

Making Time for Sketchbooks in Schools

How can we embed the use of sketchbooks in our school day and help learners get into the sketchbook habit?



When thinking about how to slot sketchbook use into the school day, especially in primary schools, the key is to think little and often.

Regular opportunities for practice, combined with open access to sketchbooks will help create momentum and energy, which in turn will help creativity flourish in all areas (beyond the sketchbook too). The opposite scenario to this is one where the sketchbooks are kept in a box, pulled out once every couple of weeks, and the same sketchbook is used for many terms (which we want to avoid).

"I think getting into the "habit" is really important (for children and adults). regular use is key, even if it is just five/ten minutes, but if it is five ten minutes every morning, then switching into sketchbook mode gets easier and easier. We provide children with short quick activities to get them to tune in." Clare

Whilst sketchbooks can of course be used in art lessons to help facilitate a creative learning journey, there is also a value in being open, and embedding sketchbooks throughout the school day, so that their benefits can ripple out into other subject areas. Creativity is a skill which underpins (or at least should underpin) all learning.

If you are uncertain as to whether there is an opportunity to use sketchbooks within certain lessons, ask these questions:

Would the pupils benefit from thinking around

the subject area? Would their learning be deeper, more active, and more relevant if they were given space to experience the subject area from a number of perspectives?

If the answer is yes, then sketchbooks can help.

Lots of different activities take place in sketchbooks, and each type of activity can help develop a different behaviour. In the same way, sketchbooks can be used at many different points of the day, and each time of the day offers an opportunity to develop different skills:

Using sketchbooks at the start of the day can help children transition, and provide an opportunity to focus and open their mind to think creatively.

Using sketchbooks at the end of the day can help provide an opportunity for reflection and absorption of ideas.

Giving learners access to sketchbooks in their free time (lunchtime, at home) can help build a sense of ownership of their own learning.

Simple ways to help embed sketchbook use in the school day

1) Encourage regular practice. Use sketchbooks for a regular 5-10 minute exercise. Commit to fill x pages a week to start to understand how momentum is built. Intersperse a given

exercise, for example a continuous line drawing, with activities which enable the individual learner to take the sketchbook work in their own direction, for example by answering an open-ended question such as "*how many worms are there in the world.*"

2) Identify moments of time which can be filled. Find a slot in your day that is otherwise occupied. Carry the sketchbook at those times, and begin to create a connection between that time and your sketchbook.

3) Impose variety. Challenge learners to fill pages in different ways. Let one action lead to another. For example, if you normally start by making a drawing, consciously start to include words on that or the next page. Purposefully use colour and different media. Even if it feels forced in the first instance, expanding the kinds of marks, notes or actions you make WILL help expand your thoughts and get you into the habit of sketchbook-like thinking.

"At our school the children start each day by working for 10 mins in their 'thinking books'. Staff pose a question via the whiteboard to encourage thinking skills and children respond via drawing. We plan to develop this into richer sketchbook use over the next term."

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