

Exploring Macbeth Through Art: Light and Dark Posters

By [Rachel Thompson](#).



In this forth of six resources on Shakespeare's Macbeth, children are invited to look closely at Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and role they play in the story. You can find the full

resource collection here.

The aim of this session is to think carefully about the imagery and symbolism in Macbeth, and to draw representations of these before moving on to creating a poster that tells us about the play.

[Back to all six sessions here.](#)

Session 4: Light and Dark Posters

Warm up: 15 minutes

Main Activity: 45 Minutes

Materials Needed: Sketchbooks, A3 sheets of cartridge paper, full range of drawing materials, some still life objects as listed in the warm up activity section

Focus Theme/s: Light and Dark

Time to Warm Up! Drawing by candlelight (or torchlight).

For this activity it would be great if you can get hold of some candles (battery powered if real flames not allowed!) or failing that, some torches. In addition, some objects that link to the imagery of light and dark in Macbeth. Some examples include some black feathers, dark stones or pieces of rock, black fabric, white flowers, toy daggers (if appropriate), some bones or a skull.

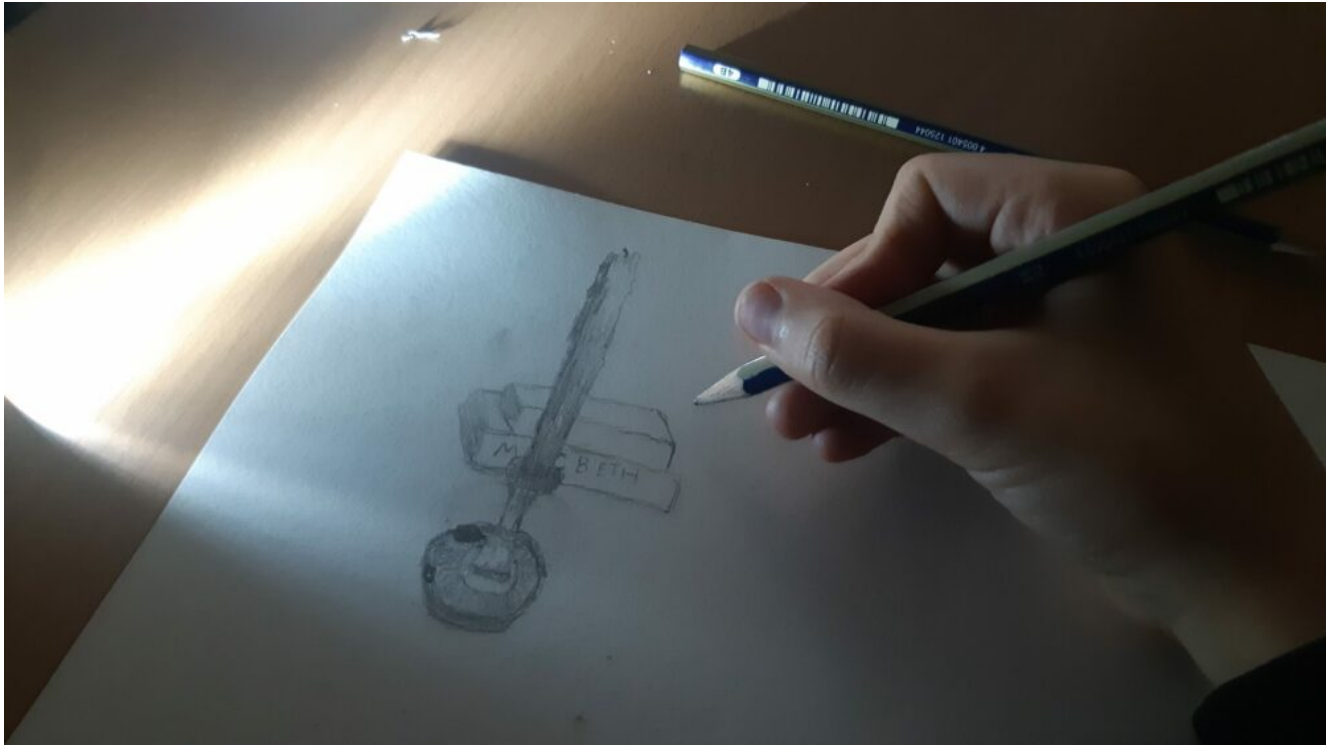
Make this fun and spooky by turning the lights out and lighting the candles/positioning the torches around the objects to create shadow.

This activity is not about a traditional still life – but more about how you can ‘deconstruct’ the view in front of you and find ‘composite elements,’ that might work together as a whole on the paper. Composite elements essentially mean finding self-contained units within the whole picture.



We're going to develop the quality of your line making and use intuition to create composition.

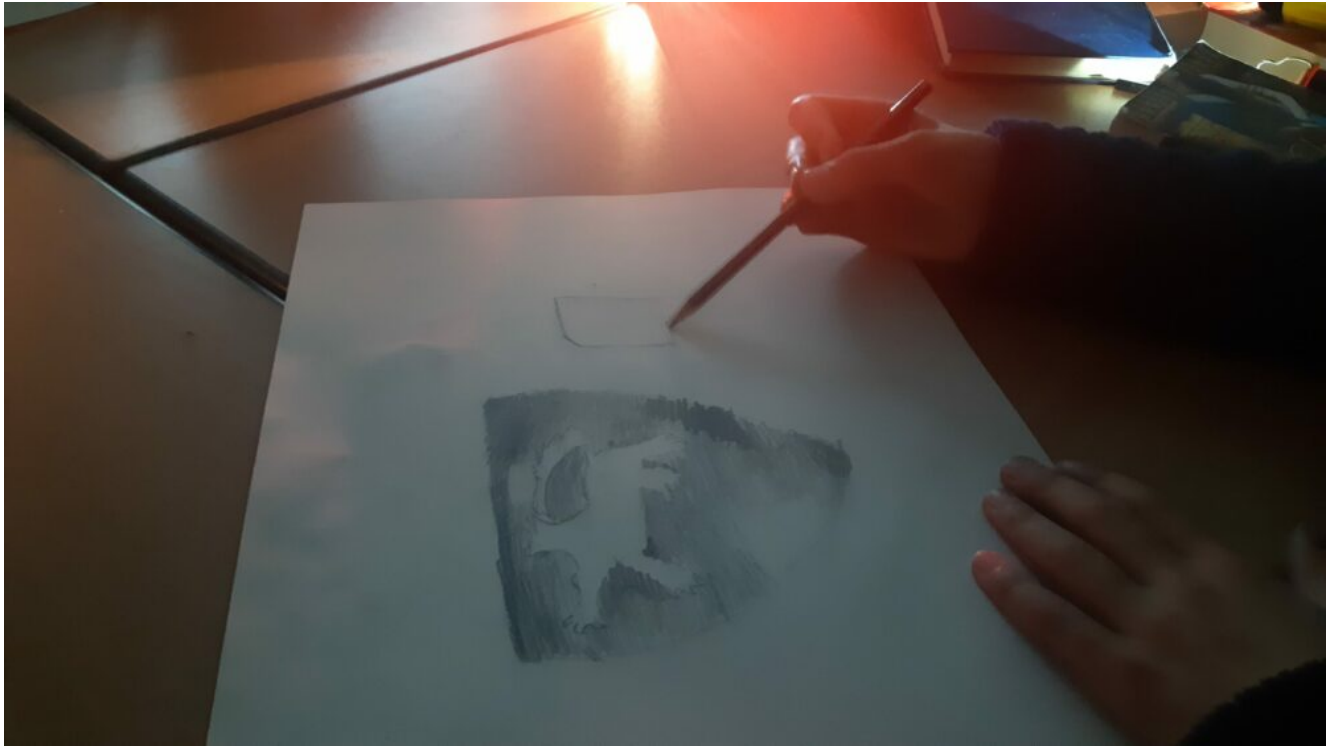
Begin by observing the objects in front of you on the table, noticing the shapes they make and how they relate to one another.



