

studio A

Primary Teacher Kit

THOM ROBERTS

Contemporary Portrait Artist

The Immersive World of Thom Roberts

This is the first solo exhibition for multidisciplinary, contemporary Australian artist Thom Roberts, on show at the National Portrait Gallery from 12 April until Sunday 20 July.

Showcasing more than 100 works spanning his prolific, decade-long career to date, this exhibition features paintings, installation and animation as well as major new work. Journey through Thom's world and discover his distinctive style made up of idiosyncratic motifs: extra sets of eyes and noses, and his signature 'piano teeth'.

Born in 1976 and living on Darug and GuriNgai Land, Sydney, Roberts' work has been featured in high-profile group exhibitions including The National 2019: New Australian Art and several Archibald prizes. He has undertaken important residencies at Carriageworks, Bundanon Trust, Canberra Glassworks and Societas Raffaello Sanzio (Cesana, Italy).

Roberts works with Studio A on Cammeraygal Country, a supported studio that creates professional pathways for artists with lived experience of intellectual disability.



Thom Roberts, *In the future there might be new tall buildings built by Bert (Farhad Haidari)*, 2023, acrylic and graphite on timber, 192.2 x 60.6 x 6.5cm



MEET THE ARTIST

Thom Roberts sees the world through a kaleidoscope lens. People, transport and infrastructure systems are interpreted as colourful multiples.

A tangarra train is named Kylie and also perceived as the Gold Coast Tower. Thom himself identifies as the Country Link Express train and the Burj Khalifa tower in Dubai. Thom's unique perception of identities are also read through the equally particular channel of people's 'crowns' (the spiral of hair on the top of a person's head). Thom loves to peer into people's crowns. There he finds millipedes, collie dogs and cows bodies. Using all this information Thom ceremoniously bestows people with new identities, and translates them, enigmatically, in painting.

Ways to engage with Thom's practice:

- How we identify ourselves
- The portrait as a representation of inner self
- Investigating features of a human face
- Exploring the boundaries of our imagination
- Working on, around and off the canvas

SYLLABUS & LEARNING GUIDE

Teacher's Page

Dive into the creative world of Studio A artist Thom Roberts! This resource spotlights his Archibald 2023 finalist portrait, *In the future there might be new tall buildings built by Bert (Farhad Haidari)*, featured in his first solo exhibition, *The Immersive World of Thom Roberts* at the National Portrait Gallery.

Students will investigate the expansive genre of portraiture and attempt to create artworks using a variety of approaches and materials. The resource provides activities that will help students create artworks through the lens of Thom's conceptual and material practice. Students will be encouraged to share their interpretations of artworks and refer to techniques used.

All the resource links to get you started:

Focus on Ability Film Festival - Inside Studio A, Amelia Bowe <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QelsAAbsmng>
Studio A, About Us: Supported studio <https://www.studioa.org.au/about>
Studio A, Thom Robert's artist page <https://www.studioa.org.au/thom-roberts>
Thom Roberts, Art Bites <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOaghv7p9LM&list=PLDCjLkxI06YwJVdFKmdSGRQO-F0QvIErw&index=1>
Art Gallery of NSW, Thom Roberts 2023 <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/2023/30548/>

Syllabus Outcomes and Guides:

This resource is designed to speak to all content descriptors of the ACARA, PYP (IB) and NSW Visual Arts syllabus. Outcomes and assessment methods can be identified through the students engagement with Thom's practice using a wider lens such as:

An Investigation into the face as a subject matter, making artworks that respond to observation, interpretation and imagination.

Links to ACARA: (ACAVAM106)(ACAVAM108)(ACAVAM112)(ACAVAM116)
Links to NSW syllabus: (VAES1.1)(VAS1.1)(VAS2.1)(VAS3.1)

The exploration of elements of art, visual conventions, material techniques and experimentation when making art.

Links to ACARA: (ACAVAM107)(ACAVAM111)(ACAVAM112)(ACAVAM115)(ACAVAM117)
Links to NSW Syllabus: (VAES1.2)(VAS1.2)(VAS2.2)(VAS3.2)

Engaging in a creative process beginning with a source of inspiration and resulting in the creation of art that reflects the students intentions, interpretations and use of techniques to convey meaning.

