

ROMANS REVEALED

A co-curated exhibition by Iffley Academy and The Ashmolean Museum to display Roman artefacts at the heart of a Special School setting

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Since 2016, the Oxford University Gardens Libraries and Museums (GLAM) have been working in partnership with the students and staff of The Iffley Academy, a local community special academy for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The partnership focuses on delivering a wide range of arts and creative projects including Arts Award qualifications to students.

2022 saw the launch of an exciting new strand of project work called *Co-curate*. A museum-grade display case has been placed at the heart of the school. The case hosts a series of co-curated exhibitions of loaned objects from GLAM. Students and the GLAM collections staff, curators and learning teams work together to co-produce each exhibition. *Co-curate* seeks to allow Iffley

Academy students the opportunity to curate exhibitions for their school community in an accessible way that enables their own ideas and agendas to emerge.

In summer 2023 it was the turn of Miro Class to work with the Ashmolean Museum to co-curate an exhibition of Roman artefacts and give the rest of the school community a glimpse into the everyday life of the Romans. Students visited the Ashmolean Museum to look at the Roman Gallery. Curator Paul Roberts met with the group and brought to



life the stories of various Roman objects, and explained what some of the fragments we had been looking at would have been used for. Paul spoke captivantly about Roman life and made links between the Romans and our lives today. Students also met Dave Orwell who made mounts for the objects included in the exhibition. This gave students a real sense of how they could make the objects in their exhibition look good for visitors. Each exhibition is installed by collections care teams and has the same high standards and stewardship of objects as we would expect with any loan.

Students spent time in school learning about the Roman empire using a multi-sensory approach which included handling fragments of Roman pottery, tasting and smelling some of the foods the Romans would have eaten (grapes and bread were popular but olives less so!) and making their own artworks based on patterns on original Roman pottery shards.

The aim of the *Co-curate* programme is not to impose a traditional museum curation on the school and the students. Students' ideas and discussions become the basis for the



labels and interpretation panels. Students think about how to explain the things they have learnt about the objects on display to their peers. Sometimes contemporary equivalent objects are added to the case to enable connections to be made.

For the launch of the exhibition Ashmolean staff visited the school and were given a talk about the objects in the case by two confident and knowledgeable students. In the Miro Classroom other students had a range of activities to show off their knowledge. Students showed a huge sense of pride in their exhibition and sharing their learning. After the launch event, Dr Paul Roberts said, 'It was inspirational this morning to see those students and what they've achieved'. ■

To find out more about the partnership with Iffley Academy please see www.glam.ox.ac.uk/iffley-academy-partnership

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