ART: PROGRESSION OF VOCABULARY

Bredbury Green Primary School | Nursery–Year 6 curriculum companion

Purpose and principles

At Bredbury Green, we recognise that a secure understanding of art vocabulary helps children to explore, create and talk about artwork with increasing confidence and precision. Vocabulary is taught explicitly and revisited regularly so that children can describe what they notice, explain the choices they make and discuss how artists use materials, techniques and visual elements to communicate ideas, feelings and meaning.

This document supports our Art curriculum and identifies the key vocabulary children should know and understand as they move through school. It includes both Tier 2 vocabulary, which supports thinking and learning across the curriculum, and Tier 3 vocabulary, which is specific to art, materials, techniques and visual language. Vocabulary is carefully sequenced so that children build on prior learning and use increasingly precise language when exploring, experimenting, creating, reflecting and evaluating.

The vocabulary reflects the content and sequencing of our school curriculum through Drawing, Painting, Sculpture, and Mixed Media and Collage. It supports children to develop control of materials and techniques, explore and refine ideas, respond to the work of artists and communicate meaning through their own work. Language linked to observation, sketchbooks, comparison, analysis and evaluation is woven through the progression so that children become increasingly independent in talking about artistic choices and effects.

In EYFS, vocabulary develops through mark-making, colour, shape, texture, modelling, construction and creative exploration. Nursery provision has a strong focus on spoken language and concept development, informed by WellComm, while Reception builds these foundations through purposeful choices, experimentation and talk about children's own and others' creations. These foundations prepare children for the language, materials and techniques they will encounter in Year 1.

Whole-school conceptual vocabulary

Concept	Early language (EYFS–Y2)	Developing language (Y3–Y6)	Retrieval thread
Line, shape, form and space	mark, line, shape, flat, solid, space	contour, form, proportion, scale, negative space, open/closed form	Move from naming visible features to controlling and manipulating them to create form, depth and meaning.

Colour, tone and light	colour, primary, secondary, light, dark, tint, shade	warm, cool, tertiary, complementary, contrast, gradient, intensity, colour theory	Build from mixing and naming colour to purposeful choices that affect mood, depth, emphasis and visual impact.
Texture, pattern and surface	smooth, rough, pattern, texture, repeat	surface, decoration, layering, hatching, stippling, glaze, assemblage	Move from noticing and creating simple texture/pattern to selecting techniques that build complex surfaces and effects.
Materials, media and technique	pencil, paint, clay, paper, charcoal, pastel, cut, join	media, mixed media, papier-mâché, modroc, slip, scoring, photomontage, technique	Repeatedly connect material choice and technique with the visual effect or purpose the artist intends.
Composition and visual effect	arrange, overlap, foreground, background, mood	composition, balance, symmetry, focal point, contrast, atmosphere, visual impact	Progress from arranging elements to making deliberate compositional choices that guide attention and communicate meaning.
Ideas, meaning and response	idea, imagine, feel, notice, choose, improve	intention, symbolism, narrative, abstraction, interpret, analyse, refine, evaluate	Develop from talking about likes/noticing to explaining, analysing and refining how artistic choices communicate ideas and meaning.

Vocabulary progression by year group and unit

The lists below are priority teaching vocabulary rather than exhaustive glossaries. Vocabulary should be introduced through looking, talking, experimenting and making, then revisited through sketchbooks, practical work and discussion so that children use it with increasing independence and precision.

Nursery | Exploring Marks, Colour and Materials

Curriculum strand: EYFS foundations for Art

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
notice, choose, make, change, same, different, more, less, feel, because	mark, line, shape, colour, paint, pencil, chalk, paper, clay, smooth, rough, pattern, print

Retrieval and progression: Use first-hand creative experiences and adult modelling to develop functional spoken language. Children name familiar materials, describe simple visual and tactile features and talk about the choices they make.

