

Exploring Macbeth Through Art: Out Damn Spot!

By [Rachel Thompson.](#)



In this fifth of six resources on Shakespeare's Macbeth, we take a closer look at Lady Macbeth's descent into madness, and specifically her famous 'Out Damn Spot' soliloquy.

The aim of the session is to use watercolour to create an observational painting of two hands covered in blood, with the option of adding either an imagined or a representational background. We recommend leaving the finer details and approach open for the children to interpret.

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

Session 5: Out Damn Spot!

Warm Up: 15 minutes

Main Activity: 45 minutes

Materials Needed: Sketchbooks, pencils, charcoal, A4 and A3 watercolour paper (or thick cartridge if watercolour paper not

available), watercolour paints, soft round headed brushes, small sponges.

Focus Theme: Health, Order and Disorder

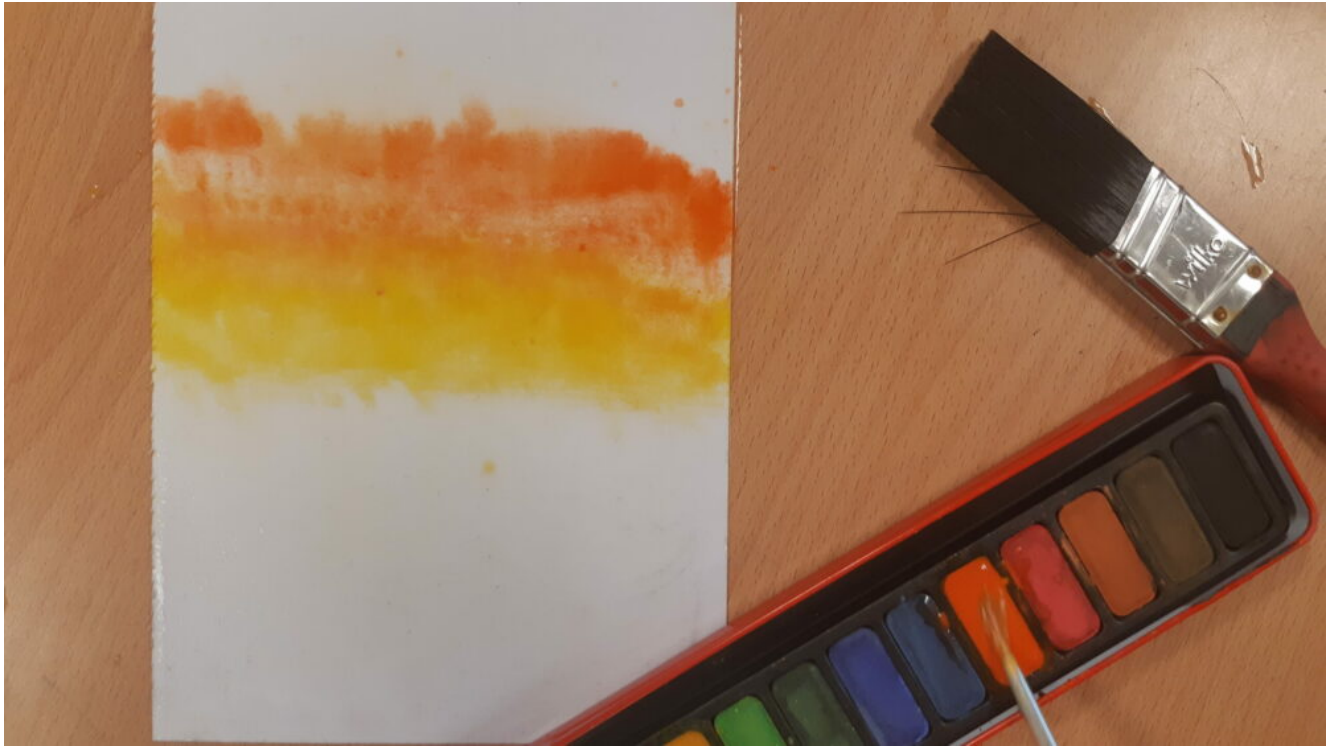
Time to Warm Up! Exploring watercolour paints and the 'wet on wet' technique.

Take a sheet of A4 watercolour paper and using a wet sponge or very large brush, smooth water all over the surface of the paper.

Vary the amount of water you add – keeping some areas more wet than others.