Take your charcoal or pencil and draw a thick, ribbon like line that traces the line of what you see. Perhaps a feather is placed alongside some fabric – can you follow the line of these two objects at the point of contact with the table?

If you are using candlelight – how does the flickering light change this line?

Focus primarily on the dark or the shadows – what lines can you find that follow these? Can you find other lines that connect the objects together?



Allow the lines you're making to flow between the objects. Work quickly, without too much thought or focus on drawing exactly what you see.





Please see the existing AccessArt resource of this activity [here](#).

Starter Discussion:

In Act 1 Scene 4 King Duncan makes on Macbeth the new title Thane Of Cawdor as a reward for his valour in battle. In doing so, the first of the witches' prophecies has come true. Macbeth also heard from the witches that he will later be King – but with a King already in reign, what thoughts begin to enter Macbeth's mind?

Look at the following quote:

*'Stars hide your fires!
Let not light see my black and deep desires:
The eye wink at the hand! Yet let that be,
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see'*
(Act 1 Scene 4)

What does Macbeth mean by this?

Macbeth knows that in order to be King himself, he must kill King Duncan. However at this point, he is haunted by this thought and his speech expresses how he does not want his eye to see what his hand does. What does this tell us about his inner feelings? He is ambitious – but how does he feel about the idea of murder?

Soon after this in Act Scene 5 we meet Lady Macbeth for the first time. This scene takes place in Macbeth's castle. Lady Macbeth reads of Macbeth's success, and the witches' promises via a letter. Although the letter doesn't explicitly say that Macbeth is considering murder, Lady Macbeth quickly knows this is what they must do.

She delivers a powerful speech calling upon dark spirits to help her not feel empathy or guilt, so she is able to be part of this murderous act. She mentions several images of dark and light such as a raven, smoke of hell, milk, blood – and how she doesn't want *'..heaven to peep through the blanket of the dark'*.

NB for teachers – optional reading out of Lady Macbeth's 'unsex me here' soliloquy depending on whether you feel it's appropriate given the age of the children.

Despite his reservations and faltering over whether to commit murder, Lady Macbeth manages to persuade Macbeth to murder King Duncan. Later, after murdering King Duncan and while plotting the murder of his friend Banquo, Macbeth speaks again of darkness casting shadow over light.

*'...Come, seeling
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day:
And with thy bloody and invisible hand
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
Which keeps me pale! - Light thickens; and the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood:
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse;
Whiles night's black agents to their prey do rouse..'*
(Act 3 Scene 2)

Here, Macbeth means there must be no tenderness or pity if he is to succeed in his ambition to be King. What do you think this speech says about his shifting state of mind?

After the murder of King Duncan, his own sons flee the castle. In doing so, it looks like they are the guilty culprits of Duncan's murder. Macduff, loyal servant to King Duncan, brings news of this and declares that Macbeth has been chosen as the new King. What might the impact of this second prophecy coming true have on Macbeth?

Which sounds more powerful in the play Macbeth – light or dark? Heaven or hell? Good or evil?

Can you list the imagery in this speech? Now do the same for the imagery evoked by Lady Macbeth when she speaks of not wanting ..*'heaven to peep through the blanket of the dark'*.

Context:

Shakespeare uses light and dark as metaphors for good and evil, usually in the form of day and night. Macbeth is a creature of the night, who brings darkness too his home and all that know him.

Many of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's speeches or interactions take place in hushed corners of the castle, out of ear shot. They also 'think out loud' quite often. How do you think this

must have felt like being an audience member watching the play and 'eavesdropping' on these moments?

Main Activity: Light and Dark Macbeth Posters.

Look back at your warm up 'candlelit' drawings. Observe the areas that are in shadow and those that are highlighted.

In the warm up you did some 'untraditional' observational drawing related to light and dark. This time, you're going to build on these techniques and use your imagination a bit more.

Imagine you are being asked to create a poster for Macbeth, showing the role that light and dark has in the play.

