

Google Arts & Culture

Learn Together: Barbara Hepworth



Using the lesson plan and Google Arts & Culture resources

This lesson plan is designed to support you as you explore Google Arts & Culture stories and exhibits related to the lesson topic. The images you will see here are just a sample of the media—texts, images, audio, and video—available to you on the Google Arts & Culture website and app. As the lesson uses only resources found on GA&C, it cannot present every aspect of a given topic. A parent or teacher might be guiding you through the lesson, or you might choose to complete it on your own.

All you need to access the lesson is an internet connection and a web browser or the Google Arts & Culture app. You may want to take notes, whether you do that digitally or with paper and pen.

The lesson plan has an **introduction**, which will describe the topic and provide some background information that will help you understand what you are seeing, hearing, and reading. Then the lesson will take you on a journey from one **Story** to another, fill in some details along the way, and pose **questions** that will help you focus on important ideas. A **quiz** and a link for **exploring the topic further** are followed by **ideas for projects** related to the lesson topic that you can do at home or in the classroom.

As noted, the lesson plan includes **questions** about the main stories, and there is also a **quiz**. You will want to write answers to the questions in a notebook or on a piece of paper. Then you can check all your answers when you've finished the lesson.

Resources on the Google Arts & Culture website include Themes, Stories, Museum Views, items, and images.

- ❖ **Themes** bring together stories, exhibits, collections, images, audio, and video files that relate to a topic.
- ❖ In a **Story**, clicking on the arrows on the right and left sides of a slide will move you forward and backward. Just keep clicking to keep moving forward. (Note that in some stories, you scroll up and down.) Audio and videos on slides will play automatically. Clicking on an image title will take you to a page with more information about it.
- ❖ In **Museum Views**, you move through a 3D space. Click to move forward. Click, hold, and move the cursor left or right to turn.
- ❖ An **item** will take you to an individual **image**, where you can zoom in and sometimes read more about the artefact.



In this lesson, you will learn about:

- ❖ How sculptor Barbara Hepworth's life shaped her art.
- ❖ How Hepworth drew inspiration from landscapes.
- ❖ Hepworth's vision of motherhood as an artist.
- ❖ How Hepworth pioneered and popularized abstract sculpture.

You will:

- ❖ Explore some stories and exhibits about Barbara Hepworth and her life and work.
- ❖ Answer some questions about what you have seen and read.

This lesson will take **30–45 minutes** to complete.



Learn Together: Barbara Hepworth

For centuries, sculpture was seen as a masculine art. Traditional sculptors worked with heavy hammers and sharp chisels. They built their work from hard stone or molten metal. Projects could take years of difficult physical labor. Women simply were not strong enough to be sculptors, or so people said.

Barbara Hepworth defied all of these beliefs. She worked in a powerfully physical way, carving directly into stone or wood without making a clay model first. She made monumental pieces that towered over the viewer. And she worked her entire life while still fulfilling the traditional “feminine” role of motherhood. In fact, motherhood was one of her greatest inspirations.

Beyond proving her ability, Hepworth was also an innovator. She was a pioneer of abstract and modernist sculpture. She partnered with other artists and musicians to promote modernist art through organizations and exhibitions. Unlike some abstract art that some people found remote or confusing, Hepworth’s work was often public and beloved. Barbara Hepworth’s life and work remains an inspiration to many artists.

As you view the exhibits and stories in this lesson, think about these questions:

- ❖ How did the events of Hepworth’s life shape her art?
- ❖ What forms did Hepworth use in her abstract art, and what do they communicate?
- ❖ How did Hepworth change the world of sculpture?

["Barbara Hepworth working on the armature of *Single Form* in the Palais de Danse, St Ives" Studio St Ives, 1961. The Hepworth Wakefield](#)



The Life of Barbara Hepworth

Barbara Hepworth showed talent from her youth in Yorkshire, a region of northern England known for its remote countryside. She attended art school in nearby Leeds, then London, and studied in Italy. During World War II, she and her family moved to Cornwall, in England's southwest, to escape the Blitz. She would live and work there for the rest of her life.

