

# **Art for Students who are blind or have low vision?!**

## **A brief handout for teachers to get you started.**

*All students use Art as a means of exploring themselves and their relationship to the world using all their available senses. The "visual" arts can be made accessible and meaningful for students who are blind or have low vision with appropriate preparation and creative problem solving. You are invited to make use of the following tips as a starting point and to get you thinking. More information and images are available via the booklet: "Meaningful Art for All Children A list of art suggestions for working with students who are blind or have low vision".*

*A variety of web sites also exist and may be of assistance:*

[www.artbeyondsight.org](http://www.artbeyondsight.org)

[www.tsbvi.edu](http://www.tsbvi.edu) (Texas School for the Blind & Visually Impaired)

[www.tate.org.uk/imap](http://www.tate.org.uk/imap) (online art resource de-signed for visually impaired people).

### **The Art Room**

*An Art-making space can be an exciting and stimulating one, appealing to all the senses. However the space does need to be organised to allow for easy access, orientation and mobility. Allow time to adequately prepare and organise materials and equipment for students who are blind or have low vision, and then provide sufficient time for them to explore, select and experiment. What every sighted student takes in at a glance and make a decision about may take a student who is blind or has low vision half a session to cover. Organise smocks, wet area, bench and equipment areas in ways that make for logical sequencing and efficient movement. Work space on a bench also needs to be arranged for easy scanning and manoeuvrability.*

*Where possible, store materials in containers with an example of the contents on the exterior so they can be easily touched and identified. Arrange materials for a specific session in open containers so they can be easily perused and considered. Where and when possible, involve the student in demonstrations of techniques to the rest of the class or have them close enough so that they can see / feel what is happening.*

*Have damp sponges available for cleaning hands as students who are blind use their finger tips to access the world.*

### **Art Appreciation**

*Many opportunities exist for excursions in galleries and museums if you keep a look-out, but there is also a need for continual lobbying of institutions to make their exhibits more accessible to people who are blind or have low vision. Be aware of outdoor sculpture shows, festivals and competitions that are touch accessible.*

### **Carving**

*Have finished examples to show students before they begin their own work. Clamp well and use bench hooks or bench vice. Keep hands behind cutting point of tool.*

### **Ceramics**

*Grogged terracotta will cope with all sorts of rule-breaking if dried and fired slowly.*

*Have examples of different pottery states – green ware, bisque ware and glazed ware.*

*The pottery wheel is a possibility, but one-to-one instruction is needed initially. There are some potters who are blind or have low vision.*

### **Collages**

*Clear contact plastic is useful for composing and holding collages.*

*Support for collages should be well fixed and not sliding around (use non-slip mats, clips or clamps). Use a framed support for items to be placed against. Small glue bottles with*

nozzles are useful. Fix an open dish of PVA to a table in an accessible spot. Items to be glued can be dipped into the dish. Sponges should be available for wiping sticky fingers.

### **Constructions**

Use easy to deal with joining materials for assembling: edible foam, straws and skewers. Joining materials can be as simple as blu-tak, plasticine, tape, small polystyrene blocks. . . Use good tape in the dispenser and place on non-slip mat. Some methods of construction may need assistance, but only in terms of an extra pair of hands to hold things in place (not doing the work), as scanning fingers check possibilities. Wind wire around itself to create forms and figures.

### **Drawing**

Draw with wire (like artist Alexander Calder). Use raised-line drawing kits, crayons and wire boards (use thin litho paper, shiny side up for good contrast). Slant boards are useful to get close to the work for low vision. Wikki-stix (tacky waxy lengths of string) can be useful (available at VA Equipment Solutions Stores). For children with low vision use markers, thick textas, charcoal, bright colours, high contrasts, oil pastels and brush and ink. Use scented markers for immediate fun feed-back.

### **Painting**

Use a variety of finger painting processes with various forms of action painting, such as dripping, rolling, stamping, squirting, spraying and brushing. As well as these techniques, you can mask areas with tape. Use "kinder" paint pots with brush-hole cap and one brush per colour. Inform student of the order colours are arranged in and keep to this arrangement if possible. For children with low vision, work with large, bold, bright and contrasting colours. Use textured surfaces and strong contrast to paint within outlines.

### **Plaster**

Plastering is a great process because it involves mixing, pouring and spreading. Cast with clay, sand, polystyrene and moulded plastic packaging. These materials can also be carved into. Add materials such as sawdust or vermiculite to soften the mix. The plaster bandage "Modrock" is great for wrapping objects. Use it with cling-wrap if you want to remove what's underneath or wrap it around food such as fruit, and allow the food to dry and rattle around inside over time. Use plaster bandage to create new forms by merging and modifying existing ones.

### **Textiles**

Make tactile objects eg. pompoms, rag rugs, pegging, button and bead pictures, and stuffed toys. Threading devices can be purchased to ease the pain of threading needles. When weaving, use anything that can be threaded such as hessian, netting, wire mesh and cardboard slats. If embroidery needles are difficult, tape around the end of the twine / ribbons, forming an aglet, to make threading easier.

### **Wood**

Lots of effective clamping is needed. Use vices, clamps, quick grips, bench hooks and tape. Use good mitre boxes and sharpened saws for cross-cuts. Use clamped straight edges for rip-sawing. Use sanding blocks and different grades of paper for finishing surfaces and a sanding panel on the bench can be used to make handling easier.

For further advice and support contact: Michael Donnelly  
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