

noguchi

Learning Resource



Introduction to the resource

Use this resource for quick, curriculum-linked routes into the Barbican Art Gallery exhibition *Noguchi*.

Each learning prompt has a Gallery Section number connected to it so you know where in the exhibition to best engage your students on each topic. The sections are detailed in the *Noguchi* Exhibition Guide, freely available at the entrance to the Barbican Art Gallery. Use the Exhibition Guide to support your visit.

All prompts are noted for their Subject and Key Stage relevance.

barbican

Explaining Abstract Art

All Gallery Sections; Art, Design, Music, Drama / All Key Stages

“I could make this!” – Student

Use food as a relatable reply to this comment. Ask the group what their favourite things to eat are. Focus on things that they can make (e.g. cheese toasties) to illustrate that just because something can easily be made, it doesn't make it any less tasty. Then ask them to imagine being the first person ever to make one of these simple dishes (e.g. a cheese toastie) and how impressive that would be!

“There's no people in it!” – Student

Use music as a relatable reply to students who struggle with non-figurative art. Ask them about their favourite music, and how certain songs are great, not because of the lyrics/vocal, but because of the beats, which are just abstract sounds, like abstract art has abstract shapes. Ask them if their favourite lyric-less song was a visual artwork, what would it look like, or ask them to move in the way it sounds.

Key Questions

Noguchi's Artistic Process

Early in his career, Noguchi studied under the artist Constantin Brâncusi in France. Brâncusi taught Noguchi the principle of truth to materials.

Gallery Section 1; Art, Design, Music / Key Stage 2–5

Q: Can you find an example where the material Noguchi uses is fundamental to the artwork? (*Globular* with its reflective surface.)

Q: Can you name any artists or musicians who have been influenced by other artists? (Van Gogh influenced Matisse; James Brown influenced Prince; Etta James influenced Adele.)

Noguchi experimented with pushing materials to behave in unusual ways, folding aluminium metal sheets like they are paper in origami.

Gallery Section 10; Art, Design / Key Stage 1–5

Q: What materials could you use in your work that play with their presumed characteristics? (Paper that is heavy and strong.)

Noguchi was heavily influenced by science and technology in his practice, and used newly invented materials developed in the first half of the 20th century. His interlocking sculptures are held together using gravity.

Gallery Section 3 & 7; Art, Design / Key Stage 1–5

Q: How else could you use gravity to make an artwork? (Drip painting.)

Q: If you could invent a new material for something, what would it be? (A phone that bounces and doesn't smash when you dropped it.)

Noguchi's Identity and Lived Experience

Noguchi's mixed Japanese American heritage played a large role in his identity as a person and an artist. Noguchi took inspiration from his travels around the world, exploring new technologies and learning from other cultures.

All Gallery Sections; Art, Citizenship, Design, History / Key Stage 3–5

Q: Why is it important to learn from other cultures? (e.g. to find different solutions and answers to questions.)

In 1942, Noguchi spent 6 months in an American prison camp for people with Japanese heritage which affected him deeply.

Gallery Section 4, 5, & 6; Art, Citizenship, Design, History / Key Stage 3–5

Q: Can you find an artwork in Gallery Sections 5 & 6 that could be inspired by the lunar-like landscape and red rock in Arizona, USA, where Noguchi was in a prison camp? (e.g. *Double Red Mountain*, Gallery Section 6.)

Noguchi's practice was influenced by the context of the Second World War and its aftermath.

Gallery Section 7 & 8; Art, Citizenship, Design, History / Key Stage 3–5

Q: Read the names of artworks in the Gallery Section 7 and 8. Do you think any of these relate to the Second World War context? How does the look of the artwork relate to its title? (Noguchi dedicated the precariously positioned bones of the column *Monument to Heroes* to wartime aviators.)

Noguchi's Civic View

Noguchi designed sculptures, playgrounds, furniture and civic spaces. For Noguchi, all the objects he created – whether playgrounds or sculptures – were works of art. He wanted to democratise artistic experiences for all, and believed art could profoundly affect our experience of the world around us.

Gallery Section 9, 10, 11 & 12; Art, Citizenship, Design, Science / Key Stage 2–5

Q: Is there a difference between art and design?

Q: Noguchi's Akari light sculptures are an example of his work becoming something that is now commonly found in people's homes. Can you think of other artworks that have become part of popular culture? (*Mona Lisa* or Andy Warhol screen-prints in fashion.)

Q: Does art need to have a social purpose?

Q: If you were to design a playground, what would your top 3 priorities be?

Noguchi was interested in creating a 'New Nature' where human-made objects and nature co-exist in harmony.

Gallery Section 9, 10, 11 & 12; Art, Citizenship, Design, Science / Key Stage 2–5

Q: Do you think Noguchi's ideas are useful for tackling our current climate crisis? How important is it for us to consider the environmental impact of the materials we use?

Creative Activities

Noguchi Activity Sheet

Collect the Noguchi Activity Sheet at the entrance to the Barbican Art Gallery for accessible and creative activities related to the exhibition. Review the [Activity Sheet online](#) before your visit, or watch the [animated video version](#) back in the classroom (search 'How to: Noguchi Inspired Family Activities' in your web browser).

All Gallery Sections; Art, Citizenship, Design, History / Key Stage 1–4

Requires: activity sheet and pencils. Both are available at the Barbican Art Gallery Front Desk.

Paper Manipulation Activity

Explore different ways to fold paper and make paper sculptures. Depending on how you fold, bend or mould paper, you can create different abstract designs. Be inspired by Noguchi's use of materials and think about the nature of paper and how you can manipulate it to give it different properties and meaning.

You can twist, curl, pinch, crimp, pleat and scrunch the paper.

Have students give a title to their sculpture and explain why they gave it that name.

All Gallery Sections but especially 10; Art, Design / Key Stage 1–5

Requires: scrap paper.

Negative Space Sketching Activity

Create a drawing of the negative space in Noguchi's work.

Noguchi played with 'negative space' a lot in his work, which is space outside of a sculpture and/or the empty space inside a sculpture. Begin by drawing the space around the sculpture. Remember to only draw the negative space, not the actual sculpture. If there is any negative space in between the sculpture, draw this too.

You can draw the negative spaces in the gallery accurately or use different shading techniques.

When finished, the positive form of the sculpture is left un-drawn, resulting in a correct negative space drawing.

All Gallery Sections but especially *Walking Void* in Section 9; Art, Design / Key Stage 1–5

Requires: paper and pencils. Small pencils are available at the Barbican Art Gallery Front Desk.

Further Resources

Visit The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum website for more information about the artist: www.noguchi.org.