Critical and Creative Thinking   
and Visual Arts

Sample learning activities

Levels 3–10

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Introduction

This resource is designed to illustrate how artworks can be used to teach both Visual Arts and Critical and Creative Thinking. A range of Critical and Creative Thinking and Visual Arts content descriptions from Levels 3 and 4 to Levels 9 and 10 are unpacked through sample learning activities based around particular artworks and artists. They could be used to support explicit teaching and/or consolidation of learning.

Levels 3 and 4

Focus artwork


Goya (Francisco de Goya y Lucientes), Manuel Osorio Manrique de Zuñiga (1784–1792), 
oil on canvas, 1787–88, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Goya (Francisco de Goya y Lucientes), *Manuel Osorio Manrique de Zuñiga (1784–1792)*,   
oil on canvas, 1787–88, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Information about the artist and artwork

Goya’s painting of a young boy, who almost looks like a doll, is softly and carefully rendered to illustrate the opposite ideas of good and evil, innocence and experience, naivety and wisdom, control and chaos. Dressed in a red jump suit and white sash, the boy stares into the distance. On the left of the boy and set in the shadowy darkness are three wide-eyed cats, who look with interest at a pet magpie the boy is holding on a leash. The magpie is holding in his beak a card that has the name of the painter on it to show how well known the artist was. On the right of the boy is a cage of finches. The red jumpsuit the boy is wearing is contrasted with and stands out because of the green cage the finches are kept in. The white ruffles on the neck and sleeves of the shirt and the white satin shoes suggest that the boy has been dressed for the occasion of having his portrait painted.

Goya was well known for his portraits of the royal family of Spain. He was very loyal to his country and he often painted members of the royal family in their formal dress. His paintings were traditional Spanish styles and showed the brilliant light and colours and textures of clothing and animals. He was also able to show the personality of his subjects, in this case the son of the king. This boy was very frail and he died when he was only eight years old.

More information about [*Manuel Osorio Manrique de Zuñiga (1784–1792)*](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436545)and [Goya](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/goya/hd_goya.htm) can be found on The Metropolitan Museum of Art website.

Visual Arts

Levels 3 and 4 curriculum links

**Strand:** Respond and Interpret

**Content description:** Identify and discuss how ideas are expressed in artworks from a range of places, times and cultures, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples [(VCAVAR028)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAR028)

**Strand:** Explore and Express Ideas

**Content description**: Explore ideas and artworks from different cultures and times as inspiration to create visual artworks [(VCAVAE025)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAE025)

**Strand:** Present and Perform

**Content description**: Explore different ways of displaying artworks to enhance their meaning for an audience [(VCAVAP027)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAP027)

Relevant achievement standard extracts:

* [Students] plan and make artworks that are inspired by artworks they experience.
* They use materials, visual conventions, techniques and processes to express their ideas in artworks.
* Students discuss how artists express ideas and use materials, techniques and visual conventions in artworks from a range of places, times and cultures.
* They discuss and evaluate the art making processes, materials and techniques they use to express their ideas.

Sample key concepts and ideas

* Artworks can be discussed using critical and creative thinking strategies.
* Critical and creative thinking can be used as a starting point for art-making activities and to develop artistic practice.

Sample learning activities

Students view the artwork by Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *Manuel Osorio Manrique de Zuñiga (1784–1792)*. The teacher uses the information about the artwork to support the discussion with students. The discussion is focused on the subject matter of the artwork and how artists use techniques to highlight characteristics of people and their culture. The students can use critical and creative thinking in the development of an artwork by exploring their own lives and using symbols to represent their own personality.

Discussion

* List the things you can see in the painting. What do they tell you about the boy?
* Describe the colours used in the artwork. Why do you think the artist has used these colours?
* Describe how the artist has painted the animals. What do you notice about the animals because of the way he has painted them?

Visual Arts practice

Ask students to make a portrait of their pet or an animal that they admire and contribute to the creation of a zine about pets and animals.