Despite being one of few women in sculpture, Hepworth was immediately recognized for her powerful work. Her sculpture was shown in exhibitions and displayed in public spaces, often alongside other modernist artists. Later in life, she experienced an explosion of creativity and produced some of her most famous work. Throughout her adult life, her surroundings and family shaped her art.

Click [here](#) to learn about Barbara Hepworth's life.

Then come back to answer the questions.

1. What other artists did Hepworth meet and work with during her life?
2. What life events helped Hepworth become a successful sculptor?
3. How did Hepworth's art change as she grew older?



"Robin Hood's Bay" (Private Collection), Barbara Hepworth, 1920. The Hepworth Wakefield

Working from the Landscape

Hepworth wrote that the landscape was a constant inspiration. She recalled loving the hills and hollows of her childhood in Yorkshire. She had similar affection for her sea-carved home in Cornwall, in England's far southwest.

Hepworth also traveled, finding powerful inspiration in the landscapes she visited. Her most important trips were to the Mediterranean nations of Italy and Greece.

Click to learn about Hepworth's inspirations in [Yorkshire](#) and in [Greece](#), and how [landscape shaped her art](#).

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. What types of landscapes is Yorkshire known for?
2. How does Hepworth describe the landscape of Greece in her diaries from her trip there?
3. How did Hepworth use what she saw in the landscape in her sculptures?

"Wave," Barbara Hepworth, 1943-1944. The Hepworth Wakefield





Hepworth as a Mother

Motherhood played a powerful role in Hepworth's life and work. She had four children: an son (born 1929) and triplets (born 1934). Caring for three babies plus an older child could be exhausting. Yet Hepworth found time to work most days, and she wrote lovingly about the joy of motherhood.

Many of Hepworth's works are directly about motherhood, including several works titled *Mother and Child*. Her earlier works are figurative, using recognizable shapes of a woman and an infant. Her later works are abstract, using only shapes. She dates her shift to abstract sculpture to the birth of her triplets.

Hepworth's life was also marked by tragedy when her eldest son was killed in an air crash. Hoping to help her heal, a friend invited Hepworth to Greece, a trip that inspired Hepworth's work for years.

Click [here](#) to learn about motherhood in Hepworth's art.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. How is the *Mother and Child* sculpture from 1934 different from many of Hepworth's previous works?
2. How did motherhood sometimes hold back Hepworth's work?
3. How does Hepworth's abstract artwork depict motherhood?

Abstraction

Abstract art is art that does not show a recognizable object, like a person, landscape, or scene. Its opposite is figurative art, which shows lifelike things. While Hepworth was in school, she usually worked in figurative art, often focusing on the human body. However, her forms were always simplified, showing their essential shape and highlighting her materials.

Later, Hepworth moved to fully abstract work. Her practice of direct carving, or shaping the stone or wood as she worked rather than making a model first, helped her pull shapes directly from her materials. Yet even as she worked abstractly, she created forms that suggested people, landscapes, birds, or musical instruments. Her appealing shapes helped popularize abstract sculpture.

Click [here](#) to learn about how Hepworth moved to abstract sculpture.

["Figure in Sycamore" \(detail\), Barbara Hepworth, 1931. The Hepworth Wakefield](#)



Then come back to answer these questions:

1. What is "direct carving"?
2. How are some of Hepworth's sculptures both figurative and abstract?
3. What objects or shapes did Hepworth use in her purely abstract sculptures?

