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Creative Learning:
Teacher Notes
Looking at Local Wildlife



Our Time on Earth

Our Time on Earth runs from 5 May – 28 August at the Barbican Centre. The exhibition takes place in the Curve, Pit Theatre and foyer. School groups can book to come any time, and we have limited slots for tours and workshops on Tuesdays at 2pm and Thursdays at 10am from 10 May – 28 July.

Please also find our digital [Exhibition Guide](#) to support your teaching.

Using this resource

This resource is for the classroom, and complements the exhibition *Our Time on Earth*, but you might use it even if you have not attended with your students.

Aimed at Key Stage 2 and 3.

In here you will find...

- An introduction to the artwork *Eyes as Big as Plates* by Karoline Hjorth and Riita Ikonen and its premise to be used as a provocation to begin a discussion
- Teacher notes on **plant identification, photography and different perspectives of local wildlife**
- Discussion points and questions
- New vocabulary
- Activities to get crafty and get outside
- Further links to resources, notes and activities to develop the session.



"Life Forces" by Tim&Ed, 2021

Key stage 2 and 3 Art –

- to improve their mastery of art and design techniques, including drawing, painting and sculpture with a range of materials [for example, pencil, charcoal, paint, clay]
- to use a range of techniques to record their observations in sketchbooks, journals and other media as a basis for exploring their ideas
- to increase their proficiency in the handling of different materials

Key stage 3 Citizenship –

- the roles played by public institutions and voluntary groups in society, and the ways in which citizens work together to improve their communities, including opportunities to participate in school-based activities
- the different ways in which a citizen can contribute to the improvement of his or her community, to include the opportunity to participate actively in community volunteering, as well as other forms of responsible activity

Key stage 3 Geography –

- understand how human and physical processes interact to influence, and change landscapes, environments and the climate; and how human activity relies on effective functioning of natural systems

Curriculum Links

Our Time on Earth brings together indigenous thinkers, artists, scientists, activists, architects and more. Our resources reflect the interdisciplinary, collaborative ambition of the project, as we acknowledge the climate emergency affects every realm of life and every subject on the curriculum. We aim to provide opportunities for teachers to engage students with climate action in a holistic way. Below is some guidance for where the subject matter links to the curriculum.

Key stage 2 Science –

- Plants: identify and describe the functions of different parts of flowering plants: roots, stem/trunk, leaves and flowers
- Light: recognise that shadows are formed when a light source is blocked by an opaque object, find patterns in the way that the size of shadows change.
- Living things and their habitats:
 - recognise that living things can be grouped in a variety of ways
 - explore and use classification keys to help group, identify and name a variety of living things in their local and wider environment



Eyes as Big as Plates # Astrid II (Norway 2011)
© Karoline Hjorth & Riitta Ikonen



Credit: Photo by Rio Lecatompessy on Unsplash

Eyes as Big as Plates

Eyes as Big as Plates is a poetic photographic exploration of our connection to the natural world. Initially created as a play on characters from Nordic folklore, this photographic series has evolved to depict characters that inhabit unique natural landscapes in wearable sculptures made from materials found in their surrounds. Artists Karoline Hjorth and Riitta Ikonen have produced this series in collaboration with retired farmers, fishermen, zoologists, plumbers, opera singers, housewives, artists, academics and 90-year-old parachutists. Since 2011 the artist duo has portrayed seniors in Norway, Finland, France, US, UK, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Sweden, Japan, Greenland, Czech Republic and South Korea. Each image in the series presents a solitary figure in a landscape, dressed in elements from surroundings that indicate neither time nor place. Here nature acts as both content and context: characters literally inhabit the landscape wearing sculptures they create in collaboration with the artists.



Eyes as Big as Plates # Sinikka (Norway 2019) © Karoline Hjorth & Ritta Ikonen

Looking in depth

Lead an enquiry into the images. You may want to print them and spread them around the classroom like a gallery. Give students some time to observe the [photographs](#) if they haven't already in the exhibition, or need more time.

Do

What do you see?

What words would you use to describe the artwork?

Where is your eye drawn to?

What materials can you see were used?

How is the sculpture or costume made?

What do all the photographs have in common? How are they different?

Who are the people in the photographs?

What feelings or emotions are being expressed in the faces of the people?

How would you describe what the person is doing?

Do

What do you think?

What messages might the artist and collaborator be sending to the viewer?

What intrigues you about the artwork?

How does it change as you keep looking?

Does the artwork make you think of any new idea or concept?

Do

What do you imagine?...

What questions would you ask the artist?

What might they answer?

Extend the story beyond the picture.

What else can you imagine about the place and the person?

What would happen next if you could step into the photograph?

Human in the Landscape



Eyes as Big as Plates # Bengt I (Norway, 2011) © Karoline Hjørth & Riitta Ikonen

These images explore the relationship between humans and landscape. Throughout Western history, we have thought of humans and nature as separate. Even in our stories, humans are often the most important character, while the environment is just the backdrop or serves as props: silent and inferior. This artwork celebrates the fact that humans are part of nature, that we are interconnected in one system.



