

Picture winter



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Capture the season through art using three different pictures as creative stimuli

As children progress through Key Stage 2, their artworks begin to include a wider range of detail. These might be details that provide more information about the people or places represented in their work, or about a particular event or activity – but they can also be details that evoke a particular time of year. Representing the changing seasons in their artwork is something that children often do instinctively, perhaps by drawing a few blobs of snow across the page or painting a blazing Sun in the top corner. With a little reflection, however, seasonal changes can be depicted a little more subtly and creatively.

On the following pages, you'll find a set of images selected to evoke different aspects of winter, each of which can be used to inspire some artwork from your class. I've chosen a peaceful rural scene by the 19th Century Scottish painter, Joseph Farquharson, to focus children's attention on subtle use of colour; an imposing landscape by the 19th Century German artist, Caspar David Friedrich, that will prompt children to explore their use of line and tone, and finally a contemporary design that will form the starting point for experiments in ICT. All the images are available on posters for subscribers at www.scholastic.co.uk/junioredplus

The Sun Had Closed the Winter's Day Joseph Farquharson

One of the current displays at London's Tate Modern features a white octagonal piece of paper pasted against the gallery wall (8th Paper Octagonal by Richard Tuttle). 'What's the point of that?' you might ask. Yet, it's interesting partly because, as you look at it, you realise that the walls of the gallery aren't quite the colour you thought they were. Previously, you were sure that they were definitely white. Yet, this piece of paper tells you that they're not – that, compared to the paper, they're actually a pale shade of grey.

In his painting, *The Sun Had Closed the Winter's Day* (see right and the Poster, 'The Sun Had Closed the Winter's Day' – available for subscribers at www.scholastic.co.uk/junioredplus) Joseph Farquharson plays the same trick on us. What colour is a sheep? Are they really white? Placed next to the snow, the sheep in the picture actually look a little grubby – more cream than white. And, the closer you look, the more you realise that Farquharson has used a range of tones to represent the snow itself. In some places, there are lighter tones as it catches the light from the fading Sun, in others, there are darker tones in the tracks and footprints.

Farquharson has also carefully planned his composition to emphasise the shift between the foreground, middle ground and background. The tracks and footprints cleverly lead the viewer's eye into the painting, passing a sheepdog on the way to the tiny figure of a shepherd. If you were to draw imaginary diagonal lines between the four corners, you would find that the shepherd is positioned almost perfectly at the centre of the painting.

- You might also notice that he is poised just at the point where the light snow is juxtaposed with the dark hill in the background.
- Farquharson painted many scenes like this – you're likely to receive a Christmas card featuring one – and he clearly never tired of recording the subtle shifts of colour and tone in the landscape. Try using the painting to inspire a range of creative abstract work.

Activities

1. **Mixing tones**
 - Ask most children how to mix grey and they'll tell you it's simple – black plus white. But, as Farquharson's painting shows, there are many different greys and ways to mix them.
 - Compare tones of grey in images and try combining blue, red, yellow and white paint to create abstract paintings of different greys.
 2. **Applying paint**
 - Talk to the children about the softness of the marks Farquharson used – there are very few hard edges. Challenge them to experiment with different textures. Try stippling, for example – apply a flat area of colour, let it dry, then stipple a second layer over the top, letting some of the first colour show through.
 3. **Observational drawing**
 - Encourage the children to make observational drawings of real trees and branches, taking note of detail, shape, silhouettes and shadows.
 4. **Naming colours**
 - Paint charts from DIY shops are a great source of creative writing. Who would have thought that there were so many ways of describing shades of white and grey?
 - Children will enjoy thinking of exotic names for the tones they create in their paintings.
- *The Sun Had Closed the Winter's Day* is in the Towneley Hall Art Gallery and Museum's collection, Burnley. ►

Winter Landscape

Caspar David Friedrich

Most of us react to a spell of cold weather by staying indoors, turning up the heating and putting the kettle on. Not Caspar David Friedrich. The 19th Century German Romantic landscape artist liked nothing better than to head into the great outdoors, intent on capturing the barren, misty landscape on his canvasses. Quite often, you'll find a lone figure in Friedrich's paintings, staring moodily out into the void, apparently bearing the weight of the world on his shoulders. Needless to say, Christmas cards depicting his work are few and far between!

Nonetheless, Friedrich's work is widely admired, essentially for its wonderfully atmospheric and spiritual qualities. These qualities are perfectly combined in his *Winter Landscape* of 1811 (see right and the **Poster**, 'Winter Landscape' – available for subscribers at www.scholastic.co.uk/junioredplus). Like *The Sun Had Closed the Winter's Day*, the painting features a single human figure in the landscape. But, there the similarities end. Unlike Farquharson's painting, with its shepherd herding his sheep home through the gentle welcoming countryside, Friedrich depicts a cold, barren, hostile landscape, the lone figure almost lost at the foot of the trees. Look closely and you'll see that, close to the man resting on the rock, there is a pair of crutches lying abandoned in the snow. The 'T' shape of the crosses is echoed by the crucifix, beneath which the man is clasping his hands in prayer. The shape of each tree is also echoed by the cathedral spires looming into view through the mist.

When a painting contains relatively few features, each of them can take on a greater significance. Older children will be familiar with the ways in which authors and poets use symbols in their writing to direct the reader's attention to bigger themes, and that's exactly what Friedrich is encouraging us to do with his *Winter Landscape*. Encourage the children to

reflect on what each feature of the painting may represent. The rock the man is resting against is a symbol of religious faith; the evergreen trees suggest continuity and renewal, and the distant cathedral is symbolic of the afterlife.

