

Teachers Resource
Art & Design/ Design &
Technology/ Photography

NO NEW WORLDS

The 'New' Language of Light



Museum
Gallery
Archive

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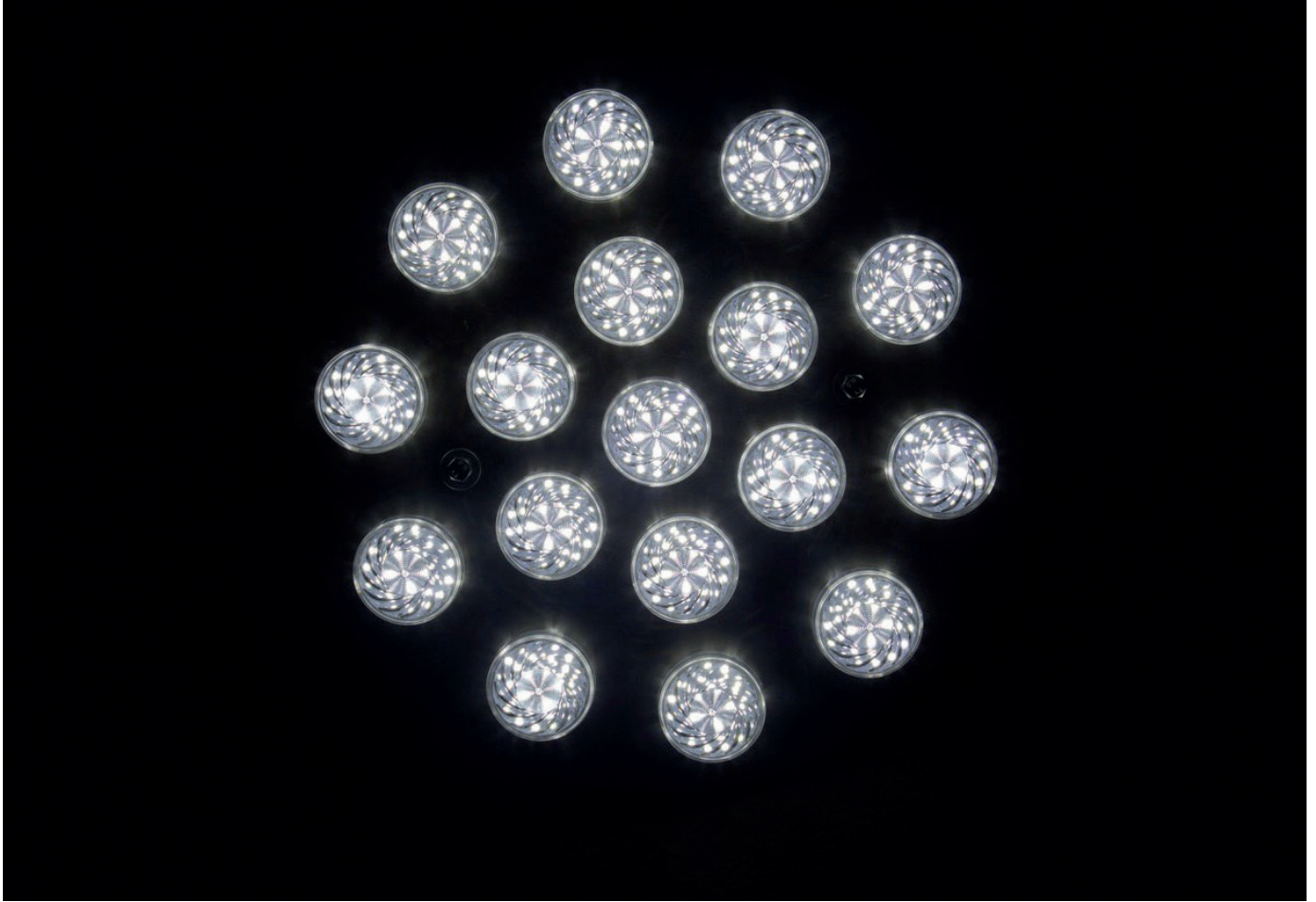
Gallery

About this resource

This lesson plan uses the example of Speedwell, a huge sculpture installed by the artists Still/Moving on the Mount Batten breakwater in 2020, to enable students to explore art, design and how they have and can be used for communication.

The Box is Plymouth's new multi-million pound museum, gallery and archive. With brand new exhibition spaces alongside state-of-the-art facilities for research and learning, it's the perfect place to teach, inspire and engage students of all ages.

