

Sketchbooks for Designers – An Introduction for Children

Sketchbooks can be a vital tool in any design process - whatever pupils are designing. Sketchbooks encourage children to externalise their thoughts, which results in more ambitious and creative thinking.



This resource introduces the concept of using sketchbooks for design to children. It includes a transcript of a thought process for teachers to share with their learners.

A Word about Sketchbooks for Design or Thinking

Many schools run into problems when encouraging children to "design".

Whilst the notion of "designing" offers pupils the opportunity to think around a subject area, and ideally come up with an original outcome, the actual act of designing on paper often fails to empower the children with an understanding of the actual properties of the materials and processes which may be involved in realizing their design, which turns the actual design process the pupils undertook into a "dream-led" rather than design-led process.

Even if there is no intention of actual building or realizing the design, the whole process can be made more empowering and enlightening for the pupil by a simple acknowledgement that different media require different considerations and will equal different outcomes. In practice this means that designing on paper with felt tip pen will lead to certain outcomes, building with straws in 3d will lead to other outcomes. Only once someone has an understanding of what a certain material can do or withstand, can a design on paper take into account these properties.

The sketchbook is the perfect place for this acknowledgement that different media facilitate different explorations/expressions. Through working in a sketchbook, pupils can explore all

aspects of the design process, and these "parts" then become part of the design. The final version (if it is to be realised) is then informed by, rather than challenged by, the paper design.

Transcript of an AccessArt workshop to introduce children to using sketchbooks to help inform design work.

"Whenever you are asked to design something, or to think about a particular subject, you might want to reach for your sketchbook.

Write it down!

The first thing to do, when you are given your task, is to write it down in your sketchbook. Why? Because right from the start, we need to get into the habit of recording your thoughts on paper. Why? Because you'll find that the more you get your thoughts out of your head, and make them real so others can see them, the more you'll think about your task, and the more ideas you'll have. The sketchbook will keep all your ideas in one place, and give you a space which you can use to share or show your ideas, and a place which you can keep going back to to remind yourself what you were thinking, and where your ideas came from.

So, when you are given a task, grab your sketchbook and write the task down in the middle of a clean page. If you want to, instead or as well of writing your task, you could draw

a quick picture to remind you of what it is.

Think Around...

Next start jotting down all the different things you might want to think about. Write them down, around your task, or draw doodles to remind you if you prefer. You might need to think about things like: colour, shape, size, scale, texture, form, material, process, the way something looks, the way something acts, how things make you feel, things you like or dislike, things you have seen or experienced, even how you are feeling...

Then, look again at your page, and see which of the areas you'd like to think about more... It might be a day when you want to think about colour – so spend your time thinking about colour, or it might be a day when you want to think about things you'd like and how you want to bring them to your design – so do that – make the choice yours.

So say you think about colour – start working with different colours in different ways – you might paint, or collage, or collect, or stick, or photocopy, or search... Find them, choose them, get them in your sketchbook. Make one page or make ten pages – it's up to you. Keep looking at what you are doing, and so that you can respond to it on the next page. And don't forget that even if you are working with

colour, you can still write notes about your thoughts, or draw, on those pages too.

Follow your Thoughts!

If a thought occurs to you, then it's really fine to go off and follow that thought and see where it takes you. Say you are using lots of red, and you are enjoying red, but want more pattern, then go off and explore pattern. And get that in your sketchbook too.

Or say you want to explore materials, go off and look for the materials you might use – look on the internet, look in a making cupboard or art store, look on a nature table, look on your way to lunch – just look around – and get your ideas into your sketchbook.

So keep going back to that first page, where you write all the different ways in which you would like to explore or think about your task. Keep picking the areas that appeal, and fill up your sketchbook!

Remember the great thing about a sketchbook is that you can just put your ideas into it everyday, without always knowing where your ideas are going.... When you are ready you can talk to your teacher or your classmates to help you understand your sketchbook journey.

This is a sample of a resource created by UK Charity AccessArt. We have over 1500 resources to help develop and inspire your creative thinking, practice and teaching.

AccessArt welcomes artists, educators, teachers and parents both in the UK and overseas.

We believe everyone has the right to be creative and by working together and sharing ideas we can enable everyone to reach their creative potential.