

VOICES

**EXPLORING HUMAN RIGHTS
THROUGH CONTEMPORARY
ART AND CREATIVE LITERACY**

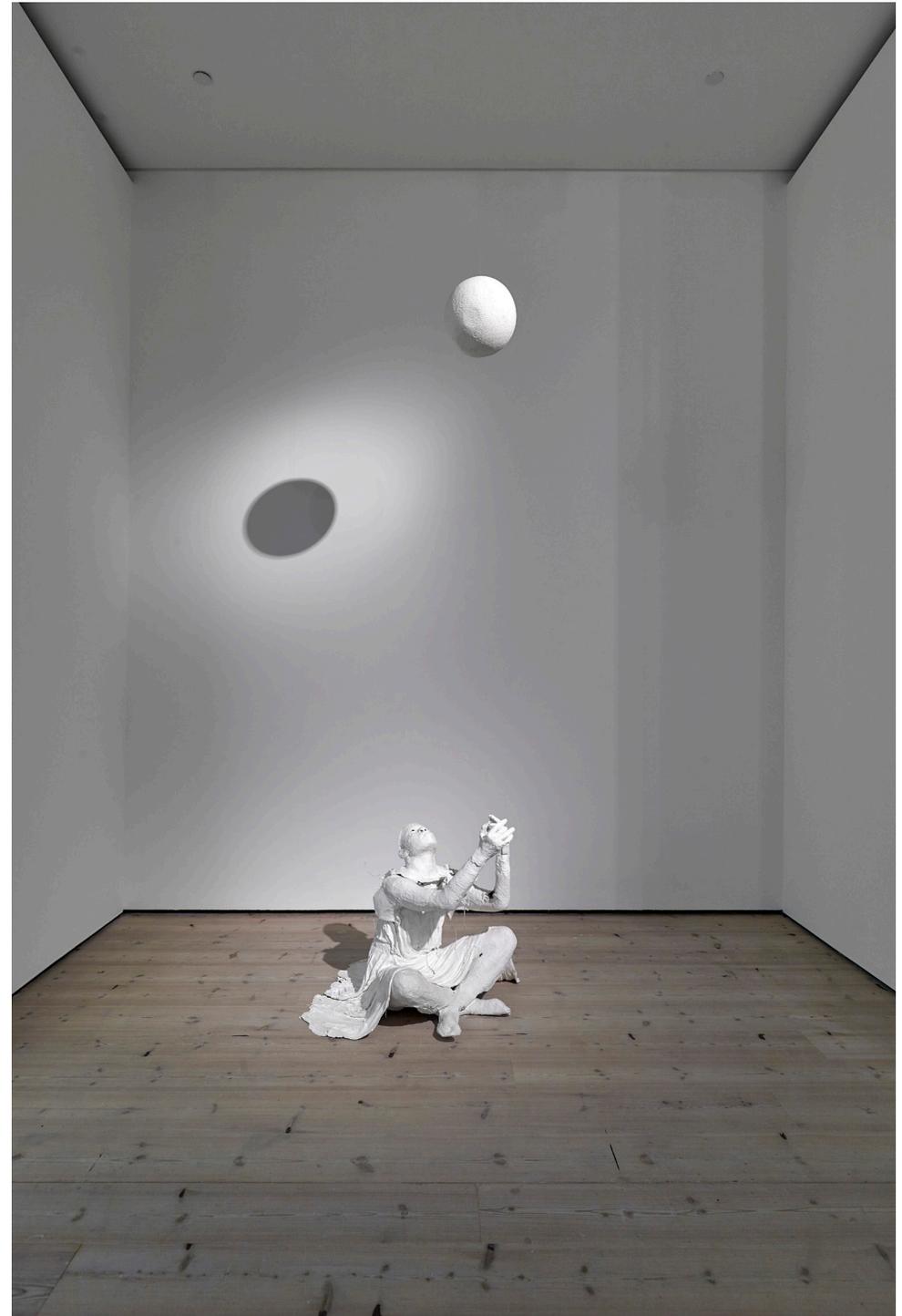
BALTIC CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART SCHOOLS RESOURCE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, along with artist and writer Stevie Ronnie, worked with pupils in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 across Tyne and Wear, Northumberland and Teesside on a creative literacy project funded by the Ernest Cook Trust.

