

Case Study

Iffley Academy Jeff Koons project

ASHMOLEAN
MUSEUM OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

The project: background and aims

Since 2016, Oxford University Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM), which includes The Ashmolean Museum, have been developing an in-depth partnership with The Iffley Academy. Iffley Academy is a community special academy for children and young people up to the age of 18 with complex special educational needs and disabilities. All students have Education, Health and Care Plans with a range of needs, but primarily the school works with students who have Moderate Cognition and Learning Difficulties, Autistic Spectrum Disorder and/or Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties. The aim of the partnership is to enable all pupils within the school to experience visits to the GLAM venues and to participate in project work with members of the learning teams and a diverse range of artists. Through this in-depth and person-centred project work we hope to raise students' cultural and social capital through introducing them to new places and enabling them to make new relationships with trusted adults. This in turn should engender a sense of 'ownership' of the GLAM venues for staff and students, allowing all areas of the curriculum to be taught through access to the diverse collections.

Aims for students:

- make two visits to the Ashmolean Museum
- visit and respond to the Jeff Koons exhibition
- meet staff at the museum including members of the learning team and Daniel Bone, Head of Conservation
- work with artist Jon Lockhart in school and create their own Jeff Koons-inspired artworks
- work with teaching staff to curate and host their own exhibition at school
- achieve Discover Arts Award
- build confidence, develop new skills and as a class share a new experience with their teachers and support staff.

What we did

The project took place over a series of visits to school and the museum. First, we visited the school to introduce students to key objects and the museum building. We took handling objects and students spent time thinking and talking about what they were, how old they were and how they might have been used.

Next, the group visited the museum, explored different materials and a range of objects and artworks. Students met Head of Conservation, Daniel Bone and found out about the job of a conservator.



The students liked the idea of becoming "Jeff Koons" experts and being able to share their knowledge with others toward the end of the project.' Class teacher

At the next visit to school, we introduced students to artist Jeff Koons, described some of his other works and worked with jigsaws of objects in the exhibition, looking at materials, design and images.

A few weeks later, the students were very excited to visit the Jeff Koons exhibition. They were stunned to see Koons' large scale works, how they played tricks with the mind, the materials used to make them and enjoyed photographing themselves in the reflections of the objects. They visited first thing in the morning and had the exhibition to themselves which gave them space and time to explore at their own pace. We also visited classical sculpture and prehistory galleries to see examples of objects which had inspired Koons' work.

Next, a day working with artist Jon Lockhart in school, gave students the opportunity to experiment with materials and make their own artwork using coloured paints, lettuce spinners and ipads to 3D scan objects and floating objects in coloured liquid. Students enjoyed creating brightly coloured responses and experimenting with photography and shiny surfaces.

Finally, we were invited to a stunning exhibition organised by the class to share their work with the wider school community. Teachers and students had transformed the classroom into an exhibition space. The students were incredibly proud of their work and gave visitors guided tours, had a feedback board and had made refreshments of Koons-inspired cakes with tiny silver balls.



'The day of the exhibition was very special. One student walked into the room and said "Wow, this is great" and another said "is this really all our work? It looks so good!" To see them having a sense of pride in their masterpieces and willingly engaging with the visitors, sharing information they had learned was an absolute delight and made all the hard work seem worthwhile! It was a wonderful shared celebration.' Class Teacher

Top tips:

- meet the group in their 'safe space' at school before they visit the museum
- use the in-depth knowledge of teaching and support staff in order to plan for all learners and allow for a 'person-centred' approach
- keep tasks short and focussed
- plan visits to the museum when it is at its quietest e.g. first thing in the morning
- ensure the project work has clear criteria for success that all students can access
- adopt a co-curational approach where teachers and museums staff plan together and support each other
- be prepared to learn a lot about your museum from the young people themselves!

Project outcomes

Students:

- increased confidence
- sense of pride both individually and as a class team
- knowledge that they can share with others at school and at home
- many of them referred to this project in their annual reviews under "what had gone well for them this year?" section and were able to share some aspects of this with parents and staff
- further development of their social skills at school and during museum visits
- a sense of collaboration and shared celebration through the exhibition day.

Museum staff:

- increased expertise in working with students with a wide range of SEND
- added to the developing partnership with Iffley Academy and GLAM
- gained expertise with an audience which reflects the Ashmolean for All strategic plan to make the Museum more accessible and relevant for wider range of audiences.



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