Links to ACARA: (ACAVAM108)(ACAVAM112)(ACAVAM116)
Links to NSW syllabus: (VAES1.3)(VAS1.3)(VAS2.3)(VAS3.3)

An indepth artist study into the artist's practice, his artistic intentions, material and conceptual choices and curatorial discernments.

Links to ACARA: (ACAVAR109)(ACAVAR113)(ACAVAR117)
Links to NSW Syllabus: (VAES1.4)(VAS1.4)(VAS2.4)(VAS3.4)

Cross Curricular Links - English

- Use portraits to write descriptions or vice versa
- Use Thom's recount of Archibald experience to teach story sequencing
- Use artworks to share feelings and thoughts about events and characters
- Use wall and gallery text to understand the different purposes of text and language

PORTRAITS WITH THOM ROBERTS

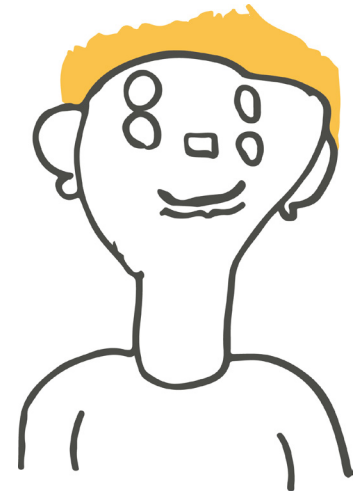


student examples - posca pen on paper

Lesson Plan 1

Drawing portraits

Be inspired by *In the future there might be new tall buildings built by Bert* (Farhad Haidari) painting and create your own Thom Roberts portrait. Remember to personalise your portrait with different colours and facial features. Giving your portrait an expression will create a moment of connection between your drawing and the audience, so don't forget to be expressive! This activity takes one lesson to learn a classic Thom Roberts portrait. Or to further explore Thom's practice continue following his step by step instructions, adding watercolour paint to introduce tonal value to their face. Students can also try to create a Thom Robert's face using collage paper.



MATERIALS YOU WILL NEED:

For your first drawing you only need simple materials like:

- Texter pens
- Posca pens



If you try the extending your activities you could think about using:

- Collage colour paper
- Scissors
- Glue stick
- watercolour



Teachers notes...

Throughout the artmaking process identify differentiated key learning moments:

All students will:

- Attempt to draw a portrait.
- Realise that portraits do not have to be exact replicas of their subject.

Most students will:

- Add expression to their portrait.
- Combine their own drawing style with qualities of Thom's.

Some students will:

- Communicate ideas and decisions made during their art making.
- Discuss the impact of different elements of art.

PORTRAITS WITH THOM ROBERTS

Let's get started!

Follow Thom's steps to make a classic Thom Roberts portrait. *Thom's way* includes some artist's choices. For your first drawing, explore Thom's way and on your second drawing you can introduce your own artist choices.

Step one:

Thom's way is to start with his shoulders and arms.

Step two:

Then you draw your neck.

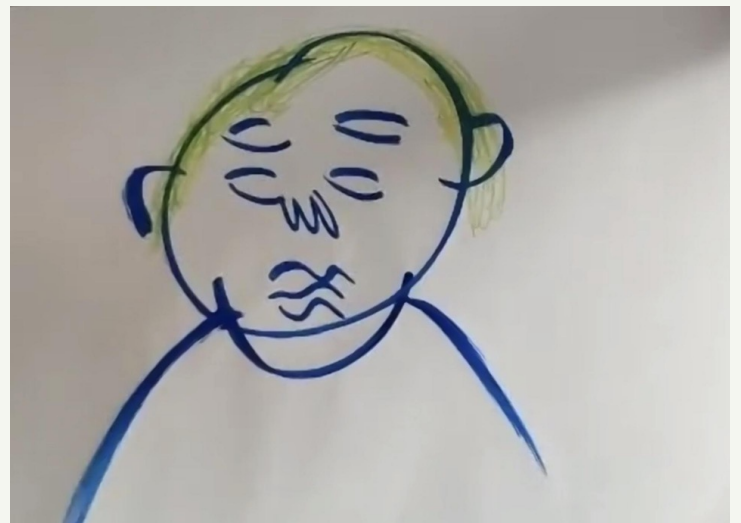


Step three:

Next is the head; you can draw a circle, oval or egg shape. You can also draw a shape for the chin.