The purpose of this project was to engage children with human rights issues through *Starless Midnight*, a group show of contemporary artists exhibiting work in response to the civil rights legacy of Dr Martin Luther King. By exploring this thought provoking exhibition, 282 pupils considered new physical and visual ways of engaging with words and language, developing skills and knowledge in creative literacy, communication, tolerance and citizenship.

The content of the workshops was inherently linked to aspects of the wider curriculum specifically relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and British values. We found the art to be a brilliant catalyst for discussing complex social issues such as racism, religion and human rights with younger pupils. Many of the words we encountered during the sessions, either in the art itself or the surrounding discussions, were new to the students and the workshops helped to increase their vocabulary.



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource is aimed at primary school teachers who would like to use visual art as a stimulus to improve literacy in their pupils through creative writing. The activities contained in this resource can help initiate preliminary student responses for creative writing and help generate more follow-up classroom activities. The creative writing techniques described in the resource focus on artworks that were included in the *Starless Midnight* exhibition but they can also be easily adapted for use with other artworks or exhibitions, either in a gallery or using images of the work in the classroom.

The resource begins with instructions for making a handmade book and then introduces several of the artists and their works from *Starless Midnight*. For each of these artworks we have provided practical ways in which students can form an initial written response in the books they have made. Each individual writing exercise is followed by suggestions that can be delivered to produce a finished poem or story using the raw materials that students have gathered.

Throughout the Voices sessions we encouraged a playful and creative approach with words and ideas. Whichever artworks you chose to respond to and however you use the techniques detailed in this resource it is important to give the students as much freedom as possible, which will in turn help them to develop a positive association with the art and the writing you are working with. This positive experience and creative freedom can encourage even the most reluctant learners to gain confidence with using words and in turn can impact significantly on their wider engagement with literacy.

HANDMADE NOTEBOOK

Bookmaking is a great way to start exploring the relationship between art and writing. By creating their own book pupils will not only exercise their practical making skills, they will also then have a container that can be used to collect written and visual responses to the art they are working with. Included here is a set of instructions for making a simple notebook with pocket flaps in the cover to hold loose pieces of paper. Stress to students the idea that the notebook is a personal compilation which will not be graded, but one that will be filled with their creative idea experiments.

Approximate preparation time: 1 hr

Time to deliver activity: 20-30 mins

Learning outcomes:

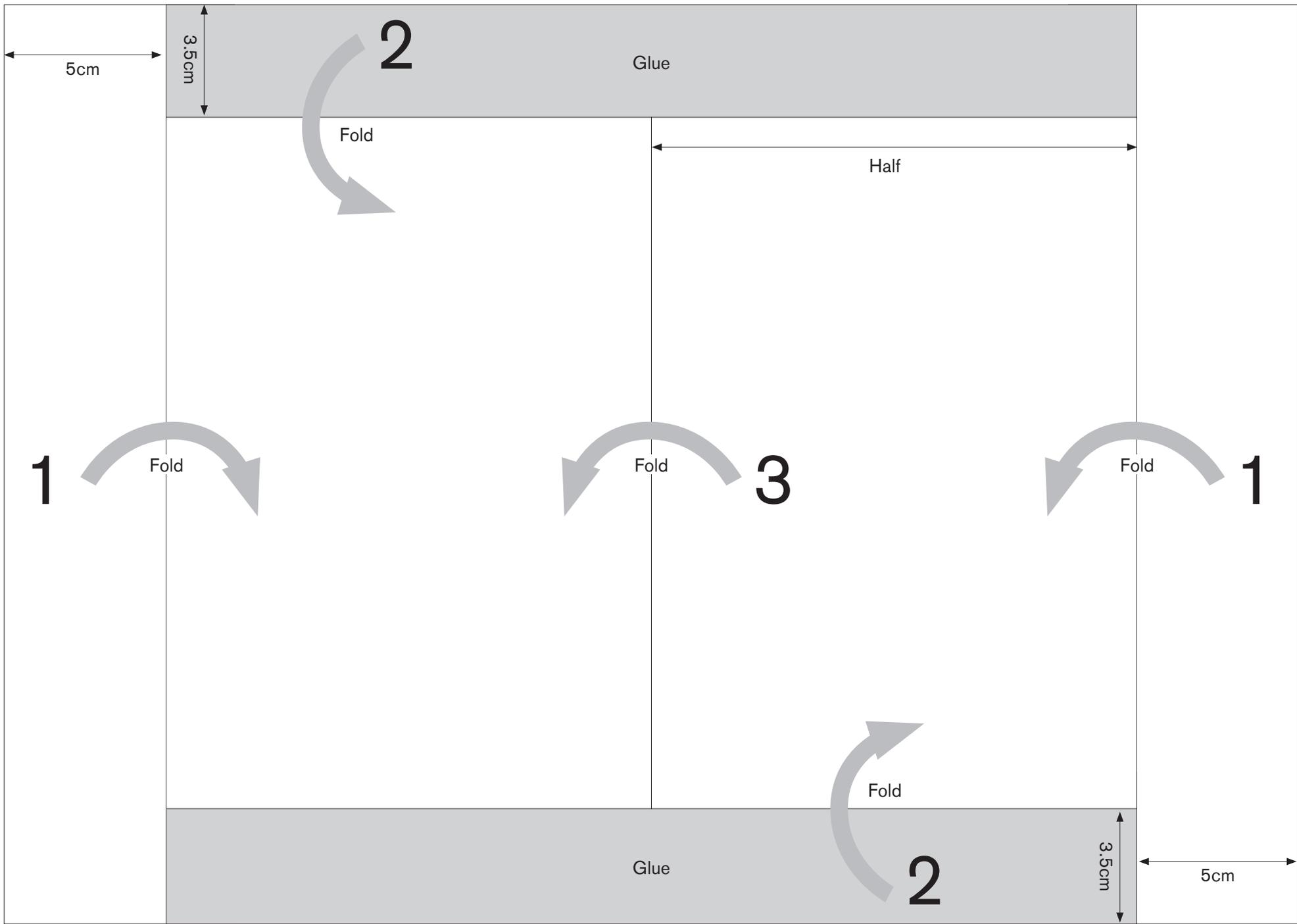
- a) Develop practical bookmaking skills
- b) Using measuring and accuracy in a practical context
- c) Improve fine motor skills

