

Old masters, NEW CHIEFS

What past masters and notable contemporary artists would all students benefit from being introduced to? Six art teachers share their suggestions with **Hannah Day**...

In art lessons, it can be difficult balancing studies of established artistic traditions and past masters with explorations of modern works and movements. Especially since the first recorded artwork dates all the way back to around 70,000 BC...

So with that in mind, what are the most essential historic and contemporary references that art teachers should be using to inspire their students? That's the question I put to a number of fellow subject specialists across the country, and these were the responses I received...



CLAIRE VILDAY

Head of creative arts and technology at Steyning Grammar School, West Sussex

Historical

Artemesia Gentileschi stands out as a key artist, and not just because she was a successful woman painter in a period where the art world was dominated by men. She's among the most accomplished of all 17th Century artists.

Contemporary

Grayson Perry is a British art hero! His range of approaches, commentary on society and Grayson's Art Club make him accessible to most of my classes. The passionate way in which he promotes and speaks about art and its importance is key to engaging students.

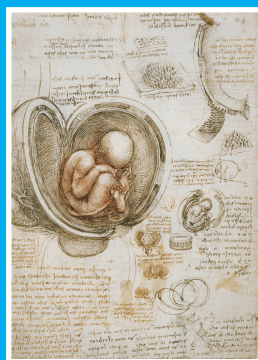


MARTYN JONES

Head of arts and technology at Astley Community High School, Northumberland

Historical

Leonardo da Vinci's 'Studies of the Foetus in the Womb' is really useful for exploring hidden narrative. The backstory involves a woman who was heavily pregnant and whose body wasn't claimed for burial, making her corpse available



for vivisection, thus opening up the work to moral conversations beyond its initial scientific use. On top of that, it can also help students develop an understanding of ways in which art can be beautiful, as well as macabre.

Contemporary

I saw Magdalena Abakanowicz's 'Backs' for the first time in the After Auschwitz exhibition at the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, and was floored by it – it shows how humanity can be conveyed without any indication of identity.

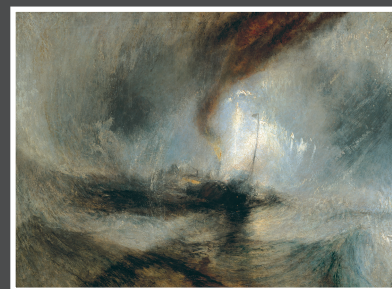


NICOLA JARVIS

St Clement Danes School at Chorleywood, Hertfordshire

Historical

In his early paintings, Turner had the ability to paint and depict the sheer power and magnificence of nature, which is a key theme of the Sublime. He was a forward-thinking artist working at the beginning of the industrial revolution, and it's Turner's later paintings that particularly make my heart sing. Described by Victorian art critics as 'unfinished' and 'repulsive', they were colour studies of light – translucent, shimmering and ethereal landscapes that became the inspiration for Impressionism.



Contemporary

Anselm Kiefer was born during the closing months of WWII, and has created work that reflects upon Germany's post-war identity and history. Fusing art and literature with painting and sculpture, Kiefer engages with both complex historical events and ancestral epics of life and death. He's fearless with scale, and possesses the ability to manipulate materials so that they resemble semi-sculptural paintings, resulting in work that can help inspire learners to be more adventurous with their own uses of texture and materials.



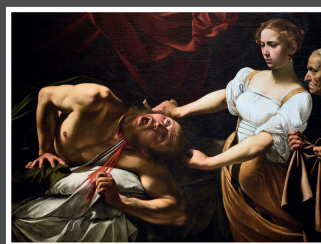
LINDSEY WILLIAMS

Head of art and photography at Cromwell Community College, Cambridgeshire

Historical

For me, the Baroque era (16C Italy) is a dramatic and expressive reaction to the mannerism created in the Renaissance. Caravaggio in particular has a talent for pictorial narrative, emotional drama and naturalism. Studying directly from life and nature set him

