

L I F T O F F

UNDERSTANDING ART

ART UNDERSTANDING

There are four main reasons for helping children achieve an understanding of art, craft and design:

- **To give an insight into the richness and diversity of the visual arts, today and in the past and to give an introduction to the work of artists, craftspeople and designers**
- **To provide a source of enjoyment that can become a life-long interest**
- **To provide a source of ideas, approaches and techniques that can help them with their own work**
- **To become familiar with 'graphicacy' which is essential in the modern world. It is the ability to use and understand visual communications**

Understanding Art goes hand in hand with Making Art. It helps children develop their own skills with more experience and confidence. It provides the essential basis for the development of the skills of observation and critical thinking. This is the beginning of being able to make qualitative judgements about their own work and the work of others.

Art and the making of well-crafted objects are as old as human society. People have used art for an extraordinary variety of reasons, ranging from personal statements to the expression of strongly held social or religious beliefs. They have made useful things which have aesthetic qualities and symbolic meanings as well as practical value. Humans have remarkable vision and the combination of eye- hand - brain have enabled them to explore the visual world and its unique qualities of line, shape, form, structure, colour, pattern, texture, proportion, scale and space.

Work in the Understanding Art Framework is structured around seven key questions:

- **What is art?**
- **Who makes art**
- **Why make art?**
- **How is art made?**
- **What is the value of art?**
- **Where can we see art?**
- **How can we make art?**

These are big questions, particularly 'what is art?' They do not have textbook 'right' answers. The purpose in posing them to relatively young children is to stimulate discussion and widen horizons.

Although children can gain much from books, magazines, the internet and documentaries, it is essential that they also see and have the opportunity to respond to original works. The classroom can become a mini-gallery but the experience of visiting museums, galleries, historic houses and gardens, talking with artists and craftspeople is essential to the Understanding Art Framework. It's important that children realise that every town and village has its own visual history. Visual history and social history mesh together in helping children understand their place in the world.

The Framework has two areas which interact and complement each other:

- In the classroom: an active, questioning approach to art that lays the foundations both for enjoyment and qualitative judgements
- In the art gallery or museum: structured visits allowing the children to see very varied and original examples of historical, contemporary art and artefacts

The basic principle is that Understanding Art should never be separated from the practical activity of Making Art, the two should develop together.

How do we understand art?

Understanding art is not a passive process. It demands active engagement to look closely and to ask why a particular work is the way it is. Who made it and why? How was it made? How does it use the visual language to communicate the artist's observations, feelings or ideas? Children should be encouraged to develop an 'art vocabulary' to enable thinking, questioning, discussion and the expression of personal likes and dislikes. One result of this process should be the valuable insight that people have widely differing tastes.

For an understanding of art to develop, children need to have a rich visual experience not only of art but of the natural and made environment. They need to have opportunities for seeing and working with art by:

- Seeing original art works in museums, galleries, sculpture parks, public places, historic houses and the local environment
- Having the opportunity to meet practising artists, craftspeople and designers to gain an insight into how they work
- Displaying art, craft and design in the school
- Displaying and discussing today's visual culture from films, TV, social media and print
- Giving children the opportunity to use the same materials, techniques and skills they have seen in galleries, book illustrations and the media
- Engaging children in projects where they make their own exhibitions, books or pamphlets and digital presentations

ART UNDERSTANDING 3-5

Young children learn about the world through their senses and interesting experiences which stimulate their imagination and curiosity. Therefore there is a need to present children of this age group with experiences which extend their original thoughts and understanding and promote new learning. School provides an environment where their understanding of the world and others develops through the gradual introduction of new concepts and skills through play, creative, problem solving and making activities.

Even at this young age, visits outside school play an important part in children's personal, social and cognitive development. A visit to an art gallery or museum is an exciting event in itself. It is also the opportunity to introduce the wider visual world of art and artefacts, both contemporary and historic. A successful visit depends on several factors. The selection of an exhibit or part of an exhibition that is particularly relevant and enjoyable for the age group. A clear aim or aims for the visit. For example, to develop the skill of observation through looking at the qualities of different objects their shape, colour, pattern and function, similarities and differences. To engage the children in the activity will call for carefully considered and appropriate questions.