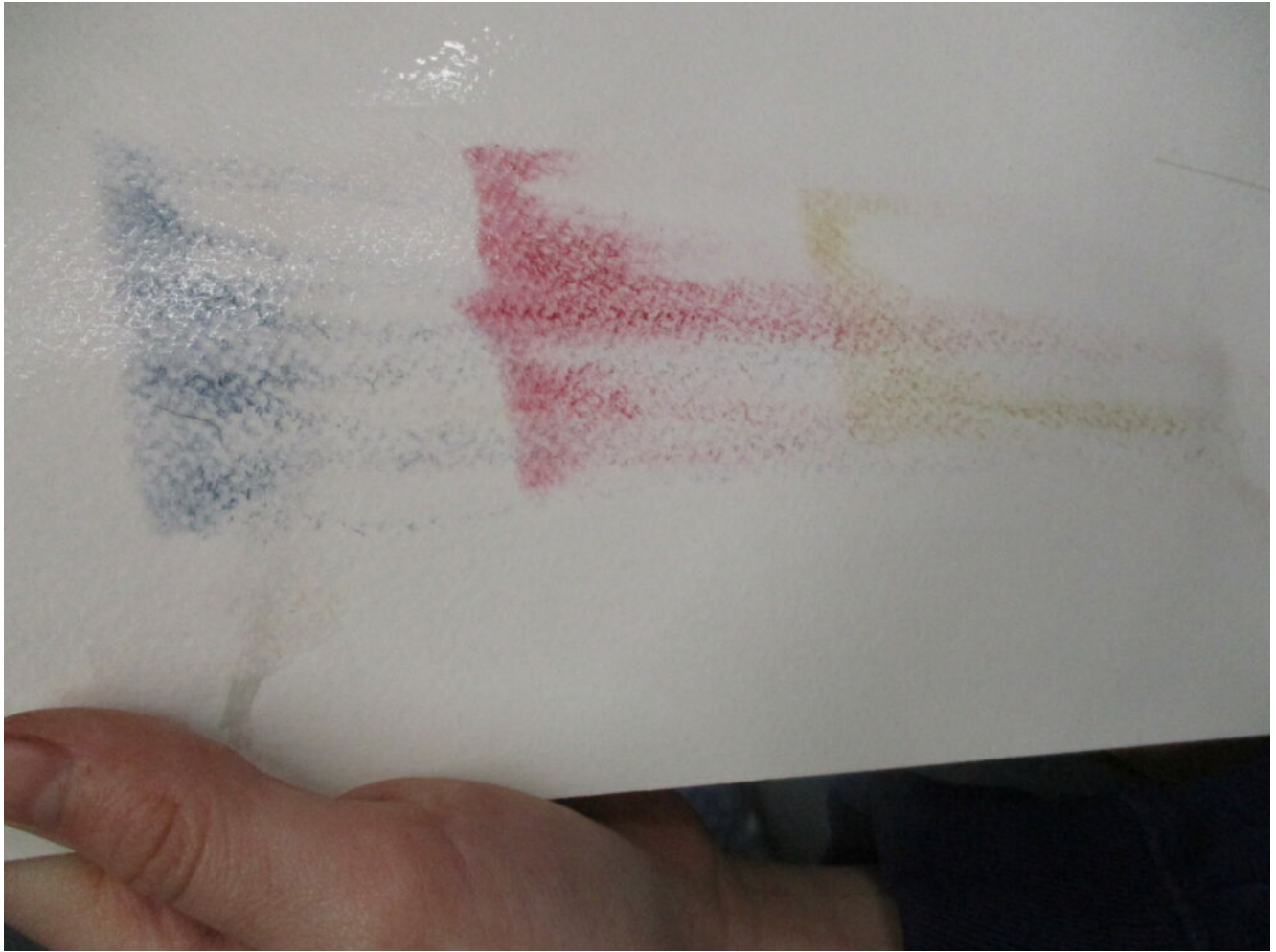
Then, using a smaller soft brush, drop some water colour paint onto the paper and watch what happens. Add more paint to other areas before adding more colours. Watch how the colours bleed into one another.





Do any patterns form, or can you see any 'pictures'? Watercolour paint is different to some other paints in that we can blur, erase or alter existing painting by saturating it with water.





You can see this technique (within a different context) in action [here](#):

Starter Discussion:

After Macbeth has murdered Duncan he is shaken and panicked. He has blood all over his hands and is horrified at the sight of them.

Lady Macbeth has little patience with him and accuses him of being a foolish coward. In response to Macbeth's anguish, she tells him to '*Consider it not so deeply*'.

She tells Macbeth to wash the blood off his hands and later mentions that '*A little water clears us of this deed*'..'

Macbeth's feelings are a bit different to this:

*'How is't with me, when every noise appals me?
What hands are here? Ha! They pluck out
mine eyes!*

*Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red'.*

What do you think Macbeth is thinking here?

Macbeth is wondering if even the whole ocean will be enough to wash his hands clean of the blood that covers them. The word 'incarnation' refers to the carnation flower which are sometimes red. Macbeth is saying that instead of the sea washing his hands clean, his hands will stain the sea red because there is so much blood on them.

Context:

The image of water is used by Shakespeare here to symbolise the washing away of guilt and sin. Later in the play, and despite her earlier calmness, Lady Macbeth is driven mad by guilt and continuously washes her hands to rid them of an imagined 'spot' she can't get rid of.

Shakespeare's audience would have seen water as life giving as well as cleansing and of course, water is associated with the washing away of sin in Christian beliefs. Shakespeare's audience would have been followers of the Christian faith, believing in good and evil and that committing sin win went against God's will.

Main Activity: Lady Macbeth's Hands

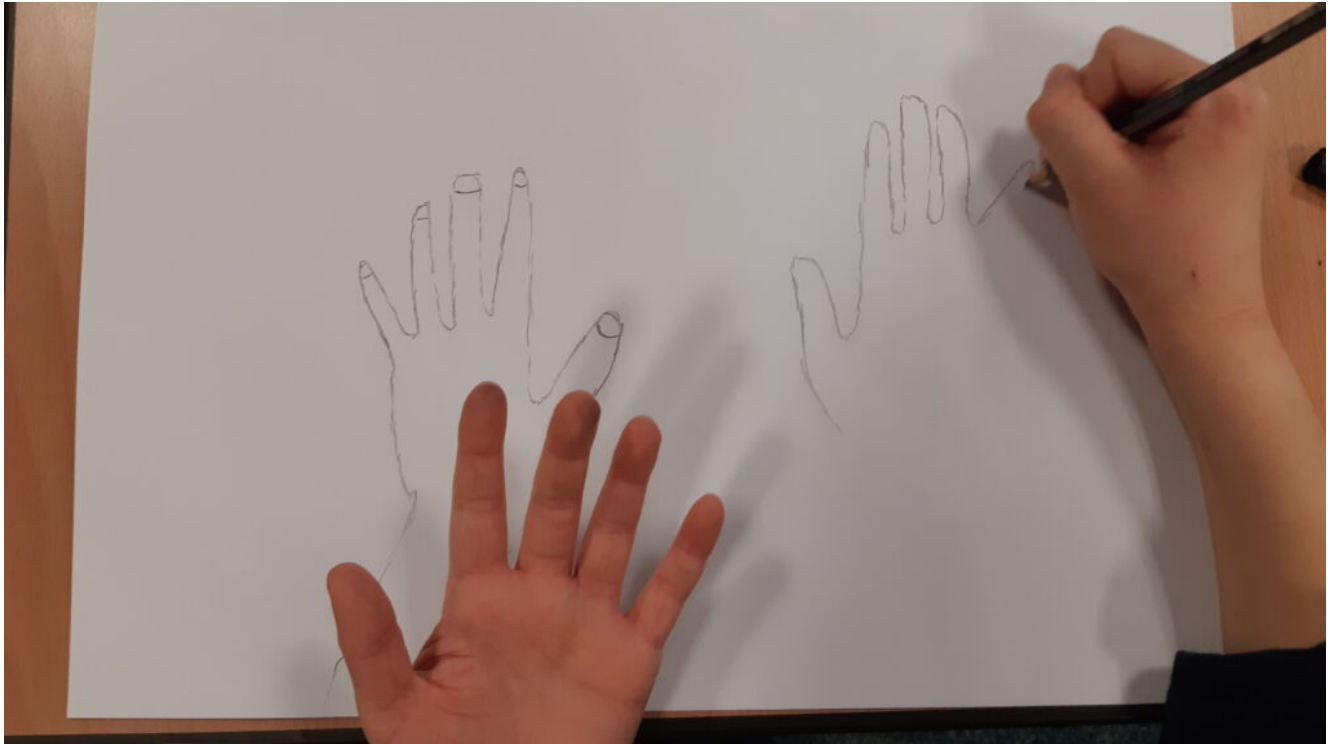
We're going to explore watercolour in a little more detail.