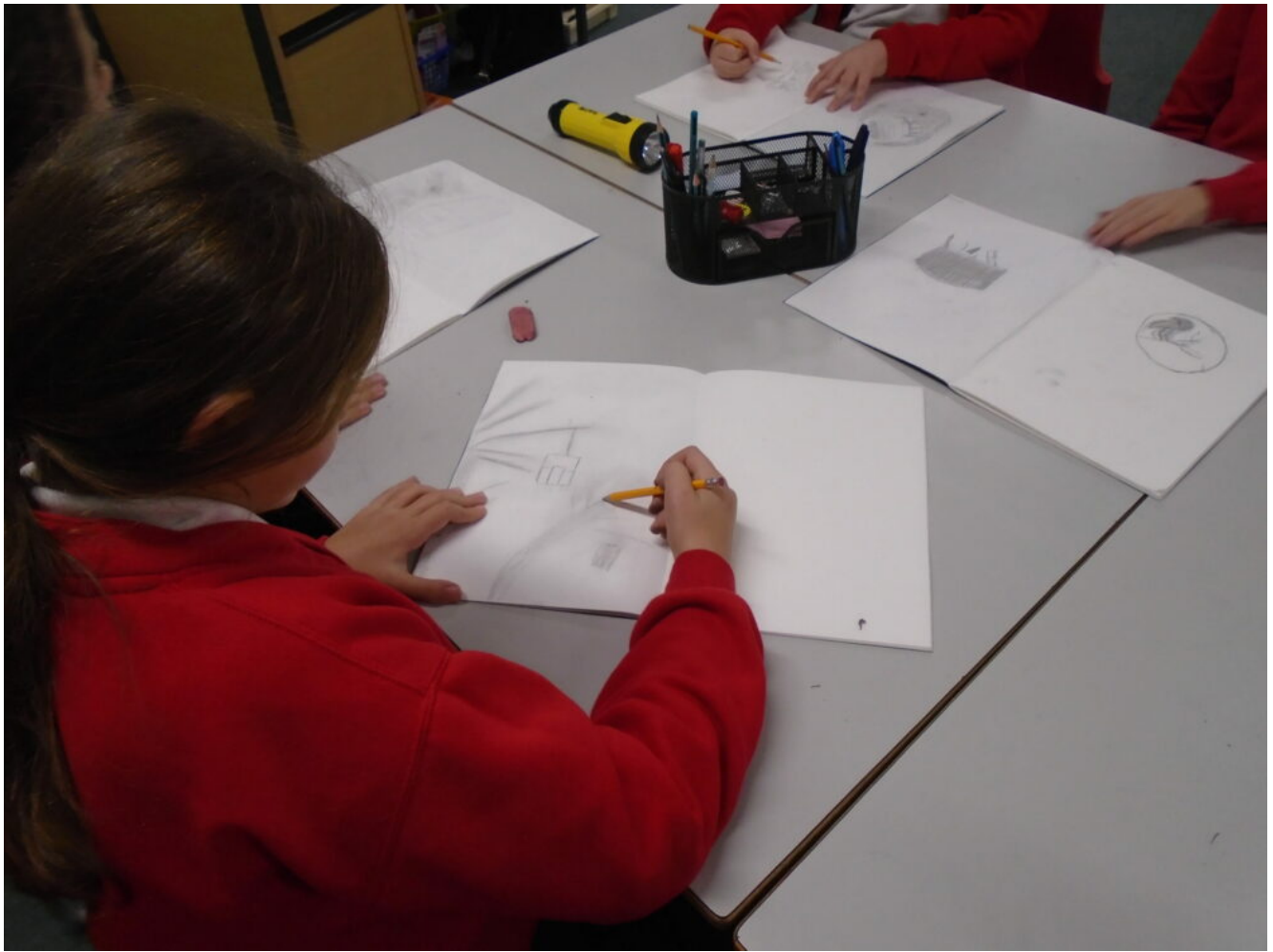
You may want to illustrate several of the images conjured by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in their speeches (the raven, the blanket of hell, the rooky wood, bloody and invisible hand etc) or may want to focus on one in particular.

How can you draw these images? Are you going to draw a recognisable crow or will you draw a close up of a black feather that sweeps across the page in a more abstract way?

How could the thick ribbon like lines you used in the warm up be used in your illustration? In your imagination what does heaven look like and how could it peep through the blanket of hell?