The success of the whole visit will depend on having made the right selection, the interaction between the children and the active involvement of the adults, careful preparation, organisation and follow up work back in school.

The emphasis should be on looking, questioning, talking and sharing points of view.

ART UNDERSTANDING

5-7

At this stage the main aim is to broaden the children's experience of art and the visual world. Work on Understanding Art should be well integrated into making activities, providing a stimulus for imagination and 'play-like' activities. Visits to art galleries and museums should continue, providing starting points for work in the classroom. Children can discuss their own work and the work of others. Between 5 and 7 children only have a sketchy understanding of historical time. The past is a story that happened 'a long time ago and far away' but equally it might be happening just round the corner.

The following are reasonable expectations of what children at this stage could be expected to understand and do and which will continue to be built on in the following stages:

- To recognise some of the visual qualities they see in their surroundings and to look for them in the work of artists, craftspeople and designers
- To have the experience of enjoying visits to a museum or art gallery, preparing for the visit, actively engaging with the exhibits, and following up with activities in the classroom
- To talk about: drawings, paintings, sculpture and illustrations found in art books, postcards, story books and the web
- To begin to express personal likes and dislikes and the reasons why

ART UNDERSTANDING

There are considerable changes from the previous stage. Children are becoming more aware of historical changes and understand the difference between fantasy and reality. They are beginning to be aware of contemporary art and mass media.

They can now understand that a work of art is the result of a process of imaginative thought and practical experiment:

- By looking at how artists, craftspeople and designers work and develop ideas, learn how to use some of the same approaches themselves
- Make a personal scrapbook of interesting images, cuttings, samples and souvenirs
- Write a short article on a favourite work
- Make a drawing or painting inspired by the work of an artist they particularly like
- Look at a collection of historical textiles or clothes from a particular period, how do they differ from what we wear today?

ART- UNDERSTANDING

At this stage children are more capable of putting art and artefacts into their historical setting. They are interested in the clothes people wore, personal adornment and the utensils they used. By now they should be confident in discussing art and artefacts and have developed personal likes and dislikes.

Extended projects now become possible either involving the children working individually or as a group:

- Explore the way a particular artist has used colour
- To help extend their own skill in drawing, look at the way artists have used perspective
- Working as a group, make a study of the art, craft and design of a particular period
- Look at images and objects from a culture very different to our own. Discuss their similarities and differences
- Take the work of a printmaker, textile designer or ceramicist. Make annotated drawings and photographs of their work and explain to others why they have chosen that artist, craftsperson or designer

VISITING A GALLERY OR MUSEUM

This is influential in relation to the art programme that will be delivered in school. A gallery visit is invaluable for encouraging looking and talking about art.

Visits to galleries can inform the children's understanding of art and answer these key questions:

- **What is art?**
- **Who makes art**
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Below are example questions that you may ask the children during a visit:

- Who made the art work and when was it made?
- What materials has the artist chosen? Can you describe them?
- What kind of details can you see?
- Do you know how the artist has made this? Can you describe the technique?
- What do you think the artist is inspired by?
- What type of artwork is it?
A painting, sculpture, textile
- Do you like/dislike the artwork and why?
- Does the artwork remind you of anything?
- If you could ask the artist one question what would it be?
- What do you think the meaning is behind the artwork?



IN LOVING MEMORY OF PROFESSOR KEN BAYNES

Ken and his partner Krysia have worked with the Harley Gallery for many years, developing exhibitions and art activities for children of all ages. Their input has been invaluable and, they have worked tirelessly to help us offer our visitors the highest quality educational experiences, through educational resources for schools and curated exhibitions designed with children in mind. Ken was fun loving and a true inspiration. His belief in the importance of creativity in children's education and development has shaped and determined our Educational Programme.

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Please visit our website www.harleygallery.co.uk to find out more about our education programme and learning resources.

**Dayle Green, Education and Outreach Manager,
Harley Foundation, December 2020**

UNDERSTANDING
ART

THE
HARLEY
GALLERY

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