

DesignLab: Exploring Skylines

through the V&A+RIBA Architecture collections

Teachers' Presentation Notes

Teachers' notes to accompany the Exploring Skylines introductory Presentation as part of At School activities

Slide 1: Title Slide

Archilab: Exploring Skylines through the V&A+RIBA Architecture collections

Slide 2: What is a skyline?

Discussion:

Discuss with the group what they know about skylines and to name any buildings they particularly like. Ask them to identify any places they know that have memorable skylines.

- A skyline is the outline formed by the profile of a collection of buildings against the sky on the horizon.

Activity: Name the cities these skylines belong to.

(Answers)

Shanghai

New York

London

- Which cities have distinctive skylines?
- What makes a city skyline interesting or uninteresting? For example, the shape, materials used, or height of buildings.
- What does the skyline look like where you live?

Slide 3: What makes a skyline stand out?

Discussion:

How does the shape of a building impact on a city's skyline? Why are some buildings more iconic than others?

- The outline shape of some buildings have become iconic as they become universally recognised and contribute towards the identity of a place. Materials used, colour and scale in relation to surrounding buildings also contribute.
- Most cities nowadays have planning regulations that control the impact of proposed new buildings on a city skyline
- What iconic buildings do you know?

Activity

Do you know the names of any of these buildings and the cities and or countries in which they can be found?

(Answers)

30 St Mary Axe, City of London, 2004

St Paul's Cathedral, City of London, 1711

Empire State Building, New York, 1931

Sydney Opera House, Sydney, 1973

Petronas Towers, Kuala Lumpur, 1988

Taj Mahal, Agra, 1653

Find out what style of buildings, classical or contemporary, students find interesting and what types they dislike.

- Name a building you like. What is distinctive about its design?
- Which landmark buildings or structures can you name that in your opinion contribute positively or negatively towards the identity of a city or place?

Ask students to find out more about architects who have designed iconic buildings and buildings in your local area. Images can be downloaded from www.RIBApix.com.

Slide 4: Who designs buildings and shapes our city skylines?

Discussion:

Find out if the group knows what profession is responsible for designing buildings, and if they know the names of any designers.

- Architects design buildings. The styles of buildings they create contribute towards the 'look' and identity of our cities and places.
- Sir Christopher Wren's (1632-1723) classical design for St Paul's Cathedral built over 400 years ago (completed 1708), had and still has a considerable impact on London's skyline.
- Sir Norman Foster's (1935-) contemporary design for The Gherkin, completed in 2004, has also changed the 'look' and identity of London's skyline.

Find out if the group know of any buildings Wren or Foster have designed?

Slide 5: Which buildings shape a city's identity?

Discussion:

Spot the differences between these two images of London's skyline.

Proposed London 1945-55 and London Today.

Can you find St Paul's Cathedral (Wren) and the Gherkin (Foster)?

- London's skyline, is constantly changing, as it is in other cities world-wide. See how many cranes there are in the photograph. Buildings are becoming ever taller as populations grow, competitive global markets develop and planning regulations change. Hi-tech office buildings dominate the city, dwarfing smaller, often older structures.
- St Paul's Cathedral, built following the Great Fire of London in 1666, dominated the city's skyline for over 400 years. In addition, the architect, Wren, built fifty-two churches in London.

Compare these two images. How has London's skyline changed over time? Do the buildings look different? What structures dominate London's skyline today?

- The area around St Paul's Cathedral suffered severe bomb damage during the Second World War (1939-1945). After the War several architects including Charles Holden and William Holford proposed ideas for new developments. The scheme was never built.

What is the difference between the proposed skylines and London's skyline today? Can you see any of Wren's churches?

Has the style of the buildings changed over time? Which buildings are old and classical, which are new and modern?

What factors might influence the design of a building or place?

Slide 6: What might London's skyline look like in 2020?

Discussion:

What might skylines look like in the future? Who and what might they be influenced or inspired by?

Find out if the group have a preference for old or new buildings and get them to explain why.

Which type of buildings should be preserved: classical or contemporary? Or both? What might buildings look like in the future?

- This image is of a proposal for a commercial tower approximately 300m in height, on a site on Bishopsgate in the City of London. Government advisers such as CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) review new design proposals and make suggestions for improvement. CABE's comment about this building was, "much of the success will depend on the design detailing and the quality of the materials and construction".

More information can be found at

www.cabe.org.uk/default.aspx?contentitemid=1139.

- Some historic or significant buildings, such as St Paul's Cathedral, have protected views. This is to ensure they remain landmarks that can be seen clearly from certain viewpoints. This therefore limits the height and location of some new buildings.

How would you change or improve your local skyline? What buildings would you like to add, or demolish?

Slide 7: How do architects design buildings?

Discussion:

Architects create different types of models when creating an idea.

Introduce the group to some of the models that can be seen in the V&A+RIBA Architecture gallery and how an architect goes about designing a building.

