

# Introduction to the medieval or early modern art gallery

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This is a very simple idea aiming to immerse students in medieval or early modern thinking by engaging them with the visual culture of these periods. Students visit a gallery of illustrations, set up around a room in the same style as in an art gallery and requiring them to move around, looking carefully and discussing each image.

The structure of the lesson can be adapted with regards to duration and can either be limited to one topic, such as religion, with students looking for specific points or can be more wide-ranging and open in coverage and, perhaps, making wider comparisons with the world of the twenty-first century. A lesson with more limited focus is recommended as a starter activity. Because students are often afraid of not being able to come to the correct answer, they feel uncertain. In addition, many students will not be immediately comfortable discussing visual culture. The more open tasks can be used later once the classes have developed experience and confidence in working with images.

## How to organise the gallery

The gallery requires three set-up provisions:

1. The collection of images printed in colour (preferably A3 size) plus small cards bearing the letter/number of each image which corresponds with the gallery sheet. Not placing the images in simple alphabetical order encourages students to wander around the room led by their own preference rather than following a predetermined pattern.
2. A gallery sheet/template (see example provided) with as much space as possible for students to record their thoughts for discussions.
3. YouTube has a selection of ambient sounds that can be used in the background e.g. cafe sounds. Hearing such sounds can help to allay any nervousness that students may have in discussing art and visual culture in general. Contemporary music is another possibility but this can be more distracting than an ambient soundtrack.

## Lesson structures

<b>Does the lesson have a specific focus?</b>	
<b>Yes</b>  Start the lesson with a brief teacher-led discussion of the topic (e.g. religion), identifying what students already know or think about the topic.  The students are then invited to visit the gallery to explore the images, perhaps looking for certain symbols or triggers for discussion. Explain that they do not all have to follow the same route.  The final stage consists of feedback and teacher-facilitated discussions on students' thoughts and findings, paying particular attention to whether the images have confirmed or challenged their existing expectations.	<b>No</b>  Start the lesson with a teacher-led question-and-answer session: 'What do we know about the period in general?' The aim should be to find out what students know or what myths they may be aware of, such as a belief that the earth was flat.  The students are then invited to visit the gallery to explore the images, perhaps looking for certain symbols or triggers for discussion. Explain that they do not all have to follow the same route.  The final stage consists of feedback and teacher-facilitated discussions on students' thoughts and findings, paying particular attention to whether the images have confirmed or challenged their existing expectations.

## What are the intended outcomes of the activity?

Students begin to think for themselves about the visual culture of the period they are studying and what it tells them. The teacher can draw out these ideas in plenary discussions. It is then hoped that engaging with this culture can give the students a visual bank of ideas to enrich their essay-writing. For example, engaging with the pre-Reformation church can help students understand the cultural implications of Henry VIII's changes for the ordinary people of England.