

Talking Points: What Is A Plinth?

A collection of imagery and sources designed to encourage children to consider what role a plinth may play in creating or displaying artwork.

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What Is A Plinth?



“Limestone plinth with the feet of a male statuette” Licensed under CC0 1.0

In the traditional sculptural sense, plinths are usually heavy boxes or bases made from stone, wood or metal, which raise a sculpture above the ground.

Plinths sometimes protect the sculpture from the

elements, such as a sculpture raised out of the way of puddles of rain in the street.

More often, the role of a plinth is to give the sculpture some kind of status. By raising the sculpture to a certain level, the sculptor can decide how the viewer interacts with the artwork.

Plinths also help create a separation between the ordinary everyday world around us and the art “object”.

Seeing an object on a plinth might encourage us to view that object as an artwork – as something special.

Questions to Ask Children

Have you seen any sculpture on a plinth in and around the place where you live?

Why do you think those sculptures are on plinths? How does the way the sculpture is displayed affect how you think about the sculpture?

Imagine two peas. One is on the kitchen floor, but an identical pea is on a plinth in a gallery. How does it change how you think about the pea?

The Fourth Plinth



Photo of “Nelson’s Ship in a Bottle,” by Yinka Shonibare, Fourth Plinth, Trafalgar Square, London by Andy Hay

What is The Fourth Plinth?

The Fourth Plinth is considered to be one of the world’s largest ongoing public art commissions. Its main aim is to bring contemporary art to the public and to encourage debate about what art is.



The “fourth plinth” was originally intended to hold a sculpture of a horse belonging to William IV, but the sculpture was never displayed due to lack of money. For over 150 years the plinth remained empty, until in 1998, the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) commissioned three contemporary sculptures to be displayed temporarily on the plinth. The legacy of those three sculptures was a rolling programme called the Fourth Plinth.

[Take a look at the Fourth Plinth website](#) to explore some recent commissions and explore the work of one Fourth Plinth artist, Antony Gormley

below.

Antony Gormley, The Fourth Plinth



“One and Other” by Antony Gormley, Image by Feggy Art

Whilst [Antony Gormley](#) usually makes sculpture out of more traditional materials like steel, he was commissioned as part of the Fourth Plinth to produce a rather different kind of art.

Instead of working in traditional materials, Gormley used the plinth as a focus for creating an artwork which “became a portrait of the UK, now”. For 100 days in 2009, 24 hours a day, Gormley and the team coordinated members of the public to take stage on the plinth for an hour at a time. They could do whatever they liked, using the plinth to give their expression a literal and metaphorical platform.

Through “One & Other”, Gormley hoped that by giving the public free will to express their hopes and fears for what might be, a “portrait of the nation” would be revealed.

Questions to Ask Children

How would you use your time if you were given an hour on the plinth?

The Fourth Plinth Challenge

Can you find a “plinth” at school and coordinate a similar project?

How would children and teachers “apply” for a slot on your plinth?

Who would decide who gets a slot and what would your criteria be?

How long would each slot last?

How would you encourage an audience?

How would you document the event?

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Pathway: The Art of Display



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