1. Ask students to bring in a reproduction or a photograph of a pet or an animal they admire.
2. As a class, discuss the characteristics of their pet’s or animal’s personality and how that can be visually represented. Think about how Goya has painted the boy and the animals in the artwork.
3. Students make a drawing of their pet or animal using coloured pencil.
4. After they have finished, ask each student to present their drawing to the class or a small groups and to identify the characteristics of their pet or animal and how they visually represented these.
5. In a space underneath the drawing, students should write a short statement about the pet or animal. For example:

* the pet’s or animal’s name
* what they like to eat
* where they like to sleep
* what games they like to play.

The students could describe how they have depicted these characteristics in the artwork.

1. Make a copy of each student’s drawing and, using the booklet function on a photocopier, create a zine using the students’ photographs and visual representations of the pet or animal they admire.

Critical and Creative Thinking

Levels 3 and 4 curriculum links

**Strand:** Reasoning

**Content descriptions:** Identify and use ‘If, then …’ and ‘what if …’ reasoning [(VCCCTR016)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCCCTR016)

Distinguish between main and peripheral ideas in own and others information and points of view [(VCCCTR014)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCCCTR014)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:**

Students … use … a range of strategies to develop their arguments.

Sample key concepts and ideas

* ‘If, then …’ and ‘what if …’ reasoning involves considering the implications of ideas or other aspects of arguments. It can be used to find constraints or limits. For example, ask ‘What if all/some/only people over 18 years old were allowed to do this, then ….’
* This reasoning can also be used to speculate in a more imaginative way, but the speculation is structured as an argument, with grounds stated for ideas within the argument.
* ‘If, then …’ and ‘what if …’ reasoning can also be used to set out cause and effect or make a prediction or inference. An inference involves putting together clues in the information or idea with something you already know to reach a conclusion about a missing piece of information or part of an idea. For example, the missing information in a portrait might be how the subject is feeling. The portrait might show a clue in the facial expression of the subject that we can put together with what we already know about emotions and facial expressions to infer a feeling. Perhaps the facial expression resembles what we already know about how someone looks when they are excited. We might then infer that the subject is feeling excited. The reasoning behind this is ‘If, then …’ reasoning: ‘If the expression of someone looks like this, then they are probably feeling excited ... and the expression of the subject in the portrait does look like this’.
* Distinguishing between main and peripheral ideas involves identifying the overall idea rather than supporting detail. Sometimes the overall point is expressed directly and sometimes it must be inferred from clues given in the information.

Sample learning activities

Students view the artwork by Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *Manuel Osorio Manrique de Zuñiga (1784–1792)*. The teacher uses the information about the artwork to support their discussion with students.

Initial discussion

Invite students in groups of two or three to respond to the following questions:

* What is this painting showing? What could happen next?
* How do you think the little boy feels about the situation shown in the painting? Why?
* What about the magpie? Why?
* What about the cats? Or the birds in the cage?

Ask each group to pick the main reason to support what they believe each character is feeling. If necessary, guide small groups to look for clues in the painting and information about it and to use ‘if … then’ or ‘what if …’ reasoning, and to distinguish between their main idea and supporting detail.

Ask small groups to share with the rest of the class their response to one of the questions, including their point of view and main reason for holding this point of view. Ask them to explain why they think their main reason is strong, using reasoning and clues from what they know about the work to do so.

The small groups can also share one idea that they thought was of less importance and that they decided not to use in their response. They explain why they rejected it.

Further discussion

When students have shared their initial ideas, ask:

* What are the similarities and differences between our perspectives on each of the characters and the reasons we gave?
* Are there any main reason/s that most of us agree with? Were there any reasons that were given by only one or two groups but that others were persuaded by?
* Does thinking about those questions change how you think or feel about the picture? How? Why?

Activity

Invite students to select one of the characters in the picture (the boy, a cat or a bird) and write a sentence or two on that character’s thoughts and feelings and the action that character might take, using the suggested prompt and response structure:

* What if I were the boy (or the cat or the bird)?
* If I were the boy (or the cat or the bird) then I would … because …
* My main reason for thinking … is because in the painting I can see that … and if … then …
* Another reason is … This is an important/less important reason.