Step four:

Put the eyes in. You can choose 4 eyes, or more eyes. You can choose how many eyes go on your portrait.



That is called an artist choice and Thom's way is to use multiple eyes.

Step five:

Nose comes next. Thom's way is to make the nose a hand.

Step six:

If your paper is big enough, you can trace your own hand on the page. This is Thom showing you an example.

If your page isn't big enough, you can draw a smaller hand shape.



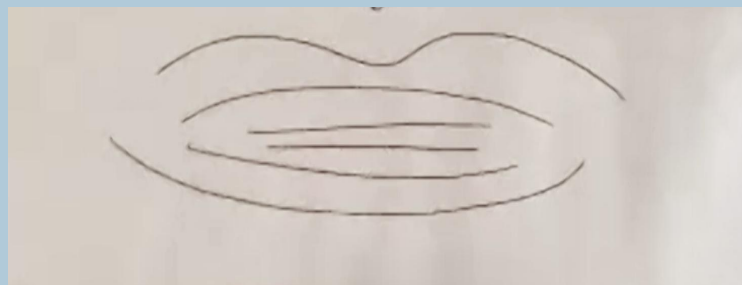
Sometimes Thom makes the artist choice to make the nose a foot instead.

PORTRAITS WITH THOM ROBERTS

Step seven:

Now its time for the mouth. For the lips Thom draws a line that looks like two mountains on top.

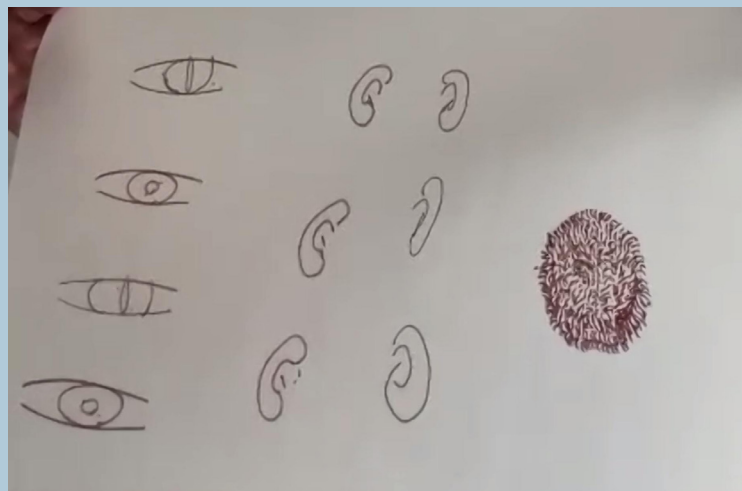
For the bottom lip, he draws a soft curve. This makes up the mouth. Sometimes Thom simply draws 3 loose squiggly lines one on top of the other, and this becomes the mouth.



Step eight:

Go back and add eyeballs if you like. Draw a circle inside the eye shape, then add another tiny circle for the pupil.

You can also choose to leave them out, as Thom does sometimes in his quick drawings.



Step nine:

“Bang the ears on”. These can be added (if you like) to the side of the head. Sometimes ears are pointy, or rounded, or a little bit of both. Thom has made a quick guide of different types of eyes, pupils and ears that may be helpful.



Step ten:

Now comes the hair. Choose a coloured marking pen that matches the hair colour you want. You can long strokes and lines with the marking pen if you are wanting long hair or a fringe.

Next! If you want to continue exploring Thom’s practice, begin the extension activities!



THOM'S SITTING WITH BERT

Lesson Plan 2

Telling the story of Thom, Bert and the Archibald Prize

Thom Roberts' painting *In the future there might be new tall buildings built by Bert (Farhad Haidari) 2023*, was painted for the Archibald Prize. To enter a portrait in the Archibald Prize, the artist must follow a selection of rules to keep the competition fair. A very important rule is that the painting must be a portrait painted from life, with the subject known to the artist, aware of the artist's intention and having at least one live sitting with the artist.