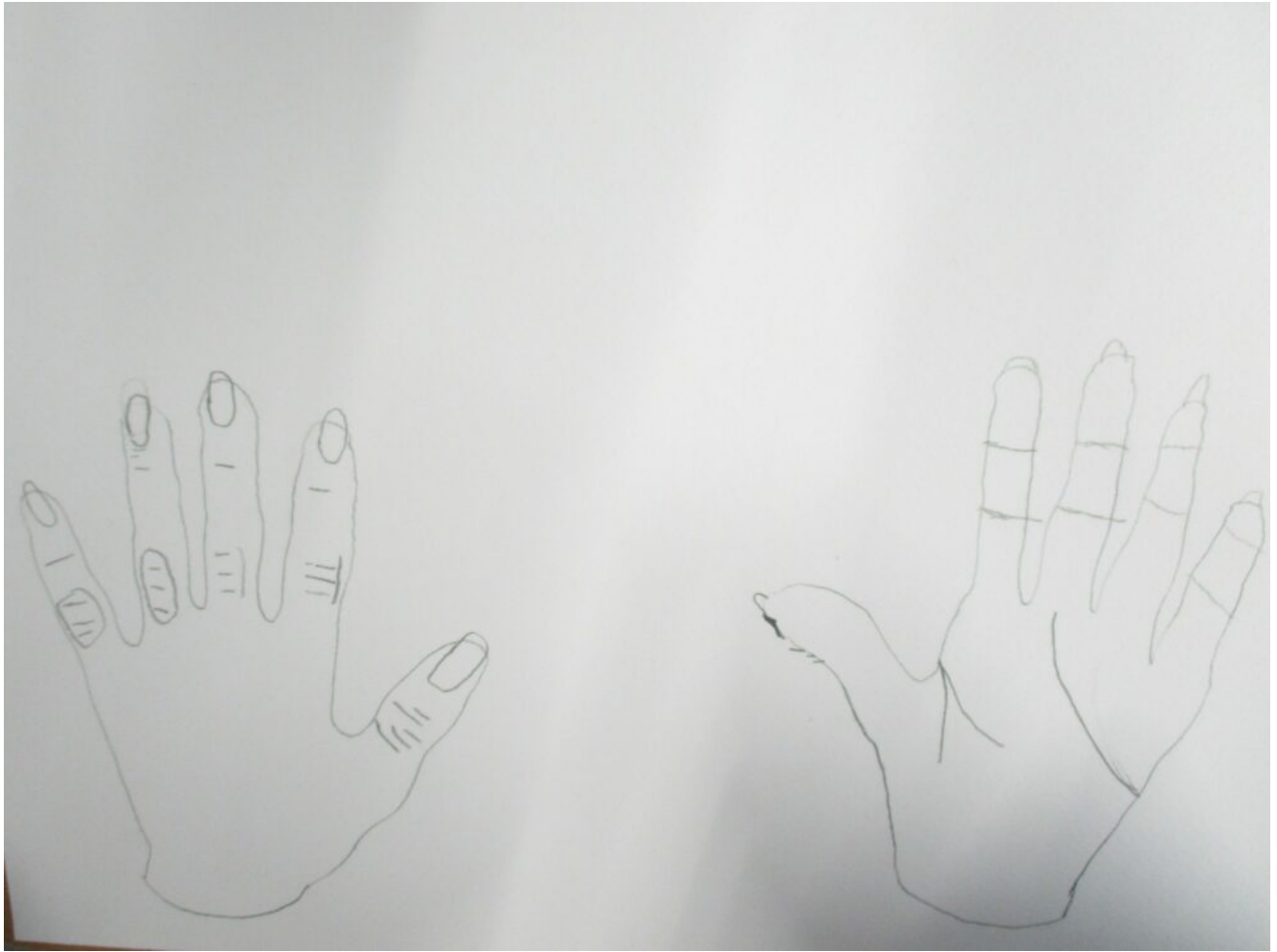
Take a piece of A3 water colour paper and position it in landscape orientation. Hold your non dominant hand out in front of you and, using the careful looking you've used in previous activities, draw a pencil outline of your hand on one side of the paper.

If your non dominant hand is your left, draw your left hand on the left-hand side of the paper and vice versa for the right.

