

The Ancient Tree Hunt

KS3 Art and Design

Movement and ancient trees

UNIT 2: TEACHERS SHEET

(Suggested time: 1–2 hours)

Introduction Overview

Watch trees with your students. In the wind they rustle and the leaves blow and move yet the trunk of a large tree manages to stand firm even in the strongest gales. Imagine how some trees on cliffs and in windy spots bend in the wind and grow in a leaning windswept fashion.

Using paints or charcoal and pencils try experimenting to see how motion can be created on paper. Blur and trace the pattern of the wind keeping the trunk of the tree firm yet feathering the leaves to create movement. Consider the weather and clouds and how you can make a landscape of trees with turbulent skies. Think about other artists such as Turner and Van Gogh and the techniques they used to create the feeling of movement.

Learning Objectives – Movement

- **Weather conditions and environment**

Learn to understand why trees are so flexible, bend in the wind and harsh weather conditions and live such long lives.

How different climates affect their growth.

- **Identification**

Learn how to identify different species of tree and examine the different shapes and forms.

- **Investigate feelings and expression**

Learn how to transform the feelings and moods invoked by the study of a tree in a rugged or atmospheric context by using paints and other suitable materials to simulate its size and shape and to create drama and expression.

- **Use a selection of materials**

Learn how to choose and manipulate different materials to achieve the feeling of movement and scale.

Key Concepts met by this Unit

1.1 Creativity

- Producing imaginative images, artefacts and other outcomes that are both original and of value.
- Exploring and experimenting with ideas, materials, tools and techniques.
- Taking risks and learning from mistakes.

1.2 Competence

- Investigating, analysing, designing, making, reflecting and evaluating effectively.
- Making informed choices about media, techniques and processes.

1.3 Cultural understanding

- Understanding the role of the artist, craftsperson and designer in a range of cultures, times and contexts.

1.4 Critical understanding

- Exploring visual, tactile and other sensory qualities of their own and others' work.
- Developing their own views and expressing reasoned judgements.

Equipment needed:

A range of different paints and inks of choice

Pencils, charcoal and crayons

Sponge, rags old combs and scraping and rubbing materials

Paper towels

Brushes large and small (household paint brushes can be used)

Large cartridge paper A3 or larger

Digital or film cameras with manual override

Camera Tripod

Internet access



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learning objectives (cont)

- **Study other artists**

Understand how other artists have worked in different media and styles to portray their interpretation of movement and the environment.

- **Photography**

Learn how to use a camera to capture movement either with or without a tripod.

- **Discuss and comment in an analytical manner**

Examine and discuss ways of working to produce the results required and to be able to comment on each other's work and compare this to other artists and photographers.

- **Internet access**

Use of the Internet to research the Woodland Trust and Ancient Tree Hunt web sites to find out more about trees and species and some of the work that is being carried out in the UK to preserve this heritage.

Introduction – Discussion and Aims

This lesson assumes that students will have some knowledge of The Ancient Tree Hunt web site so that they can use this knowledge to improve on their interpretation of this lesson. See previous lesson plans for more information relating to this.

Trees and their environment – setting the scene

Ancient trees have as their name implies been around for many years. Some of the oldest trees are Yew trees often seen growing in churchyards. The oldest of these are estimated to be some 3,000 years of age. Other trees such as the Oak may be seen as ancient if they live for 5-600 years. We know that the Yew is a very hardy tree and can layer itself to continue growing if a part of it dies, hence its longevity.

Trees such as the Silver Birch may only live for up to 200 years but are prolific seed bearers and reproduce rapidly. So a lot

depends on the species of the tree, the conditions it lives in and where, as to how long it may survive. (More can be found out about this on the Woodland Trust web site).

In a forest, trees fight each other to grow and gain access to light. On a mountain they may cling to the rocks to survive, bent and twisted by wind and storms. Discuss the forces of nature, erosion, and the seasons and how this can affect the way a tree grows and survives.

Discuss our countryside and varied environment where trees are found, (towns, mountains, forests and others). What has inspired many great artists to produce varied and diverse works of art, some realistic, some surreal and others abstract of these conditions?

Imagine the countless storms and seasons that these trees have endured. Growing thick bark, solid trunks and flexible branches and leaves these trees have evolved to deal with all manner of climate change. (Study different leaf shapes and use the tree Identification guides available at www.naturedetectives.org.uk to identify different species).