- There are over four million objects in the V&A and RIBA architecture collections at the V&A. The various models, drawings and architectural fragments reveal the design process architects use to create, develop, present and build their ideas.
- The materials an architect uses depends on what stage they are in the design process as well as the budget, the needs and expectations of their client, and the materials they have available to visualise their ideas.

- There are over 400 architectural models in the V&A and RIBA collections. 55 are displayed in the Architecture gallery. These are of a variety of types of buildings.
- The models are a miniature three-dimensional representation of a building and are used by architects to communicate their design ideas to a client.
- Some are sketch models that help that architect develop their ideas and others are presentation models showing what the finished building or a part of it would look like.

Which of these designs would you combine to make an interesting city skyline?

As well as models, architects also make different types of drawings:

- Initial sketches, in the form of models and drawings, are used to create and develop their first ideas.
- Sketchbooks are used to show first ideas or record drawings of completed buildings for research.
- Plan, elevation and section drawings are the most common types of drawing an architect uses for developing, presenting and building an idea.
- Three dimensional models, computer drawings, computer animations, drawings, painting, prints, photomontage and collage can be used to visualise and present an idea.
- Detailed drawings are used for building an idea.

Slide 8: How have artists and architects drawn skylines?

Discussion:

There might be a number of answers to how one could draw a skyline.

- The V&A and RIBA collections include a number of different types of drawings of various skylines by architects and also artists.
- The choice of media or style used to draw these skylines often reflects the era when the architect or artist was living and working. For example before cameras were available artists and architects used sketches as a common means of recording. Before computers were invented collage was an easy way of manipulating images.

- Artists and architects use drawings in different ways for different purposes.
- Architects may use drawing to research and communicate a new design idea for a building or development.
- Artists may use drawing to research or create a composition.

Discuss with the class the variety of media they could use and when they might be appropriate:

- Sketch/drawing – pencil, charcoal, pastel
- Painting – watercolour, acrylic, oil
- Print – relief, lino, screen, etching, lithographic
- Collage – paper, photomontage, ephemera, magazine/newspaper cuttings
- Photography
- Sculpture – ceramic, wire, recycled materials, found objects, papier mache
- Mural

Discuss with the class the variety of different approaches they could consider:

- Figurative
- Abstract
- Composite
- Imaginary
- Ruin
- Two-dimensional
- Three-dimensional

What materials might you take with you to the V&A to record different architectural styles and buildings?

What materials might you use to record different architectural styles and buildings in your local area?

Slide 9: Creating Skylines

Discussion:

Do you recognise any of these buildings? Is this a real or imagined place?

What does the title tell you?

- For centuries artist and designers have documented or created images of real and imaginary skylines.
- St Paul's Cathedral is the focus of the painting, 'A Tribute to Sir Christopher Wren', by Charles Robert Cockerell (1788-1863). It is an imaginary composition that brings together all the buildings that in the early 19th century were believed to be by Sir Christopher Wren into one vast urban landscape, including his London churches.

Ask students to explore how the artist has used perspective and scale in his composition.

Which building is the largest? Can you find the vanishing point?

This painting is a Heritage Lottery Funded recent acquisition to the RIBA's national architecture collection and inspired this Exploring Skylines resource.

Slide 10: Using perspective and scale

Discussion:

How has the artist used scale and perspective in this composition of a skyline?

- St Paul's is the largest building and the focal point of this painting
- St Paul's is the only building drawn above the eyeline, exaggerating its size and importance.
- The vanishing point disappears at the centre of St Paul's.

Slide 11: Researching Skylines

Discussion:

How do you think Charles Cockerell researched and recorded the buildings for his painting 'A Tribute to Sir Christopher Wren'?

Has he drawn the whole building or just a part? Why didn't he use a camera?

- These drawings are all preliminary sketches by Charles Cockerell. The RIBA has approximately 70 sketches of Cockerell's sketches for this painting in their collection.
- They depict entire, tops and fragments of buildings.
- The notes on the drawings include information about the name and location of the buildings, and measurements.

- The numbers on the top right of each drawing are RIBA catalogue numbers. These enable the drawings to be stored and found easily.
- Cameras were not readily available in the 19th century. Unable to use photography, architects and artists had to make sketches of all their preliminary source material.

Slide 12: Where can you find skylines?

Discussion:

- This drawing by Henry William Brewer, 1898, shows a panorama of London from the north end of Waterloo bridge, looking south, showing St Paul's Cathedral, Blackfriars Bridge, Tower Bridge, the South Bank, Hungerford Bridge, the Houses of Parliament and Cleopatra's Needle.

Ask students if they recognise any of the buildings.

Can they find St Paul's or Big Ben?

How does this skyline look different compared to London's skyline today?

Ask students to think about where they could find and draw a skyline.

Explore...