Additional Critical and Creative Thinking and Visual Arts activities

* The zine could be published in the newsletter or on the school’s website, or it could be distributed at an end-of-year exhibition.
* The drawings that the students make could be projected onto a larger surface and the students work collaboratively to make a large-scale mural using a fabric drop sheet (available from a hardware supply store) primed with gesso and acrylic paint or using coloured chalks or paints on board.
* The images could be imported into a video-editing program and combined with sound clips of the students talking about their pets or animals.
* Invite the students to draw:
* how the cat sees the magpie
* how the cat sees the boy
* how the magpie (or a caged bird) sees the boy
* how the magpie sees the cat.

Levels 5 and 6

Focus artwork

Jeffrey Smart, Cahill Expressway, oil on plywood, 81.9 × 111.3 cm, 1962, 
Collection National Gallery of Victoria


Jeffrey Smart, *Cahill Expressway*, oil on plywood, 81.9 × 111.3 cm, 1962,   
Collection National Gallery of Victoria

Information about the artist and artwork

*Cahill Expressway* is by Australian painter Jeffrey Smart (1921–2013), who is known for making highly detailed oil paintings of urban and industrial landscapes. Smart lived in cities in Australia and Italy for most of his life. He painted his artworks using strong geometric shapes and flat colours. Usually the paintings are empty of any people or there is a small single figure in the work.

This painting is of Australia’s first freeway in a city, which opened to traffic in Sydney in 1958 and is named after the New South Wales premier at the time, John Joseph Cahill. A bald and portly man dressed in a blue suit, which some people suggest is the artist, stares directly at the viewer. A ‘false’ horizon is created by the overpass above the man. On this horizon is a monument with a statue of a figure pointing to the sky. There is also a set of buildings and a series of streetlight poles on the horizon. The painting seems surreal; the quietness and stillness of the scene that Smart depicts in *Cahill Expressway* is in contrast to the reality of the traffic, noise and energy this area would experience on a daily basis.

Other artworks by Jeffrey Smart include:

* *Playground at Mondragone*, 1998
* *Bus terminus*, 1973
* *Portrait of Clive James*, 1991–92

More information about [*Cahill Expressway*](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/3000/) can be found on the [National Gallery of Victoria website](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/3000/).

Visual Arts

Levels 5 and 6 curriculum links

**Strand:**  Respond and Interpret

**Content description:** Identify and describe how ideas are expressed in artworks by comparing artworks from different contemporary, historical and cultural contexts, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples [(VCAVAR032)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAR032)

**Strand:**  Explore and Express Ideas

**Content description:**  Explore visual arts practices as inspiration to create artworks that express different ideas and beliefs [(VCAVAE029)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAE029)

**Relevant achievement standard extracts:**

* [Students] explain how ideas are expressed in artworks they make and view.
* They demonstrate the use of different techniques and processes in … making artworks.
* They use visual conventions and visual arts practices to express ideas, themes and concepts in their work.
* They describe how artworks that they … view can be displayed to express and enhance meaning.
* Students describe and identify how ideas are expressed in artworks from different contemporary, historical and cultural contexts.

Sample key concepts and ideas

* Critical and creative thinking can be used to discuss meaning in an artwork.
* Critical and creative thinking can be used to explain how ideas about culture are expressed in an artwork.
* Critical and creative thinking can be used to explore ideas around making a response to an artwork.

Sample learning activities

Use *Cahill Expressway* as a starting point for a discussion on the artist’s use of materials and techniques to convey ideas in an artwork. The information about the artwork will help support a discussion that uses critical and creative thinking.

The class activities will form part of a process to develop an artwork in response to Jeffrey Smart’s work. Students consider how the artist’s emotions and their own response to their environment can structure an artwork. Critical and creative thinking strategies are embedded in the visual arts practice in this activity.

**Discussion**

Lead a discussion on *Cahill Expresswa*y that focuses on the use of shapes and forms within the composition. Link the use of shape and form with ideas about repetition, scale and balance.

