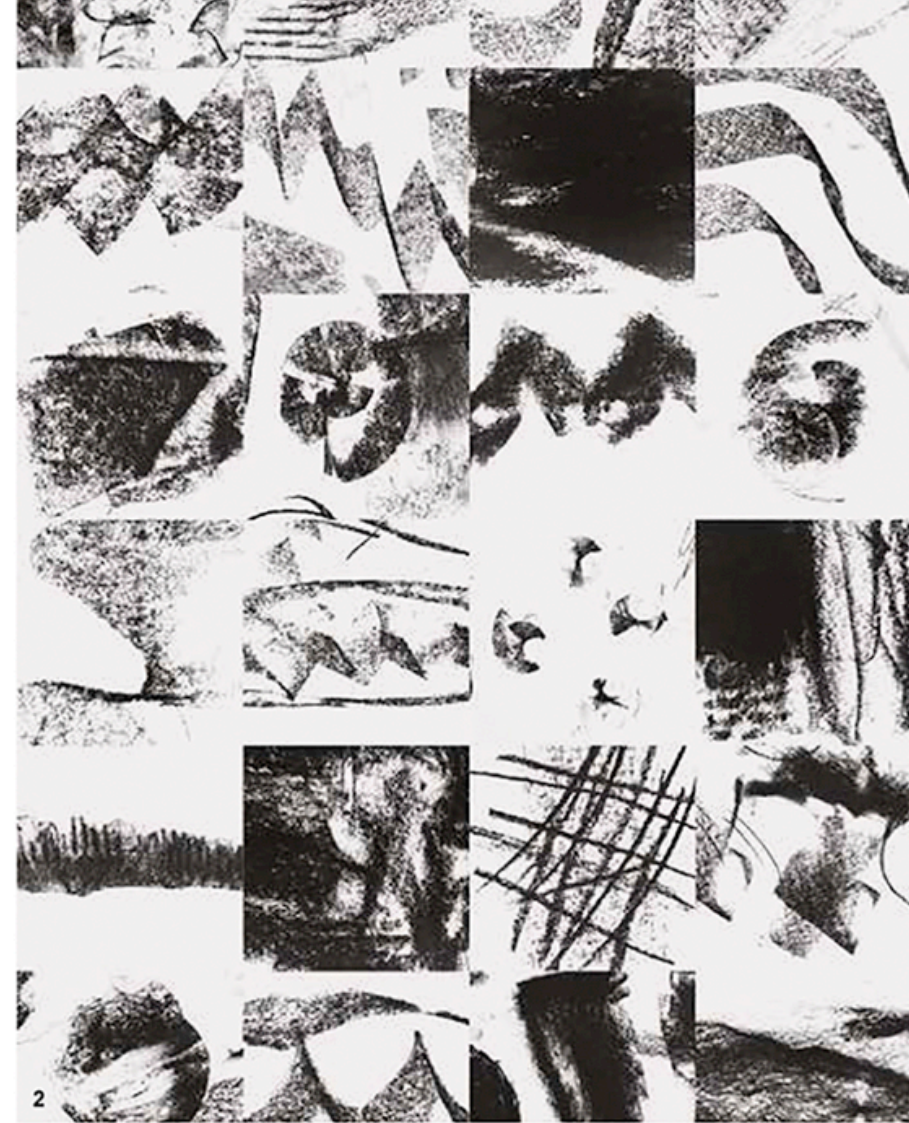


# Drawing in charcoal in school



*When approached to teach charcoal drawing to year 3 pupils, Scott Donnelly, artist teacher, felt it was crucial to embrace the qualities of the medium, rather than focussing on outcome. He describes the workshops and the results*

I was approached by the head teacher of Knop Law Primary School, Newcastle, with a view to teaching charcoal drawing workshops with two classes of year 3 pupils (ages 7–8). The brief was intriguing – to develop skills in observational drawing which the children could utilise on field trips. Although I had made participative work with this age group before, bespoke workshops would need to be designed which could be entirely flexible. It was agreed the focus would not be on any physical outcome, but on the children's learning and development.

From the outset the intention would be for the children to have fun whilst seeing their progress as their artwork develops. It would be important to remove any fear of working with the medium of charcoal and instead embrace its qualities and its potential. Such insights, it was hoped, would help achieve less predetermined and more independent and personalised images.

The workshops were formed into three distinct stages:

## Mark making

An essential part of any drawing is to maximise the potential in the medium, which can easily be overlooked. For this first stage of the workshop we focused on experimental mark making only, without looking to make anything representational (fig. 1–2).

## Tone to describe form

Here, children took a simple outline and then used tone to visualise and give the appearance of three-dimensional form. At this stage the benefits of mark making were becoming apparent – children were using the flat edge of the charcoal and began making directional strokes, following the contours of their shapes (fig. 3).

## Observational drawing

This third and final stage of the workshop saw children's developmental work coming together; the awareness of tone and form, together with the knowledge of the capabilities of the medium, saw a natural synthesis of their learning in making genuinely creative work without preconceptions (figs. 4–5).

Allowing the children a freedom of expression in using charcoal led to their making some quite outstanding marks – without fear, or

expectation. Using the medium in this way helped to gain the knowledge that they could then develop and personalise. In other words, when making their observational work, the focus was on creativity as opposed to struggling with the medium.

All feedback pointed to the children really enjoying their time in these classes. It was especially rewarding to see their progress and development – fully justifying that the focus was placed from the outset on the children's learning, rather than the outcome.

On a school trip held during the workshops which involved drawing, it emerged from one class teacher that she could differentiate clearly as to who had participated in the workshops to date and who had not by their approach to drawing.

Such was the quality of the work being made, that this inspired further investigation into a unique collaborative artwork (figs. 6–7). The children's charcoal drawings were laser etched onto pieces of wood, bringing together their traditional drawing skills with modern technology available today. The matt black paint used for the background and border reference the charcoal used by our artist children, and the very first marks they had so confidently made. ■

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