

NELSON'S SHIP IN A BOTTLE

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A **Key Stage 3-5** teachers' resource for **Art and Design** at the **National Maritime Museum**



Teachers can use this resource to prepare for a self-guided class visit to Nelson's Ship in a Bottle to investigate the artwork and develop students' analytical understanding through questioning, research and re-interpretation activities.

Please feel free to change, adapt or use the text, images and activities to suit your needs.

Background information

Originally this public artwork was commissioned by the Mayor of London for the Fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square. The square commemorates the Battle of Trafalgar. It was the first commission by a black artist.

Yinka Shonibare MBE was born in London and moved to Lagos in Nigeria at the age of three. He returned to London to study Fine Art at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, and later at Goldsmiths College, where he graduated alongside the generation of other 'Young British Artists'.

In 2004 Shonibare was nominated for the Turner Prize and awarded an MBE. Internationally respected, the artist has exhibited at the Venice Biennial, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, Brooklyn Museum in New York and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.


Shonibare is known for his exploration of colonialism and post-colonialism, and his work explores these issues, alongside those of race and class, through the media of painting, sculpture, photography, film and performance.

Nelson's Ship in a Bottle is a scaled-down replica of Nelson's flagship HMS Victory, on which the Admiral died during the Battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805. It has 80 cannon and 37 sails set, as on the day of battle. The richly patterned sails were inspired by Indonesian batik, mass-produced by Dutch traders and sold in West Africa.

Nelson's Ship in a Bottle considers the complexity of British expansion in trade and empire made possible through Nelson's victories at sea.

'For me its a celebration of London's immense ethnic wealth, giving expression to and honouring the many cultures and ethnicities that are still breathing precious wind into the sails of the United Kingdom. A ship in a bottle is an object of wonder. Adults and children are intrigued by its mystery. How can such towering masts and billowing sails fit inside such a commonplace object? With Nelson's Ship in a Bottle I want to take this childhood sense of wonder and amplify it to match the monumental scale of Trafalgar Square.' Yinka Shonibare, 2010


Practical and critical exploration

 Drawing from different perspectives- change position in relation to the bottle and sketch the varying views of the artwork.

 Why has the artist put it on a plinth?

 What role does public art have in society?

The table below is full of words that have been used in relation to this artwork.

 Discuss with peers how the words relate to Nelson's ship in a bottle and it's cultural context.

Relic	An object surviving from an earlier time, especially one of historical interest
Container	An object for holding something
Artwork	Paintings, drawings, or other artistic works made by an artist
Hybrid	Composed of different elements
Celebrity	A famous person
Memory	Something remembered from the past
Memorial	A statue or structure established to remind people of a person or event
Monument	A statue, building, or other structure erected to commemorate a notable person or event
Power	The capacity or ability to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events
Icon	A person or thing regarded as a representative symbol or as worthy of great respect
Souvenir	A thing that is kept as a reminder of a person, place, or event
Authentic	Based on facts; accurate or reliable
Past/Present	Gone by in time and no longer existing/ Existing or occurring now
Commentary	An expression of opinions or offering of explanations about an event or situation
History	The study of past events, particularly in human affairs
Gender	How a person identifies with male and female identities
Familiar/ Unfamiliar	Often encountered or experienced/ not know or recognised
Appropriated/ Borrowed	Take (something) for one's own use, typically without the owner's permission/ Take (a word or idea) from another person, or source and use it in one's own work
Class	A system of ordering society whereby people are divided into sets based on perceived social or economic status
Humour	Being amusing or comical
Identity	The characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is

Sculpture	The art of carving, modelling, welding, or otherwise producing works of art in three dimensions
Artefact	An object made by a human being, typically one of cultural or historical interest
Handmade	Made by hand, not machine
Craftsmanship	Skill in a particular craft
Symbol	A material object representing something
Public art	Art in any media that has been planned and executed with the intention of being staged in the physical public domain, usually outside and accessible to all

Re-interpretation task

Select one or more words from the table above to investigate further. Then, design a public artwork using those words as a starting point.

Further research

- www.rmg.co.uk/discover/explore/artist-profile-yinka-shonibare
- www.yinkashonibarembembe.com

Please let the Bookings team know when you would like to visit:

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Nelson's ship in a bottle, Yinka Shonibare, 2010, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and James Cohan Gallery, New York, REG10/000343