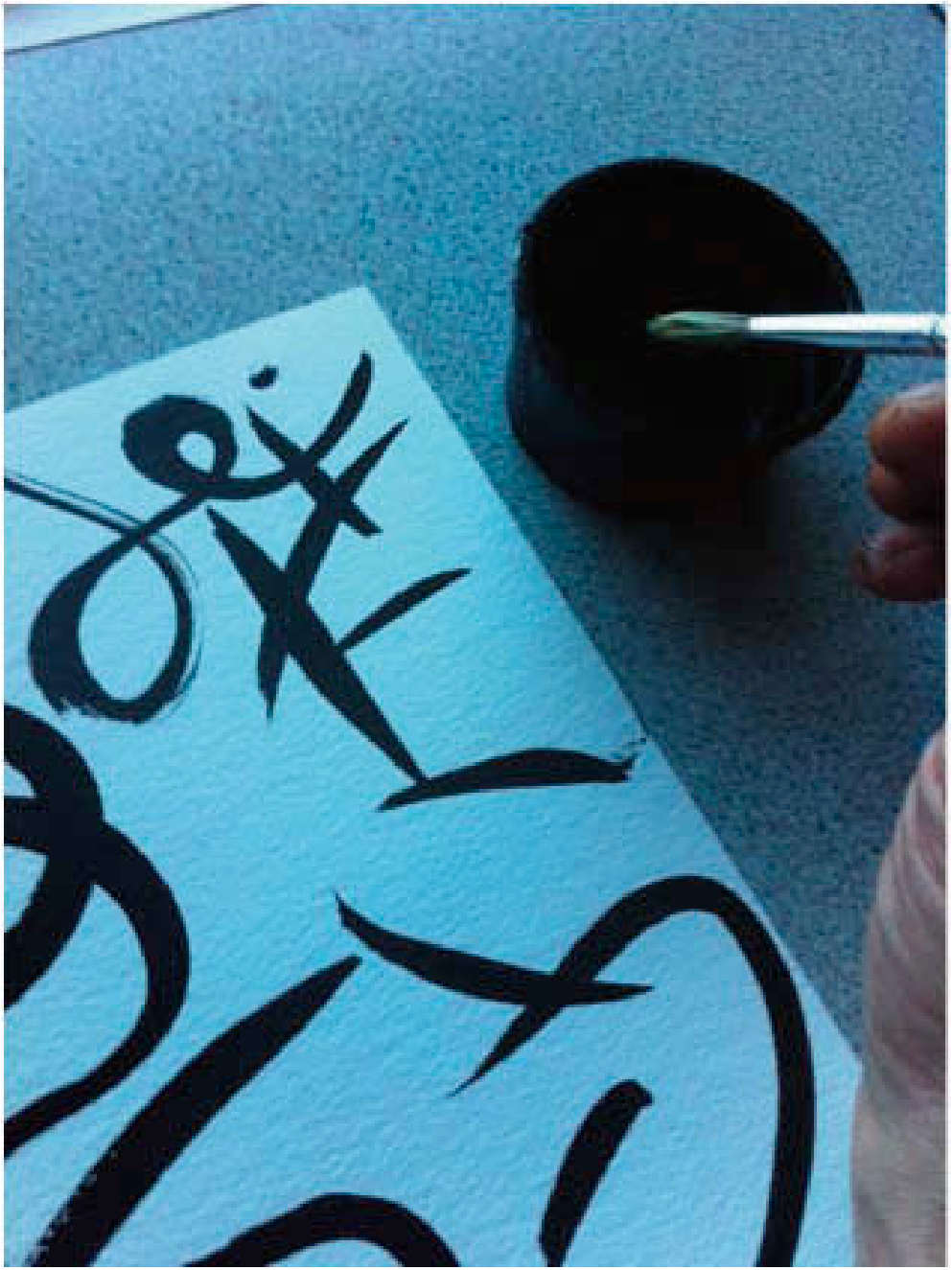

the Language of Drawing

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Scheme Learning Aim: **To understand how abstract drawing can have meaning and expression.**

Lesson Plan

Age suitability: This lesson is suitable for children aged 7-13.
Time: This lesson can be done in one hour (at a push, two hours for colouring and finalising outcomes.)

