HOW DOES ART TELL STORIES?

Art brings stories to life in all sorts of ways – it can capture the essence of a story in a single dramatic scene or show one unfold over several key moments.

The *Bayeux Tapestry* is an embroidered strip of fabric that narrates the events leading to the invasion of England by William the Conqueror in 1066. When it was made, tapestry wall hangings often decorated castles. But the *Bayeux Tapestry* was no ordinary wall hanging. At about 70m (230ft) long and 50cm (20in) high, it's the longest piece of embroidery in the world.

The action is told in around 60 scenes. Each has a short Latin caption to explain what's going on. The story reads from left to right, rather like a modern-day comic strip.







Detail from the **BAYEUX TAPESTRY**
Unknown British artists, before 1082



Only key figures and events are shown, and there's almost no background. This keeps the focus on the important parts of the story.

The painting below is a scene from a Bible story about a king. Rather than paint the whole story, the artist shows just one tense moment. The king and his guests look on in shock, as a hand appears from nowhere and writes a warning in Hebrew on the wall. It's all seen so close up, it's almost as if you are with the guests at the table.



BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST
Rembrandt van Rijn, about 1636–38





SHOULD ART BE BEAUTIFUL?

People argue a lot about art and beauty, especially when it comes to images of people. Some think art should be beautiful and pleasing to look at. Others think it's more important to show the truth, however ugly. And different people have different ideas about what 'beautiful' means.



In contrast to the ancient Greeks, people in India and Tibet admired softer, less muscular bodies – as you can see from the painting on the left.

Each statue is seven heads tall, which was considered the perfect height.



AVALOKITESHVARA OR PADMAPANI
Unknown Tibetan artist, probably 18th–19th century

This is an idealized Tibetan portrait of a holy man.

Notice how his graceful pose is echoed by the curves of the plants.



Turn to page 63 to see a self portrait by an artist who specialized in flattering portraits.

When making portraits, artists often flatter sitters. But some sitters prefer a more honest approach, as a way of showing their lack of vanity.

English ruler Oliver Cromwell thought vanity was a sin. So he insisted his portrait showed him exactly as he was. You can see him here on the right – thinning hair, wrinkles, warts and all.



OLIVER CROMWELL (detail)
Peter Lely, around 1653

AN UNEXPECTED VIEW

Dominated by a single wave and coloured with a new chemical blue, this print by Katsushika Hokusai was unlike any other when it was first made. Today, this unusual picture is one of the most famous prints in the world.

Hokusai's picture was made using a Japanese WOODBLOCK technique that dates back almost 2,000 years. Most Japanese prints showed samurai warriors, fashionable ladies and famous beauty spots. So this striking seascape showing ordinary sailors would have seemed remarkably new.

Notice the snow-covered peak on the horizon. It's Mount Fuji, the tallest mountain in Japan – but even it is dwarfed by the giant wave.



UNDER THE WAVE OFF KANAGAWA
also known as
THE GREAT WAVE
Katsushika Hokusai, around 1831

The blues come from a chemical pigment called 'Prussian blue'.

The crews of three rowing boats struggle to stay afloat as huge waves crash down around them.

The foam on the waves looks like grasping claws, adding to the drama of the scene.



First, Hokusai drew a design on paper. The design was copied and pasted onto blocks of wood – one for each colour.



The surface of each woodblock was carved with a chisel and hammer.





Paper was pressed onto the block so the ink transferred to the paper.

Baren (pressing tool)



The paper was then peeled off and left to dry, before the next colour was printed.

Woodblocks can make about 8,000 prints before they wear out.