

studio A

Primary Teacher Kit

THOM ROBERTS

Spotlight on Archibald Prize 2024

Thom Roberts is a four-time Archibald finalist; with his presence in the Prize becoming an audience favourite. This year Thom is also represented in the Sulman Prize. As an artist, Thom has a strong sense of practice, known as 'Thom's Way', in which he uses to capture his sitters in new, vibrant and always whimsical perspectives.

Thom chooses his Archibald sitters based on personal experience with people in his life. This year, Thom's interactions with renowned Australian artist Ken Done influenced a connection between the two artists that is playful, energetic and possibly bound by a love of colour!

'This is Big Bamm-Bamm. His real name is Ken Done, but I call him Big Bamm-Bamm after Bamm-Bamm Rubble in The Flintstones. I like to rename people and places, and I love The Flintstones,' says Thom Roberts.

You will notice from Thom's statement that he often uses alternate names for people and places. This is a defining characteristic of Thom, both in his work and everyday life. When asked why, he will often say 'because I do it Thom's way'. The names are affectionate and usually permanent.



Thom Roberts, *Big Bamm-Bamm*, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 152.5 x 102.5 cm

MEET THE ARTIST



Thom Roberts sees the world through a kaleidoscope lens. He interprets people, transport and infrastructure systems as colourful multiples.

Thom's unique interpretation of identities is also informed by the equally peculiar practice of crown reading (peering into the spiral of hair on the top of a person's head). There Thom might find anything from "holes" to millipedes, collie dogs and cows' bodies. Through this action, Thom frequently bestows people with new identities and translates them in his work. Thom's work is instantly recognisable, adorned with new features - extra eyes, noses, moustaches or 'piano teeth' – Thom's work invites us to see ourselves and our world anew.

Ways to engage with Thom's practice:

- Capturing *character* in portraiture
- Investigating features of a human face
- Expressive techniques and qualities in art making
- Exploring the boundaries of our imagination

Syllabus & Learning Guide

Teacher's Page

By engaging in this resource students will learn about the work of Studio A artist Thom Roberts, with a focus on his Archibald Prize 2024 portrait *Big Bamm-Bamm*, of iconic Australian artist Ken Done. They will investigate portraiture and attempt to create artworks using a variety of approaches and materials. The resource provides activities that will help students create artworks through the lens of Thom's conceptual and material practice. Additionally, the resource spotlights Thom as an Archibald painter and the experience of working with a sitter and in preparation to create a grand artwork. They will be encouraged to share their interpretations of artworks and refer to techniques used.

All the resource links to get you started:

Inside Studio A film <https://www.studioa.org.au/projects/inside-studio-a>

Studio A, About Us: Supported Studio <https://www.studioa.org.au/about>

Studio A, Thom Roberts' artist page <https://www.studioa.org.au/thom-roberts>

Thom Roberts, Art Bites <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOaghv7p9LM&list=PLDCjLkxi06YwJVdFKmdSGRGQ-FOQvIErw&index=1>

Art Gallery of NSW, Thom Roberts 2024 <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/2024/30672/>

Syllabus Outcomes and Guides:

This resource is designed to speak to all content descriptors of the ACARA, PYP (IB) and NSW Visual Arts syllabus. Outcomes and assessment methods can be identified through the students' engagement with Thom's practice using a wider lens such as:

An Investigation into the face as a subject matter, making artworks that respond to observation, interpretation and imagination.

Links to ACARA: (ACAVAM106)(ACAVAM108)(ACAVAM112)(ACAVAM116)

Links to NSW syllabus: (VAES1.1)(VAS1.1)(VAS2.1)(VAS3.1)

The exploration of elements of art, visual conventions, material techniques and experimentation when making art.

Links to ACARA: (ACAVAM107)(ACAVAM111)(ACAVAM112)(ACAVAM115)(ACAVAM117)

Links to NSW Syllabus: (VAES1.2)(VAS1.2)(VAS2.2)(VAS3.2)

Engaging in a creative process beginning with a source of inspiration and resulting in the creation of art that reflects the students' intentions, interpretations and use of techniques to convey meaning.

Links to ACARA: (ACAVAM108)(ACAVAM112)(ACAVAM116)

Links to NSW syllabus: (VAES1.3)(VAS1.3)(VAS2.3)(VAS3.3)

An indepth artist study into the artist's practice, his artistic intentions, material and conceptual choices and curatorial discernments.