Description: It is said by artists that drawing is a language all of its own, but what does that mean? This exercise will get everyone of any ability drawing in cool, abstract ways. What's more, your students' drawings will have hidden, personal meanings. This lesson will really turn your class's notions of drawing upside down! It's easy and great fun.

Bigger Learning aims: How to make marks with meaning and expression. Understand mark-making techniques used by abstract artists.

Learning Targets The students will express themselves creatively, learn about visual literacy and communicating ideas in abstractive ways. This unit will help students to understand that codes and symbols can be complex and hidden and not easily read by the observer.
They will develop their drawing and painting techniques in alternative ways that do not rely on representation. By looking at the work of others' they will develop their understanding of how abstract artists communicate.

Cross Curricular links: It could easily be linked to literacy, history and geography and the origins of written language, why we write and what writing is for. It could form part of a bigger project where students make their own clay writing tablets, write on handmade papers or papyrus. They might study different languages around the world and investigate the various styles, patterns and shapes of letters comparing them to their own. Links to early Christian and Muslim writing could tie this in with Religious Education.
Studying symbols and codes is also integral to understanding Algebra in Mathematics.

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Things you'll need: Paper or sketchbooks. Black Indian ink (I water mine down) white cartridge paper and other types of paper such as sugar paper, brown wrapping paper, newsprint. Watercolour brushes thick and thin (about number 4's and 10's for A4 or A3) or calligraphy brushes if you are really posh.

Preparation: Indian ink is really messy, so I put mine in tiny pots with screw lids, then I put the pot in a paint tray and have plenty of tissues nearby. Most spills are caused by over stretching to reach the ink or carrying it to the sink, so have it ready on the tables. Have a bowl of warm soapy water and a sponge for accidents. Newspaper or plastic on the tables is essential.

Extending: Try adding colour to your drawing using watercolours, oil pastels or inks.

Supporting & SEN: Advise/help to use simple shapes to invent letters such as circles, lines etc.

Assessment Guidance: When assessing, look for work that uses symbols of different sizes and overlaps shapes intelligently, using space, composition and layout successfully. Less successful outcomes usually struggle to interlock shapes and vary size and scale of letters. They don't pay attention to the size of the paper or the frame of the page.

Artist Links: Kandinsky and Miro are just the beginning. Can the student's find any more examples of artists who draw in an abstract style?

Mr Carney's Tips: Once you've had a practice go at this it's an easy lesson that reaps huge rewards. Kids love doing it and really respond to the challenge. Some find inventing their own language difficult, so I let the brighter one's invent a full alphabet while the less able only mange half a dozen letters. It doesn't matter for their first time. Most students don't recognise this as 'proper' drawing and quickly stop working in this way, but the truth is that it is a valid form of drawing in its own right and much more complex than observation.

Instructions

There is a Powerpoint that accompanies this lesson.

1. Task: Invent your own language in your sketchbook. Create an alphabet of letters for your own original language (at least 10 letters.) Your letters must be not be picture writing or copied from another language. You can write what your new language means next to your letters.

Time suggested 20 minutes

2. Task: On a new piece of paper and using a brush and black ink, write some words in your new language. There are rules to writing with your language:

a. You cannot write on a straight line.

b. You have to turn your paper 90 degrees after every letter you have drawn.

c. No two letters can be the same size, so you have to keep changing letter height.

Keep repeating the task, changing the size of letters and experimenting with how the whole page looks.

Time suggested 30 minutes

3. When you have finished the exercise, lay all the work out on a table to dry. Now look at the Powerpoint slide that accompanies this lesson. It shows the Disprillo tablet, which is one of the oldest forms of writing known to man and also some drawings by the 20th Century abstract artists Kandinsky and Joan Miro. Show the slides and if possible, print them and hand them out.

Answer these questions:

a. Describe the similarities and differences of the shapes in the drawing by Kandinsky and the writing on the Disprillo tablet. Show them how the circles and lines are uncannily similar. The Kandinsky is arranged randomly where the tablet is ordered and neatly set out.

b. Now compare your drawing to the drawings in the following two slides. The artists drawings are important works of art. What do you think they were trying to say? This entirely personal opinion and discussion.

Time allowed 10 minutes