Materials / equipment required to make 1 book:

- 5 sheets of A4 cartridge paper or similar
- 1 sheet coloured A3 sugar paper
- 2 brass paper fasteners
- Pritt Stick
- Ruler
- Pencil
- Standard hole punch

Instructions

1. Stack the 5 sheets of A4 cartridge paper neatly and fold them in half along the long edge. This will form the pages of the book. Put the pages off to one side.
2. Now on to the cover. Place the sugar paper in front of you in landscape format. Measure in 5cm from each side, marking the paper with a pencil on the top and bottom edges. Using the ruler as a guide, fold the sugar paper in towards the centre on both sides (FOLD 1)
3. Keep these two side flaps made in step 2 folded in. Measure 3.5cm in from the top and bottom edge of the sugar paper, marking the paper with a pencil on the left and right edges. Using the ruler as a guide, fold the top and bottom edges of the sugar paper towards the centre (FOLD 2).
4. Glue the folds along the top and bottom of the cover down, including the corners. The two side folds should now form flaps that could be used to hold paper.
5. Fold the cover in half from side to side (FOLD 3)
6. Insert the pages made in step 1 into the cover.
7. Use a hole punch to make two holes in the middle of the spine of the book.
8. Bind the book together using the paper fasteners.
9. Open the cover and fold it back on itself. Make this fold approximately 0.5cm in from the paper fasteners.
10. Repeat this process for each page, folding it back and flat against the open cover. This will help the book to remain flat while the students are writing in it.
11. Give the students creative freedom to decorate and personalise the cover of their notebook.



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

"I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word."

The Reverend Dr Martin Luther King Jr, extract from acceptance speech, Nobel Peace Prize, Oslo, 10 December 1964

Fifty years ago Newcastle University awarded Reverend Dr Martin Luther King Jr an honorary degree, the only university in the United Kingdom to do so during his lifetime. On accepting this award, he delivered what was to be his final speech outside of the US before his assassination in April 1968.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia on 15 January 1929, Dr King became one of the world's most influential activists and leader of the civil rights movement. Dr King is best known for the development of civil rights through non-violent means and is recognised as one of the most inspiring public speakers in history.

In his acceptance speech for his honorary doctorate, given just one mile away from BALTIC, he spoke of three urgent problems throughout the world: 'the problem of racism, the problem of poverty and the problem of war'. Despite the advances of the civil rights movement since this date, this message remains as crucial today.

