Every year the whole of Rhodes Avenue Primary School take part in the Take One Picture Project around this time of year. Each year a famous painting from the gallery collection is selected and primary schools across the UK are invited to explore and respond artistically. Schools can then send their artwork to the National Gallery where, if successful, it may be selected for the annual Take One Picture exhibition. Rhodes Avenue has been very lucky to exhibit at the National Gallery twice in the last three years!

If we were at school now children would be completing their undoubtedly rich and varied artistic responses to the image below. Sadly that is not the case this year… OR IS IT!? We would love to invite you and your children to explore this painting at home through the following questions and activities with a view to creating your own response(s) to this fantastic painting. Some of the classes at school started to explore the painting just before lockdown so your child may well be able to tell you a bit about it…

The Battle of San Romano by Paolo Uccello 1438 - 1440

So what's it all about?

This enormous painting is one of a series of three showing a battle that took place in Italy 600 hundred years ago. This painting originally hung with the other two in wealthy household in Florence, Italy.

Can you see the man in the centre, rearing up on a white horse and pointing his commander’s baton? Instead of a helmet, he wears an elaborate hat made from red and gold fabric. He is one of the few figures whose face you can actually see, along with his page (the boy behind him carrying his helmet). The commander leads the charge of knights on horseback, lances raised. All charge from left to right except for one lone figure on the other side of the painting, fighting three men off with a hammer.

This painting shows a battle between two cities, Florence and Sienna. 600 years ago in Italy, cities fought each other to be more powerful and own more land. On 1 June 1432 Florence’s soldiers fought against a much larger army of soldiers from Sienna. For eight long hours the soldiers clashed, Florence charging three times at Siena. The heat in the heavy suits of armour must have been stifling, and an exhausted Florence would have lost, had reinforcements not arrived late in the day and Siena ordered its forces to retreat.
The man in the red hat is a professional army commander, he has been paid by the city to fight and win this battle against Siena. If he wins the battle for Florence he will become rich and famous, a bit like a celebrity, if he doesn’t he will probably die. The red hat he is wearing is reward for winning so he wouldn’t have actually worn this in the battle. This red hat tells us that the painting was painted to celebrate the victory of Florence.

Questions for discussion...

- What do you think of the commander’s hat? Would you be happy with this a reward for winning the battle? Have you ever won a prize or a trophy?
- Aren’t we in a battle right now with Coronavirus? Who are the goodies or heroes in this battle?
- What do you think the sounds would be if you could hear this painting? What would it small like? Look into the picture to give you some clues.

Ideas for making art...including painting, drawing, 3D and animation

Below I have outlined some themes in the painting followed by some activities that you might like to have a go at. There is no need to do them all! Have a look through and see what takes your fancy over the next three weeks...you might like to try one a week from each theme over the next three weeks.

Perspective

Uccello has tried to make the painting appear three-dimensional, to give the impression that this is a landscape you could travel into. The broken lances on the floor have been carefully arranged to give a sense of linear perspective (parallel lines which converge at a point in the distance). They also create a rough grid, something which Uccello would have used to help him compose the picture, working out where each figure would go.

Have a go at using perspective in drawing, here are some great You Tubes to follow along to, I have listed them in order of challenge from simpler to trickier (the last one is just for fun and quite easy).

- This is a simple guide to basic perspective (warning this teacher is very excited about perspective!) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4ms81HYRNo
- Another great guide to using point perspective https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVKSVMsWXrl
- Draw a room in perspective (when you’re done you could collage in your own furniture from an old Ikea catalogue or magazine): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZYBWA-IfEs
- Here is a really fun (and quite easy) optical art activity. All you need is paper and a black felt tip! /optical arthttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zypOlFzdyFE

A Victorious Mural

This painting helps tells a story rather than depict reality. If this battle was really happening it would certainly not look like this! The horses would probably be wounded and covered in mud and there would probably be soldiers lying dead on the ground. This painting is a grand piece of decoration for a wealthy Florentine family who were keen to commemorate the victory of Florence against Sienna (without the gory bits!).

- Like the painting, could it be said that we are in a battle right now? Against Covid -19? If Coronavirus is the enemy who are the protagonists? The NHS? Key workers? Your family? Express your vision in any medium, drawing, painting etc. Consider making your work REALLY BIG, murals usually cover whole walls!
If you want to work 3D how about clay or plasticine to express your ideas? You may like to have a go at creating a simple stop frame animation (this one is aimed at younger kids but can be adapted to suit any level): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=511FSBZ-gbU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=511FSBZ-gbU)

Another guide to using the Stop Motion video app (this one is a bit more advanced) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_M468586Hl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_M468586Hl)

How to make a human head using clay or play dough (fun and easy!): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ww7odF50gBw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ww7odF50gBw)

The commander in the painting is presented with a wonderful hat as a reward for his success in battle. If you had been asked to design a victory hat what would it look like? Draw or make 3D using card or paper, add colour using paints, pens or collaged fabric onto your creation (if you make the human head above you could give it a fancy hat like the commander!)

The commander in the painting has been described as a celebrity. Who are your favourite celebrities? Or heroes? Print out a line drawing of them and use the grid technique to draw an image with accuracy; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAJvZm65z4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAJvZm65z4) (this video provides a great worksheet that you can have a go at to get the hang of using a grid for helping you draw).

**Symbolism**

The hedgerow in the middle of the painting is laden with oranges, roses, and a few pomegranates (on the far right). It is likely symbolic, not something the soldiers would have fought alongside: the rose was a Christian symbol for martyrdom (dying for your faith); the orange was seen as a fruit of paradise; the pomegranate often represented rebirth. All three add colour and decoration, but they may well also give deeper meaning to the battle scene.

- I have been doing lots of drawing and painting of the beautiful spring flowers in my garden which is a great way to focus and relax. Try out some of these flower painting techniques by Brenda Coyle: (they start off a bit slow but worth the wait!) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5d462O8eUn0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5d462O8eUn0) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5UCnMguu3U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5UCnMguu3U)
- How to make a continuous line drawing (you could use flowers or fruit...or whatever you like!) [https://www.accessart.org.uk/continuous-line-drawing-exercise/](https://www.accessart.org.uk/continuous-line-drawing-exercise/)
- Have a go at drawing your own self portrait (you can use this guide to drawing the face to help you) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flxVyt41p2I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flxVyt41p2I) Draw things in the background the you feel symbolise who you are or how you feel. For example a rainbow to symbolise hope or a bird to represent freedom.
- Tattoo a banana! This is just really fun and a bit scientific! [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-KtDoZYkhA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-KtDoZYkhA)

I hope you enjoy working with these ideas! I really look forward to seeing what you’ve made so please email me your art at rsawyer@rhodes.haringey.sch.uk as well as uploading it on to your seesaw account. I miss you all very much and hope that you and your families are well.

Take care and Best wishes,

Mrs. Sawyer 😊

Ps. Please email any art you have made or if you have any art related questions, I'd love to hear from you!