

Stanley Spencer Lesson Plans

Conceptual thinking and rationale

These three lessons are designed to allow pupils to access interpretations of art from one artist. However, it could be extended by using additional artists such as the German Otto Dix, Paul Nash or Pran Nath Mago (Second World War-themed). From Spencer's work, what can we tell about how he interpreted the War? Essentially, it is a much more positive attitude than that shown by artists like Dix or Nash. His belief of redemption runs throughout his paintings.

Pupils should be looking at how the art of Spencer reflects a different way of viewing the War. It should also allow them to reflect upon the way in which people left their lives behind and how they returned to them post-War. In this case, Spencer finished his *Swan Upping* painting and was commissioned to remember a fallen comrade by family friends.

How much of the man can we see in his interpretation of the War?

Lesson 1 is an introduction to Spencer's art and *Swan Upping*, the last painting he started before the First World War. It gets pupils to begin to put together a history of his life.

Lesson 2 is about the magic of his main painting in the Sandham Memorial Chapel, *Resurrection*. By the end of the lesson, pupils should have been introduced to the rest of Spencer's life and the rest of the paintings in the chapel. Their task is to work out what each painting is showing. Use the accompanying teacher notes for Lesson 2 to learn more about his art.

Lesson 3 begins with a recap of Spencer and looks at the key concepts lying behind his art. There is a video about how his daughters have remembered him, which also hits home the message of redemption through love. The central task is to put together a podcast that tells the story of the First World War through Spencer's art.

Alternative ideas

1. You could use the lessons as stand-alone pieces. For example, teach about the life of Stanley Spencer as a case study on war in another front (Salonika).
2. Use the paintings from Lesson 2 to study the War through the lens of one man.
3. Analyse letters written by Spencer as an example of a soldier's experience on the front line.

Lesson 1

Starter:

Begin with the image of *Swan Upping* and have pupils try to work out a series of questions regarding the painting, such as what they think it is showing, where it is and maybe when. An activity sheet has been provided to allow pupils to write their reflections down right from the start (Slide 1).

A differentiated version has suggested questions to help some learners.

(Teaching instruction – teach the skill of how to read art. Use Slide 2 to assist. Get pupils to think about where your eyes head to upon first look, what has been shown and any suggestions as to why.)

Reveal the enquiry question: ‘What does the life and art of Stanley Spencer reveal about the impact of the First World War?’ (Slide 4)

Main:

Read about Spencer’s early life (either as a whole class or individually). From the timeline, have pupils answer questions that would draw out what the inspiration was behind his art.

(Teaching instruction – use your judgement here as to how to effectively get pupils looking at his life. You could have pupils take parts of his life and enact sections for the whole class to work out the answer to the question.)

Gather feedback from the class to see what they have learned about Spencer. Record key facts on the board collectively. This can be used as criteria or a reminder when completing the next task (Slides 5–6).

Plenary: (Slides 7–10)

Show the painting of *Travoys with Wounded Soldiers Arriving at a Dressing Station at Smol, Macedonia* and choose one of the following activities to complete with the class:

- 1) Focused analysis – take a copy of the painting, cut it up into parts and explain what is going on in each part of the picture.
- 2) Stimulus questioning – use a series of questions to stimulate a discussion in groups, pairs or as a class, to get them thinking about how Spencer has drawn the First World War.
- 3) Table discussion – give the pupils in groups a few minutes to look at the painting and share their ideas, before getting each table/group to discuss a series of questions relating to the image.

Finish by returning to the story of *Swan Upping*. Spencer returned to this painting after returning from the War, and began to create his own redemption and digest his experiences. These would come to fruition in a memorial chapel in Berkshire (Slide 11).

Lesson 2

Starter:

Using a similar technique as at the start of the last lesson, have pupils work out what is happening in the scene. Can less able learners identify the features that are listed on the first slide?

Develop the discussion further and make links back to the last lesson. What can pupils remember about Stanley Spencer? This is another one of his paintings.

(Teaching instruction – use Slides 1 and 2 to get the stimulus needed with such an impressive piece of work. It breaks one scene down to get pupils thinking about how they digest so many images in the painting.)

Reveal Slide 3 and how the image students have seen fits into the larger painting.

Use the 'Guide to *The Resurrection of the Soldiers*' information sheet to get pupils looking more deeply at the image. It contains a range of imagery and symbols connected to Spencer's beliefs and attitudes towards war.

(Slides 4 to 6 are additional scenes from the painting, which allow pupils to interrogate it further.)

There are three suggested activities that you can choose to extend this task:

- 1) As a whole class, look for the features detailed on the slide.
- 2) In small groups, get pupils to interrogate the painting and use sticky notes to label the parts that they see or have questions about.
- 3) Give pupils the information and have them look for the features in the picture and postulate why Spencer put them into the painting.

Reveal the enquiry question for today (Slide 7).

Main:

Show the image of Sandham Memorial Chapel in Berkshire and explain that this is where the *Resurrection of the Soldiers* resides. It is one of 19 images in the chapel. The painting that we have just looked at sits where the altar and the main window in a church would be, therefore revealing the importance of this painting in the series (Slides 8–10).

Show a list of the paintings' names and see what pupils make of the list (they reveal everyday, ordinary tasks, part of Spencer's own wartime experiences and a lack of actual places or famous individuals/ranks).