Exhibited in BALTIC's Level 3 gallery between October 2017 and January 2018, *Starless Midnight* brought together the work of nine contemporary artists exhibiting work in video, film, installation, sculpture, posters and painting, and was co-curated by leading artist Edgar Arceneaux, who has worked extensively with Dr King's archive. Artists included were: Barby Asante / Season Butler / Louis Cameron / Karon Davis / Charles Gaines / Micol Hebron / Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle / Ashley Holmes / Cauleen Smith.

Starless Midnight formed part of Freedom City 2017, a programme which brought together international artists, musicians, film makers, academics and community groups to inspire a new generation to contribute towards tackling the issues that Dr King spoke of in his acceptance speech.

NOW!



LOUIS CAMERON: NOW! KARON DAVIS: WAITING ROOM

Louis Cameron's *NOW!* a large scale billboard board poster greeted audience's at the entrance of *Starless Midnight*. The text references the posters that were used in The March on Washington, also known as the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. This historic event brought together 250,000 people at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C, USA, to draw attention to the inequalities and challenges faced by African Americans. It was at this event that Martin Luther King Jr delivered his iconic "I Have A Dream" speech. The poster at BALTIC called for immediate social action in the present day.

Encountered as the first room in *Starless Midnight*, Karon Davis' *Waiting Room* was modelled on a typical medical centre waiting room. This space provided a crucial transitional point for reflection before viewing other artworks in the exhibition. While President Trump issues new world-reaching directives almost daily and the 'Brexit' negotiations continue, *Waiting Room* reflects upon a global state of uncertainty and instability as we wait for a prognosis on the uncertain matters that are fed to us daily.

Initial Response

When beginning to write creatively it is important to warm up the imagination. One way of doing this is to write quickly, without worrying too much about the outcome. The actual writing produced does not matter too much at this stage as the main point is to get the students ready for the more detailed writing exercises that follow.

Approximate preparation time: 15 mins

Time to deliver activity: 10-15 mins for each artwork

Learning outcomes:

- a) Brainstorming and ideas development
- b) Creative writing development
- c) Developing creative thinking

Curriculum links: Moral development, social development, cultural development

Instructions

1. Introduce *NOW!* by Louis Cameron, discussing the historical links of the piece in relation to historical activists like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King. Point out the way in which the artist has extracted the word from a protest banner and how they have presented the word.
2. Ask students to write up an imaginary list of things that they could have immediately on demand.
3. Introduce *Waiting Room* by Karon Davies and stimulate a discussion of the US healthcare system and its accessibility. Compare it to the NHS.
4. Ask the students to write a list of ten things that they are waiting for / have waited for in their lives.

Follow-up

Although lists are particularly useful as a warm-up exercise they can also be used to generate original pieces of writing. Here are some suggested ways to achieve this:

***Waiting Room* list:**

1. Work together in groups to use items from the lists to generate a group poem where each of the lines is taken directly from the lists.
2. Write each line onto a slip of paper.
3. Look at each line in isolation and remove the weakest. How does this change the poem?
4. Use the remaining slips of paper to re-order the lines of the poem. Consider how the ordering of the lines can change the emotional impact of the poem on the reader.

***NOW!* list:**

1. Select one of the demands from the list.
2. Imagine a character who is determined to get that demand and write a list of three things that will get in the way of achieving their goal.
3. Write a story which charts their journey to achieving this, building in the obstacles along the way.
4. Discuss how obstacles are important in stories and how they can create motivation for the character.



KARON DAVIS: MARY

Karon Davis has a wide ranging practice that encompasses installation, sculpture, film, photography and performance which explores themes of humanity, survival and ways of being. *Mary*, one sculpture out of a series titled *Pain Management*, represents the spiritual realm and the preservation of health and wellbeing. Collectively, they address our own coping mechanisms for pain, loss, division and global tension.

Initial Response

In creative writing, understanding how to use different voices is a skill and it is always useful for a writer to inhabit new voices. Although sculptures and portraits can be used for working, a voice can also be given to inanimate objects, shapes and even colours in an artwork.

Approximate preparation time: 15 mins

Time to deliver activity: 15 mins

Learning outcomes:

- a) Writing from different perspectives
- b) Developing an understanding of voice
- c) Developing creative and imaginative thinking

Curriculum links: spiritual development, cultural development

Instructions

1. Ask students to imagine that they are the figure depicted in *Mary*, and give them time to consider how the figure is feeling.
2. Ask the students a series of questions/prompts and encourage them to respond in the first person, the voice of the figure.
 - What is your name?
 - Where do you come from?
 - What language do you speak?
 - Tell me about your family.
 - What are you thinking right now?
 - What happened to you yesterday?
 - You visited somewhere once and didn't like it, tell me about that place.
 - What is your favourite song? Why?
 - Tell me about the last meal you ate.
 - What is the most important thing to you in the whole world?
 - What was the last thing that made you cry?
 - What was the last thing that made you laugh?
 - If you could do anything in the world what would you do?

