teacher's kit

MAGNIFICENT MATERIALS

Information and practical ideas for exploring the use of materials in contemporary art and contemporary art through the use of materials

MODERN TATE

Tate Modern
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teacher's kit

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Material Samples with Inventory - available to book from the Tate Modern Teachers' Resource Room, telephone 020 7401 5064.

BACKGROUND

The Magnificent Materials Teachers' Kit presents ideas from the Tate Modern primary out-of-hours projects Magnificent Materials and Material Stories. In creating a link with science, both projects explored the roles of materials in contemporary art. For more information about the projects and works produced, visit the websites:
www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/magnificentmaterials
www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/materialstories

CREDITS

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introduction

INTRODUCTION

Artists are always exploring new ways of working and discovering new materials to work with. They have expanded their range beyond the traditional materials of paint, bronze and marble to use anything: from sound to sand, from digital imaging to clockwork devices.

Some art movements have put new materials at the very heart of their identity. For example the Italian twentieth century movement Arte Povera used 'poor', everyday materials to make a statement about how art was part of the world, not something alien and separate to it. Whereas artists perhaps used to rely on a technique and skills-based knowledge of their materials, now the idea behind the work has taken precedence, and the potential of the material lies in its associations.

In Magnificent Materials and Material Stories we thought about materials in two separate but related ways, both connected with the role of the artist.

[ROLE 1.] THE ARTIST AS SCIENTIST

Artists, like scientists, test things out, find unexpected solutions and learn through observation and experiment. Seeing the artist as a kind of scientist can help us to develop and test our ideas in art, emphasising the process not just the finished product. If we approach materials as an artist/scientist would, we can think carefully about what we can and can't do with a particular material. We can also suggest alternatives depending on what we know of a material's properties and think more clearly about the reasons why an artist might choose to work with a specific material. It can also enable us to ask bigger questions about types of knowledge. Do scientists and artists provide answers? What are the questions?

Many artists rely on technical advice and help from specialists from the world of science. For example, during the planning and installation of Indian/British artist Anish Kapoor's 'Marsyas', on display during 2002 in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, engineers were involved from the start, making tests and computer projections to anticipate how the material would function in a particular form and space.

Another area of interest, for the artist as scientist, is the life-cycle of materials and what happens to them when they have outgrown their original purpose. This interest is particularly strong amongst South American and African artists, (for recent examples see the work of Alexandre de Cunha and Abraham Cruzvillegas).

For more examples of the relationship between the artist and science see amongst others Steven Pippin (Britain), Mark Dion (America), Olafur Eliasson (Denmark), Keith Tyson (Britain), and the Fluxus movement (America/Europe).

introduction

[ROLE 2.] THE ARTIST AS ARCHAEOLOGIST/HISTORIAN/...

The artist as archaeologist/historian/biographer and storyteller excavates a sense of person and a sense of place, uncovers uncomfortable histories and deliberately uses materials to tell stories.

There are many artists who focus on the associations of materials, their histories and their symbolic properties. Very often a material's symbolic properties are closely linked to its physical properties. For example, the German artist Joseph Beuys used fur, felt and animal fat to explore ideas of warmth, insulation and protection.

Many artists have 'signature' materials as seen in American artist Eva Hesse's use of fibreglass and latex. Materials can be used to tell stories, both real and invented. The Polish artist Miroslaw Balka has excavated materials from his childhood home to talk about memory and history, both collective and individual. German artist Anselm Kiefer's uses soot, brambles and dead roses to uncover the past and find parallels with the present.

Materials and objects also often carry their histories with them: these can be the histories of individuals, countries or global brands. These associations are used as one more element in the artist's vocabulary.

