

Light

Year 4

This unit introduces the children to how artists use light. It starts by connecting the concept of light to the concept of form, previously studied in Autumn B of year 3, exploring how form is shown by how light falls on an object. Children revise terms they learnt in year 3 to describe the different tones artists can use to show light as well as learning, through the work of Caravaggio how artists can use extremes of light to create drama. They practise the skills learnt in year 3 to create still life drawings using graphite, chalk and charcoal to show tone.

The children then look at the work of Vermeer, another master of light, considering how he used extremes of light to create a calm realism. They compare this with the drama of the work of Caravaggio. Over the course of four lessons the children then develop their skills using acrylics to paint a still life using tone to create form. They learn how painters traditionally used a 'ground' and 'underpainting' as a basis for their paintings and use the same techniques. They revise how, with opaque materials artists work from dark to light, referring back to their work with oil pastels in year 3 where they used the same principle. They continue to develop their colour-mixing techniques introduced in much of the work already carried out in year 1, 2 and 3.

The unit concludes by exploring how 20th and 21st century artists have used light. Goncharova makes light the subject of her work and Rana Begum uses light as one of the materials from which she makes her work.

Lesson Sequencing

In lesson 1 and 2 children investigate the painting 'Supper at Emmaus' by Caravaggio to explore how he used extremes of light ('chiaroscuro') to create drama as well as form. They experiment with different ways they can create form using drawing techniques in pencil, chalk and charcoal. In lesson 3 the children compare the work of Caravaggio with Vermeer and explore the similarities and differences between the ways the two painters used light. In lesson 4 they explore how artists in the past have layered paints to create depth in their paintings using 'ground' and 'underpainting'. They start painting a still life which they complete by adding layers of tints and shades in lessons 5 and 6. In lesson 6 they go on to study how Goncharova and Begum have used light in their work.

Key concepts covered in this unit are light, tone and form.

Key skills

Drawing skills using a pencil covered in this unit include:

- Drawing using a continuous line, without taking the pencil off the paper.
- Make lines closer together to show darker areas and further apart to show lighter areas.

Drawing skills using a chalk/charcoal covered in this unit include:

- Working from dark to light: adding shadows/mid-tones in charcoal and highlights in chalk.
- Using the end and the side of the chalk/charcoal.
- Blending the edges of tones together with the fingers.

Painting skills using acrylics developed in this unit include:

Colour mixing/brush technique

- Holding the brush like a pencil to give good control.
- Controlling the amount of water/paint that is loaded onto the brush.
- Mixing colours thoroughly in a mixing palette.
- Pulling the brush smoothly.
- Washing the brush before loading it with a new colour.

Painting using layers/working from dark to light

- Applying thin paint with a sponge over a whole surface.
- Using burnt sienna mixed with water to add underpainting where you see shade/cast shadows/midtones.
- Mixing and applying appropriate tints and shades to paint shadows with dark colours progressing through midtones and highlights with lighter colours.

Children also develop the important skills of looking (or observing) in this unit screwing up their eyes to identify the light/dark tones on an object or group of objects. They also carefully observe the shapes of objects to enable them to draw and paint the outside of still life objects and their cast shadows (which may sometimes overlap).

Key processes covered in this unit are analysing other artists' work, using observation to create the children's own work, and evaluating their own work.

Key disciplinary concepts covered in this unit include understanding that artists can use light in painting to convey form. They can also use light to convey a particular mood such as drama or calm. Artists can also seek to make light the actual subject of their painting (such as Goncharova trying to paint rays of light) or use light as a material in their works (as shown in the sculpture of Rana Begum).

Outcomes

Children carry out a separate task in the first three lessons of this unit and take three further lessons to complete one task. The first three tasks can be described as 'convergent' tasks (following guided instructions so that pupils reach broadly similar outcomes as each other). These are:

- Creating tone in a still life drawing using pencil
- Creating tone in a still life drawing using chalk and charcoal
- Painting a still life object using tone

The extended task which the children undertake during lessons 4-6 (painting a group of still life objects in layers using varying tones) can be described as 'divergent' (using specified techniques but with an unspecified endpoint).