Reception | Creating, Exploring and Talking About Art

Curriculum strand: EYFS bridge into Art

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
observe, compare, select, arrange, combine, describe, explain, imagine, improve, effect	line, shape, colour, pattern, texture, tone, drawing, painting, sculpture, collage, model, brush, mix

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve Nursery language for marks, colour and materials. Children begin to select tools and materials for a purpose, experiment with simple techniques and explain what they notice or might change, preparing for Year 1.

Year 1 | Kandinsky - Drawing

Curriculum strand: Drawing

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
represent, explore, control, express, connect, experience, imagination, effect	drawing, mark, line, shape, dry media, pencil, charcoal, pastel, chalk, pressure

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve EYFS mark/line/shape language. Children move from exploratory mark-making to controlling different dry media and explaining how line, shape and colour can represent ideas and imagination.

Year 1 | Kandinsky - Painting

Curriculum strand: Painting

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
experiment, mix, represent, express, idea, feeling, effect	primary colour, secondary colour, colour mixing, brush, brush size, brush shape, mark, painting

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve familiar colour language and make colour relationships explicit. Children name primary/secondary colours, mix colours and connect brush choice and colour with the effect they create.

Year 1 | Barbara Hepworth

Curriculum strand: Sculpture

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
explore, construct, join, arrange, explain, effect	2D, 3D, shape, form, sculpture, sculptor, model, material, joining technique

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve shape/build/join language from EYFS. Children distinguish 2D and 3D, construct simple forms and explain how shapes and joins contribute to a sculpture.

Year 1 | Eric Carle

Curriculum strand: Mixed Media and Collage

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
select, arrange, overlap, combine, create, effect, engaging	collage, cut, tear, glue, layer, pattern, texture, material, illustration

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve pattern/texture/material language. Children use cutting, tearing, gluing and overlapping deliberately and begin to explain how arrangement creates pattern, texture and visual effect.

Year 2 | Klee - Drawing

Curriculum strand: Drawing

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
invent, experiment, apply, control, expressive, purpose, effect	line, texture, tone, pressure, light, dark, pencil, charcoal, pastel, drawing

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve Year 1 line and dry-media vocabulary. Children vary line and pressure more deliberately and use tone and texture to create light/dark effects and expressive drawings.

Year 2 | Klee - Painting

Curriculum strand: Painting

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
intentional, express, mood, feeling, control, imaginative, effect	secondary colour, tint, shade, colour mixing, painting, brushwork

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve primary/secondary colour mixing. Children extend this to tints and shades and use colour intentionally to communicate mood or feeling.

Year 2 | Andy Goldsworthy

Curriculum strand: Sculpture

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
select, shape, model, purpose, respond, environment, effect	natural material, sculpture, sculptor, form, texture, join, tab, clay, slip, surface

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve Year 1 form/join/texture. Children shape and model materials for a purpose, use more specific joining vocabulary and discuss how natural materials and environment affect sculpture.

Year 2 | Picasso

Curriculum strand: Mixed Media and Collage

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
select, arrange, combine, represent, express, mood, purpose	collage, mixed media, drawing, painting, layer, material, composition

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve collage techniques from Year 1. Children combine media more intentionally and begin to use composition and material choice to represent ideas and mood.

Year 3 | Monet - Drawing

Curriculum strand: Drawing

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
develop, control, suggest, represent, observe, variation, clarity	line, shape, tone, tonal variation, light, dark, drawing, sketchbook

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve KS1 line/shape/tone. Children develop greater control and use tonal variation to suggest light and dark when recording and developing ideas.

Year 3 | Monet - Painting

Curriculum strand: Painting

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
apply, capture, convey, atmosphere, confidence, represent, effect	colour mixing, brushwork, brush stroke, paint texture, light, painting

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve colour mixing and expressive colour. Children use varied brushwork and paint texture more deliberately to convey light, atmosphere and observed or imagined scenes.