Links to ACARA: (ACAVAR109)(ACAVAR113)(ACAVAR117)

Links to NSW Syllabus: (VAES1.4)(VAS1.4)(VAS2.4)(VAS3.4)

Cross Curricular Links - English

- Use portraits to write descriptions or vice versa
- Use artworks to share feelings and thoughts about events and characters
- Write an artist statement to accompany a painting
- Use wall and gallery text to understand the different purposes of text and language

Portraits with Thom Roberts



student examples - posca pen on paper

Lesson Plan 1

Drawing portraits

Be inspired by Archibald Prize 2024 painting *Big Bamm-Bamm* and create your own Thom Roberts portrait. Remember to personalise your portrait with different colours and facial features. Giving your portrait an expression will create a moment of connection between your drawing and the audience, so don't forget to be expressive!

This activity takes one lesson to learn a classic Thom Roberts portrait. Or to further explore Thom's practice, continue following his step by step instructions, adding watercolour paint to introduce tonal value to their face. Students can also try to create a Thom Roberts' face using collage paper or digital drawings.



Materials you will need:

For your first drawing you only need simple materials like:

- Texter pens
- Posca pens



If you try extending your activities you could think about using:

- Collage colour paper
- Scissors
- Glue stick
- Watercolour



Teacher's notes...

Throughout the artmaking process identify differentiated key learning moments:

All students will:

- Attempt to draw a portrait.
- Realise that portraits do not have to be exact replicas of their subject.

Most students will:

- Add expression to their portrait.
- Combine their own drawing style with qualities of Thom's.

Some students will:

- Communicate ideas and decisions made during their art making.
- Discuss the impact of different Elements of Art.

Portraits with Thom Roberts

Let's get started!

Follow Thom's steps to make a classic Thom Roberts portrait. *Thom's way* includes some artist's choices. For your first drawing, explore Thom's way and on your second drawing you can introduce your own artist choices.



Step one:

Thom's way is to start with his shoulders and arms.

Step two:

Then you draw your neck.



Step three:

Next is the head; you can draw a circle, oval or egg shape. You can also draw a shape for the chin.

Step four:

Put the eyes in. You can choose 4 eyes, or more eyes. You can choose how many eyes go on your portrait.

That is called an artist choice and *Thom's way* is to use multiple eyes.



Step five:

Nose comes next. Thom's way is to make the nose a hand. **Sometimes Thom makes the artist choice to make the nose a foot instead.**

Step six:

If your paper is big enough, you can trace your own hand on the page. This is Thom showing you an example. If your page isn't big enough, you can draw a smaller hand shape.

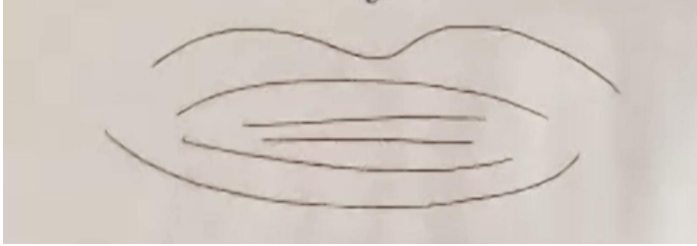


In *Big Bamm-Bamm*, Thom chose to paint Ken Done with 4 eyes and 'piano-teeth'. **Why do you think Thom has made these decisions?**

Think about the qualities of a piano and its sounds. What might piano-teeth symbolise to Thom? Perhaps, he found Ken Done to be chatty and very friendly.

Portraits with Thom Roberts

On your portrait, can you replace teeth with another 'teeth' shaped symbol?



Step seven:

Now its time for the mouth. For the lips Thom draws a line that looks like two mountains on top.

For the bottom lip, he draws a soft curve. This makes up the mouth. Sometimes Thom simply draws 3 loose squiggly lines one on top of the other, and this becomes the mouth.



Step nine:

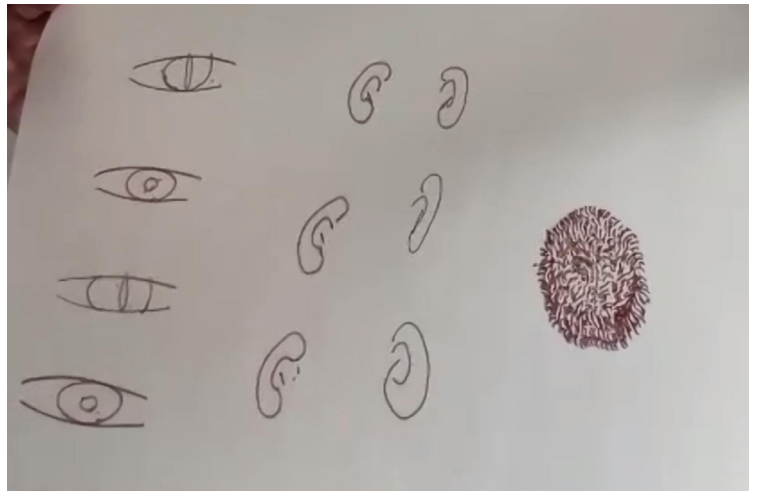
"Bang the ears on". These can be added (if you like) to the side of the head.