* What shapes and forms are used in *Cahill Expressway*?
* What type of balance is used in *Cahill Expressway*? Radial, symmetrical or asymmetrical? Why?
* How has the way the artist used shapes and forms in the artwork to contribute to the ideas he was expressing?

Visual Arts practice

Students identify and describe the ideas expressed in artworks by Jeffrey Smart.

1. Identify and select a series of artworks by Jeffrey Smart (for example, the other artworks suggested earlier) and prepare a PowerPoint presentation to share with the class.
2. Using these artworks, with a particular focus on *Cahill Expressway,* lead a discussion about the use of geometric shapes and forms in the urban landscape and how these contrast with the natural and organic forms that occur in nature.
3. Focus on *Cahill Expressway* and ask the students to consider how this painting relates to their view of the world:

* What are the similarities and differences between Smart’s painting and the school grounds?
* Are there geometric structures in the school grounds? What shapes can be identified in these structures?

1. Ask the students to create series of shapes and forms, such as circle, square, triangle, oval, rectangle, octagon, parallelogram, trapezoid, pentagon and hexagon. Shapes and forms should initially be drawn freehand and then subsequently using a ruler or protractor. Compare the qualities of the shapes and forms.
2. Take the forms outside into the school grounds and align the shapes and forms within existing structures. Photograph each alignment and create a visual taxonomy of shapes and forms within the school grounds.
3. Ask: Where are the most circles, triangles, rectangles and squares located?
4. Map the location of the shapes and present the map as the finished artwork.

Critical and Creative Thinking

Levels 5 and 6 curriculum links

**Strand:**  Questions and Possibilities

**Content description:** Examine how different kinds of questions can be used to identify and clarify information, ideas and possibilities [(VCCCTQ021)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCCCTQ021)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:**

… students apply questioning as a tool to focus or expand thinking.

Sample key concepts and ideas

* When creating a question, thinking about the desired nature of the answer is useful, for example, thinking about whether the purpose of questioning is to gain quantitative or qualitative data, a broad set of general alternatives or a specific and precise solution, or a piece of information.
* Different kinds of questions arise out of different fields, such as science, economics or the arts, and these questions can be used to shift the focus of a topic.
* Reflecting on features of questions that worked well to get the desired kind of answer or that would be ‘even better if …’ will assist in building the skill of using questioning as a tool.

Sample learning activities

Use *Cahill Expressway* as a starting point for discussion.

Initial activity and discussion

Begin by presenting the image to the class without the didactic label – that is, information on the artist/maker, title, date, medium, materials, dimensions of the artwork and often a description.

Invite students to think of their own questions about the image. Encourage students to take their time and write down at least six questions.Students could be provided with blank cards and write one question per card. Students could then move these questions around easily in the grouping activity that follows.

In pairs or groups of three, students group their questions into topics. They explain their groupings, for example ‘These questions are all about the artist, these are about what is going on in the painting and these are about how the painting was made.’

Students consider each group of questions and note the different kinds of questions in that group. What makes the questions in a particular group different to each other? Are there any that are very similar to each other and that could be merged?

Provide the students with the didactic label (drawn from the information about the artwork provided above). This will answer some but probably not all of the questions.

Discussion will depend on the student questions that you have. Ask:

* Are there any questions that have not been answered?
* Does that matter? Why/why not?
* Are there any questions that might not *have* an answer? How might you go about answering such questions?
* Which questions might make a difference to your understanding or response to the painting?

Additional Visual Arts activities

* Drawing on the photographs of the school grounds, create an artwork with the use of shape and form as its basis. The artwork could be painted using tones of the one colour or it could be a large-scale drawing using charcoal or ink.
* Create a series of artworks using the art element and art principles (visual conventions) that connect the classroom with the school grounds. The students will consider shapes and forms that are the same or similar in the classroom and outside. Consider works by artists such as Ralph Balson, Bridget Riley and Piet Mondrian.