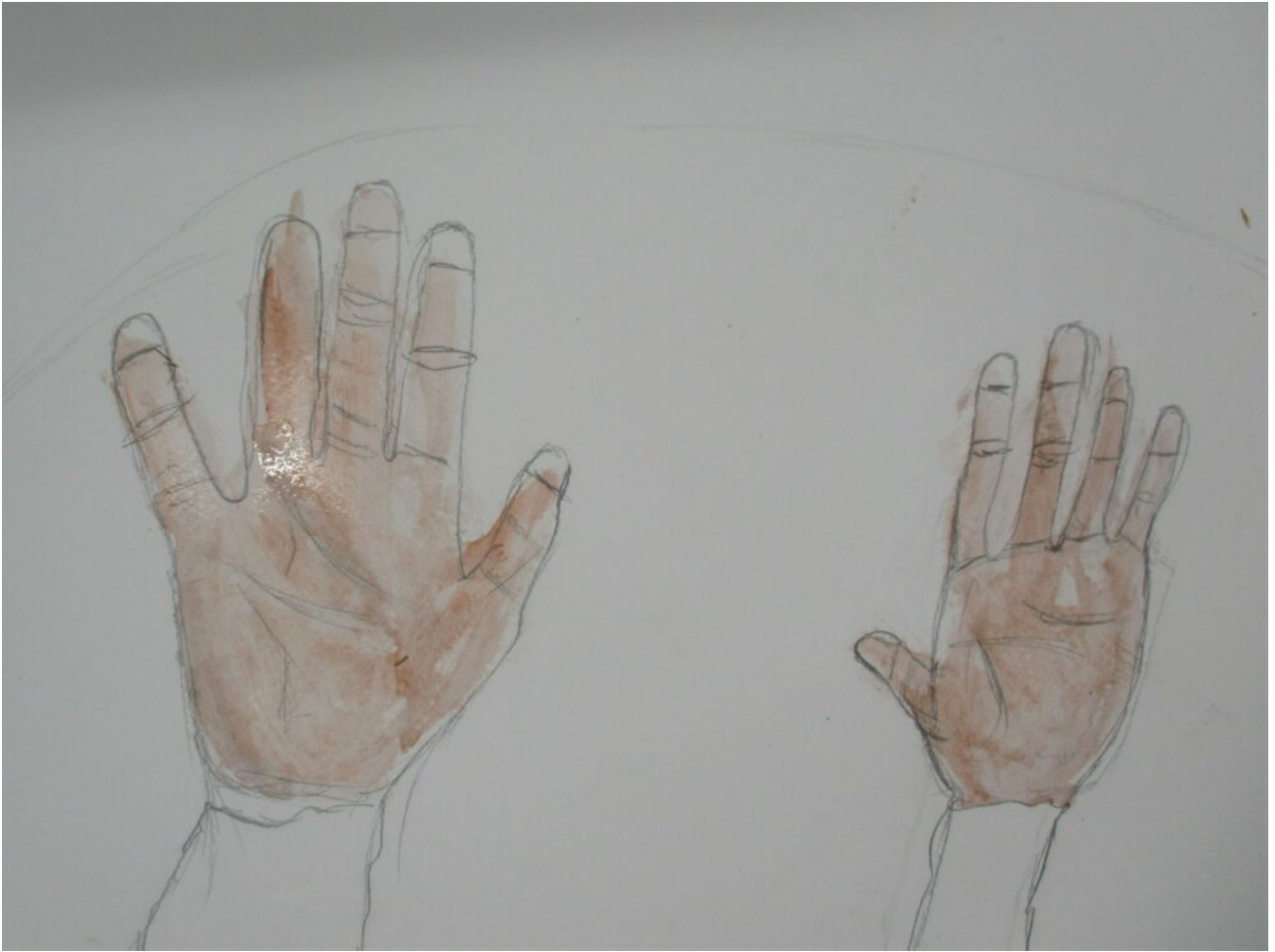
Of course, an easier way to do this is to actually draw round your hand – but drawing by looking develops our skills in observation and careful looking.

Flip your hand over and draw it again, next to the other so that the thumbs are facing. You should end up with a left and right hand (albeit one which is palm facing).





Begin to add some colour and tonal value to your hands. This means looking at the areas of dark and light.



Use some water-soluble charcoal, watercolour pencils or more watercolour paints to add in some detail. Look at your own hands to support this. This will be slightly easier with your non dominant hand as you won't have to swap between drawing and looking as with your dominant hand – but try not to let that impinge too much and just embrace the challenge!

When you are happy with how your hands look, take some red water colour paint and dab some onto the hands. This represents the blood on Lady Macbeth's hands that she can't get off.







You could work back into the hands using pencils or charcoal to further define the form or add tonal value.



Let this dry for a few minutes or so while you move onto the background.

Many of the scenes between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth take place within their castle in Scotland. The scenes between them are at night, hushed and secretive as they plot their murderous deeds. How can you communicate the 'feel' of the dark castle walls behind your (Lady Macbeth's) hands? Think about the materials you have used so far on these sessions. Make choices as to what you think would work best.

Do you want to create some brick like patterns that look like the cold dark stone of the castle walls, or will you go for a more abstract approach – thinking about mood instead? Think back to your heathland pictures that showed the disordered landscape of Macbeth. Can you apply a similar approach to this picture?



When you're happy with the background, turn your focus back to the hands which should now be dry. Just like Lady Macbeth, you're going to try and wash off the blood!

You may find it helpful to consider the following words uttered by Lady Macbeth in her madness:

*'Out, damned spot! Out, I say -
One; two: why, then 'tis time to do't: Hell
is murky! - Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and
afeared? What need we fear who knows it,
when none can call our power to account? -
Yet who would have thought the old man o
have had so much blood in him?'*
(Act V Scene 1)

Add some water to the hands using a small sponge or brush. Work quite carefully so you don't completely swamp the paper in water!

Begin to loosen the red paint so that it 'bleeds' around the hands and into the water.

Don't worry if the marks you've already made on the hands begin to blur or even smudge into the background. This is supposed to be an exploration of Lady Macbeth's experience where she believes in her madness that her hands are covered in blood, when in fact she is trying to wash away what isn't actually there.

Once you feel enough water has been added, let your pictures dry for a few moments before laying up some more lines or marks again. Would the hands benefit from some more shadow at this point? Did something interesting happen when some water merged into the background? Can you build on this?