Think and Discuss:

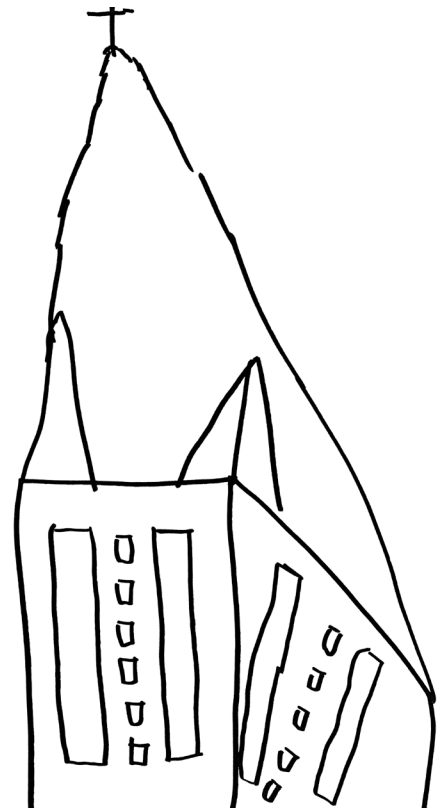
As a class discuss Thom's artist choices when painting his **subject**. The subject is the focus of a painting or artwork. So in portraiture, it is the person being painting.

What symbols has Thom used to communicate ideas about Bert's (Farhad Haidari) interests?

Describe the colour scheme of Thom's work. Why do you think he has chosen these colours?

How has Thom used facial expression and body language to suggest Bert's (Farhad Haidari) personality?

Using the artwork to give you clues, what relationship do you think the subject and artist has? What words might Thom use to describe Bert?



Thom Roberts, *In the future there might be new tall buildings built by Bert (Farhad Haidari) 2023*. acrylic and graphite on timber. 192.2 x 60.6 x 6.5cm

THOM'S SITTING WITH BERT

The exhibition says...

The audience can read Thom's artwork text to understand the works. For his wall text Thom tells the story of his relationship with Bert (Farhad Haidari), leading to their sitting for the Archibald Prize painting. Use Thom's retelling to create a visual story. Identify key details throughout the three meetings that helped to form Thom and Bert's (Farhad Haidar) relationship.

I call Farhad 'Bert'. I like to rename people and places.

I met Bert what I was doing an art residency in Epping. He was the Architect making tall building heights and he made the building I was working in called The Langston. Bert came to see me making art in his building. I said to Bert "Can I do your portruff (portrait)?" Bert said "I'd be happy too". This was my first meeting with Bert.

I love to share my love of buildings.

I was invited by Bert to go and see him in the MLC building in Martin Place where his office is, which is very high up. This is where I did my first drawings of Bert with all of the other city buildings. It was special to be invited to Bert's office in the MLC in Martin Place, as I love that building and Bert and I ate burgers for lunch.

Bert showed me his sculpture models of building heights. I am a bit like an Architect too and I also like to make VERY tall building heights like Bert, like what I have added to my painting of Bert.

Teaching Kindergarten to Year 2

Teacher reads the text to the class, inviting them through discussion to think about the sequence of meetings and key details in each.

Questions:

What happened when they first met?
How was the second meeting different?
Thom formed a connection with Bert, what was it?

Students use the scaffold provided to visualise and draw their version of Thom and Bert's story.

Teaching Year 3 to Year 6

Students read the text twice. The first reading is to understand the sequence of events. During the second reading students may highlight significant words and key details in phrases and sentences. Discuss as a class.