Year 3 | Louise Bourgeois

Curriculum strand: Sculpture

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
plan, build, explore, express, emotion, idea, develop	sculpture, form, papier-mâché, modroc, surface, texture, pattern, model

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve form/texture/joining. Children plan before making and build more complex forms, using surface texture and pattern to communicate ideas or emotions.

Year 3 | Romare Bearden

Curriculum strand: Mixed Media and Collage

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
combine, layer, represent, interest, imagine, develop, effect	mixed media, collage, fabric, paper, paint, layer, depth, texture, composition

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve KS1 collage/mixed media. Children layer and combine media to create depth and interest, using composition to represent real or imagined scenes.

Year 4 | Van Gogh - Drawing

Curriculum strand: Drawing

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
choose, suggest, direction, purpose, expressive, refine, effect	hatching, cross-hatching, shading, tone, texture, depth, shadow, form, light source

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve tone and line control. Children select hatching, cross-hatching and shading for specific effects and connect light direction with form, depth and shadow.

Year 4 | Van Gogh - Painting

Curriculum strand: Painting

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
precision, expression, energy, create, convey, effect	warm colour, cool colour, thick paint, dry brush, layering, texture, brushwork, painting

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve tints/shades and expressive colour. Children use warm/cool colour, layering and brush techniques more precisely to create texture, energy and expression.

Year 4 | Henry Moore

Curriculum strand: Sculpture

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
effective, consider, display, engage, viewpoint, refine, purpose	scoring, slip, joining, surface decoration, form, texture, sculpture, 3D, display

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve joining and surface vocabulary. Children use clay joining techniques effectively and consider how form, texture and display affect the experience of sculpture from different viewpoints.

Year 4 | Schwitters

Curriculum strand: Mixed Media and Collage

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
experiment, combine, evoke, narrative, expressive, meaning, effect	collage, mixed media, fabric, magazine, foil, tissue, printed element, composition, texture

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve layering/composition. Children combine a wider range of drawn, painted, printed and collaged elements and explain how composition and texture can evoke mood or narrative.

Year 5 | Georgia O'Keeffe - Drawing

Curriculum strand: Drawing

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
refine, select, desired effect, expressive, gradient, contour, precision	hatching, cross-hatching, stippling, blending, shading, tone, texture, gradient, contour

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve hatching/shading and develop a wider repertoire. Children select techniques according to intended effect and use contour, gradient and texture with increasing precision.

Year 5 | Georgia O'Keeffe - Painting

Curriculum strand: Painting

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
enhance, contrast, intensity, impact, purposeful, refine, effect	tertiary colour, complementary colour, colour mixing, glaze, layering, depth, form, colour theory

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve warm/cool and layered colour. Children extend colour theory through tertiary/complementary colour and glazing, explaining how contrast and intensity enhance form and visual impact.

Year 5 | Alberto Giacometti

Curriculum strand: Sculpture

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
combine, explore, communicate, presence, deliberate, relationship, effect	sculpture, form, scale, proportion, balance, symmetry, recycled material, mixed material

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve form/texture/display. Children consider relationships between form, scale, proportion and balance and use combined materials to communicate movement and presence.

Year 5 | Hannah Höch

Curriculum strand: Mixed Media and Collage

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
deliberate, communicate, meaning, impact, interpret, select, refine	photomontage, abstraction, symbolism, found material, composition, collage, mixed media, image

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve composition and mixed media. Children choose found and created imagery deliberately and use photomontage, abstraction and symbolism to communicate meaning and impact.

Year 6 | Frida Kahlo - Drawing

Curriculum strand: Drawing

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
fluent, purposeful, realistic, depict, symbolism, emotion, refine, intention	mark-making, shading, blending, pencil grade, light source, form, shadow, portrait, texture

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve the full drawing repertoire. Children use techniques fluently and purposefully, selecting pencil grades and controlling light/shadow to create expressive portraits and symbolic meaning.