You may like to let your drawings dry completely and come back to them another day if you have run out of time.

Reflection:

Consider the different stages to this activity: the observational drawing of hands, the watercolour painting, thinking about the background and composition – which did you find the most fun? Why?

Are there any materials you found worked well together? Or any that didn't for you?

Can you think of any ways you could explore other themes in the play Macbeth using water colour?

Move onto session 6 [here](#).

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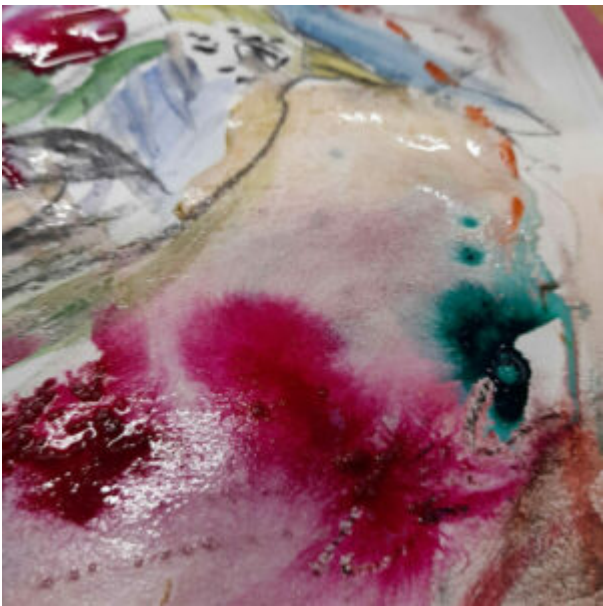
Exploring Macbeth Through Art: Light and Dark Posters

Mixed Media Landscape Challenges

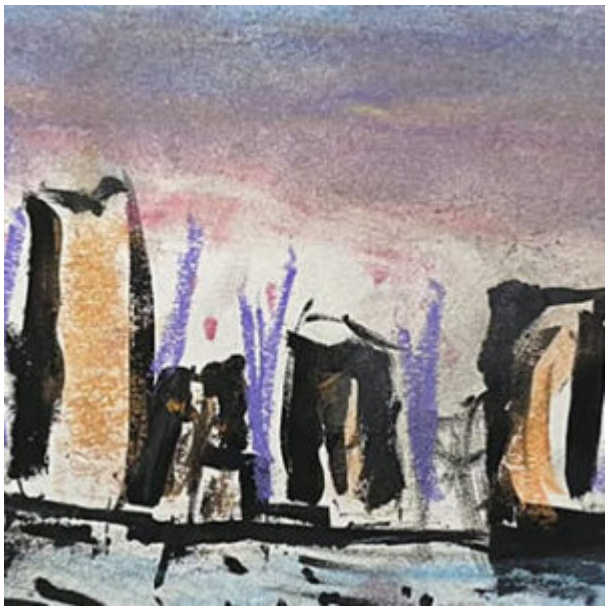
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Pathway: Mixed Media Land and city scapes



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

Talking Points: Vanessa Gardiner



Talking Points: The Shoreditch Sketcher

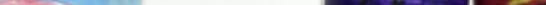


Talking Points: Kittie Jones



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





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

Talking Points: Claes Oldenburg



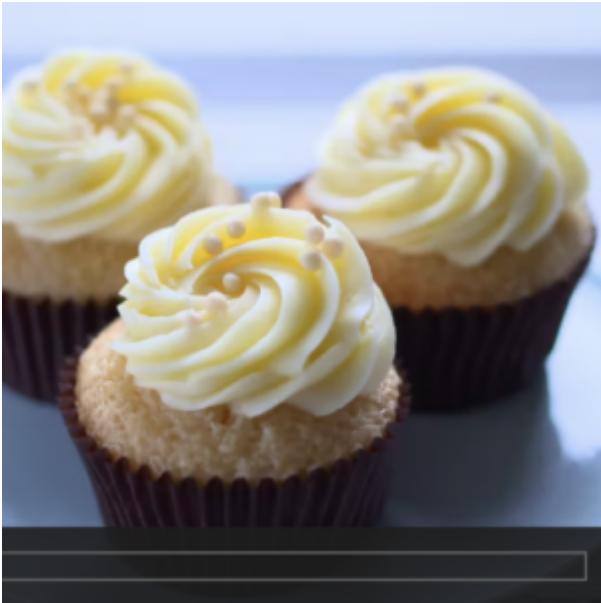
Talking Points: Nicole Dyer



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.

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AGES 5-8

AGES 9-11

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.