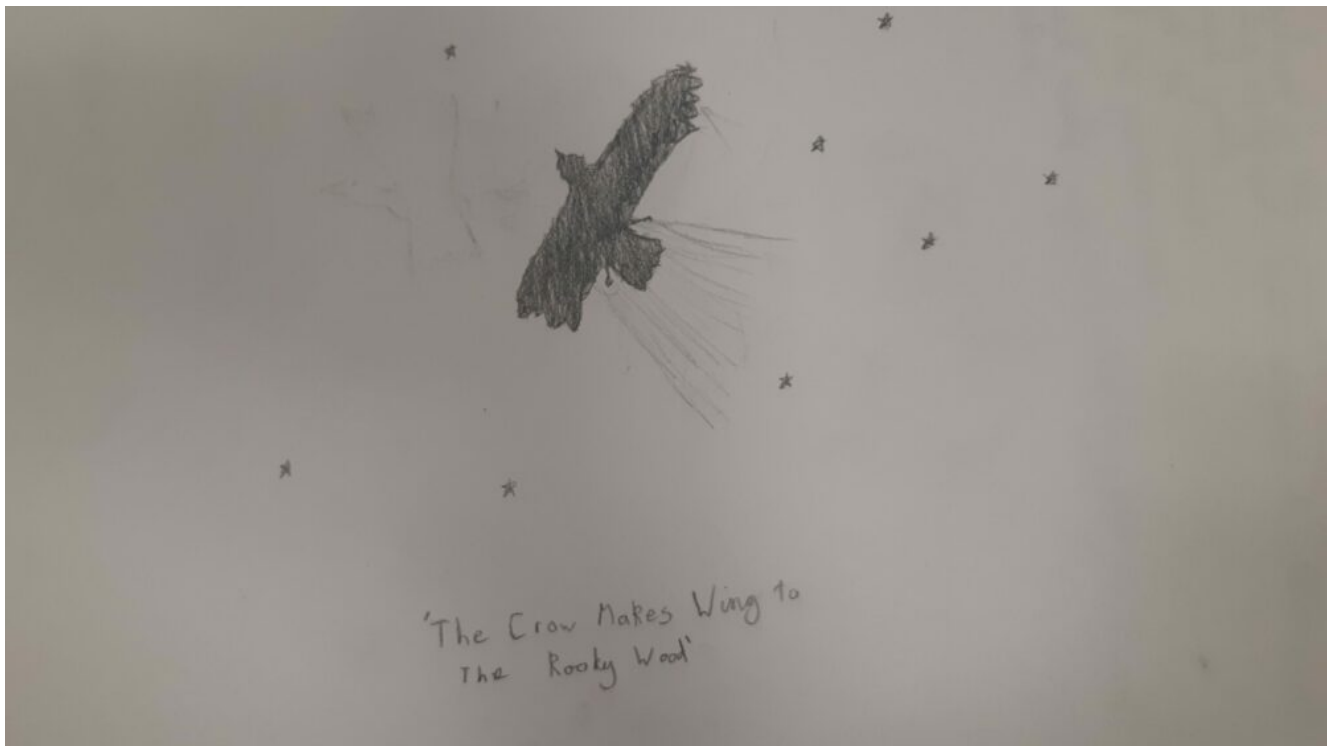
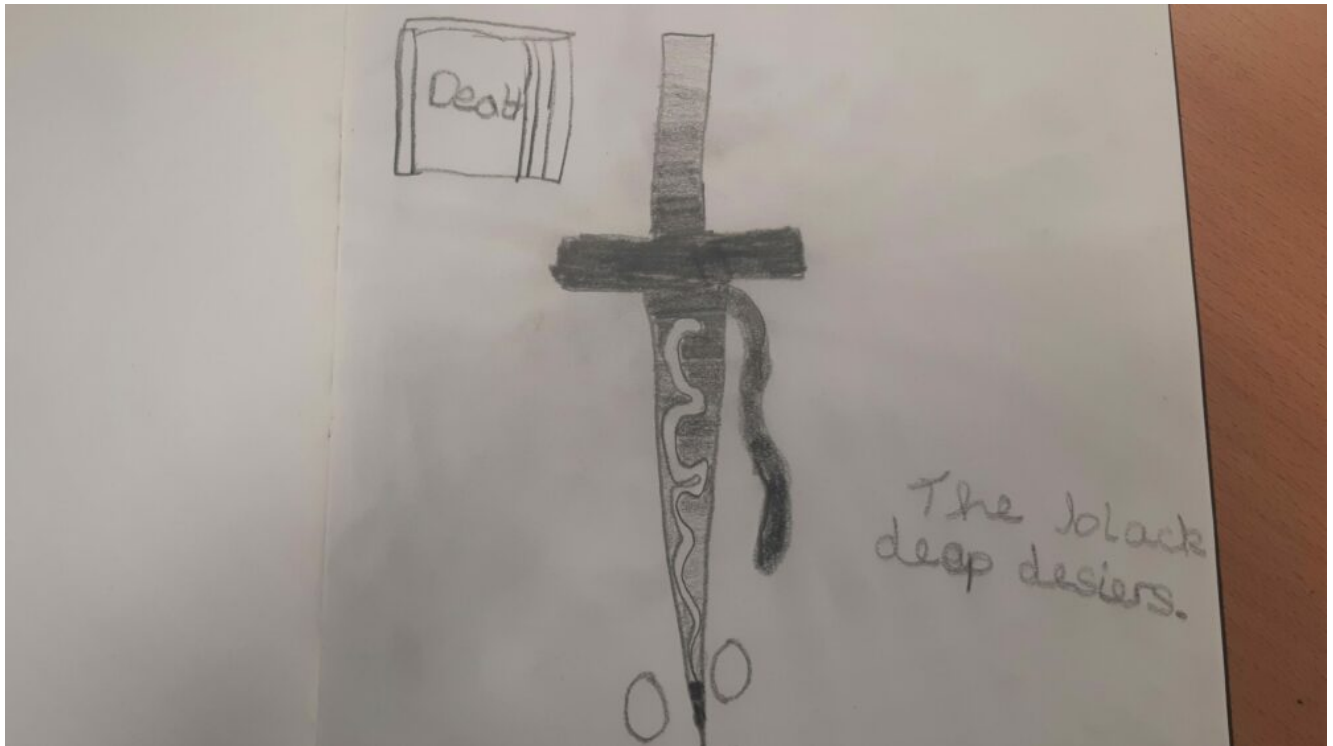
Use your sketchbook to draft a design of your ideas. Drawing as we think in this way helps develop creative problem solving. Develop your ideas as you draw roughly – there's no need to be too 'finished' at this point.

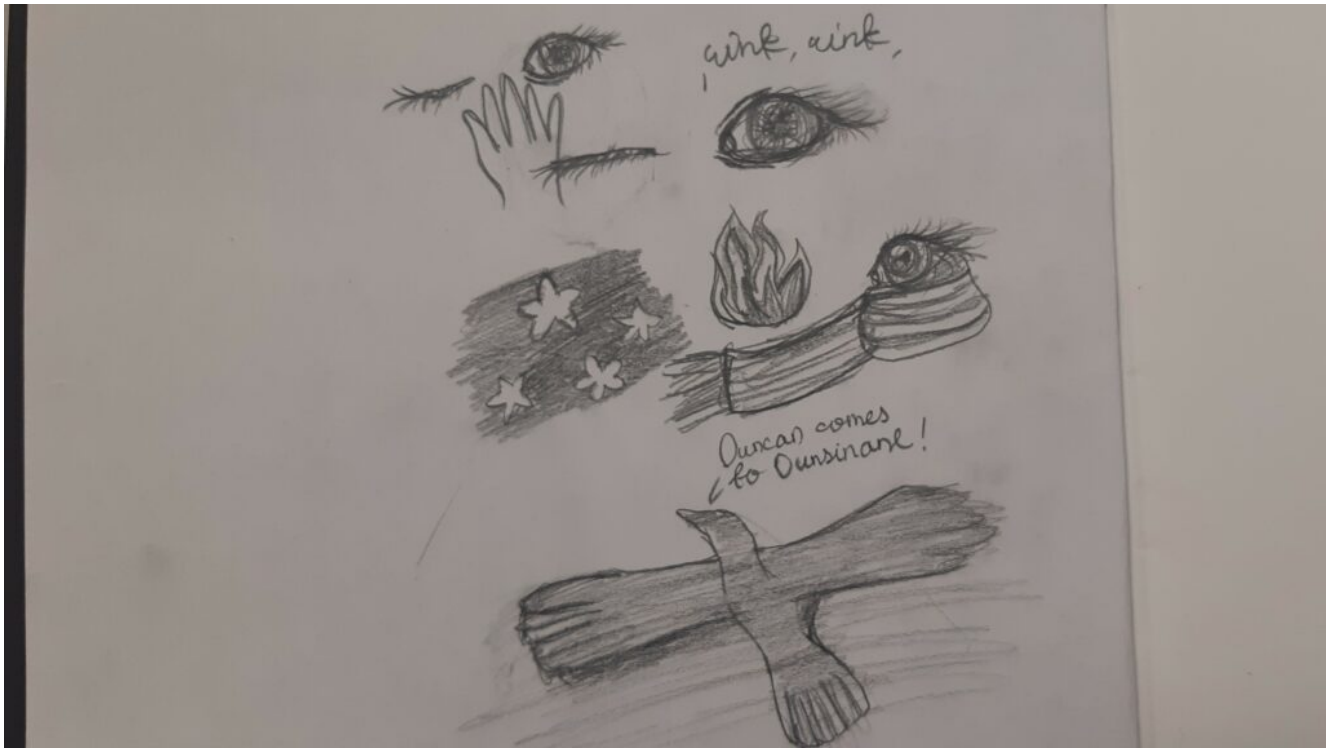
Think about the composition and what you want to communicate in your drawing.