["Two Forms with White \(Greek\)," Barbara Hepworth, 1963. The Hepworth Wakefield](#)



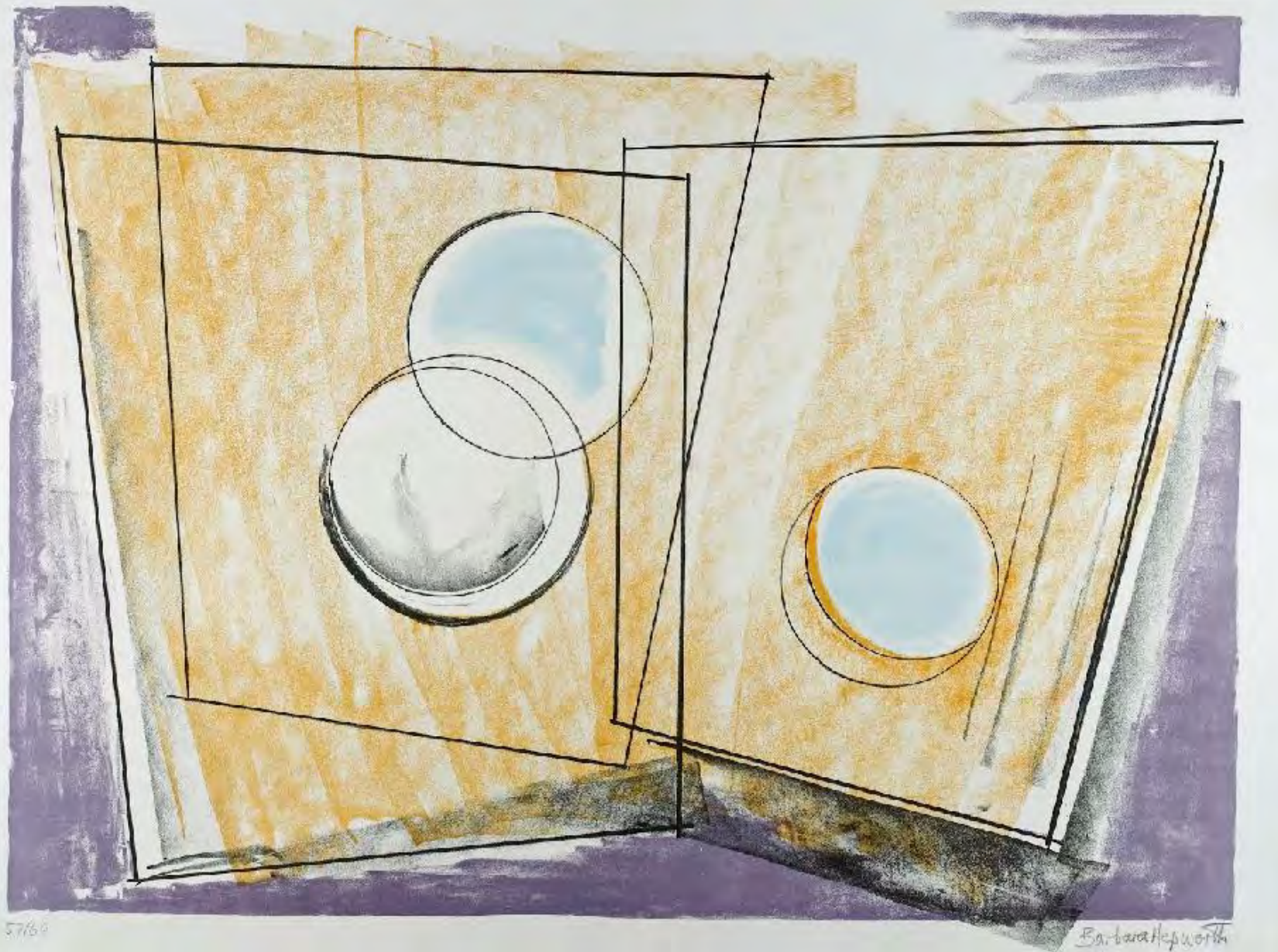
Quiz

Read the questions and write your answer in your notebook or on a piece of paper.

