



An artist's impression of the world

Discover an exciting cross-curricular unit of work that opens up the world of art

Helen Murray and Paul Boutwood, Year 5 teachers at St Columb Minor Primary School in Newquay

Artists' Impressions of the World' is a five-week unit of learning for children aged ten to 12 taken from the International Primary Curriculum (IPC). This cross-curricular unit enables the development of key skills and personal learning goals, and international mindedness is embedded throughout. Most significantly, it encourages children to look at artistic expression in a fresh, unbiased way. In this article, Year 5 teachers at St Columb Minor Primary School in Newquay, Helen Murray and Paul Boutwood, describe some of the ways in which their classes' creative expression was developed through this unit...

The Entry Point

'We launched the unit over two consecutive afternoons during which time the children were asked to create a piece of art that reflected our chosen country, Japan. The children were organised into mixed-ability groups and each group focused on a different art form – dance, song, a painting, a poem, a piece of music or a sculpture. First, the children researched how they could incorporate Japanese influences into their own artwork using books, the internet and examples of Japanese music, dance and art. Then, in groups, the children worked together to create their piece. There were lots of mediums available for them to use and no restrictions were set to give them as much freedom and flexibility as possible. At the end of the two afternoons, the children performed and presented their finished work to the rest of their class.

Music in collage

A really successful activity that captured the imaginations of the children began by them listening to a piece of pop music. We focused on the instruments, sounds and melody, and then discussed words that described the texture of the piece; sometimes it was spiky and busy, other times smooth and soft. The children were very open minded and there were some really excellent responses. Individually, the children then collected pieces of fabric and paper that represented their interpretation of the music. Using these materials, the children created collages to represent their feelings for the texture of the music. This was a unique way of getting the children to express their feelings about a piece of music.





Later on in the unit, we repeated the same activity with a piece of classical music. Applying the collage technique helped the children to engage in the music and the emotions it inspired, rather than simply saying 'I don't like it,' or 'It's boring,' or 'It's classical'. As a result, all of the children became much more receptive to the different styles of music that we worked with throughout the unit.

The Impressionists

As part of the unit, we looked at the work of Impressionist painters – Monet, Renoir, Cézanne and Degas – and the way they used light, colour and texture. After selecting from a range of different Impressionist paintings, the children cut their chosen example picture in half and stuck one of the halves onto a larger sheet of paper, leaving enough room on the paper to 'complete' the work. First, the children drew in the remaining border for their picture. Then, looking very closely, and using magnifiers when needed, the children studied the colours, light, shade and brushstrokes used by the artist. The children then tried to apply these similar painting techniques to create the second halves of their pictures.

Japan and dance

As a PE activity, we looked at the traditional dance styles of Japan. We observed the hand gestures and foot patterns, body movements and facial expressions that Japanese dancers use. We listened to the music that accompanies these dances and looked at the clothes that are traditionally worn. First as individuals and afterwards in groups, the children created, refined and performed their own dances in a traditional Japanese style. Even the boys threw themselves whole heartedly into this activity!

Pop Art

The unit also provided an opportunity to discuss the Pop Art culture of the 1960s and 70s, and look at the everyday objects that were featured in Pop Art. In small groups, the children investigated the artist, Andy Warhol, and discovered some of the everyday items that he used in his work. In groups, they selected one of his works and attempted to answer a number of questions designed to get them to think more objectively about it. For example, what did they consider to be the purpose of the work? Did it tell a story? Did they think it was created for decoration or fun? The children then looked at the techniques used to create the picture before creating their own Pop Art. In groups, they chose an object and came up with a solution for recreating their chosen image repetitively. Some groups used the computer, others the photocopier or print techniques.



Further information

The International Primary Curriculum (IPC) is a practical, skills-based, international curriculum for life-long learning that is used in over 50 countries throughout the world including more than 380 state schools in the UK. To visit an IPC school near you, or for a free sample of another IPC unit and more information, go to www.internationalprimarycurriculum.com or call IPC at 0207 531 9696.

Bringing art to life

This unit focused on art and music, complementing some of the IPC's more science and ICT-oriented units to ensure thorough National Curriculum coverage. The unit also provided opportunities for real-life experiences. For us in Newquay, visiting the Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden at Tate St Ives was an ideal choice. A music workshop with African drummers (see image below) and dancers created another exciting learning experience.

Digital cameras were vital throughout the unit to record evidence, especially to show the children working together and to show the dance, movement and music elements that were created. Lots of pictures were taken to show the range of learning experiences and skills that were developed.

The unit was an excellent way of showing the children that high quality pieces of work take time to produce. They were able to compare a painting that took two years for an artist to create, along with a poem that took three months to write with what they were able to produce in more limited classroom time. It's important for children to realise that not everything should be completed within the time-span of a traditional lesson.

As teachers, the unit helped to broaden our own minds because it included artists and art forms that we weren't particularly familiar with, and the IPC's teaching framework helped guide us through this. As for the children, it was an opportunity for collaborative learning that helped develop adaptability, problem solving, cooperation and tolerance.' ■