Levels 7 and 8

Focus artwork

Tony Albert, Sorry, found kitsch objects applied to vinyl letters, 99 objects, 
200 × 510 × 10cm (installed), 2008, Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art


Tony Albert, *Sorry*, found kitsch objects applied to vinyl letters, 99 objects,   
200 × 510 × 10cm (installed), 2008, Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art

Information about the artist and artwork

Tony Albert (born 1981) is a descendent of the Girramay, Yidinyji and Kuku Yalanji peoples. His installation *Sorry* was commissioned by the Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) Queensland in 2008 for the exhibition ‘Optimism’. It responds to then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s National Apology to the Stolen Generations for the impact and suffering caused by decades of mistreatment due to past Australian government policies that resulted in the forced removal of children from Indigenous families.

Albert has covered each letter in the word ‘Sorry’ with what he terms ‘Aboriginalia’, the kitsch caricatures of Indigenous people that adorn domestic objects such as plates and tea towels manufactured from the 1940s to the 1970s, carefully scoured from op shops. Albert has collected this memorabilia for many years. He says that he is giving these kitsch items a new life and voice. The word ‘sorry’ has been shown in reverse to question the idea and sincerity of what an apology is.

More information about Tony Albert:

* [Queensland Art Gallery, Gallery of Modern Art](http://collection.qagoma.qld.gov.au/qag/imu.php?request=displayandport=45001andid=e8caandflag=ecatalogueandoffset=22andcount=defaultandview=details)
* [‘Tony Albert discusses “Sorry” created for the National Apology in 2008’](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htlM8m6j6i8andlist=PL_OplQD58KpilXEVgFWNWr7SMVeSzi6OOandindex=7), QAGOMA, YouTube
* [‘Curator Bruce McLean gives insights into Tony Albert’s practice and his work “Sorry”’](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Drb9RbW3Twandlist=PL_OplQD58KpilXEVgFWNWr7SMVeSzi6OOandindex=8), QAGOMA, YouTube
* [‘Why does Tony Albert collect Aboriginalia?’](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPbd808PUiUandlist=PL_OplQD58KpilXEVgFWNWr7SMVeSzi6OOandindex=4), QAGOMA, YouTube

Visual Arts

Levels 7 and 8 curriculum links

**Strand:**  Explore and Express Ideas

**Content descriptions:** Explore visual arts practices as inspiration to explore and develop themes, concepts or ideas in artworks ([VCAVAE033](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAE033))

Explore how artists use materials, techniques, technologies and processes to realise their intentions in artworks ([VCAVAE034](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAE034)).

**Strand:**  Visual Arts Practices

**Content descriptions:**  Experiment with materials, techniques, technologies and processes in a range of art forms to express ideas, concepts and themes in artworks ([VCAVAV035](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAV035))

Develop skills in planning and designing artworks and documenting artistic practice ([VCAVAV036](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAV036))

**Strand:**  Present and Perform

**Content description:**  Create and display artworks, describing how ideas are expressed to an audience ([VCAVAP037](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAP037))

**Strand:** Respond and Interpret

**Content description:**  Analyse how ideas and viewpoints are expressed in artworks and how they are viewed by audiences ([VCAVAR038](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAR038))

Identify and connect specific features of visual artworks from different cultures, historical and contemporary times, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ([VCAVAR039](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAR039))

**Relevant achievement standard extracts:**

* [Students] identify, analyse and evaluate how other artists use materials, techniques, technologies, processes and visual conventions to express ideas and convey meaning.
* Students plan and make their art works in response to exploration of techniques, technologies and processes used in the work of other artists.
* They demonstrate the use of materials, techniques, processes, visual conventions and technologies to express ideas and convey meaning in their artworks.
* Students identify and describe artworks and exhibitions from different cultures, times and places and how ideas are interpreted by audiences.

Sample key concepts and ideas

* Critical and creative thinking can be used to discuss how artists express ideas about contemporary issues in society in their work.
* Critical and creative thinking can be used in art-making activities, for example using materials and techniques to express ideas on contemporary issues.