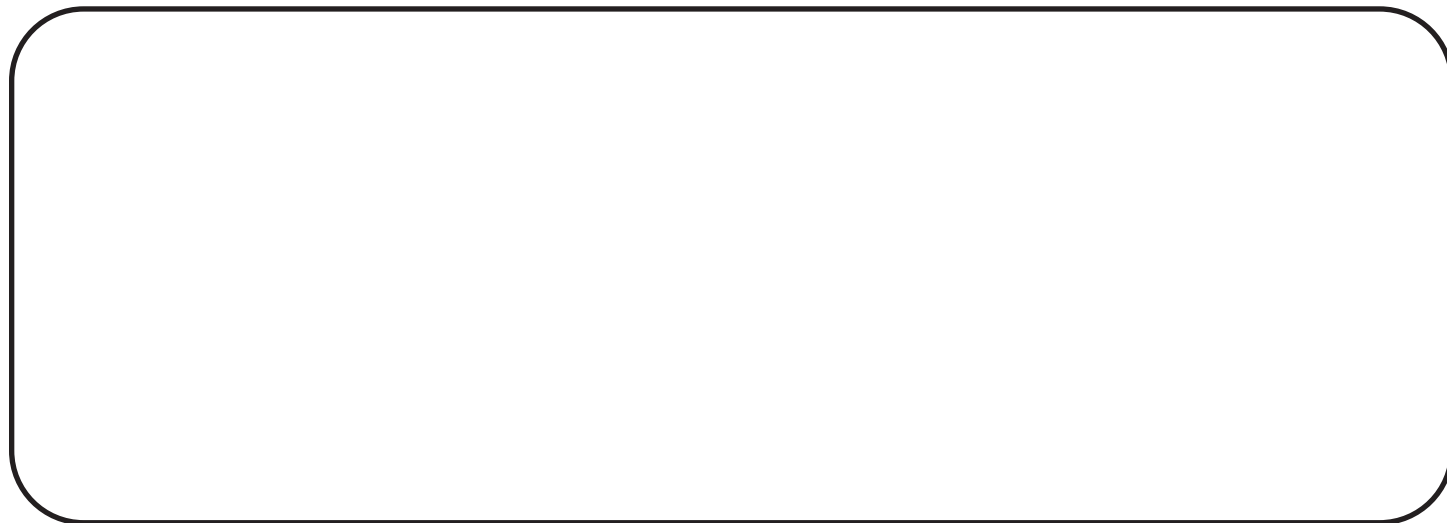
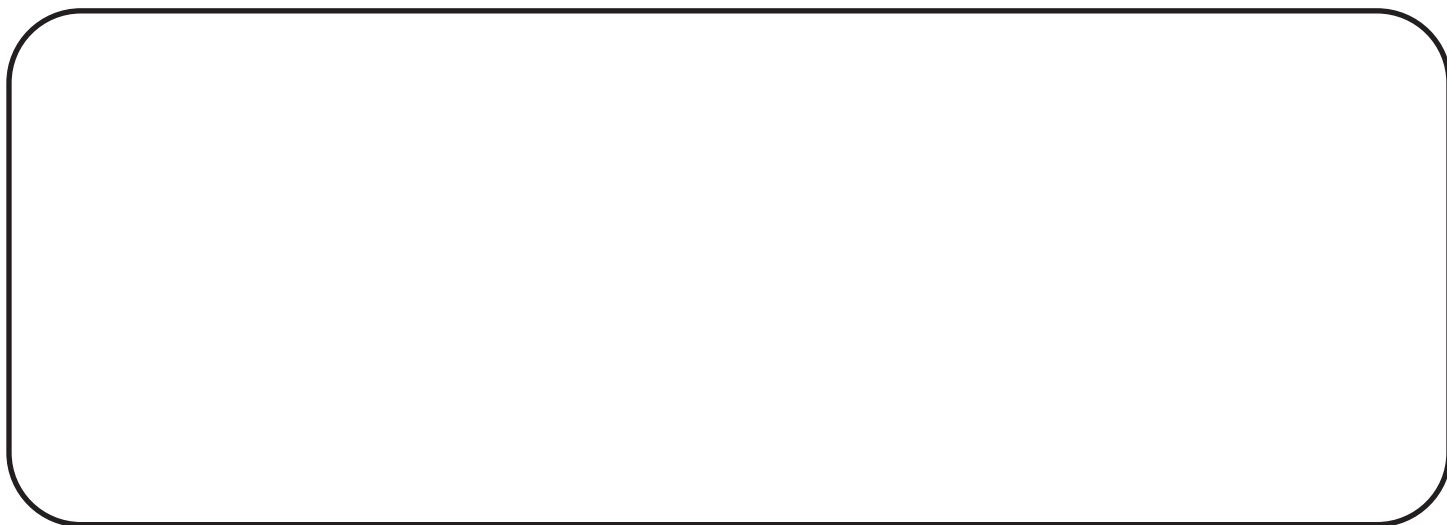
Questions:

What was important in each meeting?
What parts of the text do you personally connect to?
Thom formed a connection with Bert, what was it?

Students use the graphic novel template provided to visualise and draw their version of Thom and Bert's story. Include graphic conventions such as speech and thinking bubbles.

