

Research Briefing N^o 27

Painting the Curriculum: The National Gallery's Masterwork in the Classroom

This research evaluates the National Gallery's Picture in Focus approach to using the painting *Diana and Acteon* by Titian to stimulate cross-curricular teaching and learning in secondary schools.

Key words: cross-curricular teaching and learning; visual art; secondary curriculum

Image credit: see footnote¹



Key findings

- The National Gallery's Picture in Focus approach using Titian's masterpiece *Diana and Actaeon* in the classroom was very highly regarded by teachers in a diverse range of secondary schools (particularly the inspirational introductory training day run by the gallery).
- The data showed that teachers collaborated across subject departments including art, maths, music, German, English, PE, RE, ICT, law & history, geography, science, drama, and in a hospital education setting that taught the whole curriculum. The teachers welcomed the benefits of the cross-curricula approach that extended their normal subject teaching boundaries.
- Barriers to cross-curricula work for teachers and students alike included national curriculum subject requirements and high stakes tests or examinations.
- Most of the 99 students who were interviewed reported significant interest in the Picture in Focus work, and lesson observations revealed evidence of innovative teaching and learning.
- One of the issues that arose in the research was to do with the nudity that is a feature of the painting. The data revealed at least three kinds of responses from students: a) initial surprise followed by rationalisation of the context; b) in one setting, more extended thoughtful engagement with body image and nudity; c) for a minority of pupils, seeing nudity as an obstacle to their engagement with the Picture in Focus work.

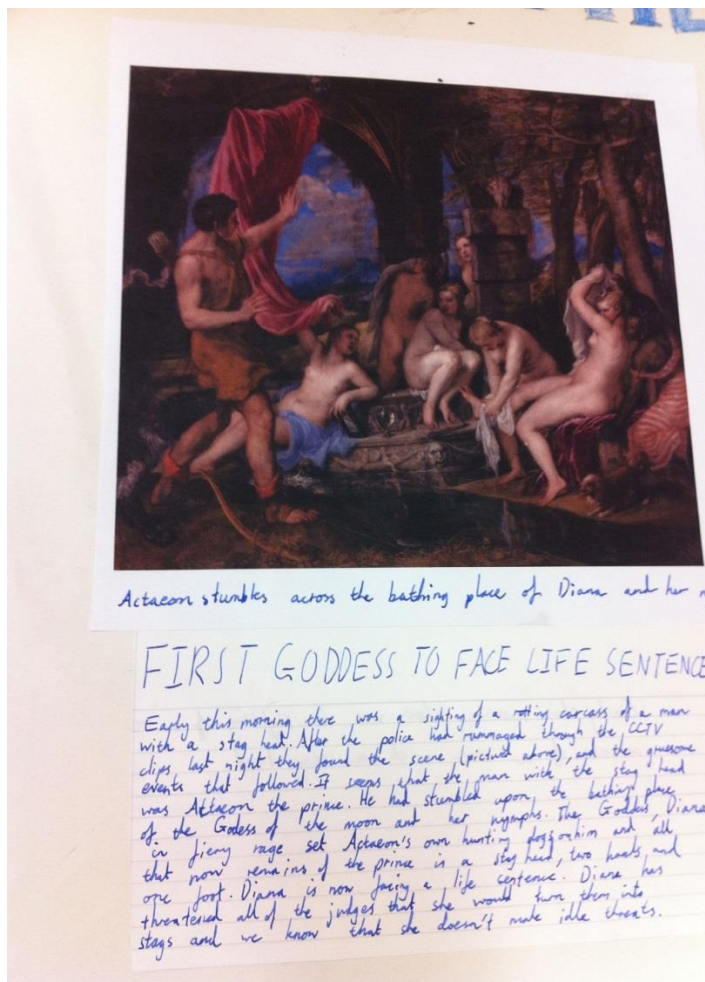
¹ Titian, *Diana and Actaeon*, Photo © The National Gallery, London/ The National Galleries of Scotland. Bought jointly by the National Gallery and National Galleries of Scotland with contributions from the Scottish Government, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, The Monument Trust, The Art Fund (with a contribution from the Wolfson Foundation), Artemis Investment Management Ltd, Binks Trust, Mr Busson on behalf of the EIM Group, Dunard Fund, The Fuserna Foundation, Gordon Getty, The Hintze Family Charitable Foundation, J Paul Getty Jnr Charitable Trust, John Dodd, Northwood Charitable Trust, The Rothschild Foundation, Sir Siegmund Warburg's Voluntary Settlement and through public appeal, 2009

What we did

The research was carried out between 2010 and 2013 and was funded by the National Gallery in London who wanted to investigate the efficacy of their approach to using paintings to stimulate teaching and learning. The aim of the research was to evaluate the Picture in Focus approach. In particular: 1. The schools' ways of working; 2. The pedagogy (teaching methods and approaches) the teachers adopted; 3. The reported and observed impact on teachers and students.

The Picture in Focus approach uses paintings in the National Gallery collection as stimuli for cross-curricula teaching and learning in primary and secondary classrooms. The approach emphasises a) curriculum planning around themes inspired by the painting; b) creative

Figure 1: Example of two students' newspaper story inspired by the painting



teaching emphasising creativity by young people; c) final products from the young people that may be published online by the National Gallery. Cross-curricula teaching and learning is an important topic in relation to school curriculum design and at the level of national curricula. There is limited research on cross-curricula teaching and learning.

The painting selected for this project was Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* painted between 1556 and 1559. The painting reveals, through an interplay of figures, light, intense colour and animated brushwork, the dramatic impact of Actaeon finding the secret bathing place of Diana, something that resulted in him being transformed into a stag, then hunted down by his own hounds and killed by them.

Figure 2: Display of young people's exploration of nudity and body image as portrayed in the media and in society



How we did it

The research adopted an in-depth qualitative evaluation research design with two phases. Ten secondary settings from London, the South East and the South West of England were the sites for the research including London comprehensives, an Academy, independent schools, and a special school in a hospital setting. The data sets were:

- observations of Picture in Focus lessons;
- photographs of resources;
- semi-structured interviews with teachers involved in the project; and
- semi-structured focus group interviews with students who had been involved in the project.

Further information

See National Gallery website for project details: <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/learning/teachers-and-schools/secondary-schools/picture-in-focus/>

The painting Diana and Actaeon was part of a series by Titian painted for King Philip II of Spain. In 2009, the National Galleries of London and Scotland acquired Titian's Diana and Actaeon for £50 million with the aid of a substantial figure from the Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Monument Trust, the Scottish Government and from public donations. It is the agreement of the National Galleries that the painting will be displayed for five years in each gallery on an alternating basis. Diana and Actaeon was acquired for the nation with the condition that it would be made available to a wide audience meaning that it would be seen by more than only traditional visitors to the museums.

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