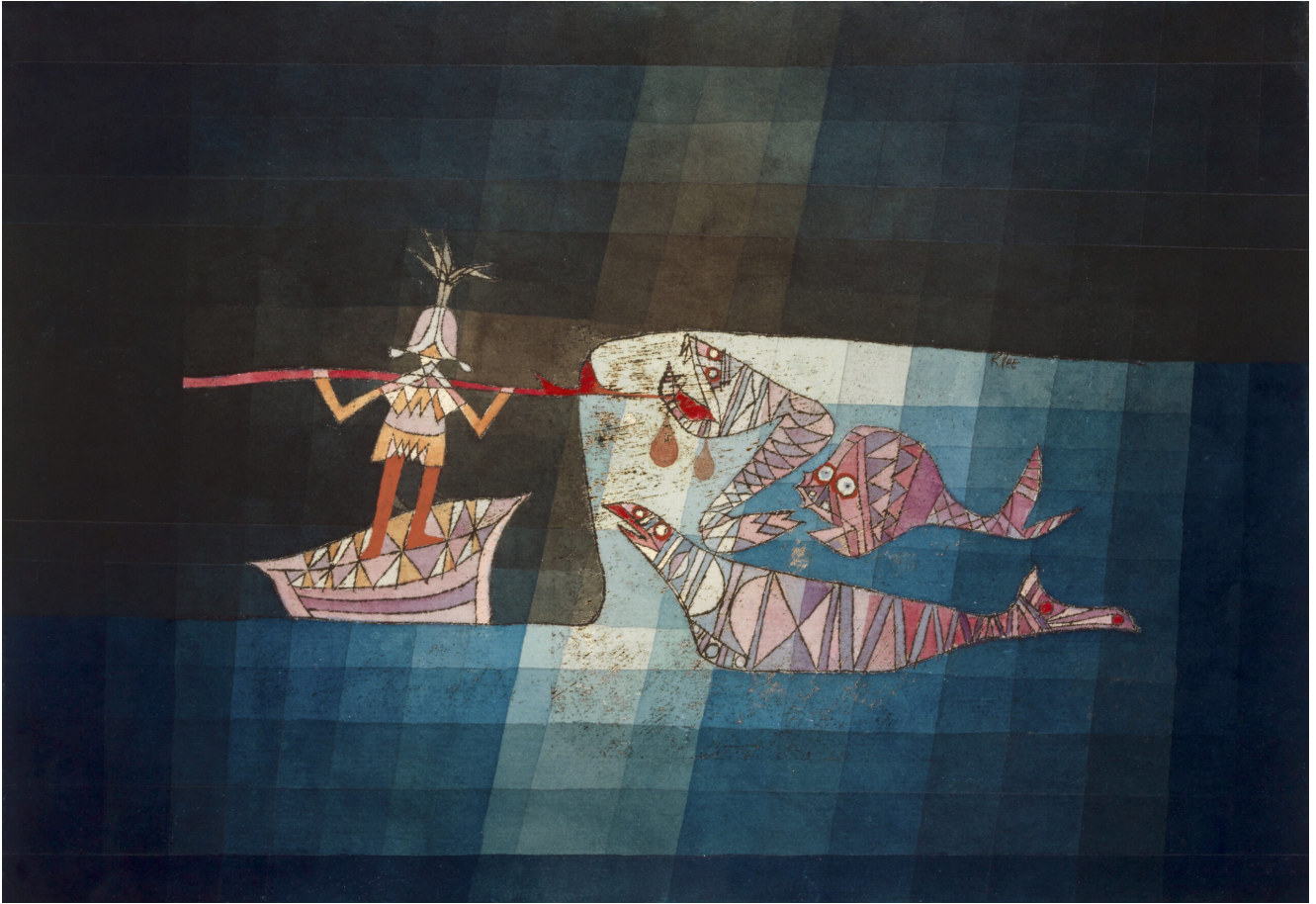
He became less interested in painting exactly what he saw and in fact from 1915 onwards he never again worked from a model. Instead, he became interested in painting the colours around him, letting them detach themselves from the objects the colours were on. In this way his work moved towards Abstraction.

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

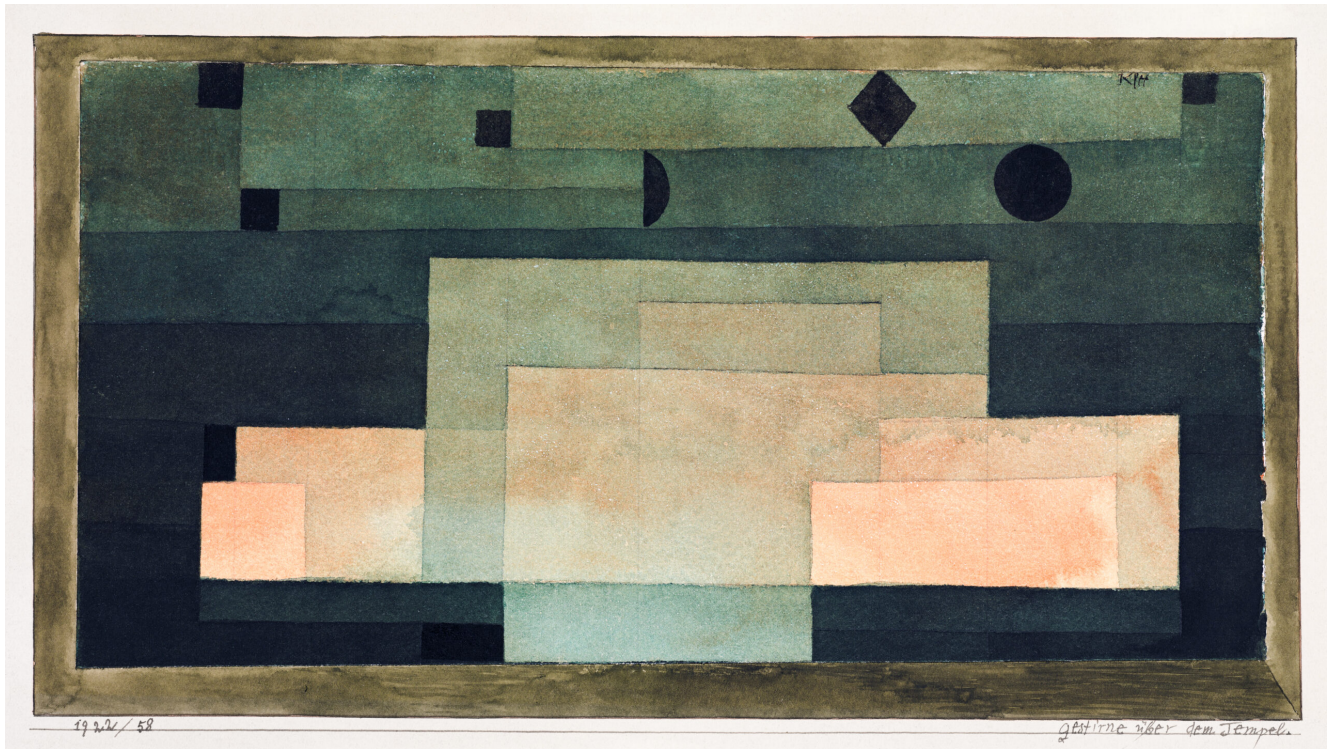
Describe what you see.

