

Visual literacy in RE teaching and learning

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Case study 4

The Baptised of Christ: RESEARCH: Physical object

Visual elements:

Additional key questions are available on page 9 of the book.

Colour

Key questions: What colours has the artist used? How has the artist used colour symbolically? Which colour has the artist used most? Why do you think this is?

Sample response: The artist has deliberately chosen not to use colour, but instead to present a striking black and white image using bold shapes.



Lines and marks

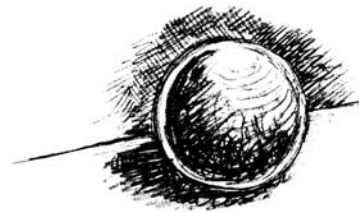
Key questions: How has the artist used lines and marks for example as outlines, or to show movement? How has the artist used lines and marks to create patterns, decoration, and symmetry? How has the artist used line or marks to create texture: rough, smooth, or feathery?

What lines and marks has the artist used to create mood (dark, angular, thick, light, thin, or soft?)

What moods are expressed?

Sample responses: The way the artist has used line and marks is very striking. He seems more interested in the expressive power of marks and lines than making things representational. For example the way the bird's wings combine with the arms of the figure at the top of the

painting is intriguing and makes one ask why?

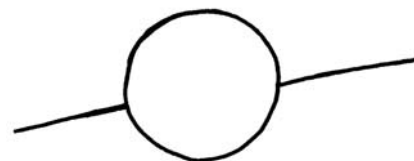


Tone

Key questions: How has the artist used tone from black through grey to white? How has the artist used tone to express mood, for example by creating shadows, highlights or contrast? How has the artist used tone to depict light and shade?

Where is the light source? How does the direction and focus of the light add to our understanding? How has the artist used light symbolically to point to a spiritual message?

Sample responses: The work of art is monochromatic which means black and white. There are no gradations of tone. The composition, elements in the story and spiritual message of the artwork are embodied in the intense sequences of patterns that both mark out distinct parts and also blend together.



Shape

Key questions: What shapes has the artist used in the artwork? How are these

arranged and what feelings and thoughts do they express? How has the artist used shapes symbolically or in an abstract way? Is the artwork a particular shape? What significance does the shape have?

Sample responses: Shapes in the image are simple and quite childlike or naïve. For example, proportions of the figures are not accurate and features and details are stylised. There is a halo round Jesus' head to symbolise his divinity.

Mood (atmosphere and feelings evoked by work)

Key questions: How does this artwork make you feel? (Happy or sad, warm or cold, calm peaceful, uneasy, frightened, angry)

What sort of mood has the artist created? What elements in the work of art tell us this? How did the artist want us to feel? How do you know?

Sample responses: The mood of the artwork is uplifting and lively. This sentiment is expressed through the direction and movement of the patterns in the wings and clothes of the figures for example the angels

Composition

Key questions: What is the central focus of the work of art? Where is the focal point and why is it there? What is happening in the background, in the corners, at the edges? Do some parts of the artwork look more finished than others? Why do you think this is? Is there an illusion of space in the artwork? How are we as viewers positioned by the work? Are we forced to look at it from a particular angle? Are we made to become conscious of our own position in space? Is it clear where the artwork begins and ends? Can you see any underlying geometrical structure to the work and how does this affect the composition?

Sample responses: The composition can be divided into two halves. The bottom half contains all the human beings and angels. Jesus is in the centre with John the Baptist on the left and an angel plus the faces of people behind. The top half of the composition is filled with the dove (the Holy Spirit) and the Father's face, hands and arms, all of which become

intermingled. The amount of space given over to motifs representing the Godhead and the different scales of the figures, for example, God's large head compared to the human scale of the angel, Jesus and John the Baptist makes the distinction between the human and the divine. What is the artist saying about Jesus' divinity/humanity through this? The representation of John the Baptist echoes the description in Matthew 3:4. Jesus is presented standing in the water in such a way as to suggest to the viewer that they are in the water with Jesus. Perhaps this is a deliberate invitation to the viewer to think more deeply about the significance of 'Baptism'. This gesture would be encouraging for a Christian.

Process

Key questions: How did the artist make the artwork? Did the artist make it by hand or did someone else make it? What kinds of skills were involved? What changes might have occurred to the piece while it was being made? How visible or invisible is the process of making? If it is an installation how has it been assembled? If it is a video work, how was it filmed and how is it projected?

Sample responses: John Muafangejo has printed the image on paper using woodblock and lino-cutting techniques. He has used tools to carve out areas that would print as white and leaving raised areas that would print out black. He hand printed and published his own work.

Activities:

- **Locating the origins:** pupils find on a world map where the work of art was made (Namibia) to help them consider the wider influences on the beliefs, choice of motifs and artistic style of the artist. What can they find out about the country and how might this have influenced John Muafangejo?
- **Artist profile:** pupils make an artists' profile to present evidence from researching biographic details and influences on their work