This lesson plan has been develop collaboratively between Still/Moving and The Box.



Mayflower 400

Introduction

This lesson plan is best used for Key Stages 2-3, but the text is aimed at you, the teacher, to provide you with background knowledge and information so you can deliver a really successful lesson.

The lesson draws a line from the original 'Neon Art' - its uses in the world of advertising and as an art form - towards an exploration of significant artists who have worked with this form. It examines the friction between advertising and art and considers site-specificity as a key element of the form. Using the example of Speedwell, a huge sculpture installed by the artists Still/Moving on the Mount Batten breakwater for September-November 2020, it explores the technical apparatus and the boundaries of design when operating at such scale in the open.

Learning Outcomes

By delivering this lesson, your students will:

- Learn about the originators and trajectory of 'Neon Art'/'New' Art
- Discuss contemporary examples of this artform
- Examine the power and purpose of this form in relation to advertising
- Use this information to design their own forms of illuminated text art
- Explore the context of where and how this art is displayed





Activities

Background information

Neon itself is invisible – and is in every breath we take. It's one of the inert 'noble' gases that comprise a tiny fraction of the Earth's atmosphere, alongside the likes of argon, krypton and xenon. The British chemists William Ramsay and Morris Travers identified and isolated neon ('new') gas in June 1898, filling a glass tube with it and running an electrical current through it to reveal its spectrum. As Christoph Ribbat relates in **Flickering Light: A History of Neon** (2013), the men were astounded when the tube glowed with 'a blaze of crimson'. After pausing a while to admire this unexpected property of the gas, they noted its 'magnificent spectrum', and moved on.

The gas was harnessed for neon lighting more than a decade later by the Parisian chemist Georges Claude, who established which gauge of tube produced the most intense light and solved the technical problems that impeded commercial application. Claude also experimented with the colours produced by other noble gases – blue/purple from argon, for instance, and a paler blue from xenon. Claude's tube was first demonstrated to the public at Luna Park, the Paris amusement park that would become so popular with the Surrealists, in 1911.

Surrealism was possibly the defining art movement to take place between the two World Wars. It was started by Andre Breton in around 1920 and came as a direct result of the influence of Dadaism. The first commercial sign using neon lights was installed on a barber's shop on the Boulevard Montmartre in 1912, and the first rooftop advertisement – for Cinzano – appeared the following year.

Though many contemporary critics despised the new light for its vulgarity, it boomed throughout the 1920s and 1930s, its first and truest golden age.

Source: <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/neon/>
↳ Luna Park, Paris



Luna Park, Paris

Warm-up Activity 1: Text and Light

Activity 1

Split your class in to groups of four, and set a timer for 3 minutes.

Ask your students to work in their groups to think of and write down together as many examples as they can that use light and text.

(Try to get students to think of their own but if stuck you can prompt them with: brands, artists, shops, signs, buildings)

Activity 2

Show your students some images of neon writing, to add to their ideas (see p.20-21)

Activity 4

If the students chose the categories themselves, ask them to share with the other groups why they chose the categories.

Activity 3

Give your students 3 minutes again.

Can they sort the ideas that they've written down into separate categories?

You can decide these categories for them, or they can choose their own – for example Adverts, Information, Art.

Activity 5

Now, using whatever resources to hand – like your whiteboards, digital tablets, colours, paper etc. – each member of the group presents to the rest of their group an example that they think best demonstrates the impact of combining light and text. What do they like about it? Why does it have impact?

Activity 6

1, 2, 3 Show Me -

now share all the outcomes with each other.

Extension Questions

Are there any repeated examples?

Why are these examples given by the groups so powerful?

Why have they remained in their imaginations?

Warm-up Activity 2:

Kim's Game



This is the classic 'covered-tray' game reimagined to encourage your students to reflect on the different impact of combined text and light.

In the game, objects are removed one by one, and students have to guess which one is missing. In this version, images of illuminated brands, artists, shops, signs, buildings are placed into a grid which the students can look at for a while, then one is removed, and the challenge is to remember which one.

This could be extended so that the students draw on a piece of paper or whiteboard, which one they think is missing. We are including this game to emphasise how prevalent this form of text is in the built environment, and how we visually distinguish between advertising, signage and art.



How to...

Activity 2

Place all the images on a tray and place a cover over them, like a piece of material.

