

# Portraying relationships

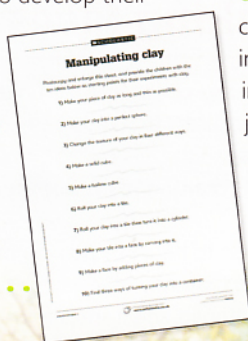
Encourage your class to explore the relationships of both humans and animals with wire and clay

The theme of portraying relationships in art is one that has preoccupied artists for centuries. Henry Moore made a series of beautiful sculptures on the theme of mother and child, while contemporary artists such as Nicola Hicks (see the **A1 poster** for an example of her work based on animals) have explored similar themes in different ways.

The activities on these pages focus on some of the ways that children can represent relationships through making sculptures of both humans and animals. Children will not only be challenged to make works of art on a range of scales, but also to ensure that the sculptures that they make are strong and self-supporting.

## Getting started

- Whether children move onto make sculptures using clay or wire, time spent exploring the materials is invaluable. However, if left alone to experiment for too long, children's investigations can become directionless. Begin by setting a series of quick, manageable tasks that will enable children to develop their confidence with the material. For example, you could provide them with a set of challenges that will focus their attention on manipulating clay in various ways. Hand out **Photocopiable 5**, 'Manipulating clay' for ten quick activity ideas.
- Once engaged with a specific challenge, children will need to explore the properties



of the material. They will quickly learn, for example, that clay can be rolled until it is very thin, but that this will reduce its strength as a modelling material. They should learn that an effective way to roll clay is to place identical strips of wood either side of it to ensure that its thickness is even.

- Similarly, working with modelling wire presents further challenges for children. It is a material that can be manipulated in various ways – one piece can be wrapped around another to increase its volume, pieces can be twisted at their ends to be joined together, ends can be bent and taped into a table to create a base.

- At this experimental stage, children should not worry about creating anything finished or recognisable – they should be concerned with exploring the potential of their materials.

## Curriculum links

**NC:** Art and design 1b–c; 2a–c; 3a; 4a; 5c; PSHE 1a; 4c; D&T 2d

**QCA:** Art and design Unit 3A – Portraying relationships; Unit 6A – People in Action



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Ages  
7–9

## Storybook sculptures

**Learning objective:** to manipulate clay with the aim of creating sculptures on different scales.

**You will need:** clay; clay tools; pencils; sketchbooks.

- Show the children a small selection of images from illustrated storybooks that feature two or more animal characters. Select examples in which the illustrations bring the relationship between the animals to life – Martin Waddell's *Let's Go Home, Little Bear* (Walker Books), for example.
- Ask the following questions: 'Does the picture give us any clues about the characters' relationship?'; 'What makes you think that they are happy together?'; 'How can we tell that one of them feels protective of the other?'
- Through discussion of the images, children should become aware that relationships can be portrayed through images as well as words. Explain that they are going to make drawings and sculptures inspired by the theme of portraying relationships.
- Children should each choose a storybook to base their sculptures on. They should sketch a pair of animals from the story, and then decide how they will show that the two animals are linked – they may be looking at each other, for example.
- Provide children with small amounts of clay and give them time to explore its properties through rolling, squeezing it and so on. Encourage children to begin their sculptures by building the basic forms of their animals without worrying about detail.

Ensure that the different sections are moulded together securely, so that the pieces don't separate when the clay dries.

- Demonstrate how each surface can be cross-hatched and the clay moistened with a little water to increase the strength of the join (see pages 6–7). Seated animals, with as few legs as possible, are the most robust.
- Children can now use basic clay tools to add detail. Working from images at this point can be useful.
- Finally, challenge children to make a second animal on a smaller scale – this will develop their fine motor skills and provide an opportunity for them to bring to life the relationship between their two characters.



### Differentiation

**Support:** Some children will need to work in small groups to ensure that they receive sufficient support when moulding their figures.

**Extension:** Challenge some children to create environments for their sculptures using natural materials – then photograph them at 'eye-level'.

Ages  
9–11

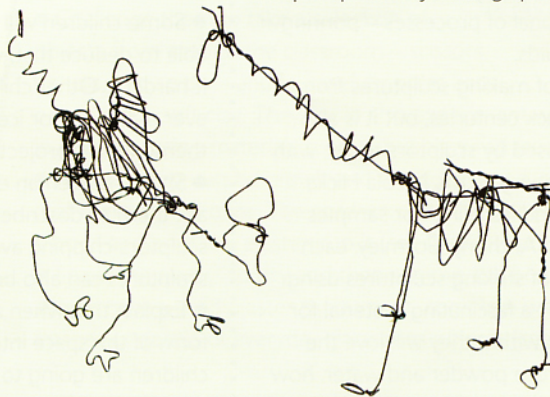
## Wire animals

**Learning objective:** to develop skills in manipulating and joining materials with the aim of creating self-supporting structures.

**You will need:** modelling wire; small pliers; wire cutters; balsa wood (optional); masking tape.

- One of the key challenges facing children on this project is that their work will have to stand up! There are links here with design and technology, in the sense that children are faced with a specific problem that needs to be addressed in order for the sculpture to 'function'.
- Begin with some observational drawing; ask two children to pose while the rest of the class or group draws them. 'Models' should try to strike dynamic poses that mimic specific animals – on all fours, twisting, stretching, and so on. The poses need only be held for a few minutes before others take turns.
- Drawings should be of line only and form the basis for children's wire sculptures. The simplest way to construct a figure from wire is to work out the points where it will rest on the surface and build it up from there.
- Children can do this by bending the first piece of wire into a 'U' shape and turning it upside down. They can then bend each end to make small U-shaped feet at each end. Use tape to secure the feet to the table or to a wooden base.
- Children should do the same for the second pair of legs, then

connect the two pairs with a third piece of wire, using pliers to twist the ends securely. This will form the basis of the structure of the sculptures, which children can now develop into more complex pieces by adding specific details.



### Differentiation

**Support:** Pipe cleaners ('chenille' in craft shops) are easier to manage than modelling wire. Children who struggle with construction could use them to make 'drawings'.

**Extension:** ModRoc (a bandage-like material covered in plaster) can be used to cover the structures, and then painted.

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