Away from such contrasts our suburban trees may be growing in parkland or high streets, farmers fields or neighbours gardens. Often unnoticed they stand quietly growing through the seasons as we grow from children to adults. Our lifetime to an ancient tree is just a short span in its many hundreds of years of life. Discuss the historical aspects. How did we live 100 or 500 years ago?

High on the hills trees can often be seen to bend and curve themselves over the rocks driven close to the ground to escape the gales.

Many artists, poets and writers have been inspired by these dramatic conditions and landscapes producing work that is rich in both subject and inspiration. Can you name examples of any of these?



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Consider other subjects such as history, poetry, writing and music as part of this project; maybe there is a theme that could be developed as part of your schools environmental strategy.

Sadly many of our old trees have been cut down and used for construction, fuel, and furniture. These days our trees are still under threat but there is more awareness as to how important they are for our health and well being. Discuss the balance between our need for roads and houses and how important it is to maintain our green spaces.

Emotion and feelings – materials and methods for discussion with your students

• What are the key points in understanding the purpose of this exercise?

By studying other artists' techniques and methods we can see examples of their interpretations. Knowing the feelings that are invoked by seeing a tree in a storm, a dramatic sky or tranquil environment, is it amazement, fear or serenity? Understanding how to translate these feelings into a visual image and different media to use to achieve this. Different people see things in different ways, which is why each and every one of us has the ability to produce wonderful works of art.

Discuss with your students:

How often have you slept in a room where the windows are rattled by the sound of leaves and branches waving in strong winds? Imagine the fear or wonder this invokes in you. Discuss how this can be created in your work, maybe through using sound or colour and motion.

What types of movement are there? Sometimes-strong gusts in one direction and other times circular gusts so a tree will be swept in different directions, swaying and creaking. How can you use your brushes or other media to create this pattern of movement?

The wind creates much of this effect – you can hear the wind and feel the wind but you can only see the effect it has, bending trees, blowing autumn leaves in spirals, swirling clouds in the sky into motion.

How can you capture the drama of the elements and the scale of these ancient trees? How can you produce an imaginative artwork to illustrate movement and size?

Discuss the range of media and the differences between them. Examples are Charcoal, conte, pastels, oils, and watercolour. How would you decide which is the right medium to use?

Can you think of an artist who used motion in their work? Van Gogh made swirls using strong colour to emphasise the effect. Francis Bacon painted portraits, which often were hard to identify because of the intense action and movement in his painting. Turner painted turbulent skies and vast landscapes which were full of emotion and awe. Constable made tranquil picturesque countryside scenes as the subject for his paintings. Each of these artists portrays a different set of emotions and styles in their work.

Imagine a dancer trying to convey the feeling of a tree being blown or wind swept. Try to use your whole body to express the feeling and deliver the strokes of action through your brush.

Matisse painted *Dance*, which conveys a real sense of movement as they hold hands in a circle. He used colour and the linking of figures to create his motion.

Jackson Pollock created movement in his controversial pictures using dripping paint and bicycles. Discuss abstracts in more detail.

Op art creates a feeling of movement by optical illusion.

How does colour effect motion? Warm colours such as reds appear close while cool colours recede such as blues. By using warmer and cooler greens leaves can appear to recede.



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Bright light colours can appear closer while dark sombre colours recede.

Discuss the ways that the feeling of movement can be created using mixed media and a variety of techniques. Examples such as sharp lines and washes, wavy lines and curves to simulate the bendiness of trees, blurs and sponge effects to soften edges.

Activity – Discuss with your students:

You now have a wide range of ideas with which to produce your artwork.

Use whichever techniques and materials that feel right to create the impression you want to achieve.

The choice is between using paints, washes and brush strokes to produce your impression of a windswept tree in its environment, cliff, field, street or other. Or to use cut outs to make and montage either photographs or drawings together as layers. Photographs used as a montage with other media such as pencil and charcoal can produce very interesting results.

Remember to feel the emotion and use these feelings to inspire your work.

Other possible opportunities for this project are to use your ideas as a mural, a poster with text that fits with the artwork, a montage made as a group effort or a photographic essay, using the most interesting effects, maybe even combine these with paintings.

Encourage group participation and discussion to evaluate work as it progresses – this is an experimental project and relies on these experiments and mistakes to be utilised and seen as advantages. This is of particular help to any students with learning challenges as the freedom to experiment and make mistakes often produces an exciting and rewarding result.

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Start by experimenting on rough paper – create swirling shapes using different paints, sponges and brushes to make the effect.