Follow-up and Teachers Notes

1. Making this exercise work well encourages more writing from students which can in turn be mined into poems. Review the students' writings to highlight interesting passages.
2. Write a poem in the voice of *Mary*, incorporating the underlined passages that you identified in step 1.
3. Read the poems out loud to the class and discuss how the response of each person is individual even though it came from the same original subject. Consider how this reflects the relationship between the writer's own voice and the voices of the characters they create.



KARON DAVIS: NICOTINE

Waiting Room was accompanied by two figures from a series of eight. The figure of *Nicotine*, a nurse in scrubs taking a drag on a cigarette during a presumably rare break, is stuffed with shredded medical bills.

Initial Response

A work of art provides an ideal subject when we are trying to develop our powers of observation and description, which are both crucial skills when writing creatively. The key to accurate and powerful descriptive writing is to understand the importance of detail and to learn which details to include (or leave out) in order to draw the reader in. As with any skill, practising descriptive writing increases our ability to use it more effectively. This exercise will help students to develop that skill.

Approximate preparation time: 5 mins

Time to deliver activity: 15 mins

Learning outcomes:

- a) Developing the ability for close observation and focus
- b) Developing descriptive writing
- c) Developing creative and imaginative thinking

Curriculum links: social development, moral development, cultural development

Instructions

1. Ask the students to closely observe the sculpture and to write continuously for ten minutes, describing it in as much detail as possible.
2. Challenge them to use all five of their senses.
3. Give the students the background to *Nicotine*. Point out the connection between the materials used and the artist, referring back to *Waiting Room* piece from earlier. Discuss the moral aspects of this work.

Follow-up

The detailed descriptions that students created in their initial responses can be used to create characters for future stories.

1. In small groups, read back the descriptions to each other and discuss which details work particularly well in terms of reflecting the character of the work.
2. Give each student four small pieces of paper and ask them to write a first name, a surname, a location and an object onto the pieces of paper (one thing per piece of paper).
3. Ask the students to fold up the first names and collect them together in a box or a pile. Repeat this for the surnames, the locations and the objects.
4. Ask the students to draw out one piece of paper from each pile.
5. The students can then look at what they have picked out, which will give them an idea for a character.
6. Ask the students to think about why the character is in that place with the object they have chosen.
7. Ask the students to write a word portrait of their character holding their object in a selected location. They should include as much detail as possible.
8. Review and discuss the word portraits.
9. Ask the students to write a short story which opens with the description that they have generated in their word portrait.

even social maturity until racism is totally eradicated. Racism is exactly what it says. It is a myth of the inferior race; it is the notion that a particular race is worthless and degraded innately and the tragedy of racism is that it is based not on an



CHARLES GAINES: MANIFESTOS 3 MLK (1967)

Charles Gaines has been highly regarded as one of the leading pioneers of conceptual art in America since the 1970s. In drawings, works on paper, photographs and video installations, he investigates how rule-based systems construct experiences of language, politics and aesthetics. Music forms a large part of Gaines' works, which is evident in his use of repeated musical scores that accompany his *Manifestos* – conceptual artworks focusing on famous and influential speeches and turning them into musical notations.

Initial Response

This writing exercise uses Charles Gaines' response to Martin Luther King's 1967 speech that he delivered after collecting an honorary degree from Newcastle University. For Voices we were able to sit in front of the piece to complete this exercise. It would be possible to use a printed transcript of the speech or a video recording of the speech is freely available on the BFI film archive (<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-martin-luther-king-honorary-degree-ceremony-at-newcastle-university-1967-online>)

Approximate preparation time: 5 mins

Time to deliver activity: 10 mins

Learning outcomes:

- a) Improving vocabulary
- b) Handwriting
- c) Reading creatively

Curriculum links: social development, moral development, cultural development, British values

Instructions

1. Discuss the speech delivered by Martin Luther King in Newcastle in 1967, giving the historical and wider context of his work.
2. Watch or read through the speech and ask students to write down any new words that they find.
3. Share the words the students have written down and discuss their meaning. Reflect on the new word in the context of Martin Luther King's struggle for civil rights.
4. Reflect on the three key problems that he identifies in his speech – the problem of racism, the problem of poverty and the problem of war. Do we still have those problems in Britain today?