Eyes as Big as Plates #Mis Nerimova (Czech Republic, 2016) © Karoline Hjørth & Riitta Ikonen

The viewer is also invited to engage with the idea of an "elder". By working with retired people, the artists celebrate this demographic's often deep connection and history with the local landscapes which they are from. Through their labour, memory and the documentation of both, new perspectives on human's relationship to nature are brought to light.

Do

Choose one of the photographs you are drawn to. Look at the edges between the person and the natural material. Write down a few adjectives to describe their relationship, for example: "covered", "enveloped", "entangled", "on top".

Ask

What is the landscape doing to the person? Think about the land or the natural materials in the image. If it could speak, what might it say?



Bodies in Landscape

These photographs are both portraits (pictures of people) and landscapes (pictures of space – often nature). Define both for the class and discuss why it might be interesting to combine both forms in one photo.

Do

Create quick portrait sketches in class in pairs. Use what is available to you, for example smart phones, tablets, or just pen and paper.

Start with these things to consider: Facial expression, light and shadow, background.

Portraiture – further things to consider:

Who is in the image and why? Is the image brightly lit or quite dark – so what time of day will it be? Does this affect the mood? Does the image have a story? Is the person in the photograph close up or far away and how does this change our experience as the viewer? Which factors do you think make the most powerful photographs? What shape will the persons body make, and how will this relate to the environment they are in?

Do

In the same pairs, develop a landscape photograph. Use what is available to you. Explore corners of the classroom, the playground, the corridors.

Start with these things to consider: Objects, light and shadow, atmosphere of the place.

Landscapes – further things to consider:

Which direction is the light coming from? Are you inside or outside? What season is it? What objects or features to include in the image? How zoomed in or out will you be? Where do you place the body in the space if there is one? What time of day is it? What atmosphere do you want to convey? What shapes does the photograph make? How do you feel about this place, and how might you communicate this in the picture?

Choose a portrait and a landscape you find interesting. Perhaps encourage the pairs to swap photographs around. How could you put these ideas together to make a new photograph idea? What new story does it tell?



Photo by British Library on Unsplash



Noticing and Looking

Eyes as Big as Plates encourages us to think about how we look at things.

"We need to learn to see not just with Western eyes but with Islamic eyes and Inuit eyes, not just with human eyes but with golden-cheeked warbler eyes, coho salmon eyes, and polar bear eyes, and not even just with eyes at all but with the wild, barely articulate being of clouds and seas and rocks and trees and stars" Roy Scranton. (Author of *We're Doomed. Now What?: Essays on War and Climate Change*, 2018)

Identification, the naming of something, can help us notice more about it. Being able to name what's in front of us makes it visible. A scrappy bit of greenery in a car park looks much less scrappy when you can distinguish the different plants in it. "Plant blindness" refers to the inability to see or notice the plants in your own area.

Is there a type of leaf, flower or seed pod you see around a lot?

"Humans can only recognise (visually) what they already know"
– Elisabeth Schussler

Do

Ask your students to bring in a sample of something they see around, but don't know what it is. Perhaps it's a buddleia flower, a conker, sycamore seed, a dandelion or type of long grass.

Tip: Use a free plant identification app to ID the plant if you're not sure. It doesn't matter if you use common names or Latin names.

Find out the uses, life cycle, relationship of this plant to us and other wildlife. What are its properties? What part of the plant have you brought in?

Key phrase: "There is a why for everything in nature".

Ask

What is a "weed"? Ask the class to give a definition. Can you list some examples? Why might they be classified in this way? Why might some people want to remove weeds? Can you think of reasons why we might want to keep them?

Tip: For example, you may discuss the difference between a "lawn that needs weeding" and a "meadow".



Urban Wildlife

If possible, explore local areas of wildlife accessible from the school, if there aren't places on the school grounds. There are more urban farms and community gardens in London than in any city in the UK, but they can be easy to miss if you aren't looking for them. Find a list at the end of this resource to help you.

Encourage students to name areas they know that might have wildlife. It could be some of the more obvious places, such as groups of trees, a park or spot outside the city. It could also be in unexpected places, such as an overgrown area behind a train station, it could be on a journey to school, or somewhere on the school grounds.

Discuss the ways humans can create and protect habitats, creating space for wildlife in different ways such as: community gardens, by avoiding pesticides, creating flower beds, ponds, bird and insect friendly areas, and nurturing plants.

Web of life

Vocabulary:

Ecosystem – a biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment

Biodiversity – the variety of life in the world or in a particular habitat or ecosystem

Classification – the action or process of classifying something according to shared qualities or characteristics

Once a chosen area to explore is identified, think about all the living creatures that might be there.

Include **animals** (perhaps foxes, badgers, rats, bats etc.), **plants** (stinging nettles, grass, dandelions, trees) and **insects or soil creatures** (worms, ants, butterflies, bumble bees), and **microorganisms** (fungi and bacteria).

It might surprise you how many creatures exist in urban spaces. While cities are not usually known for their flora and fauna, they absolutely can be thriving habitats for some organisms (think about pigeons!), which is important for the biodiversity of our ecosystem.

