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Learning Resource

barbican



Introduction to the resource

This resource provides curriculum-linked access points, thematic breakdowns and activities for the exhibition *Our Time on Earth* in The Curve and around the Barbican Centre.

Each prompt has the relevant installation number listed, and is noted for their Subject and Key Stage relevance. The sections are detailed in the *Our Time on Earth* Exhibition Guide, available digitally and in print for those who need it.

An invitation to the party

For those who feel it's too big

Climate change can feel too massive and overwhelming to engage with; where do you start? Use the specifics of each installation as starting points, rather than the broader issue of climate change, and allow the themes to emerge from these specific enquiries. Remind them that the climate emergency involves the whole planet, and who can think about all that at once? Thinking about "climate" could mean discussing anything from photography to microbiology to buildings to sci-fi to gardening to parties. It is not just one "subject".

For those who feel it's too sad

Conversations about climate change can feel scary or sad – for young people especially. Use the reflective spaces in the exhibition to allow and make room for these feelings. Ask students to list the opportunities they have learned about to find ways forward from the crisis. Use the artworks that focus on the abundance, joy and complexity of the natural world to remind of the power of celebrating those things (e.g. in the Pit Theatre, and 1, 6, 10, 13 in The Curve). As philosopher and ecological thinker Timothy Morton says, the movement should feel like a "solar-powered house party with all the lights on", otherwise, who would want to come?

For those who feel it's not for them

Use students' current interests as starting points, and find links with passions they already have. Avoid pointing out or differentiating people who are "eco-warriors", or particularly environmental, from others. Allow for perceived contradictions, for example if someone is interested in biomaterials or soil health, but also eats meat. Remind the students there are countless ways to be ecological: we already are, just by living, breathing and standing on this planet! Use the exhibition to remind the students of this fact. Ask them to point out all the things they engaged with today that are or were alive – a pet, fruit, materials like wood, and microorganisms inside the body.

Key Themes

Wonder and Awe

The artists showcased in the exhibition invite us to revel in the wonder of our planetary system, and be in awe of our deep interconnection with the natural world.

Q: What is a system? Can you find an example in the exhibition? (e.g. a Ceiba tree, the whole planet, soil)

Q: What different ideas can you see about how humans and non-humans can be together? (e.g. through our breath, at dinner, as costume)

Q: What is the role of the arts in the fight against climate change? (e.g. to celebrate, to reflect, to empathise, to disrupt worldviews)

Q: How can technology help us connect to the natural world? Can you see any art that is achieving this for you? (e.g. animation, sound design, interactivity, film)

Art, Design, Science, Geography. Key Stage 2-5.

The Local and the Global

Our Time on Earth takes us from the Amazon rainforest to outer space and to the depths of a waterfall. It also provokes us to look at the world directly around us: to think about what buildings are made of, what lives in the ground beneath our feet, and how resources can be shared in your own community.

Q: How might learning about different cultures and places influence how we live locally? (e.g. to find different solutions to problems, to have empathy with people that have different experiences)

Q: Find an artwork that explores the idea of the city. How has this artist included the idea of "wilderness"? Can a city be wild? Why?

Q: Pick a video from *Stories of Change* (12) that interests you most. How might you collaborate with this changemaker to transform something in your local area?

History, Citizenship, Geography, Design Key Stage 3-5

Immersed Bodies

Our Time on Earth is a multi-disciplinary exhibition – featuring artists, activists, indigenous campaigners, scientists and more. It is not a "traditional" gallery show, but is an experience – emotional, interactive and immersive.

Q: Can you name the installations you would describe as "immersive"? (e.g. Ideal City in the Foyer, in the Pit Theatre, and 3, 10, 13 in The Curve) If you were to design an immersive space, what would you choose? (e.g. inside a coral reef)

Q: Get up close to the materials used in *Refuge for Resurgence* (2) and *Where Does Your Building Come From?* (9). Which bits are "natural" materials? Which bits are "futuristic"? Can something be both? Why? How does the material used in art change the story its telling?

Q: How does the interactivity of art change the experience for the viewer? (e.g. it's more active, you see yourself in the art)

Q: The exhibition begins and ends with installations that invite audiences to breathe, connect with the ground, and reflect (e.g. 1 and 13 in The Curve). Why might this approach be taken when it comes to viewing art with a social purpose?

Art, Design, Citizenship, Drama, Music Key Stage 2-5

Creative Activities

Image Composting

The Feral and the Sphere film by Selvagem (3) uses a technique called "image composting", which mixes footage and images from different sources together to create a new effect. Make your own storyboard through the exhibition of images from different installations. Fold your paper down 3 times until you have 8 smaller rectangles to draw your images in. Try and choose ones with the greatest contrast. Step back and look at the 8 frames. How do these images change now they are composted together? If it was made into a film, what title would you give it? Why?

Required: Paper. Available at The Curve front desk.
Art, History, Drama, Music. Key Stage 1-5

Shifting Identity

Queer Ecology, Life Forces and Sanctuary of the Unseen Forest explore the fact that our bodies are "matter", belonging to the universe, an idea that critiques the myth we tell of ourselves as separate "individuals". Make a collage of your own body using scraps from magazines of contrasting images depicting both natural and human worlds. Think about the different materials in this collaged body. How might this body shift and transform? How might this collaged body tell a new story of belonging?

Required: Magazine/image scraps. Available at The Curve front desk.
Science, Art, Citizenship, Design. Key Stage 1-5

Poem Tree

Draw a version of the Ceiba tree, showing both the soil and the sky. Write a short poem within the tree, with the words tracing the direction of energy, nutrients and water flowing between the ground and the air. Use words and phrases from the exhibition as inspiration, for example:

"The tiny creatures that inhabit it" (10)

"Reforest our minds" (3)

"Wild is the heart that beats, regardless of the command of reason" (3)

Required: Paper and pencils. Available at The Curve front desk.
English, Art, Science. Key Stage 2-6.