



# painting for peace

exploring peace through art  
a guide to creating a peace mural

**'There's loads of fighting in the world, more than I expected'. Anna, aged 9.**

**'I think there should be more peace in the world because lots of people are killing each other.' Arnold, aged 9.**

**'I learnt that life is not all for fighting. We talked about what the war fighters could do instead of fighting'. Aziza, aged 9.**

**'The peace mural project was a wonderful opportunity for the pupils participating to express their feelings about war and conflict and their hopes for world peace'.**

*Siobhan Kevins, Teacher, Brecknock Primary.*

## Why paint for peace?

Art is an ideal way to learn about issues of conflict and peace. It has the power to give shape and colour to feelings and hopes, the ability to communicate across barriers and to help understand one's own and other people's culture. Art, in all its forms, offers the opportunity for expression and communication and is particularly helpful to those who find it hard to express their thoughts and feelings verbally.

Through art we can become better informed and develop the knowledge, skills and attitude necessary to make a difference in the world. Art helps us engage our imagination and envisage a more peaceful world in which all people can prosper and live together in harmony. It can help us to highlight problems and solutions and to form a guide to action for a better world.

With some thought and preparation art projects can help young people explore topics which are often overlooked in the school curriculum and can help foster a culture of peace and non-violence. Art projects can be used to explore a wide range of peace issues: from nuclear weapons and global warming to racism and bullying. Some suggestions for your own peace-art project are provided in this booklet.

The process of educating for peace, in art or any other subject, is as important as the content of the learning. This approach requires emphasis on how young people learn as much as what they learn. By bringing children and others together in an atmosphere of co-operation rather than competition, and by ensuring their ideas are valued and contribute to the design, all participants feel empowered and respected. This is reinforced by being involved in the production of the final piece, where participants can develop new skills and the confidence to put their ideas into practice.

Once completed the artwork remains as inspiration for others. It can be used to start discussions and debates or as a reminder to do (or not do) something. It can express celebration, sorrow, change, excitement, solidarity, defiance, openness, reconciliation and much more.

We hope that the PPU peace mural will inspire you to produce your own peace-art (see outside cover) and hope that this booklet will be a useful guide if you decide to do so. Although this booklet chiefly concerns mural art with children you do not have to limit your plans to a mural or young people. You could produce a sculpture, mosaic, collage or 'graffiti' piece with any kind of group – young or old.

# Guide to creating a peace mural

## Starting off

Find a suitable wall, indoors or outdoors, and ensure you have permission to use it. Choose a general theme for the mural – there are some suggestions for themes on page 4.

## Inspiring ideas and developing designs

Avoid imposing a design and simply asking the children to paint in-between the lines. For the children to identify with the mural they should have as much input as possible to the design process – developing the content and the look and feel of the mural - as well as actually painting the mural. Let the children's ideas create the mural and ensure they are listened to and respected. Encourage sharing and co-operation and ask them to use their imagination and to draw on their own experiences, knowledge and skills.

Think about what you want to express in the mural and the colours and forms which work with your theme. Should it be bright, bold and colourful or more subdued, intricate and relaxing – or a combination of these? Consider who the intended audience is and whether they will view the mural from up-close or a distance. This will help guide your choice of colours and level of detail in the mural. Also consider the composition - how the various elements of the mural relate to each other and to the surrounding environment.

Stories, personal accounts and newspaper articles are a good way to help children start thinking about an issue and to stimulate creativity. You can also use pictures, music, poetry, film and TV programmes. Start collecting stimuli before beginning the project

It is important not to be depressing or too negative. If abolishing nuclear weapons is your theme, for example, focus on the heroic stories of some of



the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki or on the peace protests outside nuclear bases or testing sites. Understanding the horrific human consequences of nuclear weapons is an important part of the learning experience but it should not be a strong theme in the mural. Try to focus on the positive steps people have taken, or could take, to create a more peaceful world.

## Preparing the wall and paint

Prepare the surface by ensuring it is free from damp, flaky or dusty material. Make sure the area is safe and free of hazards. Conduct a risk assessment - it need not take long and you can get free advice from your local authority health & safety adviser. It is particularly important if you are working at height and using scaffolding or ladders.

