

Teaching materials

Analysis of the Artwork

Seeking the North

by

Elia Escarmelle

Click on the title of the artwork above
to be directed straight to the online video
(hyperlink)

Questions

1. The Artistic Approach to History

At school, you are probably more used to exploring topics related to the Second World War and the culture of remembrance mainly through historical sources in textbooks or through testimonies from people who lived during that period.

- Do you think there is particular value in complementing this traditional approach by engaging with history through the artistic work of a student your age, such as Elia?
- Does Elia's presentation, for instance, draw our attention to perspectives on history that are usually less considered, but that you find important for understanding the meaning that history can have for our present time? Justify your point of view!
- Can you name other artistic works that have made you reflect on history in a way that differs from history books? Why, in your view, can art allow us to look at history from another angle?

2. Elia's Creative Process

Sometimes, at the beginning of a creative project, it is difficult to know where to start and where the process will eventually lead.

- For what reason does Elia describe themselves, at the very beginning of the workshop, as sceptical about a "creative exercise"? Include in your answer the later explanations they give when speaking about their challenges (1) while creating the compass needles and (2) when deciding whether or not to raise their artwork.
- How does Elia eventually manage to develop their artwork despite initial difficulties? What practical approach helps them in this process?
- Based on your own experience, in what kind of working environment do you feel most comfortable: one with maximum freedom or one with clearer structures? Illustrate your answer with concrete examples and try to explain why this is the case!

3. The Comfort of Discomfort

Despite their initial scepticism, Elia still accepts the creative task, as they believe that “it is beneficial to step outside one’s comfort zone”. Give examples from your life when you have stepped outside your own comfort zone — voluntarily or not — and explain how you assess this experience today!

4. The Metaphor of the “Compass”

The main metaphor in Elia’s artwork is that of the “compass”. In the first phase of their creative process, the compass symbolises, for them, “the journey”.

- Which three types of journeys do they have in mind?
- Now imagine your current dream journey. Where would you go? And regarding preparation: to what extent would the details of your journey (accommodation, activities, and so on) already be well planned on the day of departure?

5. The Chameleon-Like Superpower of Metaphors

What makes a metaphor such a powerful storytelling tool is its ability to open up countless paths of interpretation. After deciding to raise the compass needles with the help of a wooden pillar, Elia gradually discovers additional metaphorical interpretations of their sculpture. Which ones do they identify (five in total)?

6. You Are the Compass Artist!

Although at first Elia clearly associates the points of their compass with the four cardinal directions – North, South, East and West – they decide not to mark them explicitly on the artwork in order to leave room for other interpretations. Look at the compass and imagine that YOU created this artwork: what does the compass represent for you, and where do its four ends point?

7. Abstract Art or Figurative Art – A Matter of Taste!

During their creative process, Elia admits that they find it difficult to engage with abstract objects and representations that “do not resemble anything”. Which type of art are you more drawn to: abstract or figurative? Give examples and try to explain your preference!

8. The Link Between Elia’s Artwork and the History of the Second World War

In what way does Elia address themes linked to the Second World War through their artwork? Which specific material do they use as a metaphor to build this “bridge” to the past?

9. Time for Your Podcasts!

Imagine that Elia’s sculpture symbolises a podcast: if you had a week after school to record a podcast on social issues that matter to you, what would it be about?

IMPORTANT

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