How about adding some of the words or quotes from the play?
Does this help you to consolidate your ideas?







The theme we are looking at is light and dark – so charcoal and pencils will work well for this drawing – but can any colours enhance your art work too?

Once you have drafted your idea, move onto a fresh piece of paper and start drawing your final design.

Try not to rush your poster. If you don't get time to finish it you could take it home and finish it there, or maybe there will be time at the end of another session. It may also be possible to use the whole of this session for planning and re working your design - and then another session for developing the final poster.





STARRING:

Sir Ian McKellan

& Judi Dench

Write by:
William Shakespeare

Directed by:
Sylvester Stallone

MAKBETH

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Reflection:

Stick your work up on the wall or hold it up.

Can you share your creative thought process with the class?
How did your drawing in rough first help you refine your ideas?
Which light and dark imagery do you find most evocative or memorable? Why?

Do you think drawing in this way would make a good poster for a performance of Macbeth and want people to go and see it?

Move onto session 5 [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.

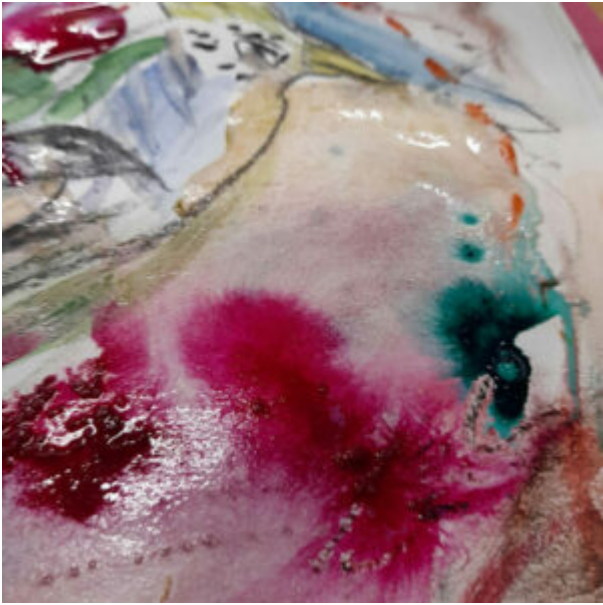
We believe everyone has the right to be creative and by working together and sharing ideas we can enable everyone to reach their creative potential.

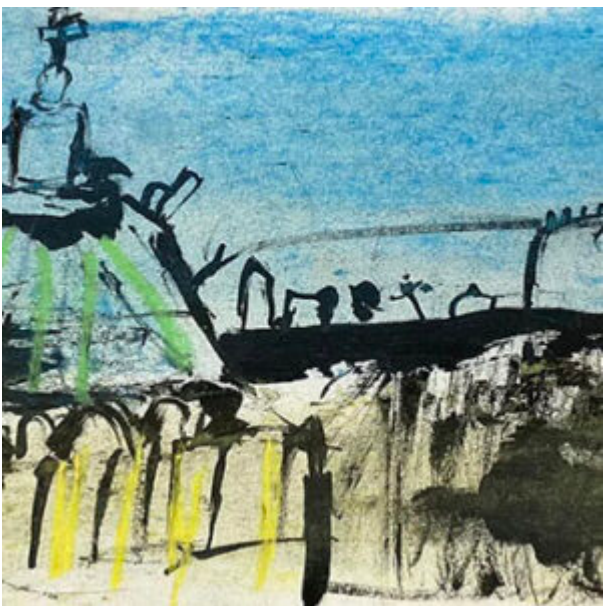
Mixed Media Landscape Challenges

See This Resource Used In Schools...













You May Also Like...

Pathway: Mixed Media Land and city scapes



[This is featured in the 'Mixed Media Land and City Scapes' pathway](#)

Talking Points: Kittie Jones



Talking Points: Vanessa Gardiner



Talking Points: The Shoreditch Sketcher



Expressive Painting & Colour Mixing

What We Like About This Post: “I love that this activity introduces students to colour mixing in a fun and interactive way, steering away from the more formal colour wheel and promoting a more intuitive way of colour mixing. The use of sketchbooks also gives students the opportunity to curate their work, nurturing the individuals creative decision making.” – Tobi, AccessArt

Osakana

Paint Your Corner Shop

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You May Also Like...

Pathway: Festival Feasts



[This is featured in the 'Festival Feasts' pathway](#)

Talking Points: Claes Oldenburg



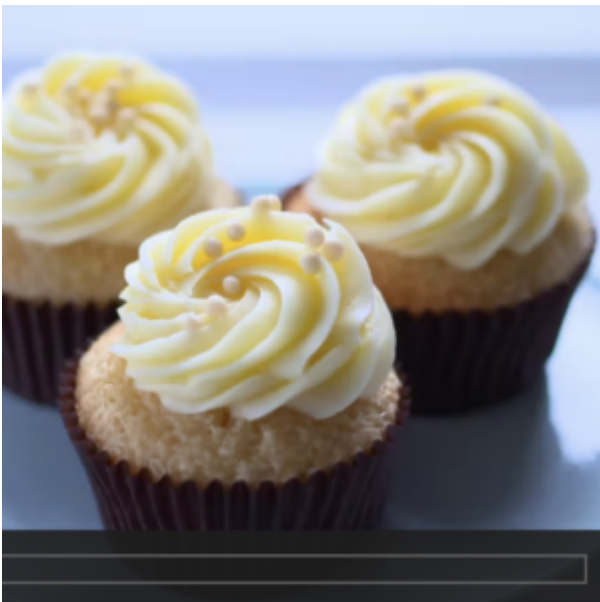
Talking Points: Nicole Dyer



Talking Points: Lucia Hierro



Drawing source material: Food



Light-field Monotype

Light-field Monotype with Acrylic Paint

Talking Points: Paul Klee

A collection of imagery and sources designed to encourage children to explore the work of Paul Klee.

