

## 31. What do we see in art?

### INTRODUCTION

Explain to children that today we will be looking at artwork from different times and different places.

### ACTIVITY

Ask the children to look at a range of artworks – some are listed below but any artwork could be valid. A quick internet search will find all of them. It would be useful to have paper copies of these artworks as well as showing them on an interactive whiteboard so everyone can see them clearly for group discussions. Depending on group numbers, more than one copy of each might be a good idea.

The Last Supper – Leonardo, 1490s

Guernica – Picasso, 1837

The Starry Night – Van Gogh, 1889

The Scream – Munch, 1890s

Banksy images on Palestinian wall – Banksy, 2005

Ask children for an initial reaction. They could write down ideas on sticky notes and place them on the images in response to the following questions:

- What do you think each picture might be about?
- Is there a message or story in the artwork? What might it be?
- What do you think the picture might be saying about *human beings*?
- Do you think the message is important to the artist? How can you tell?

Share ideas generated from these questions to see if children agreed. Then ask them to look more closely at one artwork that they particularly liked. Provide them with a cut out rectangular or circular frame so that they focus in on one part only and 'frame' it.

Ask them to respond to the following questions:

- Do they notice different things now?
- Are there opposite opinions that can be formed from the same picture? For example, can we look at the Last Supper and think that it is happy in some parts but sad in others?
- Many pictures contain 'wisdom' about life and 'compassion' for people. Where do you see wisdom and/or compassion in this picture?

- How might the picture help people to see something of *real value* in the world?

Again, share ideas to explore different opinions.

## ACTIVITY

Can we produce our own artwork that is ambiguous? At this stage it would be interesting for children to create their own artwork to have the experience of being the artist rather than the viewer. They could respond to a stimulus such as a piece of classical music. See [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/qt76WSzksPSPmkj9tbV0p9/the-pieces-and-composers](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/qt76WSzksPSPmkj9tbV0p9/the-pieces-and-composers) for some examples.

Ask the children to draw a response to the music in the form of abstract art; using lines, shades, colours etc.

To help children to discuss their work they could think about the following questions:

- What do you want to show in your artwork?
- Which parts of the artwork are most important to you?
- Would someone else who saw the artwork understand what it is all about if you were not there to explain it?
- Would a title help the 'viewer'?
- Is it important if the viewer 'understands' or is it ok for them just to see the work in isolation?

When they are ready, they could share their thoughts with a partner.

## CONCLUSIONS

Now provide the children with some further information about the famous artworks, (see examples below) to see if it tells them something new about it. Ask them for their reflections in response to such questions as:

- Does it help you to understand the artwork?
- Is it important that we know what the artist intended?
- Do you want to find out more or are you happy to look at the work of art as a piece of art without knowing more about it?
- What do you think the artists would have wanted?
- In what ways does this piece of art make the world a better or worse place?

Brief information about the artworks:

### **The Last Supper**

The scene showing the last supper may appear busy and sociable but Leonardo wanted to show the shock felt by his friends after hearing Jesus' prediction that one of them would betray him. Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed his whereabouts to the Romans is 4<sup>th</sup> from the left, wearing green and blue and clutching a small bag, perhaps signifying his role amongst the disciples as treasurer. Peter, who is just behind Judas, is holding a knife.

### **Guernica**

This painting reflects the aftermath of the bombings of Guernica city by the Nazis in 1937 in support of the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil war. It was toured around the world as a warning against the horrors of war. Today it is seen as a powerful symbol – it warns us against the wide-scale suffering and devastation that war brings.

### **Starry Night**

This painting was created during the day but it shows a night scene. The seemingly calm view is actually the view from the window of Van Gogh's asylum room. Although at this point in his life Van Gogh was disillusioned by religion, he appears not to have lost his belief in an afterlife. He wrote in a letter to his brother Theo that he had a "tremendous need for, shall I say the word – for religion – so I go outside at night to paint the stars."

### **The Scream**

Munch said, "One evening I was walking along a path, the city was on one side and the fjord below. I felt tired and ill. I stopped and looked out over the fjord - the sun was setting and the clouds turning blood red. I sensed the scream passing through nature."

### **Palestinian Wall**

The wall itself is seen by many as an illegal wall that segregates Palestinians and creates a ghetto. Many Israelis argue that it is needed to prevent Palestinian attacks on Israeli citizens. Much of Banksy's art on the wall draws attention to its nature as a barrier by showing images of escape. They also show how people are cut off from lovely landscapes and children are cut off from access to the sea, playing with sand buckets and spades on piles of rubble that look like sand.