Year 6 | Frida Kahlo - Painting

Curriculum strand: Painting

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
purposeful, convey, represent, experience, emotion, symbolism, intention, refine	colour theory, composition, blending, layering, brushwork, painting, visual language

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve colour theory and painting techniques. Children combine colour, composition and brushwork with clear intention to represent personal experience, emotion and symbolism.

Year 6 | Anthony Gormley

Curriculum strand: Sculpture

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
execute, independent, purposeful, convey, narrative, experiment, refine	scale, negative space, open form, closed form, sculpture, form, space, 3D, installation

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve form, scale and display. Children manipulate positive/negative space and open/closed form independently, explaining how spatial choices communicate meaning, mood or narrative.

Year 6 | Robert Rauschenberg

Curriculum strand: Mixed Media and Collage

Tier 2: academic / transferable	Tier 3: art / unit-specific
intent, convey, refine, complex, concept, impact, purposeful, evaluate	assemblage, collage, mixed media, layering, imagery, text, composition, found material

Retrieval and progression: Retrieve photomontage, symbolism and composition. Children combine imagery, text and materials with clear intent, refining composition and evaluating how assemblage and layering communicate complex ideas.

UNCRC connections

- Article 12 – children can express their views and make choices when discussing, creating and evaluating artwork.
- Article 13 – children have the right to express ideas and feelings in different forms; art provides a powerful visual means of communication and expression.
- Article 17 – children benefit from access to a broad range of cultural material, including the work of artists from different places, times and traditions.
- Article 29 – education should develop children's talents, personality and abilities; creative exploration and artistic expression contribute directly to this.
- Article 30 – children have the right to enjoy their own culture; studying and responding respectfully to varied artistic traditions can support cultural identity and understanding.
- Article 31 – children have the right to participate in cultural and artistic life.

Suggested retrieval routines

- Revisit 3–5 previously taught words at the start of a unit and ask pupils to locate or identify them in an artwork, material or technique.
- Use “notice, name, explain” when looking at art: notice a visual feature, name it with precise vocabulary, then explain its effect or possible purpose.
- Retrieve conceptual contrasts regularly: 2D/3D; tint/shade; warm/cool; positive/negative space; open/closed form; collage/assemblage.
- Use sketchbooks to retrieve earlier techniques and vocabulary before pupils select approaches for new work.
- Compare a current artist with an artist studied previously, requiring pupils to reuse vocabulary for line, colour, texture, form, composition and meaning.
- Use sentence stems selectively: “The artist has used ___ to…”, “I selected ___ because…”, “This creates the effect of…”, “I refined ___ by…”.

What progression should look like

- EYFS: children use spoken language to name materials, colours, marks, shapes and textures and talk about simple choices in their own creations.
- KS1: children use vocabulary for visual elements and basic techniques, describe the work of artists and explain simple choices and effects in their own work.
- Lower KS2: children use increasingly precise technical and visual vocabulary to plan, experiment, compare, discuss artistic intention and make considered refinements.
- Upper KS2: children select and apply a broad artistic vocabulary independently to analyse artists’ work, justify technique and composition, interpret meaning and evaluate/refine their own work.

Implementation notes

- Teach vocabulary through looking, talking, experimenting and making; avoid reducing Art to learning definitions in isolation.
- Model accurate pronunciation and meaning, including artists’ names and technical terms, before expecting independent use.
- Use sketchbooks as a place to record observations, try techniques, revisit vocabulary and reflect on how ideas develop over time.
- Expect pupils to use the language of visual elements consistently across strands: line, shape, form, space, colour, tone, pattern and texture.
- Use morphology where helpful, for example compose/composition, symbol/symbolism, express/expression/expressive, abstract/abstraction and refine/refinement.
- Expect vocabulary to become increasingly precise: make → create/construct/execute; light/dark → tone/gradient/contrast; arrange → compose; change → refine; feeling → mood/atmosphere/meaning.