1. Where are three places Barbara Hepworth lived during her life?
2. What events in Hepworth's life changed her artwork, and how did they change it?
3. What shapes in Hepworth's sculptures may have been inspired by landscapes?
4. How did Hepworth's travels influence her work?
5. How did Hepworth's artwork change after she became a mother?
6. How did Hepworth balance her work with the duties of motherhood?
7. How does Hepworth use her materials to create abstract shapes?
8. What do Hepworth's abstract shapes make you think of? Choose one of her sculptures and write a short paragraph about the ideas and feelings it creates for you.

Explore Further

To learn more about Hepworth's life and work, including the collection at the Hepworth Wakefield museum, click [here](#).



["Oblique Forms," Barbara Hepworth, 1969. The Hepworth Wakefield](#)

It's Your Turn!

In this lesson, you learned about the life and work of Barbara Hepworth. Here are some ideas for projects that you can do at home or in the classroom.

- ❖ Follow the instructions [here](#) to recreate one of Hepworth's classic sculptures using a potato and household tools.
- ❖ Experiment with materials to feel how Hepworth drew inspiration from wood and stone. Gather sculpting or carving materials such as artist's clay, modeling dough, carving foam, papier mâché, or even wet sand. Try to form a similar shape in different materials. How does the material determine what shapes you can make?
- ❖ View Hepworth's [prints](#) and [fabric designs](#) and reproduce her process using paints, homemade stamps, and collage.

Answers

The Life of Barbara Hepworth

1. Hepworth was lifelong friends with sculptor Henry Moore, and married sculptor John Skeaping and then painter Ben Nicholson.
2. Hepworth was inspired by a scholarship trip to Italy. Motherhood was also an inspiration. Having her own studio as she grew older allowed her to do more work.
3. Hepworth's work became completely abstract. She also began to work in different media, including making bronze sculptures and lithographs.

Working from the Landscape

1. Yorkshire is known for both its rolling countryside and its industrial towns.
2. Hepworth describes Greece as being vividly colorful and bright. She describes strong feelings and emotions when she is there.
3. Hepworth uses curved shapes with hollow areas, similar to what she sees in the hills, cliffs, coasts, and mountains of the landscape. She also usually uses natural colors of stone, wood, and white paint.

Hepworth as a Mother

1. The *Mother and Child* sculpture is carved as two separate pieces of stone rather than one.
2. Motherhood took up much of Hepworth's time when she was young, and she also wrote that she felt discriminated against in the art world for being a woman, wife, and mother.
3. Hepworth's sculptures often show a larger form (the mother) physically supporting the smaller forms, but the smaller forms are also separate and independent.

Abstraction

1. Direct carving means cutting into the wood or stone without making a model in clay first.
2. Some of Hepworth's sculptures are figurative because they show things you can identify, like a mother and a child, but the shapes are not lifelike.
3. Hepworth often used a standing form, which could represent a human or a tree; the two forms, which could represent a mother and child or a couple; and the closed form, which was a hollow shape that could represent a landscape or a human body.

Answers

Quiz

1. Hepworth lived in Yorkshire, in London, and in Cornwall, all in the UK.
2. Answers will vary. Possible answers: Hepworth's work changed during art school, when she focused on figurative art. After becoming a mother the first time, she began making mother and child sculptures. After having triplets, her work became abstract. A trip to Greece inspired new shapes and colors. Owning her own studio allowed her to make more and larger work.
3. Hepworth uses curves, tall forms, and hollow forms that may have been inspired by hills, trees, and coastlines.
4. During Hepworth's travels to Italy and Greece she saw bright, intense landscapes and classical sculptures that inspired her work.
5. Hepworth's art focused on themes of motherhood. She began working in abstract art after she had triplets.
6. Hepworth made time to work each day, taking care of her children as she worked. She also found childcare that allowed her time to work.
7. Hepworth used direct carving, or cutting a sculpture without making a model first, so she could adapt her shapes as she worked with the material.
8. Answers will vary.



"Pierced Hemisphere I," Barbara Hepworth, 1937. The Hepworth Wakefield