Activity 1

Cut up images of uses of neon light. You can use the images on page 20-21, which includes examples by contemporary artists working in this medium. or find some of your own examples online.

Activity 3

Students play in pairs or groups, showing one player all of the images, before removing them one-by-one.

Activity 4

Can the player guess which ones have been removed?

Extension Questions

Why are these examples given by the groups so powerful?

Why have they remained in their imaginations?

Focused activity:

Exploring Speedwell

Speedwell uses the poetry of light to oppose the historic idea that there ever was a ‘New World’. It urgently asks us to imagine new ways of living, caring and dying well together on this damaged planet.

The ‘New World’ is a colonial term used throughout the 17th Century, which showed a particular, Eurocentric view of the world, which isn’t what we think of today. Decolonialising narratives is really important in museums, as we move forward into wiser understandings of the world and its peoples. In 1620 the Speedwell, sister ship of the Mayflower, was deemed unseaworthy and did not make the journey across the Atlantic to America, but instead returned to Plymouth. In seeking a ‘New World’ the Mayflower settlers left these shores 400 years ago and landed in an Old World where indigenous people already lived.

Still/Moving’s sculpture Speedwell appears on the horizon as a site-specific installation on Mount Batten’s breakwater situated in Plymouth Sound, UK. Speedwell is a light that joins the constellation of other navigational beacons within the Sound that illuminates a path to safe harbour.

It uses modular, recyclable technology that has the capacity to be re-written in the future. Through its rhythmic, randomly generated sequence of iterations, individual authorship is relinquished, and the sculpture embodies an intuitive voice of its own.

Plymouth Sound is the threshold of the Atlantic Ocean, a site of military and sea defence, a canvas upon which this object can play out these multiple meanings, futures and possibilities.



Mayflower 400



Mayflower 400

Focused activity:
Exploring Speedwell

Questioning Art

Watch the film about Speedwell with your class. Discuss the following questions with your students.

To help you in your exploration of this work with your students, you could try using the 'Philosophy for Children' questioning approach, outlined in more detail on page 18-19.

Question 1

Why do you think it is so large? (63 x 6.4 metres)

Question 2

Why have the artists decided to shift between different phrases?

Question 3

If you were designing a structure for this sign - what might you use instead of scaffolding?

Question 4

What are the pros and cons of the different modular elements of this design?

Focused activity:
Exploring Speedwell

Design and Making

Still/Moving went through a lengthy research and development stage in the design process of this sculpture, often in quite a home-made way!

Message

What do you want to say to the world that is important, honest and valuable?

Still/Moving challenge you, using craft materials, science circuit resources, construction kits or CAD technology in your school to design a message that you want to share, and to create a version of it.

Think about:

- Who might be the audience for this message?
- Where should it be situated?

We would like you to create a labelled drawing/design of your sculpture first.

- How will this message be supported and made visible?
- You can choose whether you make a model (maquette) of the structure, or whether you decide to go for a full scale piece of text.

Summary Activities

If your sculpture were to contain more messages - what would it read?

How would you know if your sculpture was 'successful'?

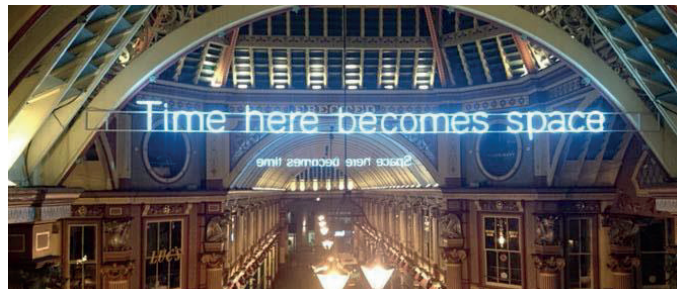
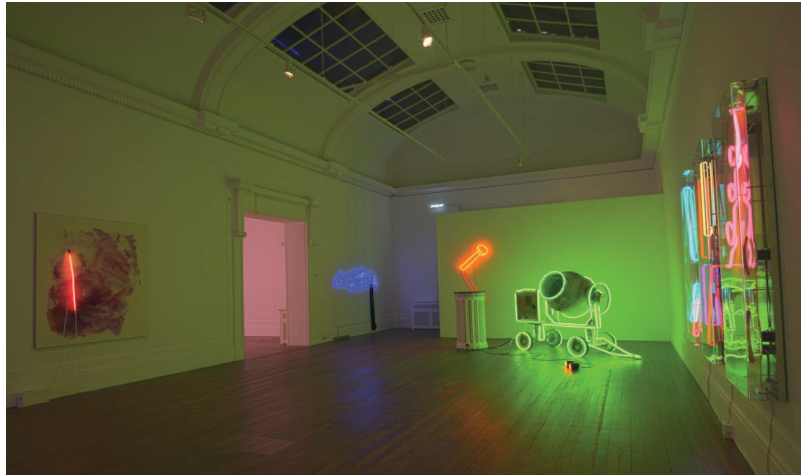
Philosophy for Children – ways in to questioning and exploring art

