 minute, 3 minute and 4 minute drawing at each pause.

Encourage close and slow looking by talking as they draw – use your voice to attract their attention to qualities of the artefacts.

Try the same exercise using different materials, ie handwriting pen, ink and nib, pastel, watercolour...

Explore the collections of Rijksmuseum van Oudheden [here](#).

You can find lots of visual resources on [Google Arts and Culture about preserving Egypt's history](#).

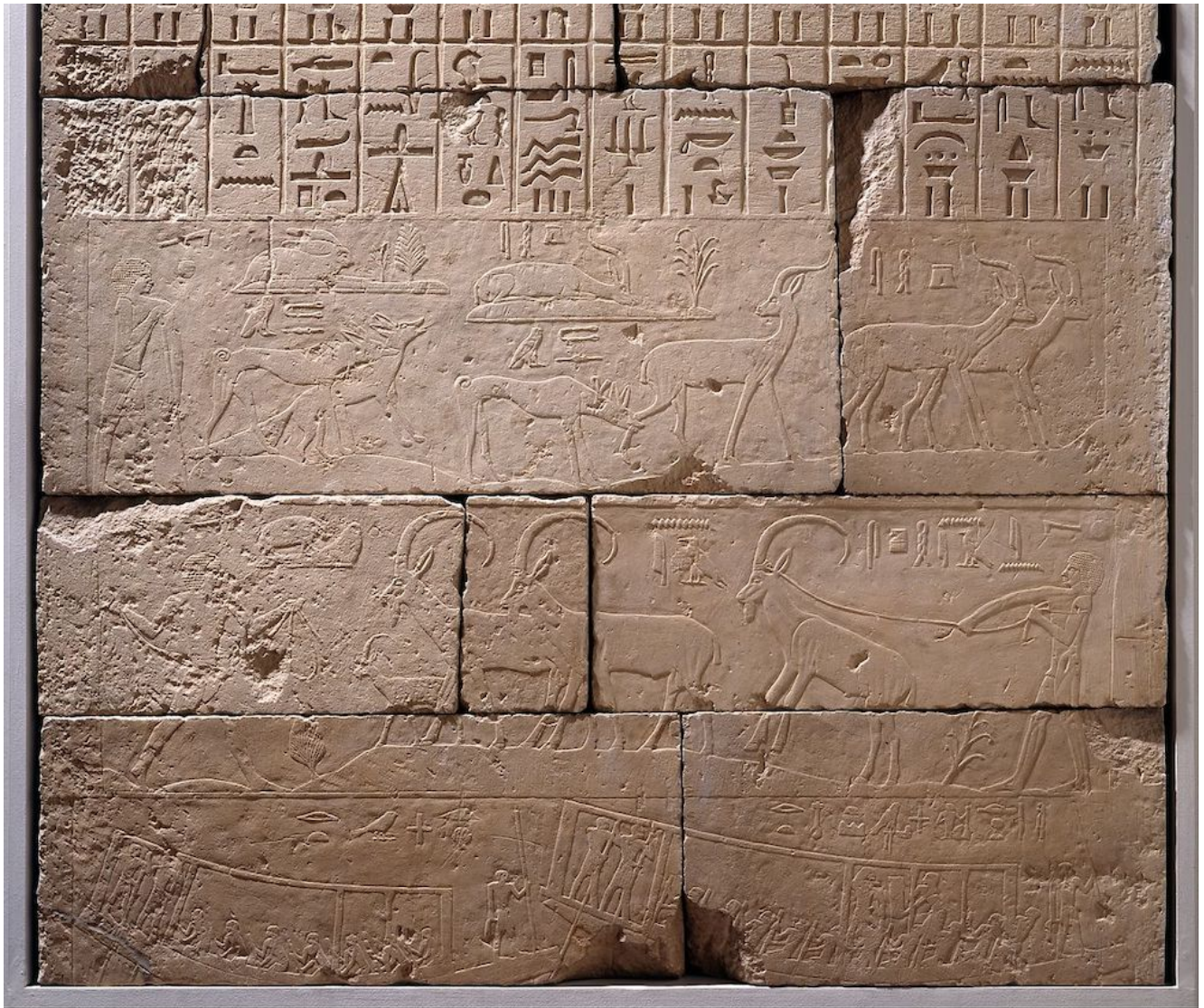


Military Musicians Showing Nubian and Egyptian Styles, Nina de Garis Davies (1881–1965), New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Thutmose IV, ca. 1400–1390 B.C. From Egypt, Upper Egypt, Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Tjeneny (TT 74) Tempera on paper, H. 44.5 × W. 93 cm (17 1/2 × 36 5/8 in.) Rogers Fund, 1931