Sample learning activities

*Sorry* by Tony Albert provides a starting point for students to discuss how artists express contemporary issues in their artworks. The discussion questions will assist students to explore the use of ‘found objects’ in Albert’s work and how the artist has used them to express an abstract concept. Critical and creative thinking strategies are used to unpack the ideas behind the artwork and are embedded in the Visual Arts practice activities.

Discussion

Lead a discussion about everyday materials and words.

* What is the main concept behind *Sorry*?
* How do you think the artist has expressed the idea?
* Consider the materials and techniques the artist has used to make the work and why he chose those materials.
* Describe how the artist has expressed the concept using visual conventions.

Visual Arts practice

With students, identify a concept that they consider to be significant or important to them. Concepts could include:

* climate change
* immigration policies, refugees and asylum seekers
* technology
* colonisation.

1. Collect together a range of articles from text-based sources that represent issues associated with the concept.
2. Identify key words or statements used in the articles. What language is repeatedly used or is consistent between the articles?
3. Select key words or phrases that express the concept.
4. Look at and investigate the types of fonts used and how the type of font connects with the concept.
5. Collect objects that represent the concept. This work could be a collaborative project, and a message could be distributed to the school community requesting the donation of objects to form the artwork.
6. Once the objects have been collected, categorise and arrange them according to the art elements – for example, shape, form, colour and texture – and the art principle scale.
7. Arrange the objects to form the letters in one of the key words or phrases. This could be completed either indoors or outside. If the school has access to a drone, the final arrangement could be filmed from above.

Evaluation

Ask students to evaluate their work.

* Describe how your selection of materials and visual conventions express the concept behind the work.
* Explain how Albert’s work influenced your work.

Critical and Creative Thinking

Levels 7 and 8 curriculum links

**Strand:**  Reasoning

**Content description:** Consider how to settle matters of fact and matters of value and the degree of confidence in the conclusions [(VCCCTR038)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCCCTR038)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:**

Students explain different ways to settle matters of fact and matters of value and issues concerned with these.

Sample key concepts and ideas

* Different disciplines have different ways of engaging with issues of fact and value, but they may share elements such as quality of evidence and its sources, and dispositions such as open-mindedness.
* Resolution of fact or value does not necessarily mean complete consensus. How much disagreement to tolerate is often determined within different disciplines (for example, an agreed process of peer review in science) or may depend on context.
* In an issue involving several stakeholders and several experts and non-experts, it should be considered who has authority over what and the best mode (citizen forum, academic papers) for reaching a resolution.

Sample learning activities

*Sorry* by Tony Albert provides a starting point for students to discuss the concept of ‘kitsch’ and the role it might play in artworks.

Initial discussion

Before engaging with *Sorry*, explore the concept of ‘kitsch’ in general with students.

* Ask: What is ‘kitsch’?
* Consider related concepts, such as ‘tacky’ or ‘cheap’ or any similar terms students are inclined to use.
* Ask: How much is being ‘kitsch’ a fact about a work? How much is it a value judgment?
* Even if being ‘kitsch’ is overall a value judgment, are there certain qualities that ‘kitsch’ objects have? What are they?
* Are these things qualities in the object (colours, forms) or facts about the purpose or some other aspect of the work?

Responding to the artwork

Present the artwork to students.

Ask students to look at the artwork and read its didactic label.

Further discussion

Students discuss the following in small groups and report back to the class:

* Why has the artist chosen these particular ‘kitsch’ objects?
* What makes these particular objects ‘kitsch’?
* How does the choice of these items contribute to the message of the work?
* What does this work suggest about ‘apologising’?
* How important is it that the viewer shares the artist’s interpretation of these works as ‘kitsch’?

Following reports from the small groups, prompt the class as a whole to consider:

* Where are the points of agreement and disagreement between groups?
* Are there areas of disagreement about particular facts or are the disagreements about value judgments?
* How important is it to try to resolve these disagreements?

Additional Visual Arts and Critical Creative Thinking learning activities

Explore how text has been used by artists in the history of art. Look at artworks by Angela Brennan, Agatha Gothe-Snape, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Roy Lichtenstein, Lawrence Weiner, Ed Ruscha, Bob and Roberta Smith, Jon Campbell and Jean Michel-Basquiat. Complete the activities in this resource using some of the artworks.