This will help remind students that nature isn't something that is "over there", but here, and part of our life in cities.

Tip: explore the campaign to make London a National Park City which achieved success in 2019. Link at the end of this resource.

Create: Looking with Different Eyes

Look:

1. The societies we live in do not support us to connect us to nature. We have to go and look for it.
2. Walk around your local landscape or chosen area of exploration - imagine the invisible and visible creatures present both in urban and "natural" spaces.
3. Take a deep breath. Allow your eyes to move all the way around you, left to right, and to travel high up above buildings and trees, to the ground. What do you notice? What do you hear? What might be underground? What might be in the air?

Gather:

You may need: gloves for hand protection, and safe scissors to take cuttings of the plant.

Explore the organic materials in the area. You could gather only one type of material, or a variety of things that help you connect to and celebrate the landscape.

Here are some questions to guide you:

Are they alive or dead?

What time of year would you normally find this?

What part of the plant is it?

What materials are the most striking?

What materials are the easiest to ignore?

Discuss whether you think it is right to gather the material.

Is there enough of it going around?

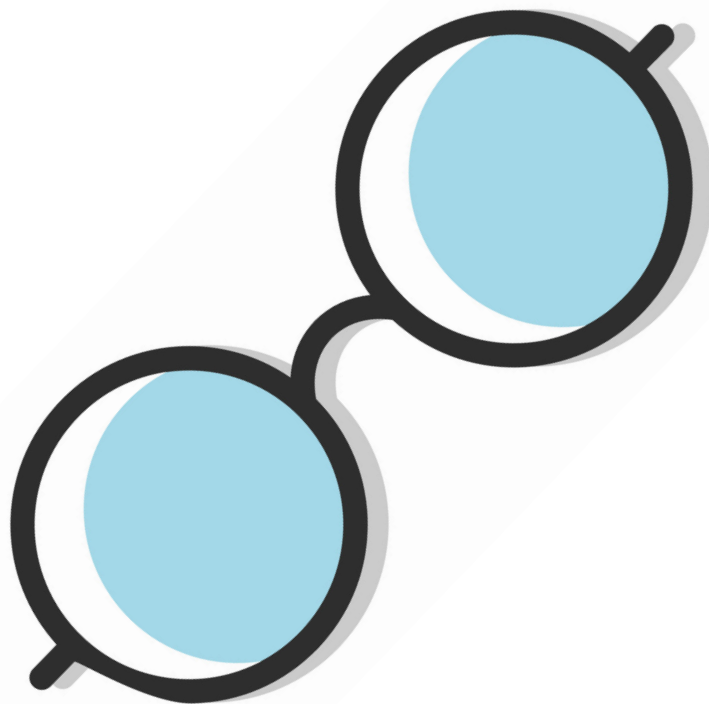
Who might it affect if you take it?

Examples: petals, seeds, grasses, stalks, dried flower heads, buds, leaves



Create:

Draw an outline of a pair of glasses in your desired shape on a piece of card, or find a printable glasses template.



Cut out the frames, and arrange your materials to create a pair of glasses as a new natural sculpture.

Fold the glasses to make them 3D.

Wear them in order to always look with different eyes, and spot things you didn't see before in your local area.



Challenge: shoot a portrait wearing the head piece, in the landscape from where the materials came from. Think about the story you want to tell, of you, but also of the place.



Photo by David Clode on Unsplash



Courtesy of Julia Watson

Further Resources

Wildlife in Urban spaces:

[Activities with the Natural History Museum.](#)

[More than weeds](#)

[10 challenges for outdoor learning](#)

[RSPB's Habitat Heaps](#)

Photography

[BBC Bitesize](#)

[National Portrait Gallery](#)

[Audubon nature photography challenges](#)

Community Gardens

[Spitalfields City Farm \(Tower Hamlets\)](#)

[Hackney City Farm \(Hackney\)](#)

[Calthorpe Community garden \(Camden\)](#)

[Union of Hackney Gardens \(Hackney\)](#)

[The Wildlife Gardeners of Haggerston \(Haggerston\)](#)

[Arnold Circus \(Tower Hamlets\)](#)

[Walworth Garden \(Southwark\)](#)

[Eden Nature Garden \(Lambeth\)](#)

[Phytology \(Tower Hamlets\)](#)

[The May Project Gardens \(Merton\)](#)

[Grow 2 Know \(Kensington and Chelsea\)](#)

Want more? [Check out the Capital Growth gardens map.](#)

Can I Live?

By Fehinti Balogun

Produced by Complicité

A new online performance about the climate emergency. With rap, theatre and animation, Fehinti links the climate crisis & social justice, finding hope, through activism, for the future.

Catch the Trailer of the film [here](#)

If you want to discover more about the ecological emergency, climate justice and the creatives behind this filmed performance download the digital resource pack [here](#).

To screen the film at your school contact creativeengagement@complicite.org

Credits

These Learning Resources were created by Hannah Calascione for Barbican Creative Learning, with ethical consultation from Angela Chan, Angela Camacho and Sarah Melia.



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