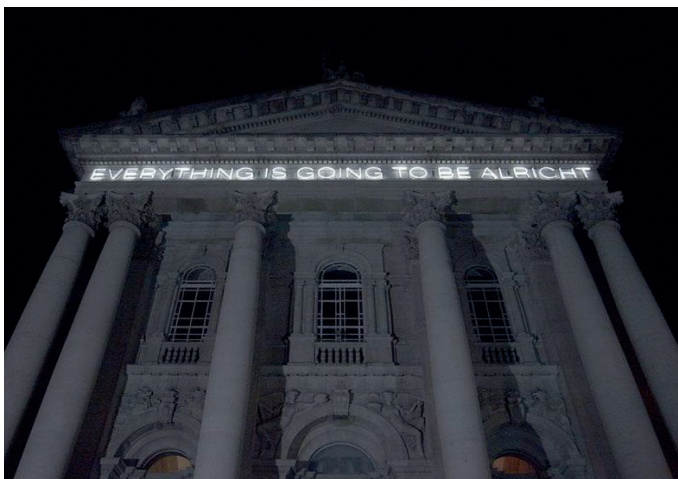
Philosophy for Children (enquiry-based learning) offers a way to open up children's learning through enquiry and the exploration of ideas. Children learn that their ideas have value, and that the ideas of other children have value too. Through Philosophy for Children they realise that they don't always have to be right, but they gain the confidence to ask questions and learn through discussion.

The opposite page offers Philosophy for Children Guidelines that might help to draw out deeper understandings during the course of the activities listed in this resource. For more information and tips, visit www.philosophy4children.co.uk

Philosophy for Children Guidelines for Facilitators

- Though they look very different, in both activities players follow the same deep structure. Think about a question that has competing reasonable answers.
- Thinking time is crucial – or the children may “sheep” each other instead of thinking for themselves.
- As the facilitator of the activity, commit publicly to an answer by moving yourself or giving your opinion. This is a very important step. It forces a choice – or perhaps a decision to be indecisive and gets everyone engaged. It enables you to bring shy children into the dialogue.
- Once a child has committed to an opinion, it’s much less abrupt to ask, “So John, why did you think it could never be right to...” rather than, “So John, what do you think?”. If someone feels they can’t decide, they can decisively indicate their indecision by standing in between two options or arrange cards on top of each other.
- Try not to offer this option to begin with, as it’s better for participants to decide for themselves that their thinking doesn’t fit a pattern that’s been offered.
- Justify your answer with your best reasons – in response to facilitator or peer questions. As a facilitator, it’s easy to see differences of opinion, so that you can ask questions that are likely to lead to dialogue and disagreement. “Green group, you’ve rated that as much more popular than the yellows did. Why was that?”
- When you can see someone has thought differently to you, it’s natural to be curious as to why. If you can see they have agreed, you want to know if their reasons are the same as yours or different. There are more potential starting points for dialogue than with a single thread of speech.
- Taking physical positions to reflect mental positions leads to a little more partisanship than just answering a question and injects energy into dialogue. 3
- Reflect on what you have heard and show if you have changed your mind. Always give people the opportunity to show they have changed their minds. This stage is often omitted or underexploited.
- You can note questions that arise out of the dialogue to use later or as examples of philosophical questions. It’s powerful for a child to see others moving across a circle, or standing by a different choice, in response to the reasons they have given. It also reinforces that it’s fine to change your mind when someone gives you a good reason to do so. Sometimes, dialogue will take off from a disagreement or question at this stage. Be opportunistic about it.
- Vote with Your Feet (example – WYF Would You Rather) Ask a question. Place the possible answers, each on a separate sheet of paper, on the floor. Go and stand by the one you think is the best answer. Thinking time is crucial to avoid children “sheeping” instead of thinking for themselves. You can use images for non-readers.





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