Please note that this page contains links to external websites and has videos from external websites embedded. At the time of creating, AccessArt checked all links to ensure content is appropriate for teachers to access. However external websites and videos are updated and that is beyond our control.

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This resource is free to access and is not a part of AccessArt membership.

AGES 5-8

AGES 9-11

FREE TO ACCESS

Watercolour Paintings by Paul Klee

Take a close look at these paintings. Use the questions to talk about them as a class.

Klee was born in 1879 in Switzerland. When he was 35 he visited Tunisia in Africa, where his experience of the light and colours of the landscapes and architecture helped awaken his interest in colour.

He became less interested in painting exactly what he saw and in fact from 1915 onwards he never again worked from a model. Instead, he became interested in painting the colours around him, letting them detach themselves from the objects the colours were on. In this way his work moved

towards Abstraction.

He became interested in creating fantastical worlds, full of symbols, shapes, colour and line.

He took his inspiration from the world around him, and his imaginative response to the world, and also from poetry, music and literature.

Sometimes his work was serious and meditative, other times it was full of humour. He also loved the sounds of words and phrases and the titles of works were often very important to Klee.



Battle scene from the funny and fantastic opera "The Seafarers" (1923). Painting by Paul Klee.

Original from the Kunstmuseum Basel Museum

Questions to Ask Children

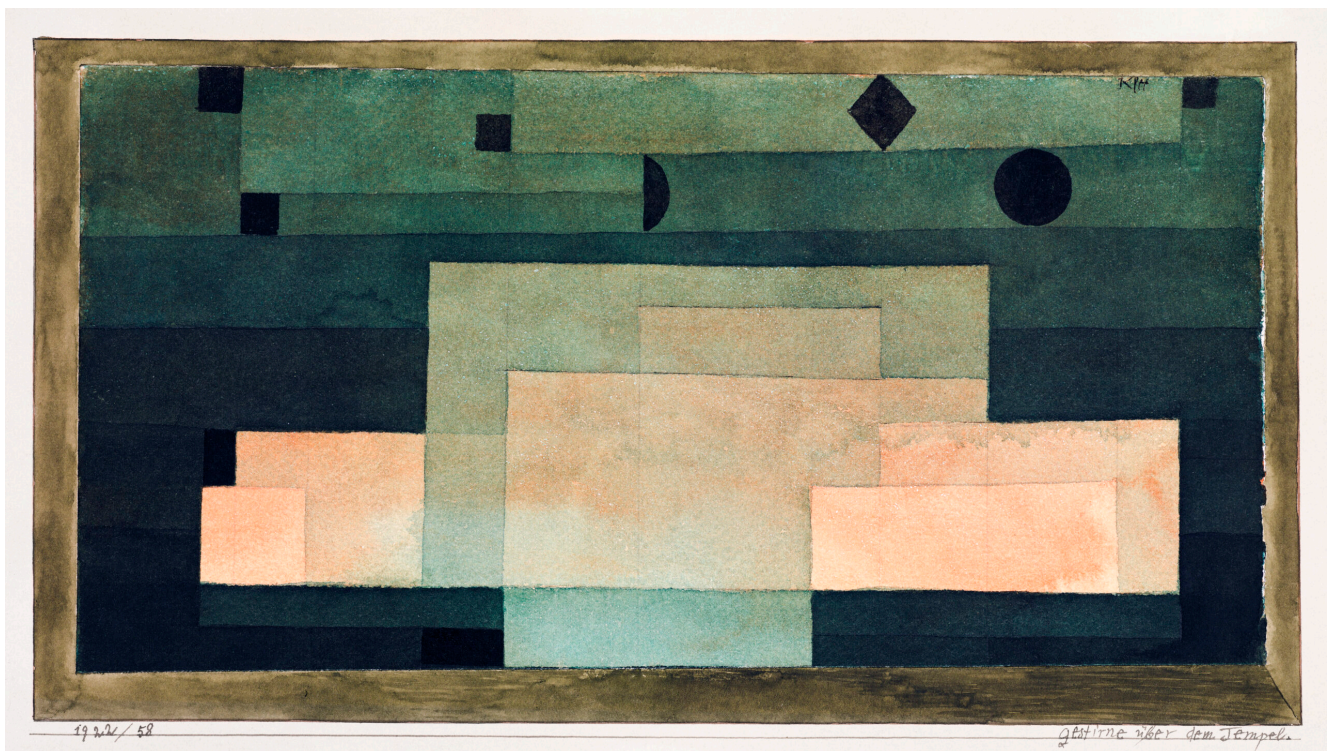
Describe what you see.

What do you think is happening?

How does the title change the painting?

Why do you think Klee painted in blocks of colour?

How does the painting make you feel?



The Firmament Above the Temple (1922) by Paul Klee. Original from The MET Museum

Questions to Ask Children

Describe what you see.

Can you see the landscape and the sky? How has Klee painted them?

How does the painting make you feel?