Talking about the symbolic value of material objects allows us to investigate how symbols work. Which are shared and which are personal? Which are culture-specific and which are universal? For more ideas about materials as personal symbols, see the work of French/American artist Louise Bourgeois.

appendix

CURRICULUM LINKS

Investigating the use and meaning of materials in modern and contemporary art can act as a starting point for the teaching of almost any curriculum subject. The following is a list of a few possibilities:

[art] consider how artists use the tactile, sensory and symbolic qualities of materials. How they arrange their materials and what processes they apply in creating the work. What does this mean for the way you experience and interpret the work? What can you learn from them? How can this help you in making your own work?

[design and technology] consider how materials 'work'. What are their physical properties and how do they correspond with their symbolic meaning? How can you use this knowledge to select and combine materials? Has any of the artists used an unexpected processes that you can perhaps develop further?

[english] use materials as a starting point for investigating both the artwork and the artist. What meaning does the materials have? Are they part of a personal vocabulary? Do they tell everbody the same story?

[geography] where does materials come from? What meaning does this carry? Does artists from different countries or cultures use different materials?

[history] artists' use of materials can reflect concurrent developments in technology and the discovery of new materials or processes. How does the artwork and materials used reflect what was going on in the world at the time it was made? Can artwork be used as 'historical records'? What materials were used in the past? Which will be used in the future?

[music] what sounds does a material make or remind us of? How can you manipulate or combine materials to make them sound differently? Use raw materials to make a personal instrument or a piece of music.

[science] investigate the materials used and categorise them according to different parameters. Use scientific language and introduce methods for further research. What physical or chemical make-up does the material have? Which processes are most appropriate to manipulate or change the material?

appendix

ARTISTS AND THEIR MATERIALS

This list of artists and their materials is by no means exhaustive. Extend the list by adding artists/materials as you discover them.

Ann Hamilton [f. american] **bread, horsehair**
Anya Gallaccio [f. british] **flowers, chocolate**
Bruce Nauman [m. american] **concrete**
Christian Boltanski [m. french] **rags**
Donald Rodney [m. british] **skin**
Doris Salcedo [f. columbian] **furniture, concrete, hair**
Ernesto Neto [m. brasillian] **nylon, spices**
Eva Hesse [f. american] **plexiglass, latex, rope**
Felix Gonzalez-Torres [m. cuban-born american] **liquorice candy**
Gu Dexin [m. chinese] **plastic, apples, chocholate**
Janine Antoni [f. bahamas-born american] **chocolate, soap, lard**
Jannis Kounellis [m. greek] **burlap, wool, stuffed birds**
Jeremy Wafer [m. south african] **plaster, wax, pigment**
Joseph Beuys [m. german] **wax, felt, fat**
Mario Merz [m. italian] **newspaper, glass, metal**
Mona Hatoum [f. palistinian] **hair**
Muteba Luntumbue [m. congolese] **metal wire, wood, plastic**
Rachel Whiteread [f. british] **resin**
Richard Deacon [m. british] **wood**
Richard Long [m. british] **granite**
Richard Serra [m. american] **steel**
Richard Wilson [m. british] **sump oil, steel**
Robert Smithson [m. american] **dirt, rocks**
Shelagh Wakely [f. british] **tumeric spice**
Suresh Jayaram [m. indian] **flowers, urban objects**
Tomoko Takahashi [f. japanese] **office rubbish**
Wolfgang Laib [m. german] **pine pollen, wax, milk, rice**
Yayoi Kusama [f. japanese] **water, mirrors**
Yinka Shonibare [m. british-born nigerian] **cotton, plastic, wood**

gallery activity

THE TRANSFORMATION GAME

activity [a] **1./do/** Choose a sculpture from the collection. Make a drawing of it, taking into consideration the materials from which it is made. Vary the kinds of lines and marks you make to show texture and structure (imagine the person looking at your drawing has to guess what materials the work is made from). **2./discuss/** Why do you think the artist chose these materials to make the artwork? What are their properties and associations?

activity [b] **1./do/** Now make a second drawing, imagining the same sculpture made from entirely different materials. If the original was made of metal (heavy, rigid, smooth), imagine a material that is light, flexible and bumpy. **2./discuss/** Would your sculpture still stand? What new associations would the sculpture have?