Use washes, runny inks or paints and large brushes to build a feeling of motion on your work.

Retain the feeling of the structure of rocks, mountains or streets by using firm angular strokes to create rigidity.

The trunk of the tree may be quite solid and large – does this move?

Leaves and branches rattle and blow in strong winds – how can you convey the colour and motion?

Multiple images can be used in layers to create the feeling of movement.

Consider painting a forest of trees all in motion using blocks of colour and blurred strokes. This can be abstract to create a tension and flow between the shapes.

Photography

If there is an opportunity to take photographs then interesting effects can be obtained with a manual digital or film camera.

Try setting your camera up on a tripod and look at a tree from a variety of angles. Using a selection of slow shutter speeds from 1/8th second to 1 second, keep the tripod steady and if you shoot a branch with some leaves then you will probably have a fairly good image of the branch but with blurred leaves. Do this against a dark background such as the trunk of the tree and the brighter leaves will stand out and create some interesting effects. These can be enlarged to use within a painting or a montage or as material for design and print.

Alternatively you can use the camera on slow speeds without the tripod and swing the camera across the subject – this will produce a curved blur of all the camera sees. This is good for



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creating backgrounds or ideas for paintings. This is very much hit and miss so digital cameras are the best as you see the results immediately, experiment until you get something interesting.

Continue by making prints from some of the most interesting results. These can then be used as reference for paintings or to used as cut outs and incorporated into a painting, other photographs or a montage.

Summary

During this lesson you will have covered a range of topics that relate to movement and trees.

Students will have experimented with different materials and photography to develop the concept of movement.

Assess the results in a group discussion to analyse the different ideas and methods used.

This idea can equally be used on other subjects or utilised to extend this lesson into other areas. Examples of this could be in the design of posters, multimedia (effects for animation with the added drama of soundtracks), web sites or photography.

It may be possible to develop this project alongside other core subject(s). Science, History, English, Music and Drama.

Study other artists and their techniques and ways of communicating their ideas and feelings. Learn from this to understand how to find your own inspiration and ideas.



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Written work or group oral work, session material

1 It is the middle of the night a storm is raging outside, the branches of the trees are rattling on the window and making eerie noises!

How do you feel? Describe the thoughts and feelings in your mind.

2 Describe what it must feel like to be an old tree, rooted to the same spot for Centuries.

What might have changed? Would there be more houses, motorways?

Do you think there are more people around?

Would there be less trees around then than when the tree was a sapling?

What would the landscape look like 300 years ago?

What was happening in history?

3 Describe 24 hours in the life of an ancient tree, night and day.

What happens at sunrise with the birds and animals?

When happens during the rush hour?

Would people sit and rest under this tree?

Would children play or climb in this tree?

What happens at dusk, and people go home?

What animals come out at night?

4 A leaf is growing from a bud to a full sized leaf – write about the way this leaf pushes itself into the bright sunlight and describe what it must feel like.

Describe the shape of the leaf as it emerges and opens out into a beautiful fresh growth.

Does the sun cast shadows and shapes on the texture of the leaf?

Compare this to a ballet dancer, how would you create this in dance?

5 Discuss the life of a tree in a busy high street or a windy mountain.

What must it feel like in either of these environments?

What happens to the tree as it grows and weather

conditions change throughout the seasons?

6 Imagine you are the wind blowing across fields and forests, swirling in and out of trees and leaves.

Describe this movement and how you would feel.

7 Thinking about question 6 now discuss the colours that the wind might become in your imagination as it travels at different speeds and twists and turns.

Which colours might blend together to represent speed and blur?

Which colours recede and which look closer (cold and hot colours)?

8 What media would you use to create the feeling of motion and how would you use it?

Can oil paints, pastels and sponges be used to create these effects?

9 Imagine the size of an ancient tree compared to a small insect or animal living in the branches of the tree.

Describe how this must feel in terms of scale, height and motion.

Imagine how quickly a bird can fly, how a squirrel can jump along the branches and what an insect must feel like living inside the bark.

How big does the tree seem to a small insect?

10 Discuss two different artists who have used different techniques to paint or replicate movement in their work.

What were they trying to express with movement? Was it emotion or was it a way for the artist to express motion or style?

11 Cameras can display a sharp or blurred image using a time exposure on a tripod.

Explain why this happens.

What happens when something moves when the camera shutter is open?

What shutter speeds would you use to freeze movement with a camera?