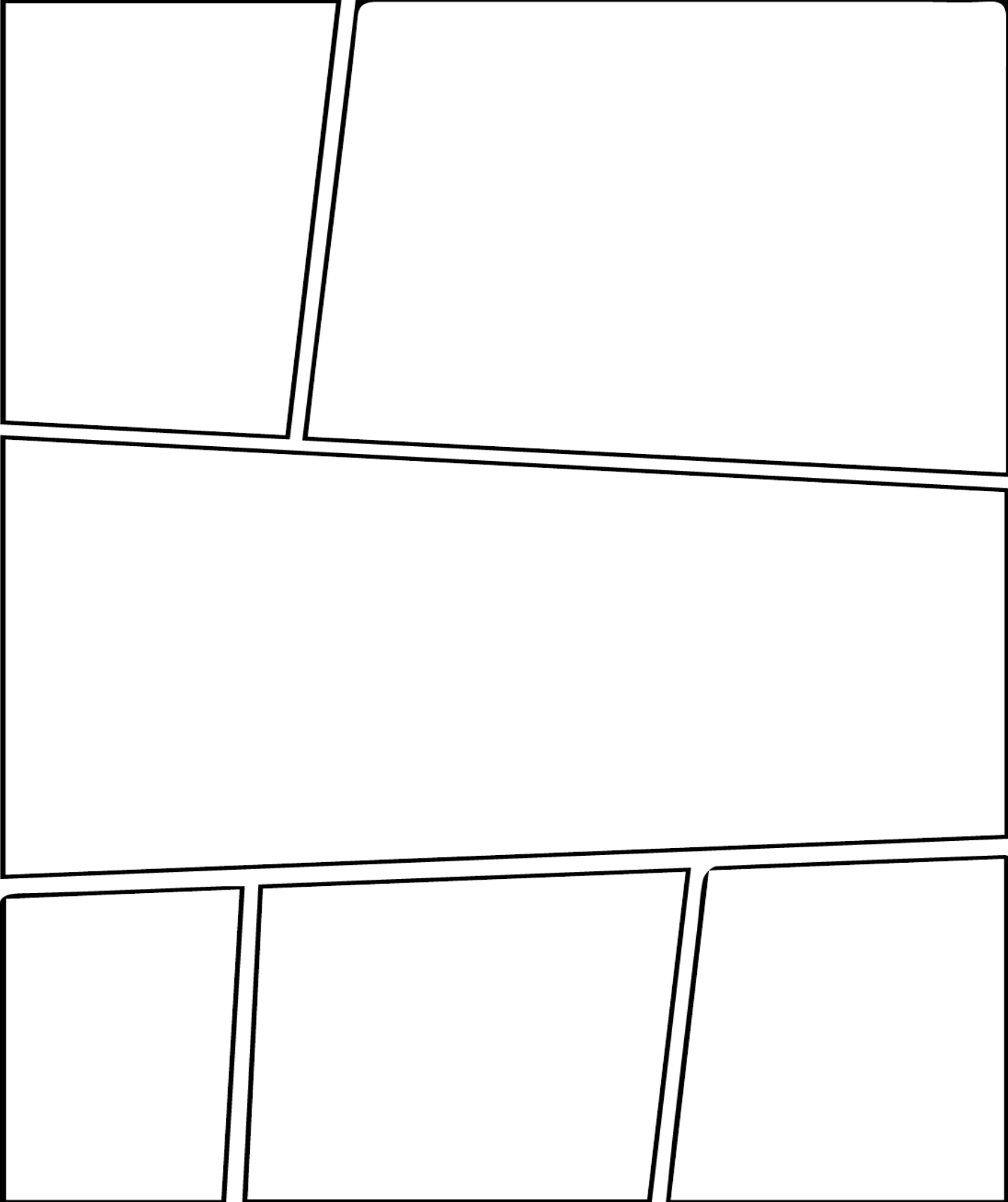
THOM'S SITTING WITH BERT

Teaching Kindergarten to Year 2



THOM'S SITTING WITH BERT

Teaching Year 3 to Year 6



MAKING FUNNY FACES

Lesson Plan 3

Making new faces from photocopies

This activity can be completed over one lesson. The intention is for students to begin thinking about the structure of the face. Using a photocopier, magazines, scissors, masking tape and glue, follow Thom's steps to make crazy new faces!