While some children may be able to identify these references, others will find rather more contemporary and secular parallels. Surely those Gothic spires in the distance could be Hogwarts! Children should be aware that the design of many modern fictional landscapes is often influenced by artists' work, and they will be keen to experiment with creating some atmospheric work of their own.

Activities

1. Outlines

Begin a sequence of activities inspired by *Winter Landscape* by using the observational drawings of trees that children made in response to *The Sun Had Closed the Winter's Day* as a starting point for some new images. Re-draw the trees, this time concentrating only on their outlines. Encourage the children to avoid generalising about the lines and shapes they can see – too often, children can switch to auto pilot when drawing trees and produce work that resembles diagrams rather than drawings. Prompt the children to make a sequence of outlines, some larger, some smaller, and to experiment with overlapping each of the shapes. Within a short time, they will have an interesting composition of twisting lines and shapes that can be used as the basis of an abstract painting.

2. Collograph

The tree outlines can also form a starting point for collographs. A collograph is essentially a collage of textures glued onto a board, then inked up and printed. Explain to the children that they will each contribute at least one tree towards a class display of a forest of silhouetted trees similar to those in *Winter Landscape*. Provide card rectangles of different sizes – pieces cut from boxes can be used. Gather together a range of textures (recycled materials will provide a good selection) and encourage the children to experiment with arranging their pieces into a shape that represents their tree. Once again, encourage them to look closely at the outlines of their shapes and to avoid



generalisations. When the children are happy with the collage, seal it into place on the card by applying a thin layer of PVA glue. This will need to dry thoroughly – probably overnight, depending on how much glue has been used – before ink is rolled onto the surface. The children can then print their collographs by pressing paper over the top of the ink (you could use a rolling pin to press down evenly). Individual prints can be kept while copies can be made to contribute to the class forest that can be assembled onto a background of an atmospheric sky painted using watercolours.

3. Symmetrical patterns

Children love experimenting with symmetrical patterns. The church and trees in *Winter Landscape* not only echo each other in their shapes, they are each also near symmetrical. Ask the children to trace half of a tree or the cathedral in the painting before completing the second half independently – this activity can easily be extended using ICT.

Winter Landscape is in The National Gallery's collection, London. ►





Both these images have been created using ICT. The starting point for each picture was an image of winter trees (a drawing or photograph are both suitable) that was then manipulated using art and design software, such as *Photoshop*® (see right for details).



Red Tree

If Caspar David Friedrich and Joseph Farquharson were alive and working as artists today, it's quite possible that they would be using computers rather than paintbrushes to create their masterpieces. Good quality art and design software is now more accessible to schools than ever before, and children can quickly learn the functions of the basic tools. The *Red Tree* image (see right and the **Poster**, 'Red Tree' – available for subscribers at www.scholastic.co.uk/junioredplus) that I've selected for this final part of the project provides a stark contrast with the paintings on the previous pages. The shape of the tree echoes those of the evergreens in *Winter Landscape*, but whereas Friedrich spent many hours painstakingly recreating the branches of the trees, this image appears to have been created in a few seconds. Although we can tell immediately that it has been created using a computer, the tree looks and feels as though it has been formed from a single brushstroke, starting lightly at the top with a gentle mark before gathering strength as it cascades towards the bottom of the page.

It may seem strange to use a computer to create something designed to look like it was made by hand, but the range of options for creating images using art software is almost endless. This can, however, be a problem: if children open up a programme such as *Photoshop*® and start experimenting without an aim in mind, they tend to quickly lose focus and their attention begins to wander. However, if they are set a task that challenges them to create something specific – while still encouraging them to make something that is individual and unique to them – they can produce some genuinely interesting and original work.

The challenge for this task is to use art and design software to create an abstract pattern that evokes the theme of winter. Children may want to use elements of the paintings reproduced on the previous pages, or to select something new as a starting point. On this page you'll find a few snapshots of possible approaches that use only a few of

- the available tools. Encourage the children
- to become familiar with these tools before
- moving on to explore the rest of the toolbox
- – they'll soon come up with ways of capturing
- winter using a tool that Joseph Farquharson
- and Caspar David Friedrich never had.

Activities

- Each of the images on this page (see left) uses
- the trees from Friedrich's *Winter Landscape* as
- a starting point for an experiment in ICT. To
- begin your own experiments, try this using
- *Photoshop*®:
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- ● Open up the image you want to use as a
- starting point for your work.
- ● In the 'Layer' menu, select 'New', 'Layer',
- then click 'OK'.
- ● Make sure you have white selected as the
- foreground colour, then select the 'Paint
- Bucket Tool' and click on the image – it will
- 'flood' with white.
- ● On the 'Layers' palette, reduce the 'Opacity'
- of the layer to 50 per cent or so – you will
- see the image emerge from beneath the
- layer you have created. It's a little like placing a
- sheet of tracing paper over the image.
- ● Working on the top layer, you can now use
- elements of the image below to create your
- own ICT masterpiece – experiment with the
- range of brushes and colours available.
- ● Make the background layer (the painting)
- invisible by clicking on the 'eye' icon on the
- 'Layers' palette
- ● In the 'Layer' menu, select 'Flatten image'
- then save your work. ■

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