Levels 9 and 10

Focus artwork

Colleen Ahern, 46.11mins (Odetta at Town Hall), oil on board, 30 × 30cm, 2016, 
Neon Parc gallery, Melbourne


Colleen Ahern, *46.11mins (Odetta at Town Hall)*, oil on board, 30 × 30cm, 2016,   
Neon Parc gallery, Melbourne

Information about the artist and artwork

Colleen Ahern (born 1971) is a Melbourne-based artist who references music and musicians she admires in her paintings. Often the subjects of her paintings are musicians who are activists or have written music that reflects issues in contemporary society. The style of the artworks reflects the personality or the views that Ahern has about the artist. The subjects are painted from imagination and Ahern uses no source materials. The colours and brushstrokes used also reflect Ahern’s response to her choice of subject.

*46.11mins (Odetta at Town Hall)* is an oil painting of the American singer Odetta Holmes, who was often referred to as the voice of the civil rights movement. *46.11mins (Odetta at Town Hall)* is an appropriation of the cover image of the record *Odetta at Town Hall,* which Ahern listened to while making this painting. Ahern used the total length of the recording to define the process of commencing and finishing the painting, which in this case was 46 minutes and 11 seconds.

More information about Colleen Ahern:

* [Artists: Colleen Ahern](https://neonparc.com.au/artists/colleen-ahern), Neon Parc
* [‘Colleen Ahern – ‘Cortez the killer’](http://stamm.com.au/colleen-ahern-cortez-the-killer/), Stamm

Visual Arts

Levels 9 and 10 curriculum links

**Strand:**  Respond and Interpret

**Content descriptions:** Analyse and interpret artworks to explore the different forms of expression, intentions and viewpoints of artists and how they are viewed by audiences ([VCAVAR045](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAR045))

Analyse, interpret and evaluate a range of visual artworks from different cultures, historical and contemporary contexts, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to explore differing viewpoints ([VCAVAR046](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAR046))

**Strand:**  Explore and Express Ideas

**Content descriptions:** Explore the visual arts practices and styles as inspiration to develop a personal style, explore, express ideas, concepts and themes in artworks ([VCAVAE040](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAE040))

Explore how artists manipulate materials, techniques, technologies and processes to develop and express their intentions in artworks ([VCAVAE041](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAE041))

**Strand:**  Visual Arts Practices

**Content descriptions:** Select and manipulate materials, techniques, and technologies and processes in a range of art forms to express ideas, concepts and themes ([VCAVAV042](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAV042))

Conceptualise, plan and design artworks that express ideas, concepts and artistic intentions ([VCAVAV043](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCAVAV043))

**Relevant achievement standard extracts:**

* [Students] analyse and evaluate how artists communicate ideas and convey meaning in artworks.
* Students identify the influences of other artists and analyse connections between techniques, processes and visual conventions in artworks to develop their own practice.
* They select, and manipulate materials, techniques, processes, visual conventions and technologies to express ideas and viewpoints in their artworks.
* Students analyse and evaluate artworks and exhibitions from different cultures, times and places, and discuss how ideas and beliefs are interpreted by audiences.

Sample key concepts and ideas

* Critical and creative thinking can be used to analyse and evaluate how artists communicate abstract concepts in their work.
* Ideas about the relationships between art and music and how ideas can be represented can be expressed and explored.
* Critical and creative thinking can be used in art practice to develop a conceptual artwork.

Sample learning activities

The artistic practice of Colleen Ahern is used as a starting point for discussion about the relationships between the disciplines of visual arts and music. The students discuss Ahern’s artwork *46.11mins (Odetta at Town Hall)* and compare it with the work of other contemporary artists. Critical and creative thinking is used to expand students’ thinking and as a catalyst for the development of an artwork in response to viewing and discussing Ahern’s work.

