

IN YOUR dreams!

Once children have created and personalised a dreamcatcher, they can go on to write about and paint the fantasies they might ensnare, says **Robert Watts**.

Today you will...

- draw inspiration from artists' explorations of dreams and fantasies
- make decisions about the design of artworks and artefacts
- develop techniques for weaving and construction

It's Thursday afternoon in the Y4 classroom and the minds of one or two children are starting to drift. Take Joe, for instance. He's been staring into space for the past five minutes, mouth open, eyes half closed, slowly twirling his pencil around in the air.

But wait – before you call his name and snap him back to reality, it might just be that Joe is experiencing his most creative moment of the week. Maybe his mind is taking him on a journey to a galaxy far away or to a land that time forgot; maybe he's remembering his favourite afternoon of the summer holidays or daydreaming about the future.

If so, he's in good company. Although there are times when we wish our pupils were tuned in to teaching rather than following their fantasies, dreams have long been a wonderful source of inspiration for artists. Many memorable artworks – Salvador Dali's surrealist landscapes, for example, or René Magritte's mysterious portraits – feature images half-remembered from dreams, and art lessons can offer opportunities for children to explore the parts of their minds that other subjects cannot reach.

This lesson plan takes inspiration not only from the dreamlike paintings of Marc Chagall but also from Native American craft work. Experiment with one or two of the ideas on these pages and, who knows, your children might experience the lesson of their dreams.

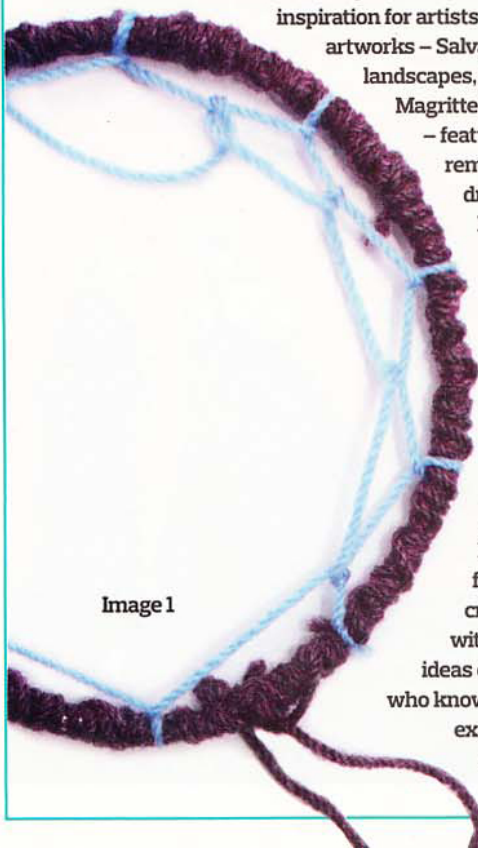


Image 1



Starter activity

Begin by showing the class a selection of images of dreamcatchers – magical structures traditionally made by Native Americans from willow and decorated with beads and feathers. At the centre of the dreamcatchers' web-like design is a single bead representing the dream, and when hung above a bed the dreamcatcher is believed to protect those sleeping beneath.

Children should understand that there are key features of the dreamcatcher – the structure, the web, the beads – they will need to emulate in order that it retains its magical qualities. They will also,

however, be quick to appreciate that their own designs should be unique to them. Before children begin to construct their own dreamcatchers, allow time for them to create some initial designs on paper.

Encourage children to think carefully about the materials and objects that they intend to add to their dreamcatcher. You might consider setting this as a homework task for children a day or two before the lesson, as it will offer them the opportunity to bring to school one or two personal items that will make their work distinctive.

Main activities

Making dreamcatchers

Provide children with a selection of lengths of wire – or willow, if possible – and demonstrate how to wrap it around a circular object such as a tin before twisting or tying the ends together to form a hoop. A length of string or wool then needs to be wrapped tightly around the circumference of the hoop (leaving a loop at the end so the dreamcatcher can be hung from the wall).

Tie a second piece of string or wool onto a point on the wire hoop and create a polygon around the circumference, encouraging children to decide how many points they want to include. Continue with a second lap, looping the string around the centre of each 'side' of the polygon to create the web-like structure (see image 1). As the gaps get smaller and smaller towards the centre of the circle, a bead – or other object – should be inserted to represent the dream caught in the web.

Some children will prefer to construct simpler designs – a Star of David could be used as a model, for example – but all will be keen to attach objects that will personalise their dreamcatchers (see image 2). Each dreamcatcher should be different from those around it – displayed together they will look amazing.



Dream stories and paintings

Almost a hundred years have passed since Russian artist Marc Chagall created his wonderfully dreamlike painting *The Poet Reclining*, a work from the Tate Collection (see tinyurl.com/tpoet). The painting seems to capture those moments between waking and sleeping, when it can be hard to work out what is and isn't real. Is the figure really sleeping alone in the countryside? Or is he drifting to sleep in his bed and imagining himself in a field far away?

The atmospheric qualities of *The Poet Reclining* make it ideal for inspiring creative writing. Show children the image on screen and encourage them to talk with partners before sharing their thoughts and questions with the class. The mysterious nature of the painting should ensure that children come up with a wide range of responses – ideas that can then form starting points for their own stories and paintings.

Explain to children that they should each decide whether the scene depicted in Chagall's painting will illustrate the beginning, the middle or the end of their story. Encourage them to identify their favourite details of the painting and to think about how these details could be described in ways that will engage their reader.

Finally, children can make paintings of their own, inserting themselves or other characters into the atmospheric scene. Point out to children how Chagall has used a muted range of colours in the painting – the mossy green, the pale pink sky – and demonstrate how colours can be thinned down by adding water to the paint. Some children will be want to experiment with applying 'washes' of thin colour, building up layers of tones.

Extending the lesson

- > Paintings by Salvador Dali and René Magritte offer great starting points for creating dreamlike stories and images in the classroom. Be warned that children may find some of their works a little disturbing, so discourage online searches for these artists. Odilon Redon, a less well-known artist who explored dreamlike images, offers a gentle, colourful alternative.
- > Display children's paintings alongside their stories and encourage them to engage with each other's work and to reflect on the contrasts and connections they find. Have children succeeded in creating atmospheric work through their use of language, colour and tone?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Watts is the Programme Convener for the MA Art, Craft and Design Education course at the University of Roehampton, London, and the co-author of *Teaching Art and Design 3–11*, published by Continuum Books.



Q

USEFUL QUESTIONS

> Marc Chagall once said that a painting was 'like a window through which I could fly away toward another world.' Describe what you think he meant by this.

> Do you dream about the past, or about the future? Or is dream-time a special kind of place where there is no past or future?

> People often talk about their hopes and dreams for the future. What are your hopes and dreams? Which one thing could you do today that will help you work towards making your dreams come true?

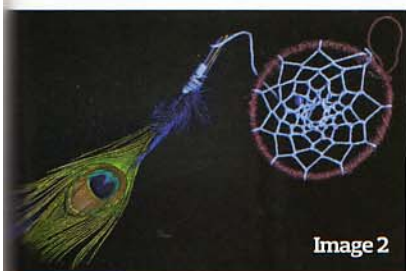


Image 2