Different paints are suitable for particular surfaces and locations. You may want weather-

proof masonry paint, for example, or paint with a gloss or matte finish. Get advice from a DIY store if necessary.

## Transferring the design onto the wall

There are a variety of ways of transferring your design from paper to the wall. Try copying it to an OHP transparency and projecting it onto the wall to trace out. Alternatively, draw a grid over the paper design and another larger grid of the same proportions on the wall. Transfer the design one square at a time from paper to wall, using the grid to guide you.

## Painting the mural

Get well organised before you start applying paint and allow plenty of time if working with children. Ensure suitable protective clothing is worn and there are enough brushes and paint pots. Be clear about who has responsibility for

mixing colours and decanting paint (decant small amounts of paint into plastic containers – e.g. old margarine or yoghurt pots - rather than using the original tin). Decide which parts of the mural to paint first and which afterwards. Also ensure someone is responsible for health and safety and stick to your risk assessment guidelines.

If a large group is working on the mural divide into smaller groups, each with responsibility for different elements of the design. If there are too many children to be painting at the same time you can rotate the groups so everyone has a chance to paint. Children who are not painting will need something else to occupy them - this could be practising painting on paper the part of the mural they will paint next, or perhaps a book, video or website related to the theme of the mural.

### Publicity

For maximum impact you will probably want to tell other people about your new peace mural. Invite the press, your local MP and councillors, as well as all the children involved in the project to come to an unveiling ceremony. It will be an opportunity to proudly display your mural. To talk about the issues it raises and to thank everyone for all their hard work.



## Possible peace-art topics

The Christmas Truce of 1914/5 – in no-man's-land between the trenches of the First World War soldiers from opposing sides shook hands, played football and swapped food and jokes. What did they say? How did they feel? Why was it all over so quickly? What can we learn from this extraordinary event?

A world without weapons – a visiting alien could find it difficult to understand the obsession with weapons and killing each other on Earth. Imagine if all the effort put into weapons was poured into improving the environment and making life better for all the inhabitants of this small planet. What would the world look like? What would change?

War toys and games – with toy guns and knives, violent computer games and films, children are regularly exposed to violence and learn to accept it as a normal part of life. How can we help children understand the difference between play and reality? Which toys condone violence? Which promote sharing and conflict resolution?

Nuclear weapons - Sadako Sasaki was two years old when a United States bomber dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. She died ten years later of radiation-induced leukaemia. In hospital, she began folding a thousand paper cranes - the white crane is the sacred bird of Japan, and 100 origami cranes traditionally mean the granting of a wish. What did she wish for? Did her wishes come true?

Nonviolence – Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Vera Brittain and many others have rejected violence in all situations, believing an eye for an eye makes everyone blind. How can we solve disputes without violence – in the playground, the community and the wider world? What lessons and ideas did these famous pacifists leave us?

Further information on the above topics, as well as many more, can be found on the PPU website.

## PPU peace mural – the peace machine

The mural on the front of this booklet is of a peace machine. The theme is of change and transformation: how to transform people and weapons of war into people and tools for peace. We are grateful to the children and teachers of Brecknock Primary and Kentish Town Primary Schools for these wonderful ideas and their hard work.

Military people and hardware enter one side of the peace machine and come out the other ready to create a more peaceful world. Guns are recycled into toys, tools and equipment for art. Battle tanks turn into fire engines and dull camouflage uniforms are transformed into bright civilian clothing. Former soldiers come out ready to build sports equipment for schools and take people from disaster areas on holidays on their cruise ships - formerly warships.

When one thinks of a peace mural one might imagine a scene which looks and feels peaceful – probably scattered with doves, flowers and rainbows – but they do not have to be like this. The peace machine mural is busy with action and with concrete ideas and lessons to be learned from. It hints that a different world is possible if we disarm and devote resources to living rather than preparations for killing.

Although it looks easy in the mural, transforming our society to one which works towards peace will take a huge effort. But the resources are there. The UK is the second largest military spender in the world and the second biggest arms dealer. Rather than preparing for war and arming the world for the same, this money should be ploughed into preparing for peace. We need resources for living, not killing, and for conflict prevention, not promotion. Only if we prepare for peace will we achieve peace.