



St Philip's Ten Minute Talk

By Tom Underwood

I've been privileged to be part of the I Am Festival for over five years now. An annual arts festival that celebrates the creativity of neurodiverse, D/deaf and disabled young people, I Am Festival has given the pupils I've brought along some fantastic opportunities, one of these has been the opportunity to deliver a Ten Minute Talk at Tate Modern.

Tate's Ten Minute Talks are normally delivered by staff and volunteers, not necessarily art experts but people who are willing to share their own personal reactions to different artworks in the Tate collection. Whilst those giving the talks are encouraged to talk about the artist, the focus is very much on personal interpretation. It is an ideal format for the pupils I work with.

The eight pupils I am working with on the Tate Ten Minute Talks this year range from 14-16 and have moderate learning difficulties, including Autism and/or Downs Syndrome. We began our work on the project by visiting Tate Modern to choose an artwork on the theme of 'Hear Me, See Me'.

There is a daunting amount of artwork at Tate Modern! Therefore, to help my pupils not feel overwhelmed I choose five artworks for them to look at whilst also being open to the possibility that they may react to another artwork that I hadn't chosen. As we walked around the gallery all of the adults with the class used clipboards to make notes on the pupil's responses to the artworks - it was important to capture their fantastic in-the-moment responses.

The pupils chose the artwork [Babel by Cildo Meireles](#), and those initial responses were incorporated into speeches. For some of the pupils they find it difficult to express themselves verbally but their physical reactions to the artwork communicated their responses, eg a pupil reaching out to touch or covering their ears.

My name is Michael.

My name is Arad.

The first time I saw Babel I said, "Oh"

When I first saw Babel I said it

my God."

looked like a town of radios.


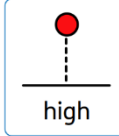


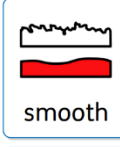
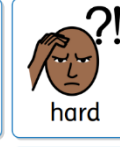



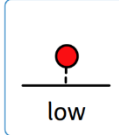

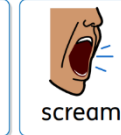


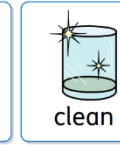

It made me want to cover my ears

I wanted to climb up it.

because it was very loud.

It makes me feel calm and happy.

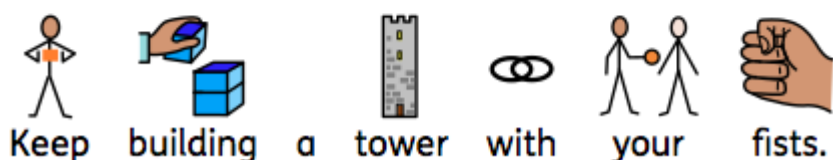
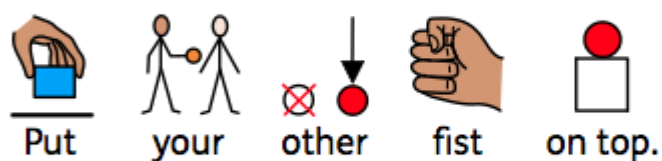
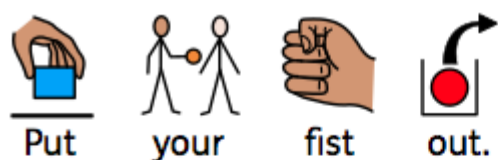
Inspired by the V & A Museum of Childhood, who have developed sensory bags for visitors, we have created our own sensory bags to go alongside our talks. Pupils with Autism often have a sensitivity to sights, sounds and/or textures so are able to reflect on experiences from a sensory perspective in a profound way. To help pupils think about their sensory responses to the artwork I created a series of choice boards.

What does it sound like?				What would it feel like to touch?			
 loud	 high	 crash	 whisper	 smooth	 hard	 bumpy	 cold
 quiet	 low	 groan	 scream	 soft	 sticky	 clean	 hot

Taking some ideas from pupils and adding other objects I created a table full of objects where pupils could match their sensory word to an object, for example, bumpy – bubble-wrap.

During the process of creating the sensory bags I noticed that many pupils had physical responses when talking about the artwork, for example one pupil put her fists on top of each to build a tower when talking. I took these reactions and

wrote them up to add into the sensory bags as movements for the audience to try out.



This process took place over a month, with one lesson per week. Throughout the process we revisited the artwork 'Babel' by looking at pictures from different angles, using the audio description on the Tate website and watching a video of it being built.

For the decoration of the front of the bag we took an idea from a couple of pupils who told us the artwork made them think about being a DJ. We talked about how a DJ chooses music, so the pupils chose pictures online of their favourite music and then collaged these onto the front of their bags.

On Wednesday 13th March we'll be presenting our talks and sensory bags at Tate Modern as part of the I Am Festival 2024, we hope to see you there!



Tom Underwood is the Head of Primary & the Arts at St Philip's. He has been part of the I Am Network for eight years.