

Summer Art Task: Exploring History Through Art

This activity is intended to help you prepare for September and be ready for the first theme for Next Term: Creating Artwork from Historical Events

Over the summer, you are invited to begin exploring how artists respond to and represent historical events through their work. This will prepare you for next term's project, where you'll create your own artwork inspired by a historical event of your choice.

Visit Tate Britain

As part of your research, visit Tate Britain and spend time with **Chris Ofili's No Woman No Cry**.

This deeply moving painting is a tribute to Doreen Lawrence, the mother of Stephen Lawrence, a Black British teenager murdered in a racially motivated attack in 1993. Ofili's work does not depict the tragedy itself, but instead honours Doreen Lawrence's strength, dignity, and relentless pursuit of justice after a flawed trial allowed the accused to walk free.

At the time, the double jeopardy rule in British law meant that a person could not be tried again for the same crime once acquitted. Doreen Lawrence's campaign for justice led to a public inquiry (The Stephen Lawrence Enquiry) and ultimately helped change this law—an extraordinary legacy born from personal tragedy.

Chris Ofili has described Doreen Lawrence as a modern-day saint, and his painting reflects this reverence. The work features subtle, layered symbolism: each tear shed by the figure contains a tiny image of Stephen Lawrence, and the painting glows with a quiet, spiritual intensity.

Critics have compared No Woman No Cry to the Christian image of La Pietà—a depiction of the Virgin Mary mourning the body of Christ. In this way, Ofili's painting has been called a modern-day La Pietà, elevating Doreen Lawrence to a figure of universal mourning, strength, and grace

While viewing the work, consider the following questions:

What historical event is being referenced?

How does Ofili use symbolism, colour, and materials to convey emotion and meaning?

What role does the title play in your understanding of the piece?

How does the artwork make you feel, and why?

What techniques or ideas could you borrow for your own work?

The work is a symbolic representation of Doreen Lawrence. Why do you think Ofili chose to paint the subject in this manner instead of as a photographic likeness?

Further Research

In addition to No Woman No Cry, look for other artworks at Tate Britain that respond to historical events. Some suggestions:

John Singleton Copley's The Death of Major Peirson

Turner's The Slave Ship

Other suggestions that you might find online:

Pablo Picasso's Guernica (online research)

Kara Walker's silhouettes (online or in galleries)

Ask yourself:

What event is being depicted?

How does the artist interpret or reimagine the event?

What emotions or messages are being communicated?

Your Task

Record the source material you find in the museum that responds to the theme – creating art in response to a historical event.

In recording source material, you need to;

1 – take photos, make notes and studies (sketched copies of a visual piece, to better understand it)

2 – write about the work. When writing about the work, follow this plan,

Intentions

Firstly, describe what you are hoping to learn from this piece? Why are you collecting information/studies on this source?

Knowledge

Write up all the information you have found from your chosen source and cite the source. Citing sources is a good habit to get into early. You should use the source of information from the museum, but back this up with further information from other sources, mostly web based.

Understanding

How will this source and the knowledge you have gained from it, help you to respond to it, or how will it guide your response? By this we mean your personal artwork in response to your chosen historical event.