Watch the clip with the volume off as you guide children's attention to parts of the paintings



Bronze statuette of Osiris, Late Dynastic-Hellenistic 664–31 B.C. Egyptian Medium: Bronze Dimensions: H. 4 1/2 in. (11.4 cm) The Cesnola Collection, 1874–76



Tomb Chapel of Raemkai: South Wall, Old Kingdom, Dynasty 5, ca. 2446–2389 B.C., From Egypt, Memphite Region, Saqqara, North of the Djoser pyramid complex, Mariette D3, Egyptian Antiquities Service/Quibell excavations, 1907–08, Limestone, paint, Rogers Fund, 1908



Take a virtual tour of the Tomb of Menna on [Google Arts and Culture](#)



Deconstructing Ancient Egyptian Stelae on [Google Arts and Culture](#)

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Pathway: working with shape and colour

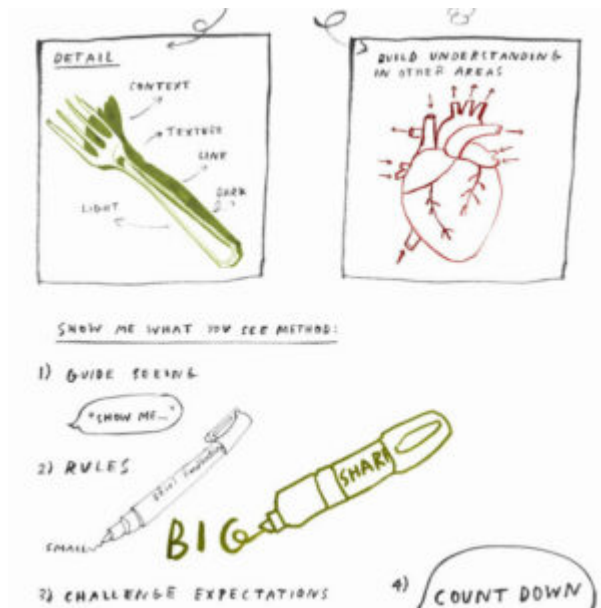


This is featured in the 'Working with Shape and Colour' pathway

using sketchbooks to make visual notes



Show me what you see



Drawing Source Material: Amazing Architectural Homes

A collection of imagery and sources which you can use to prompt drawing in schools and community groups.

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FREE TO ACCESS

Amazing Architectural Homes

Use this collection of films as source material for pupils exploring amazing architectural homes. In the first instance you might want to pause the videos at suitable points to enable the children to carefully look at the main forms and details. Try to create a sense of momentum – for example you might pause the video 4 times and ask the pupils to make a 1 minute, 2 minute, 3 minute and 4 minute drawing at each pause.

Encourage close and slow looking by talking as they draw – use your voice to attract their attention to features of the building.

When pupils are more experienced, you can also try getting them to make their drawings as the videos play – making quick gestural sketches.

You May Also Like...

Pathway: Architecture- Dream big or small?



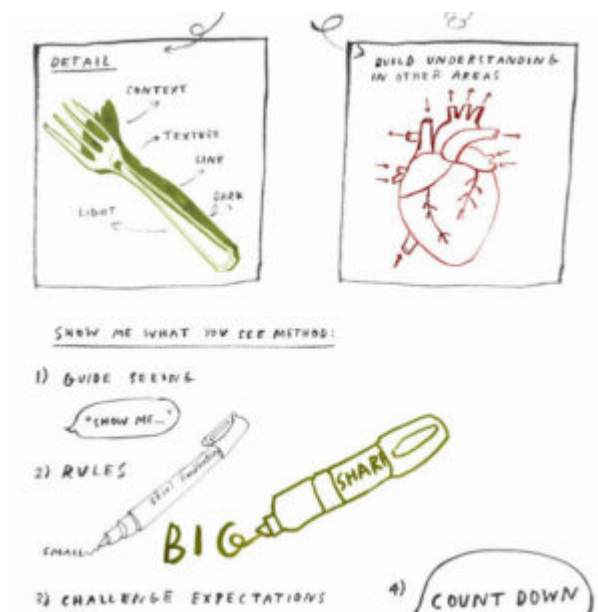
[This is featured in the 'Architecture: Dream Big or Small?' pathway](#)

using sketchbooks to make visual notes



Find out how pupils can respond to artists work in sketchbooks

Show me what you see



Enable close looking and drawing with this exercise