Learn more about Spencer's life by reading his story and highlighting different strands to his experiences during the War. Having read the story through as a class or individually, get pupils to compile a data capture sheet that summarises what Spencer was doing and what happened to him at different points of his wartime experience (Slide 11).

Task: highlight key parts of the three features of Spencer's life – medical orderly at Beaufort Hospital, soldier at Tweseldown and Macedonia, and post-War.

Use a data capture sheet to record thoughts as a group or individually. A differentiated version is available, with questions to focus some pupils on what to record. They can use the sheet to help them with their final task.

(Teaching instruction – the Spencer story could be set as homework to give more time for looking at the art, which is the central theme of this lesson.)

Look at the 18 other panel images and have pupils interrogate the scenes. Options available include:

- 1) Complete a table looking at the different images and filling it in.
- 2) Give the pupils copies of the descriptive cards and get them to find the appropriate painting.
- 3) Have the pupils look at the paintings and make their own observations about what they reveal.

(Teaching instruction – perhaps you could use the chapel painting card sort to get pupils to match the descriptions to the right painting to assist their observations.)

Slides 12–32 have the instructions and paintings on.

(Teaching instruction – feel free to choose activities here depending upon the timing of each of your lessons. You may find it faster to start the lesson with multiple images from the *Resurrection* and then delve into the rest of the paintings.)

Plenary:

Finish by getting pupils to share what they have found out about the First World War from Spencer's painting, either verbally or by using sticky notes.

You could also finish by getting pupils to show different parts of Spencer's life through the examples of paintings.

Another suggestion would be for pupils to share their favourite painting from the 18 looked at and explain why they like it (Slide 33).

Lesson 3

Starter:

Give pupils a recap quiz to help them to remember some of the key features of Spencer's life, from his life in Cookham through the War to the paintings at Sandham (Slide 1 and then Slide 2 for the quiz answers).

An extended starter question is also available, where pupils can describe his artwork in 200 words.

Once pupils have marked their own answers, allow a few to share their 200 words and use this to question them on why they think this.

Main:

A source from one of Spencer's wartime letters has been added to get pupils to look at what his attitudes were in 1917 on the battlefield. It offers an insight into how earlier in the War he perhaps wasn't coping too well – 'I feel ashamed of what I would do when I first came out here' – but shows that he has grown to appreciate the power to love and move beyond the conflict. This could be used to explore reasons for Spencer's paintings (Slide 4).

There are three sources available, with a mini-introduction to his letter writing, which could be used as a homework activity or an extended task to differentiate or extend pupils' learning.

Slide 5 is a video interview of Spencer's daughters by John Snow. This could be used to extract how we see his paintings today, to get a sense of perspective and introduce the size and scale of the chapel.

Slide 6 summarises the key message of Spencer's story, which could be gathered from pupils through a Q&A or whiteboard task if time.

Main task: Pupils will be working on creating a podcast that could be shared with the National Trust to accompany the paintings at Sandham Memorial Chapel. They will need to write a script to present the influences in Spencer's life and introduce the works. The podcast is to be no more than three minutes long.

Feel free to adapt the criteria or allow pupils to devise their own criteria to give them ownership of the task (Slide 7).

Any pupils that finish should record their podcasts, or it could be set as homework to record them and then listen to some as a peer-assessed activity in a future lesson.

(Teaching instruction – use Slides 8–10 to establish timings, the process of making the resource and a template suggestion, which links to the templates provided. Feel free to adapt as necessary or structure accordingly to suit the class.)

A template to help to write the podcast is included, along with source material to get pupils thinking about what happened to Spencer during the War. There are three templates included; encourage pupils to write their own, but for those who really struggle, give them the easiest template to complete and have them focus on how each theme makes them feel about the War.

(Teaching instruction – fundamentally, pupils need to create a podcast that addresses the three locations Spencer was at during the War: Beaufort, Tweseldown and Macedonia. Allow some pupils to extend their script with reference to Cookham too.)

Plenary:

Suggested plenary activities:

- 1) Share an excerpt from students' podcast scripts with each other, meaning that pupils could deliver part of their podcasts verbally.
- 2) Have pupils complete a review of the top five things they have learned from the last three lessons.
- 2) Give pupils the opportunity to write a postcard to a friend expressing how the War shaped this man's life.

Additional reading and resources beyond the lessons

Information on the artist and artwork: www.jacksonsart.com/blog/2016/03/27/can-learn-stanley-spencers-sandham-memorial-chapel

Information on Sandham Memorial Chapel and the murals (also contains a short podcast): www.nationaltrust.org.uk/sandham-memorial-chapel

Bettany Hughes's *Ten Places, Europe and Us* podcast on Sandham Memorial Chapel: <https://podcasts.google.com/?feed=aHR0cHM6Ly9yc3MuYWVhc3QuY29tL3RlbnBsYWVhc2V1cm9wZWFuZHVz&episode=MDMzZDEyNTMtMTcxZi00NDFlLThIMWltMGEzOTYyMmVjZjU4&hl=en-GB&ep=6&at=1567166524774>

Dr Janina Ramirez's *Miss Ashwanden in Cookham by Stanley Spencer – with Robin Ince* podcast: <https://podcasts.google.com/?feed=aHR0cHM6Ly9mZWVkc3ZaW1wbGVjYXN0LmNvbS94U2dOd19TbA&episode=NjE2N2U3NmMtOTI5MS00ZWVjLThkZjMtZTEwYmIzNmM3MTkx&hl=en-GB&ep=6&at=1567166582932>