Discussion

Look at the work of Colleen Ahern, Darren Sylvester, John Nixon, A Constructed World (a collective group of artists who collaborate),Jon Campbell, Mutlu Çerkez, Geoff Robinson, Charlie Sofo, Angelica Mesiti, Angela Tiatia and Marco Fusinato.

* How do artists express music as a subject matter in their artworks? The artist may have used music as an inspiration.
* What is the role of music or sound in the development of subject matter in the artwork?
* What is the relationship between music or sound in the way the artist has used materials?
* How are art elements and art principles used in the artwork? What relationship do they have to the elements of music?

Visual Arts Practice

* Ask students:
* What musician do you admire?
* Why is their music important to you?
* How would you use any of the artworks by the artists who have used music that you have studied as inspiration for an artwork?
* How would you employ an album by a musician whom you admire to make art?
* Select one album by a musician you admire and play the album from beginning to end. Without pausing or stopping the music, make a visual response to the work using a material that relates to the musician or album.
* Alternatively, try using the length of the songs as a method for making a visual response. Each of the songs could be rendered in a series of monoprints, drawings, collages or paintings.

Critical and Creative Thinking

Levels 9 and 10 curriculum links

**Strand:** Questions and Possibilities

**Content descriptions***:* Suspend judgements to allow new possibilities to emerge and investigate how this can broaden ideas and solutions [(VCCCTQ044)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCCCTQ044)

Challenge previously held assumptions and create new links, proposals and artefacts by investigating ideas that provoke shifts in perspectives and cross boundaries to generate ideas and solutions [(VCCCTQ045)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCCCTQ045)

**Relevant achievement standard extract:**

Students … demonstrate a willingness to shift their perspective when generating ideas, resulting in new ways of perceiving solutions

Sample key ideas

* Judgments are necessary to evaluate the quality of ideas, but for idea generation it can be helpful to suspend judgments in order to increase the range of ideas.
* Suspending judgments involves being aware of any cultural and socioeconomic contexts, past experiences, perceptions of expertise and knowledge of constraints, such as financial cost, that might create bias or lead to assumptions.
* Ideas that provoke shifts in perspective are often found within disciplinary contexts, for example how science understanding changes over time.
* Social psychology and behavioural psychology can also provide insights into how perspectives can be shifted and strong underlying biases that might be present.

Sample learning activities

The artistic practice of Colleen Ahern is used as a starting point for discussion about how underlying assumptions about how the work was made might influence a response to the work and whether different disciplines can inspire each other.

Begin by presenting the image to the class *without the didactic label*. Invite students to write down their response to the work, including whether they like it or not and why.

Then introduce students to the manner of the work’s production – that is, that it was painted while listening to the musician’s performance in real time.

Invite students to respond to that information by reflecting on:

* whether the information about the manner of production changed the way they perceived the work and, if so, how
* what they had assumed in their initial response about how the work was made
* whether these assumptions had influenced their evaluation of the work.

Discussion

Ask students:

* Why might the artist have chosen to impose these particular constraints upon herself? (These are the ‘natural’ constraints that the live performer works with but a painter usually does not. Students may have other interesting theories.)
* How might ‘constraints’ (for example time limits, limitations of material, or limitations of form or genre) hamper an artist? How might these ‘constraints’ help an artist?
* How does knowing about how the work was created contribute to your understanding of the work?
* To what extent *should* a work of art rely on the viewer’s knowledge of how it was made?
* What does this work suggest about the similarities and differences between visual and performing arts? To what extent can the performing arts be an inspiration for a visual artist?
* Has learning about this work challenged your own ideas about how you could or should work as an artist?

Additional Visual Arts and Critical Creative Thinking learning activities

* Record the sounds that objects make in the art room. Create a composition from the recording using a sound editing computer application. Using the visual responses generated in the earlier learning activity, create a video that combines these sounds with the images.
* Create your own musical instrument using natural materials collected from the school grounds or from recycled or found objects.
* Pick a location such as the city centre or an event such as a concert or football match. Record the sounds that you hear and use them as a basis for an artwork. The work could be a sound work and be accompanied by a suite of paintings, drawings, video or photographic work that symbolises the sounds that you have recorded.