



Jeff Koons and the Iffley Academy Project: the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Background and aims

Since 2016, Oxford University Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM), which includes the Ashmolean Museum, have been developing an in-depth partnership with the Iffley Academy, a community special academy for children and young people up to the age of 18 with complex special educational needs and disabilities. All students have Education, Health and Care Plans with a range of needs, but primarily the school works with students who have

Moderate Cognition and Learning Difficulties, Autistic Spectrum Condition and/or Social, Emotional and Mental Health difficulties.

The aim of the partnership is to enable all pupils to visit GLAM venues and to participate in project work with each learning team and a range of artists. We aim to raise students' cultural and social capital by introducing them to new places and enabling them to make new relationships with trusted adults through this in-depth and person-centred project. This engenders a sense of "ownership" of the GLAM venues for staff and students, allowing all areas of the curriculum to be taught through access to the diverse collections.

Aims for students:

- Make two visits to the Ashmolean Museum.
- Visit and respond to the Jeff Koons exhibition.
- Meet museum staff from the learning team, also Daniel Bone, Head of Conservation.
- Work with artist Jon Lockhart in school to create Jeff Koons-inspired artworks.
- Work with teaching staff to curate and host their own school exhibition.
- Achieve Discover Arts Award.
- Build confidence, develop new skills and share a new experience with teachers and support staff.

What we did

The project took place through visits to school and the museum. First, we visited the school to introduce students to key objects and the museum building. We took handling objects and students considered what they were, their age and original use.

Next, the group visited the museum, explored different materials and a range of objects and artworks. Students met Head of Conservation, Daniel Bone, and found out about the job of a conservator.

At the next visit to the school, we introduced students to artist Jeff Koons, described some of his other works and worked with jigsaws of objects in the exhibition, looking at materials, design and images.

When the students visited the exhibition, they were excited to see Koons' large scale works, how they played tricks with the mind, the materials he used, and they enjoyed photographing themselves in their reflections. They visited at opening time when the exhibition was quiet, giving students space and time to explore at their own pace. We then visited classical sculpture and prehistory galleries to see related objects which had inspired Koons.

Next, a day at school working with artist Jon Lockhart gave students the opportunity to experiment with materials and make their own artwork using coloured paints, lettuce



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spinners and iPads to 3D-scan objects and floating objects in coloured liquid. Students enjoyed creating brightly coloured responses and experimenting with photography and shiny surfaces.

Finally, the class organised a stunning classroom exhibition to share their work with the whole school community. The students were incredibly proud of their work and gave visitors guided tours, had a feedback board and made refreshments of Koons-inspired cakes with tiny silver balls.

Project outcomes

Students:

- Increased confidence.
- Sense of pride both individually and as a class team.
- Knowledge that they can share with others at school and at home.
- Many of them referred to this project in their annual reviews under the “what had gone well for them this year” section and were able to share some aspects of this with parents and staff.
- Further development of their social skills at school and during museum visits.
- A sense of collaboration and shared celebration through the exhibition day.

Museum staff:

- Increased expertise in working with students with a wide range of SEND.
- Added to the developing partnership between Iffley Academy and GLAM.
- Furthered the *Ashmolean for All* strategic plan to make the Museum more accessible and relevant for a wider range of audiences.

Class teachers at the Iffley Academy said:

“The day of the exhibition was very special. One student walked into the room and said ‘Wow, this is great!’ and another said ‘Is this really all our work? It looks so good!’ To see them having a sense of pride in their masterpieces and willingly engaging with the visitors, sharing information they had learned, was an absolute delight and made all the hard work seem worthwhile! It was a wonderful shared celebration.”

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What we learned – top tips!

- Meet the group in their “safe space” at school before they visit the museum.
- Use the in-depth knowledge of teaching and support staff in order to plan for all learners and allow for a “person-centred” approach.
- Keep tasks short and focussed.
- Plan visits to the museum when it is at its quietest, e.g. first thing in the morning.
- Ensure the project work has clear criteria for success that all students can access.
- Adopt a co-curational approach where teachers and museums staff plan together and support each other.
- Be prepared to learn a lot about your museum from the young people themselves.

Find out more

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Ashmolean Museum Learning
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