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

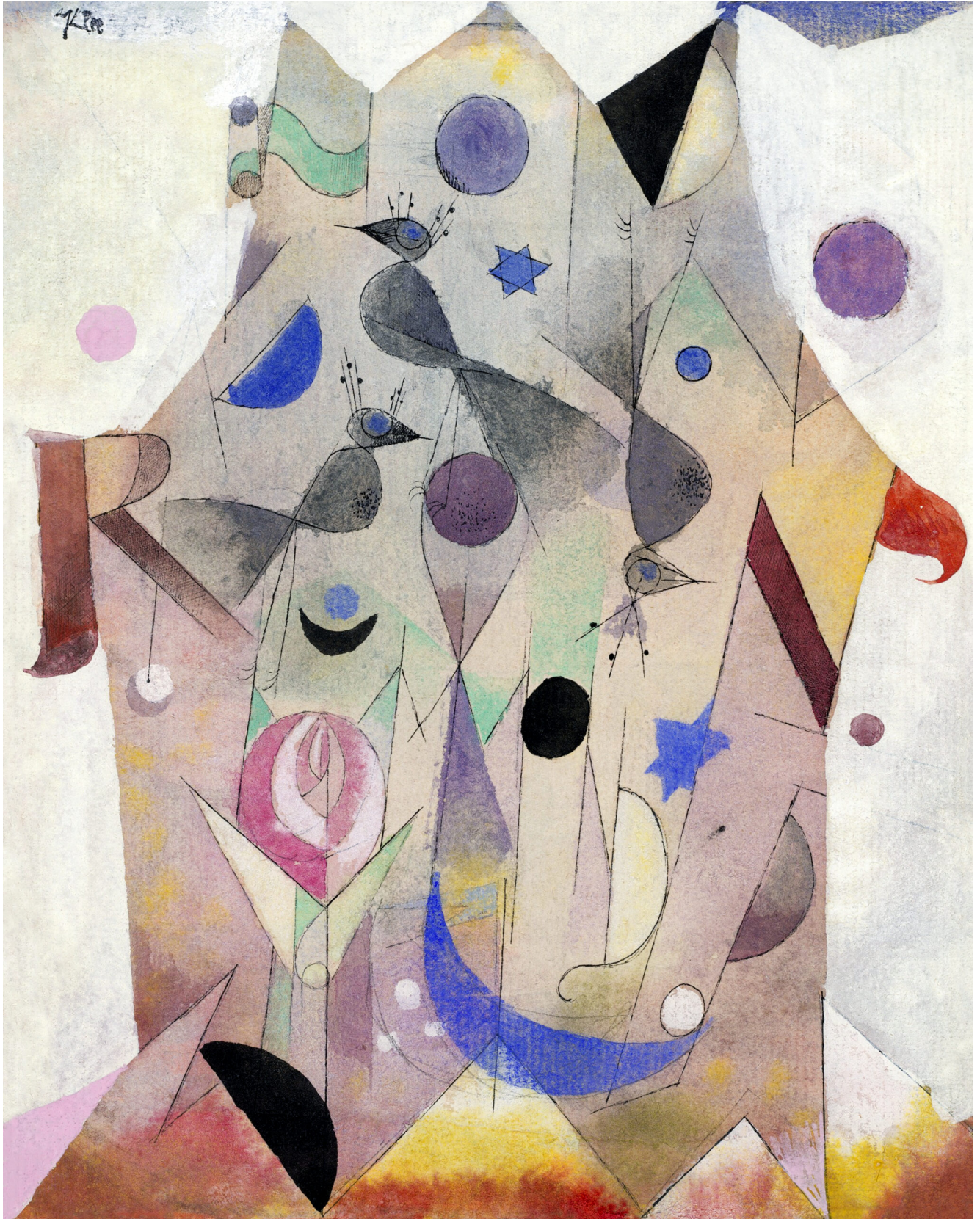
Questions to Ask Children

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

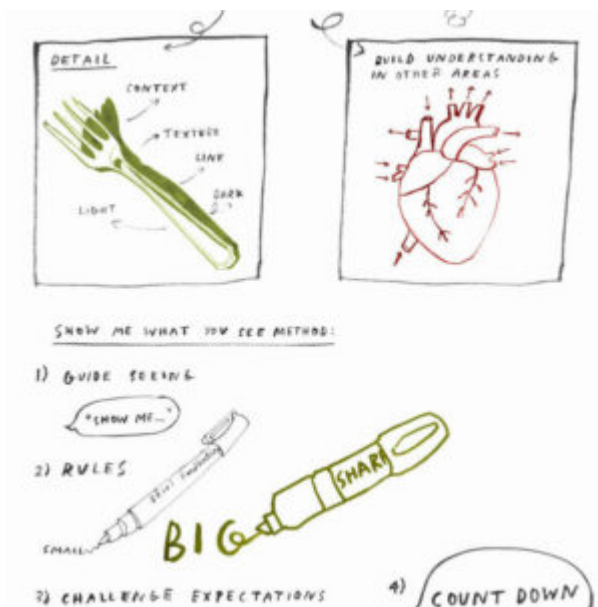


[Featured in the 'Exploring Watercolour' pathway](#)

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: Paul Cezanne



talking points: Contemporary still life



talking points: Flemish and Dutch Still Life Painters



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...



