



Christ Church Soars

Using art historical studies across all years, Allison Murdoch, art co-ordinator at Christ Church Junior School in Ramsgate, promotes critical thinking and visual skills in her students. Here she explains their methodology

Recognising the importance of developing visual literacy, Christ Church Junior School in Ramsgate is introducing art history into the curriculum. Using works of art to link to topic has been successful in promoting dialogue in the classroom, as well as intense debate over whether or not a work of art should be studied for its intended significance. The initiative has developed our students' confidence in their use and application of both visual and verbal language.

In one exemplary lesson, students looked at images of the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*

c. 200–190BC, the large sculpture that graces the Daru staircase in Musée du Louvre in Paris (fig. 1). Students discussed what the sculpture represented using the method of inquiry pioneered at the Museum of Modern Art in New York called Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). This is where teachers act as facilitators of the information, and students uncover by looking and talking collectively.

Across the age groups, student discussions began by referring to the sculpture as an angel, eventually using more correct terminology (e.g. 'goddess') and art specific vocabulary (e.g. form, content and technique). Hypotheses about where she came from followed and students speculated about where she was discovered using knowledge from their topic lessons. In the art history lesson itself, teachers reiterated only statements and questions put by students themselves. For some year groups, this meant referencing lessons from previous years, which challenged students to explore and re-experience the power of visual images, and thus to encourage their faculty of memory and recall. Students were then provided with the



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title and date of the work and asked to consider why a sports brand would have taken the name of Nike, the Greek goddess of Samothrace, to advertise its products (pic. 2). Students shared their collective knowledge about Greek history and myths and pieced together an understanding of the Nike of Samothrace's nickname – 'Winged Victory' – with its unexpected connections to the contemporary consumer market.

Having focused on the image of 'Winged Victory', students began planning and

preparing their own collaborative work of art, drawing 'zentangle' designs and patterns on sheets of cartridge paper which they had painted carefully in gradients of colour (pic. 3). Students reviewed their preliminary designs in order to select their most successful designs. Following the template of a wing feather, students then cut their own individual feather. Collectively, their 'feathers' were then mounted on the school's 'Living Wall', a dedicated school community art space for the display of

children's artworks to share (pic. 4). Links to current events were evident – the Duchess of Cornwall was photographed standing between Liverpool's Liver bird wings the same week that the children were preparing their own wings.

In challenging the crude popular stereotype that some maintained schools do not inculcate the critical thinking and visual skills that arise from art historical studies, Ramsgate's Christ Church junior students are very much being exposed to this subject area. They gain major advantages in cultural and cognitive development. They have enjoyed lively discussions about the broad field of visual imagery and the role of museums in displaying art and artefacts of particular eloquence as well as the impact of history of art on contemporary culture. We see our students engaged, taking their knowledge beyond the classroom, taking flight and involving parents and siblings, and truly understanding how art history both describes our society and also how it shapes it. We are very proud of our own 'Winged Victory'. ■

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1 Students looking and responding to images of the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*

2 Nike trainers
3 Wing feathers
4 Feathers mounted on the Living Wall