Step one:

Find a face in a magazine.

Step two:

Photocopy it twice, making two copies.

Step three:

Fold each face in half.

Step four:

Chop it in half!
Either tearing it slowly or cutting it with scissors.

Step five:

Swap the two halves over to do a mirror image.

Step six:

Place the new halves in a position with the other that makes a funny face.

Step seven:

Tape it all down.

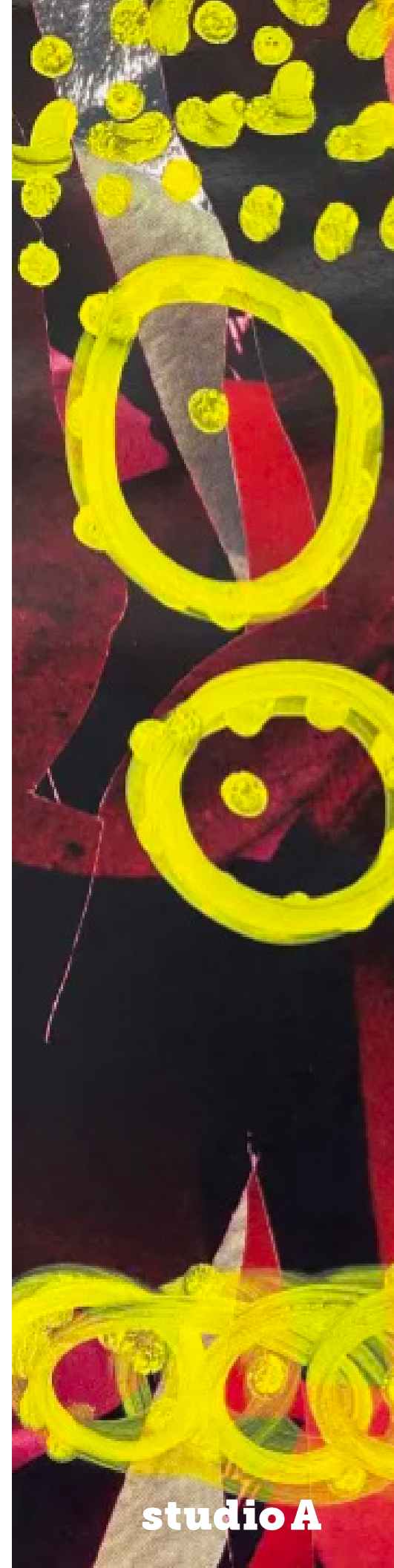
Step eight:

Show your friends the new funny faces you made!

Teachers notes...

As students are creating, ask them to respond to the below questions to practise thinking and discussing artist intentions and choices.

- How has your face changed through the process?
- What choices did you make to create an expression on your face?
- Does your face have a name?
- Describe your face's personality.



What makes up a face?

Lesson Plan 4

Making faces with clay dough.

This is a quick and playful activity that can be completed over one lesson. The intention is for students to begin thinking about the structure of the face. Using clay dough (or a similar material such as Playdoh, air-dry clay or modelling clay) students explore shape as an Element of Art to build faces.

This lesson is designed for all ages and can be differentiated through material selection and complexity in detail. Kindergarten to Year 2 are encouraged to use clay dough or soft molds, whereas older years can create more detailed faces using clay and glazes.

First attempt to remake one of Thom's portraits using clay dough. You can find portraits by Thom on the Studio A website, www.studioa.org.au. On your second attempt you can create an artwork based on your chosen sitter or someone in your class!

Step one:

Create a flat rectangle. This will be your background to frame your face.

Step two:

Using any colour, create the base of your face - this is the skin of your face.

Step three:

Begin to build your eyes, nose, hair and ears using different coloured clay. Mold them into different shapes. Revisit *Thom's Way* to creating a portrait to ensure your face has multiple eyes and unique features.

Step four:

Design a t-shirt using colour symbolism.

Teacher's notes...

As students are creating, ask them to respond to the below questions to practise thinking and discussing artist intentions and choices.

- What shapes are you using to create your portrait?
- How did you approach this task - where did you start?
- Which colours have you chosen to use, why?



student examples - clay dough