- the V&A+RIBA architecture collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum (record techniques and approaches, details, fragments, drawings and models)
- your neighbourhood (record details, fragments and local buildings)
- a nearby town or city (record details, fragments, buildings and town or cityscapes)
- other cities around the world (collect photographs, drawings and images from the internet, e.g. Google Earth, holiday snaps, and record details, fragments, buildings and town or cityscapes)

Slide 13: Where could you explore skylines at the V&A?

Discussion:

The V&A is the world's greatest museum for art and design. It houses many collections of decorative objects such as glass, textiles, silver, ceramics, furniture, paintings, musical instruments including architecture, from different

times in history and a variety of countries. The V&A and RIBA Architecture collections can be found in:

- The drawings in the Prints and Drawings Study Room
- The architectural fragments in the Cast Courts
- The models, drawings and architectural fragments in the Architecture Gallery

Other architectural objects can be found in

- The Ironwork Gallery
- The Asia Galleries
- The V&A building

Slide 14: How to look at drawings of skylines

Discussion:

Explain to the class that:

- There are over one million drawings in the architecture collections. These range from initial sketches or sketchbooks showing first ideas and drawings of completed buildings for research, detailed plan, elevation and section drawings – the most common types an architect uses, to computer drawings or computer animations.
- The Exploring Skylines project focuses on small a selection of drawings from the V&A and RIBA architectural drawings collections and these have been chosen because they each portray a different way of drawing skylines.

When looking at drawings ask students to consider:

- What types of buildings and fragments can you see in the drawing?
- Is the drawing of a real place or an imagined place?
- What materials has the architect/artist used to make the picture?
- How has the architect/artist used line, tone and colour?
- Does this create a sense of distance or add atmosphere?
- What viewpoint has the artist chosen, and how does this impact on your view of the buildings?
- Is there a focal point?
- How does the architect/artist create a sense scale or drama?

- Do the buildings have interesting outlines?
- Do they use perspective to create dramatic effect?
- What do you think the purpose of this drawing was?
- Has the architect/artist included any text or notes and for what purpose?
- What smells and sounds might you find in this environment?
- Can you see buildings like this today?

Slide 15: How to look at architectural models

Discussion:

Explain to the class that:

- There are over 400 architectural models in the V&A and RIBA collections. 55 are displayed in the Architecture gallery. These are of a variety of types of buildings.
- The models are a miniature three-dimensional representation of a building and are used by architects to communicate their design ideas to a client.
- Some are sketch models that help that architect develop their ideas and others are presentation models showing what the finished building or a part of it would look like.

When looking at the models in the Architecture gallery ask the students to consider:

- What type of building is this and what are its distinctive features?
- Does it have any interesting decoration or details?
- What materials have been used to make the model, do you think they the same materials used to create the real building?
- How has the architect/artist used line, colour, shape or texture?
- Does the model have a front view, a back view and a side view?
- Which is the best viewpoint and why?
- Does it have an interesting outline?
- What do you think the purpose of this model was?
- Can you see buildings like this today?

Slide 16: How to look at fragments of buildings

Discussion:

- The Cast Courts plaster casts of architectural fragments, sculptures and monuments taken mainly from works of art or architectural details throughout Europe during the 19th century, when the collecting of such casts was at its most popular. The V&A commissioned or bought these reproductions from some of the leading cast manufacturers of the day.
- The collection that was assembled allowed people, especially students who could not travel abroad, to admire some of the major European monuments.

When looking at the casts in the Cast Court for The Exploring Skylines project, ask the students to consider:

- What type of building is this from?
- What part of the building is it?
- Does it have any interesting decoration or details?
- Does it have any interesting use of line, colour or shape?
- Which is the best viewpoint and why?
- Does it have an interesting outline?
- Can you see buildings or fragments like this today? If so where?
- Have you seen buildings or fragments like this before?

Other galleries at the V&A:

- There are over one million architectural fragments in the V&A. These are actual parts of buildings that may have been demolished or collected because they demonstrate a particular style, use of materials, practice, culture or special building. These range from plaster casts, stone capitals, mosaic friezes, and columns to linenfold panelling, a window from the Bauhaus and metal structure from the original Eurostar terminal in the Architecture gallery. You can visit the Asia galleries, The Ironwork galleries and look at the magnificent Museum building itself.

Slide 17: Could you draw an imaginary or real skyline?

Ask students to create their own skylines.

Be inspired by...

architecture at the V&A
architecture in your local area
your imagination

(See the Exploring Skylines case studies for ideas.)

Slide 18: Getting started: preparing to make your own skyline

Discussion:

Find out from or suggest to students what they might research, record and draw. Consider what they will need to think about before they start.

Discuss:

- Which objects interest you most?
- Where is the best place to stand or sit to draw them?
- What is the best viewpoint to see simple outlines and architectural shapes?
- Choose an object and make a series of drawings, e.g.
 - the outline shape
 - a detail
 - a figure or animal including an expression, emotion or clothing
 - different scales of objects
- How could you use notes to annotate your drawings?
 - date, time
 - location
 - artist
 - measurements
 - sounds and smells
 - information on materials, details, surrounding features, colour
 - time taken