Follow-up

In following up this exercise during the Voices workshops we asked students to use everything they had written across all the exercises in their notebooks as raw material for poems.

1. Prepare around 50 word-sized pieces of blank paper for each student.
2. Place piles of the paper in the middle of each table in the classroom.
3. Ask the students to go through their handmade notebooks, writing out every fourth word onto a slip of paper and make a pile of them in the middle of the table.
4. Mix up the words.
5. Pull out words from the pile and use them to construct a poem. While constructing the poem they can also add in any other words they want (i.e. they are not restricted solely to the words from the pile).
6. Ask the students to write out their poem.
7. Invite some of the students to come to the front of the class and read out their pieces. After hearing each one discuss the new word that they discovered through Martin Luther King's speech and review their meanings.



THEY WILL

NEVER

KILL

US ALL

LOUIS CAMERON = THE POSTER PROJECT PRESENTS

Further within the *Starless Midnight* exhibition, Louis Cameron presented the artwork *I AM...* a series of posters by Black male artists addressing the recent violence against Black men in the United States. *The Poster Project presents* is a forum for dialogue on current cultural issues in the form of posters. They are produced by a select group of artists and distributed on the internet. Cameron initially started making posters to quickly respond to current cultural conversations and widely distribute them in a timely manner. Soon after making his first posters, he saw the potential to collaborate with other artists. The use of the internet as a distribution channel allows for a worldwide reach. The poster is a democratic form of art. Many can possess it due to its reproducibility. It can function outside the normal venues for art, such as museums and they're often found at home, work, school, and other settings.

Initial Response

Working visually with language can help to draw a closer connection between art and writing. It can be a particularly effective way of engaging students who can sometimes struggle to write. Working with words in this way can also help students to consider the visual impact of language, which is a useful and important attribute of poems.

Approximate preparation time: 10 mins

Time to deliver activity: 15-20 mins

Learning outcomes:

- a) Working visually with language
- b) Developing an understanding of typography and design
- c) Using words to generate impact

Curriculum links: social development, cultural development

Instructions

1. Give the background to the posters and discuss the way in which the artist uses the poster form to distribute their work and encourage a collective response from other artists.
2. Look at the posters in detail, reading through them and considering how each one works in terms of visual impact and the ways in which they can be read.
3. Ask the students to create their own 'I am a Man' poster, incorporating language into their designs.

Follow-up

Work up the initial designs created by the students in their notebooks to create text based posters for display. When the students are finalising the design for their posters pay particular attention to the words they have chosen and how the way in which they are presented influences their impact.

FURTHER RESEARCH

EDGAR ARCENEUX / BARBY ASANTE / MICOL HEBRON
CHARLES GAINES / KENYATTA A.C HINKLE / ASHLEY HOLMES
KARON DAVIS / MARTIN LUTHER KING / FREEDOM CITY
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL / NOBEL PEACE PRIZE / GUERILLA
GIRLS / CITIZENSHIP / CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT / MARCH
ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM / MONTGOMERY
BUS BOYCOTT / ROSA PARKS / THE POSTER PROJECT
PRESENTS... / THE LONELY LONDONERS

USEFUL LINKS

www.baltic.art

www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes

www.amnesty.org.uk

www.studioedgararceneaux.com

www.guerrillagirls.com

www.freedomcity2017.com

www.louiscaeron.com/posters

www.amnesty.org.uk/files/give_it_up_passport.pdf

IMAGE CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Image credits

Louis Cameron *NOW! 2016 Starless Midnight* installation view, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo: John McKenzie © 2017 BALTIC

Karon Davis *Waiting Room 2016 Starless Midnight* installation view, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo: John McKenzie © 2017 BALTIC

Karon Davis *Mary 2016 Starless Midnight* installation view, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo: John McKenzie © 2017 BALTIC

Karon Davis *Nicotine 2017 Starless Midnight* installation view, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo: John McKenzie © 2017 BALTIC

Charles Gaines *Manifestos 3: MLK (1967) 2017 Starless Midnight* installation view, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo: John McKenzie © 2017 BALTIC

Louis Cameron *The Poster Project presents* ongoing series *Starless Midnight* installation view, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. Photo: John McKenzie © 2017 BALTIC

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BALTIC