activity [c] **1./do/** Reconstruct one of the sculptures from the collection using entirely different materials (for example, reconstruct a metal sculpture out of paper) **2./discuss/** How does the sculpture and its associations change when you use different materials?

gallery activity

FIND A LINK

Use selected samples from the resource pack to find a link with artworks in the galleries. You can use the Find a Link activity in different ways:

a. [identification] **1./do/** Use the sample to find an artwork made of the same or a similar material. This is a good way of encouraging close looking and noting small differences in materials. **2./discuss/** How and why did you make the link?

b. [opposites] **1./do/** Now, find a work that the sample doesn't match with. List the differences and describe what this means in terms of how the work was made, how long it will last and what it reminds you of. **2./discuss/** Share your findings with the whole group.

c. [associations] **1./do/** Spend some time as a group discussing the properties and associations of some of the samples. Make connections between the physical properties of the material (for example, wood: smooth, warm) and its personal associations. Find a work in the galleries (not necessarily sculpture) that has the same associations. **2./discuss/** Share your links with the rest of the group.

gallery activity

THE ART DETECTIVE GAME

Look at works by artists such as: Joseph Beuys, Eva Hesse, Rebecca Horn, Miroslaw Balka, Rachel Whiteread, Giuseppe Penone, Cornelia Parker, Eileen Agar or Rosemarie Trockel.

activity [a] **1./do/** Look closely at the work. Consider that some artists use materials to tell stories and that objects - and the materials they are made from - can be looked at as a kind of evidence. **2./discuss/** Who do these things belong to? Where have they come from? What has just happened? What is about to happen?

activity [b] **1./do/** In pairs, make an inventory of the materials used in an artwork. Use this list to invent a life-story for an imaginary person. Draw a comic strip to show a typical day in your character's life. **2./discuss/** Which materials would you add to your inventory and why?

activity [c] **1./do/** Imagine you are a detective writing a report at a scene. Describe everything you see in detail and imagine possible scenarios to explain the material evidence. **2./discuss/** Compare your senarios and explanations with the rest of the group.

gallery activity

CATEGORIES & COMBINATIONS

Suggested artists: Mark Dion, Cornelia Parker and Tony Cragg.

activity [a] **1./do/** Using the samples provided in the pack, work in small groups to sort the materials in different ways. You might give word clues to suggest different categories or allow pupils to invent their own criteria. **2./discuss/** Which of your arrangements most closely matches that used by the chosen artist?

activity [b] **1./do/** Experiment with different forms of arrangement. You can divide a larger category into subcategories (see above) or arrange materials in a line (for example, from strong to fragile, rigid to malleable). **2./discuss/** How does the arrangements you make influence the way you see and experience the materials? Does your associations of the materials change when they are arranged differently (for example, does a hard material suddenly seem even harder or more fragile)? You can test your findings by looking at an artist who uses contrasting materials in the same work and see if the combination of opposites influence your interpretation.

gallery activity

MATERIALS AS METAPHOR

activity [a] **1./discuss/** How does materials change over time? Which change quickly, which more slowly? How do their properties relate to the rate of change? Do hard objects change more slowly than soft? **2./discuss/** Choose samples from the resource pack and consider what you can do to each of the materials to change their properties? Can you make a solid become a liquid?

activity [b] **1./discuss/** How can the life cycle of materials can act as metaphor for life and lived experience? **2./do/** Use the material samples to make up metaphors about life or people (for example, 'Life is as fragile as ...').

activity [c] **1./do/** Find a link with works in the display that reflect processes of change similar to those of the chosen material. **2./discuss/** What do you think change means for the artist? Does the life cycle of the material chosen by the artist reflect a view on life? What things in life are always changing? Does anything last forever?

classroom activity

GROUPS & CONFIGURATIONS

This activity can be carried out before or after your visit.