Temple Gardens (1920) by Paul Klee. Original from The MET Museum

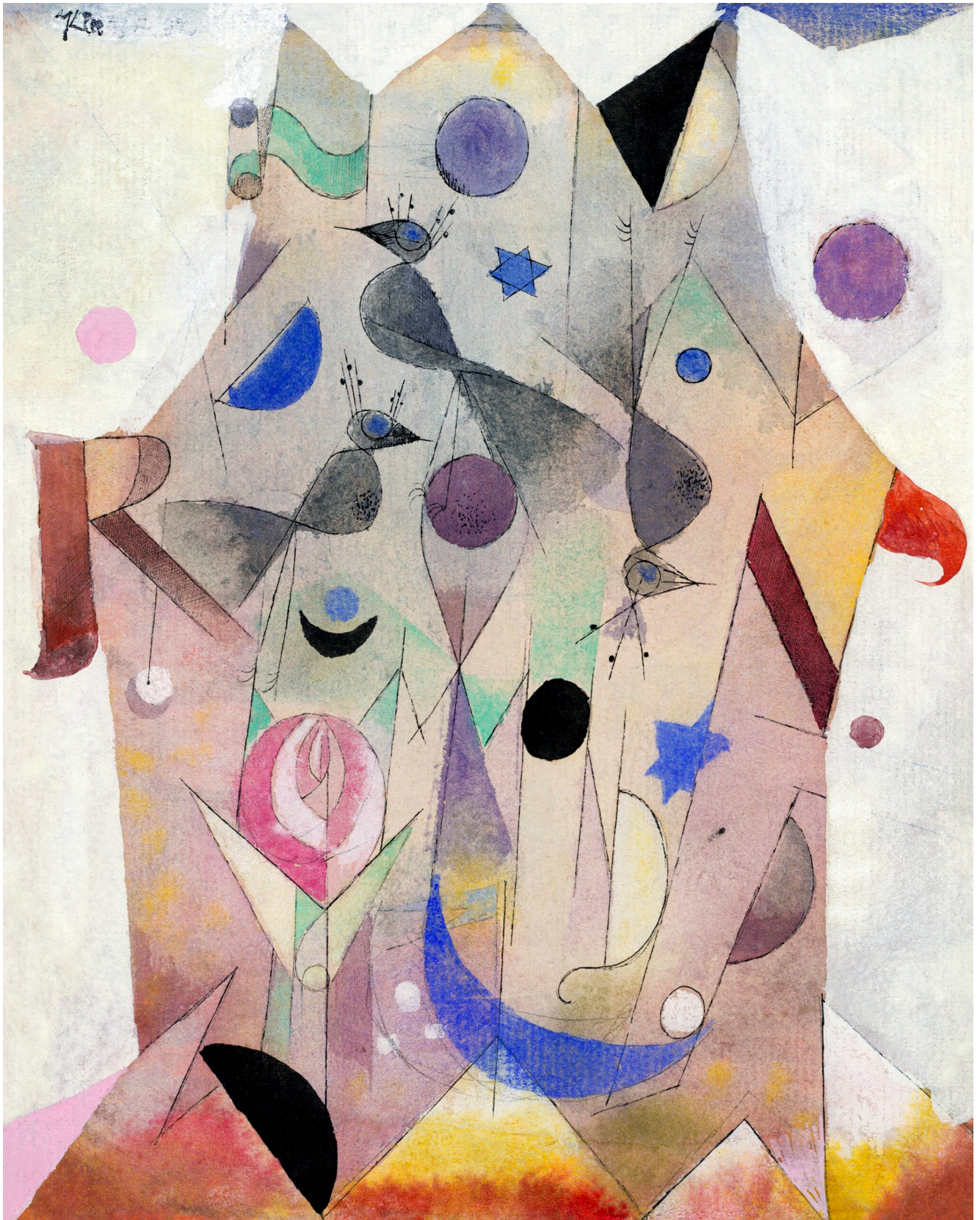
Questions to Ask Children

Describe what you see.

How does this landscape make you feel?

If you were there, in the painting, how would you feel?

Tell me about the colours. Why do you think Klee choose these colours?



Persian Nightingales (1917) by Paul Klee. Original

portrait painting from The Art Institute of Chicago.

Questions to Ask Children

Describe what you see.

What materials do you think Klee used?

Can you see two letters?

The R and the N stand for Rose and Nightingale. Can you spot the rose and the Nightingales in the painting?

How does this painting make you feel?

How do you think the painter felt when he painted it?

This is an animation of one of Klee's paintings.

Questions to Ask Children

How do you feel watching the animation?

What kind of world has Klee/the animator created?

If you could animate one of the paintings above, how would you bring it to life? What would you make it do?

In this video Klee's paintings are shown alongside music.

Questions to Ask Children

How does the music change the way you look at the paintings?

Do you think Klee would have liked this video (remember Klee made his paintings at a time when there were very few films).

This Talking Points Is Used In...

Pathway: Exploring Watercolour



[Featured in the 'Exploring Watercolour' pathway](#)

using sketchbooks to make visual notes



Show me what you see



Basic and Budget Friendly Art Materials for Primary Schools

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: Flemish and Dutch Still Life Painters



Talking Points: Paul Cezanne



talking points: Contemporary still life



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

Volcano Painting inspired by

Frank Bowling

See This Resource Used In
Schools...



















What We Like About This Resource...

“We love how this activity provides an opportunity to explore a well known Artist’s work, through focussing on their materials and techniques. The children looked at Frank Bowling’s work before creating their own individual responses that retained individual ownership – something we advocate as part of a rich and balanced visual arts education. It was also great to see how a professional artist visited the school to further enhance the children’s experience.” – *Rachel, AccessArt*

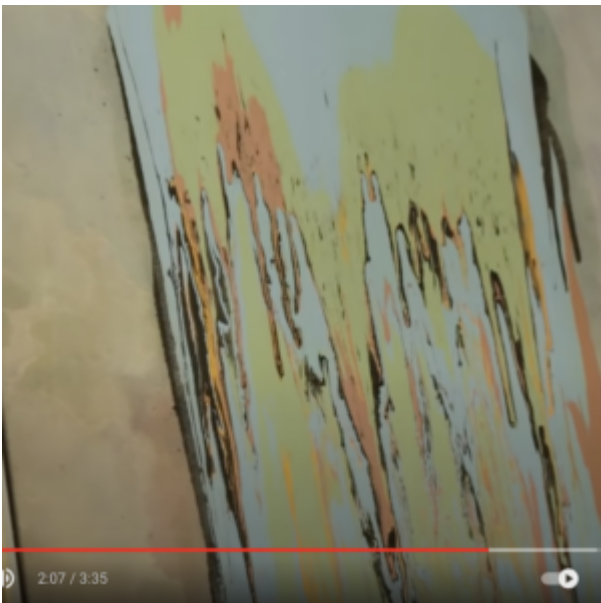
You May Also Like...

Pathway: Cloth, thread, paint



[This is featured in the 'Cloth, Thread, Paint' pathway](#)

