

My Favourite... Art lesson

Find out what goes on in **Elizabeth Taylor's** classroom, Teaching Award winner 2010...



A bit about Elizabeth...

YOU SEND A PERSONAL LETTER AND A TEDDY TO EACH CHILD BEFORE THEY START SCHOOL. WHY?

Elizabeth Taylor: The children receive their letter before the end of the summer holiday. It comes with a little teddy bear, which they are asked to look after and then bring to school at the beginning of term. New parents are so surprised. It lets them know that their individual child is very special. As a FS teacher you are the first port of call for both parents and children and so you have to get the relationship just right. These parents are going to be in the system for a long time, so you want to form a good partnership.

IN WHAT OTHER WAYS DO YOU WORK WITH PARENTS?

ET: Once the children have been in school for a couple of mornings, I give the parents the opportunity to come and speak to me – a bit like a doctors surgery. They can tell me anything they like, or nothing they like, or just say 'hello'.

What's good?

It's a very special feeling to see the children squeal with delight as they unlock the wonders of the world. At the end of the year you think back to what they could do when they first arrived and you realise you've given them tools for life.

What's tough?

I enjoy what I do and I get immense job satisfaction, but that isn't to say that I am not ready for the holidays because the list of 'to do' jobs never seems to end. Your husband has to be part of the extended school family, hoovering up the hall after the school fair, etc. Once when we were doing Palm Sunday at school I told him he couldn't come home until he had found me a donkey!

The lesson

TP: WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ART LESSON?

ET: In the Autumn term, I like to do some exploration of art inspired by Andy Goldsworthy. His work draws on nature and he often creates moveable collages using natural materials. It's an ideal stimulus for this age group because it can encompass all six areas of learning. For instance, in Knowledge and Understanding we're looking at seasonal change.

TP: HOW DO YOU START THE PROJECT?

ET: We begin with a lot of preliminary work. At this age, children will quite often bring in something they have found to show the class - perhaps a conker - and we take things from there, growing the topic from the children's interests. We organise an autumn walk where the children collect leaves and other autumn artefacts. We then explore these using different media and techniques. We'll look closely at the shape of a leaf and experiment with different ways of interpreting this using charcoal, pastels, paints, pencil and, a great favourite of the children, printing. This leads to a lot of physical development – using a paintbrush, etc – and the chance to practise observational skills.

TP: THEN THINGS DEVELOP ON A BIGGER SCALE?

ET: Yes, we take all of the artefacts we've collected outside. Then we create a large, movable sculpture in the style of Andy Goldsworthy using leaves, bark, seeds and pieces of wood, etc. The objects can then be collected back in and moved to a new location, or, like Andy Goldsworthy, we can leave the sculpture to be blown away in the wind. The circle of life, if you like.

It's a sensory experience. The children love the leaves being all crunchy in the bag. They also enjoy working as a team, "You put that there, I'll put this here." "No, I want that to go there!" Suddenly they see a picture emerging. A strong character in the group will say, "Let's make a face! What can we use for eyes, conkers?" You have brought your indoor classroom outdoors.

TP: WHAT OTHER WORK DO YOU DO IN THE OUTDOOR CLASSROOM?

ET: Before the summer we did a big Jackson Pollock canvas outdoors. There were lots of paint covered children and paint covered walls, but we all had a great time. Outside there are no inhibitions as you don't have to worry about making a mess.

Children are very privileged here and the next day they brought in Jackson Pollock images that their parents had printed out for them from the internet. Parents were asking, "Who is this person Jackson Pollock?" and the children were telling them about him. Again, this brings art into ICT as the children can use computer software to create their own Pollock-inspired work.

Elizabeth Taylor is a Foundation Stage teacher at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