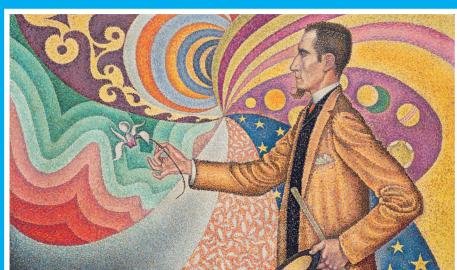
apart, coupled with his dramatic use of lighting. 'Judith Beheading Holofernes' (1602) explores the physicality and sensuality of death – Caravaggio's use of line and placement of objects draws your eyes around the shallow space. The light highlights the complex emotions of the subject, while also creating a sense of the divine, making it a useful work with which to teach students about the importance of composition and narrative.



Contemporary

Abstract expressionism, and the artist CY Twombly in particular, is important for discussions around marks and their value. I love Twombly's work for its sheer dynamism and movement, and the symbolism it encourages viewers to place onto marks, symbols, shapes

and colours. Consider 'Leda and the Swan' (1962). At first glance, pupils will often dismiss it as just a bunch of scribbles, but when you bring in the context, they start to pick out elements that help them see the narrative.



EDWARD BARRETT

Teacher of art and photography at City Academy, Bristol

Historical

Signac's work reminds me that bold innovation isn't a recent phenomenon. Just look at his 1890 work, 'Portrait of Félix Fénéon', for a perfect example. Through his use of bold, brash colour, and the exquisite twists and swirls of the meticulously dotted background, Signac's work ushered in a wave of vibrant pointillism and acted as conduit for his own musings on colour theory. Students are always surprised to hear that 'Portrait...' is 130 years old, so it works well as a gateway into studying various pre-20th century art movements.

Contemporary

I wouldn't be an artist without Hannah Höch. One of the pioneers of photomontage, her eye for the absurd paved the way for a new generation of cut and paste artists, and her influence can clearly be seen in works spanning many different media – from painting to mixed media, through photography and film. It's a great introduction for students into the absurd, and a good way of signposting them towards work that touches on politics, gender and identity.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hannah Day is head of visual arts, media and film at Herefordshire and Ludlow Sixth Form College, where she has responsibility for overseeing the department's teaching and strategic development

LUCY BETHEL



Deputy director of expressive arts at Crickhowell High School, Powys

Historical

Post-impressionism had a significant impact on not just painting, but the art world as a whole, and is fundamental in understanding how artists developed more symbolic and

conceptual ways of looking at the world. Bridging the turn of the 20th century, its influence is still seen in many artworks today.

Contemporary

Bedwyr Williams' humour and engaging artworks allow learners to explore identity, equality and community. Through his immersive pieces, such as 'Tyrrau Mawr', we start to fear for the future of our planet's longevity; in 'Walk a Mile in My Shoes' we experience empathy, tolerance and individual difference.

WONDERING HOW TO COVER THE BREADTH OF ART HISTORY WITHIN YOUR LESSONS? HERE ARE SOME IDEAS...

Weekly treasure hunt

Each week, give your students a keyword – maybe a specific style, colour, media, theme or object. For homework, they then have to find a single artwork that matches it. By recording their weekly discoveries in a Word doc, noting the artist, title, date and image, they can start to build their own art timeline. Print them off at the end of term or year, and you'll have amassed a sizeable collection of alternative art histories.

Quickfire round

Begin a lesson by presenting students with an artwork, providing key details such as the artist, its title, date of creation, media and brief notes on its background. Then pose students a question or two for them to discuss and provide feedback on. You can get quieter students involved by encouraging everyone to write their responses on whiteboards and display them all simultaneously.

Dictionary corner

Highlight a key subject term, or collection of related terms to the whole class. In small groups, students are then tasked with writing reflective comments about an artwork assigned to their group that makes use of this key term. Each group should be provided with a different artwork, so that they can see how the same term can be used to critique different media at various points throughout history.