activity [a] **1./do/** Arrange a selection of objects according to different rules (use a collection of real objects or images). You can encourage small groups within the class to arrange the objects then invite the rest of the class to guess the rule that has been used.

activity [b] **1./do/** Experiment with different types of arrangements or configurations for the materials. For example, *linear* (hard to soft, old to new), *radial* (relationships to a central object), and *venn-diagramatic* (subgroups). **2./discuss/** Note how the different types of arrangement can change the way you think about your objects and the materials they are made from.

classroom activity

MATERIAL SELF•PORTRAITS

This activity can be carried out before or after your visit.

activity [a] **1./do/** Use materials to tell stories about yourself. Bring in an object or material that says something about your interests, your personality or your past. **2./discuss/** Compare your object or material with your classmates. What is your object made from? Does this say anything about you? If you could make it from another material that said something more about your personality, what would it be and why?

activity [b] **1./do/** Invent an alter-ego and find materials that would tell his or her story. Make a material talisman for your alter-ego. **2./discuss/** Present your alter-ego to the rest of the class and answer any questions they may have about him or her.

classroom activity

MATERIAL PROVERBS

This activity can be carried out before or after your visit.

activity [a] **1./do/** Make up proverbs combining parts of the body and different materials (hands and feet work particularly well). Think about the meaning of such phrases as 'feet of clay' or 'heart of gold'. **2./discuss/** Share the different proverbs you made. How does proverbs become part of everyday language? Can you imagine that your proverb will be widely used in the future? How would you make sure that it did? Would making an artwork about it be the most effective way?

activity [b] **1./do/** Make a photographic collage (image and text) or a cast of your proverbs. **2./discuss/** Show your proverbs to the rest of the class. Can they guess what it is simply by looking at your artwork? Can proverbs help us to interpret and talk about art?

classroom activity

[DIGITAL] MATERIAL STORIES

activity [a] **1./do/** Use an image editing software to type simple descriptive words (smooth, wobbly, spiky). Try to make them visually express their meaning by experimenting with fonts, sizes, colours and manipulating filters. [If you do not have access to digital equipment you can draw your words instead].

activity [b] **1./do/** Choose two or three different materials. Discuss what you associate with these materials and how they can be combined and manipulated in different ways to tell a story. Use digital cameras and 'frame by frame' animation software to make a stop-frame animation that demonstrates the materials' properties. [If you do not have access to digital equipment you can make your animation as a photographic or drawn flip-book].

For some examples of the possible outcome of activities a and b, look at the websites for Magnificent Materials and Magnificent Stories at:
www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/magnificentmaterials/
www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/materialstories/

classroom activity

MATERIAL DICTIONARY

This activity can be carried out before or after your visit as well as in the Gallery.

activity [a] **1./do/** Using the template provided below as a guide, make your own dictionary of materials. Take a material sample and consider three things; What are its properties? What does it remind you of? What would you use it for? You can mimic the style of a scientific dictionary but perhaps invent words, terms and proverbs about your materials. **2./discuss/** Would you arrange your dictionary alphabetically or in smaller groups according to material properties, associations or use? You can experiment with different types of arrangements and discuss their strengths and weaknesses.

dictionary templates

sample, photograph or drawing of material

Felt (felt), a fabric of matted and compressed animal fibres, such as wool or fur, sometimes mixed with vegetable or synthetic fibres. **1./properties/** tickley, warm, soft, flexible, durable, water repellent, **2./processes/** cut, stitch, roll, wrap, fold, **3./associations/** sheep, hat, warmth, safety, **4./artists/** Joseph Beuys (Felt Suit, 1970); Laura Ford (Moose, 1998); Robert Morris (Untitled (Pink Felt), 1970); Yahya Alshiekh (Lovers, 2002); **5./fact/** the invention of felt is thought to have happened in the 12th Century when St. Clement filled his shoes with animal fur to soften his step.

sample, photograph or drawing of material

/name + description/

1./properties/

2./processes/

3./associations/

4./artists/

5./fact/