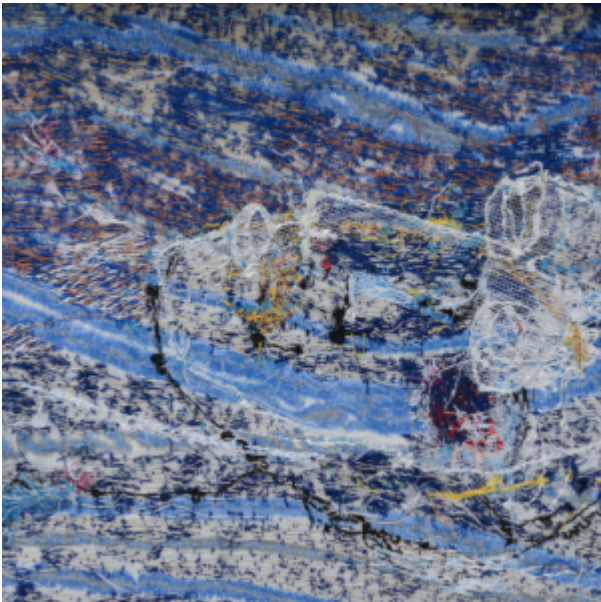
Talking Points: Frank Bowling



Talking Points: Hannah Rae



Talking Points: Alice Kettle



Ethos: Learning From Participants

Let Me Inspire You: Emma Burleigh

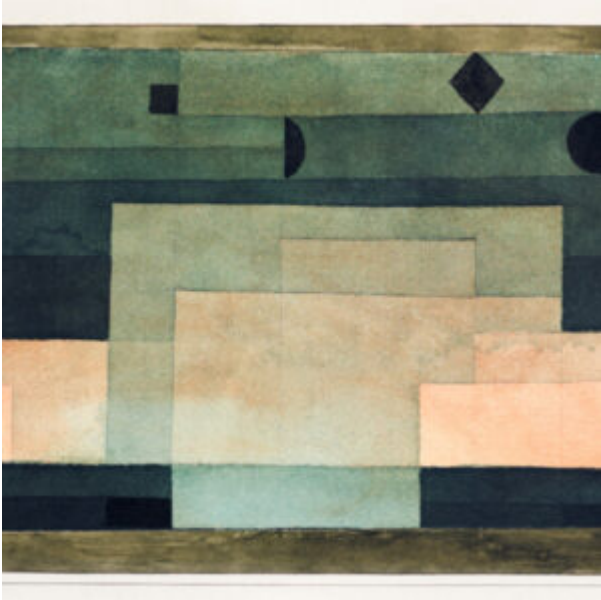
You May Also Like....

Pathway: Exploring Watercolour



[Featured in the 'Exploring Watercolour' pathway](#)

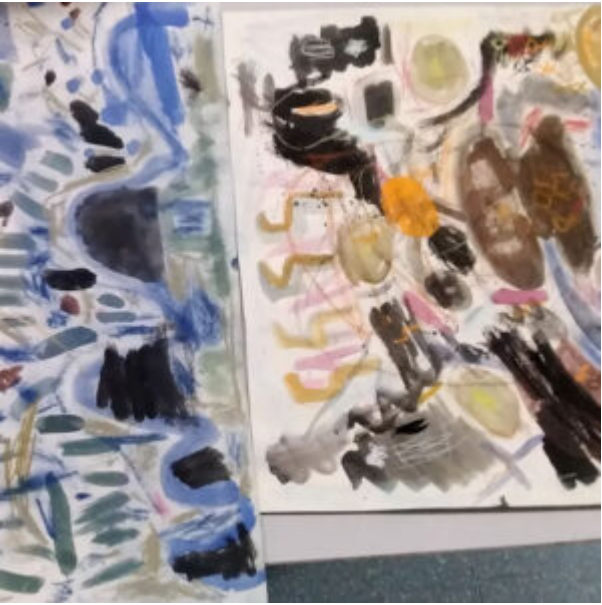
Talking Points: Paul Klee



[Explore the work of Paul Klee](#)

**DrawAble: Exploring Through
Watercolour by Emma Burleigh
Part Three**

**See This Resource Used In
Schools...**



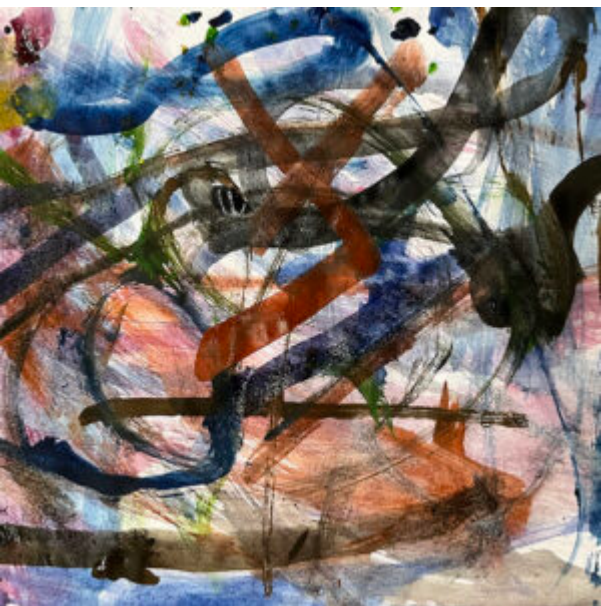
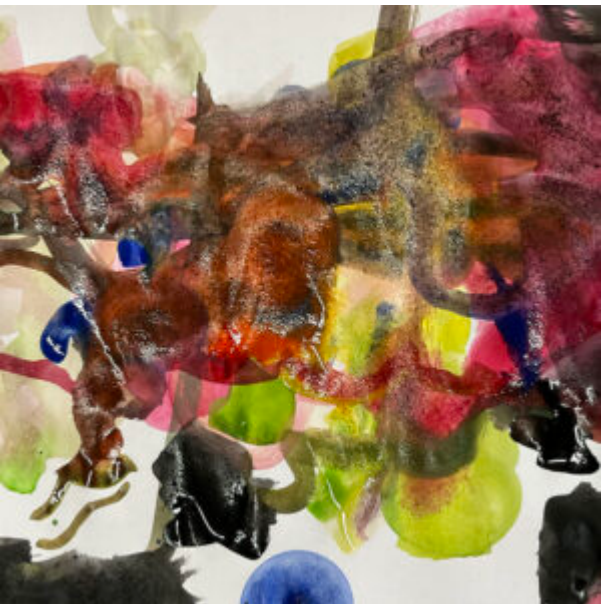




DrawAble: Exploring Through Watercolour by Emma Burleigh Part Two

**See This Resource Used In
Schools...**









DrawAble: Exploring Through Watercolour by Emma Burleigh Part One

Drawable: Globe Paintings by Stephanie Cubbin

Back – Painted Portraits

How to create portraits using an effective back painted technique. A great activity to explore less traditional portraiture methods that is suitable for a wide range of primary age groups.

Be Inspired by Flowers in a Glass Vase by Jan Davidsz de Heem

This resource looks at 'Flowers in a Glass Vase' by the Dutch painter, Jan Davidsz de Heem (1606-1684), on permanent display at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and how it might inspire your own creative responses and experimentation with colour.