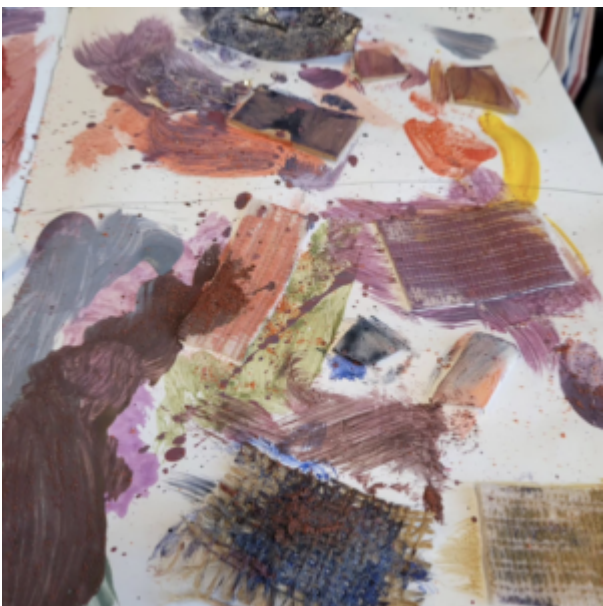
[Tackling Still Life for Children](#)

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*

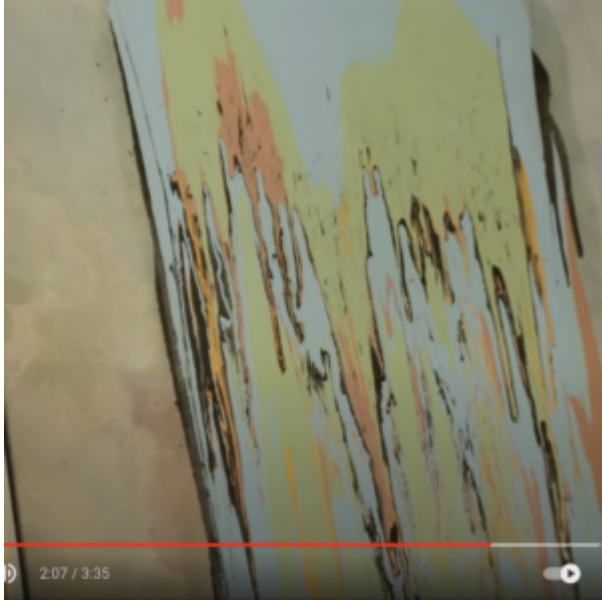
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Pathway: Cloth, thread, paint



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

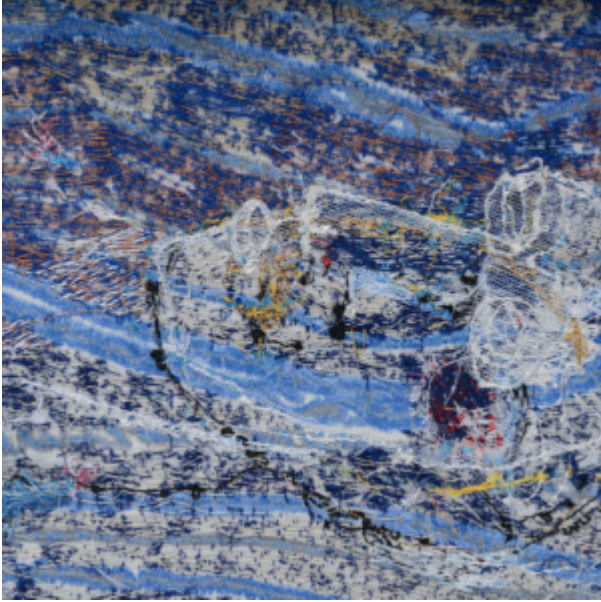
Talking Points: Frank Bowling



Talking Points: Hannah Rae



Talking Points: Alice Kettle



Ethos: Learning From Participants

Let Me Inspire You: Emma Burleigh

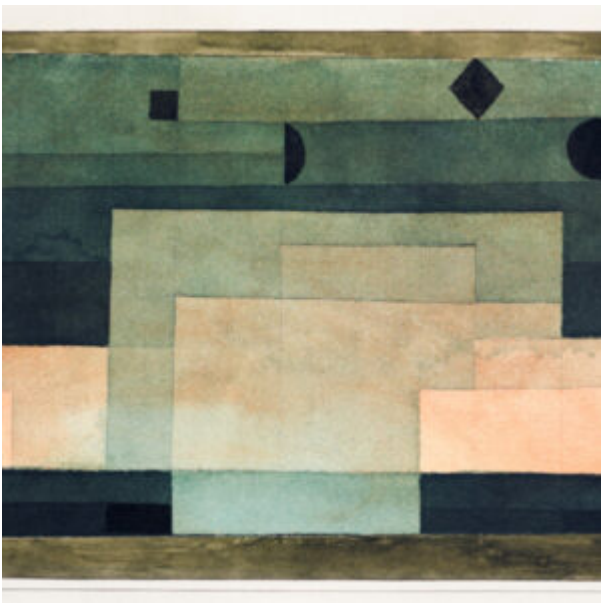
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Pathway: Exploring Watercolour



[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

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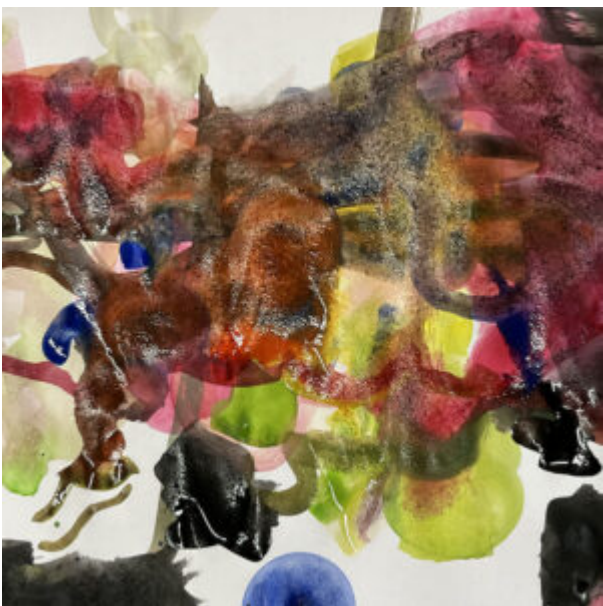




DrawAble: Exploring Through Watercolour by Emma Burleigh Part Two

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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.