Sometimes ears are pointy, or rounded or a little bit of both. Thom has made a quick guide of different types of eyes, pupils and ears that may be helpful.

Step ten:

Now comes the hair. Choose a coloured marking pen that matches the hair colour you want. You can use long strokes and lines with the marking pen if you are wanting long hair or a fringe.

studioa.org.au



Step eight:

Go back and add eyeballs if you like. Draw a circle inside the eye shape, then add another tiny circle for the pupil.

You can also choose to leave them out, as Thom does sometimes in his quick drawings.

CREATING AN ARTWORK LABEL WRITING TASK

To finish your portrait you will need to write some important information to make sure it is a completed artwork and ready to be given to a gallery! When an artwork goes on display it will have an artwork wall label sitting on the wall nearby. On a small piece of paper, which can later be stuck to the wall or stuck onto your artwork's frame, you need to include the below text:

Name of Artist (*That's you, first and last name*)
Artwork Title (*Thom's Way would be to title the artwork a name he has given his sitter*)
Date (*Today's date*)
Medium (*Materials you used to make the portrait*)
Size (*Use a ruler to measure your pages in centimeters*)

This is *Big Bamm-Bamm's* artwork wall label:

Thom Roberts
Big Bamm-Bamm
2024
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
152.5 x 102.5 cm

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Choosing a 'Sitter'!

Lesson Plan 2

Choosing a sitter; relationships in artmaking.

Thom Roberts' painting *Big Bamm-Bamm* was painted for the Archibald Prize. To enter the Archibald Prize an artist must choose a 'sitter' - this is the person that becomes the subject matter to their artwork. The artist and sitter will spend time together as the artist sketches preliminary drawings and starts to visualise what the end painting will be. In 2024, Thom chose one of Australia's most celebrated artists, Ken Done. The audience can read about Thom's journey in choosing his sitter through the exhibition's wall text. Use the wall text to build an understanding of how relationships are built in artmaking and how you, as an artist can choose your perfect 'sitter'.

This activity takes one to two lessons and involves art appreciation and art making activities. The intention of this lesson is to develop your understanding of how significant people in your life can become a source of inspiration and subject in your artworks! Along the way we look at how colour is an important Element of Art that helps us use symbolism to create meaning.

Teacher's notes...

Throughout the artmaking process identify differentiated key learning moments:

All students will:

- Investigate colour as an Element of Art.
- Identify a significant person in their life.
- Create a portrait using colours selected by the student.

Most students will:

- Demonstrate an understanding that colour can create meaning.
- Identify a significant person and attempt to portray character through colour choice.

Some students will:

- Communicate complex ideas about colour symbolism through their artmaking and discussions.
- Use accurate depictions to create a portrait based on a significant person, providing persuasive reasoning for their choice of sitter in respect to their relationship.

This lesson has key art appreciation vocabulary. The words are highlighted in pink and should be unpacked throughout the lesson as they arise.



Thom Roberts, *Big Bamm-Bamm*, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 152.5 x 102.5 cm

Teaching Kindergarten to Year 2

The lesson is taught by the teacher to a class and engages learning through class discussion. Exhibition wall text and colour symbolism activities are done collectively and students are then invited to create the artwork of their sitter once class discussion has finished.

Teaching Year 3 to Year 6

The lesson can be taught as a collective discussion with intervals for group discussions and writing opportunities. Or the lesson can be completed autonomously by each student. It is suggested that some collective brainstorming and sharing of ideas is encouraged.

Choosing a 'Sitter'!

Thom's exhibition wall text says:

The audience can read Thom's exhibition wall text to understand the artwork. The exhibition wall text accompanies the artwork when it is displayed in the gallery and online. In the text Thom explains his different interactions with Ken Done and how their relationship was built. As a class, identify key moments in the text and discuss how you think these different moments made Thom feel? Below the text is a list of 'feeling' words to help your class use **critical thinking** when completing this activity.

'Bamm-Bamm [Ken Done] is an artist like me and everyone at Studio A. I met him when I had an exhibition at Pink Panther Gallery [Mosman Gallery] when I has a show there in 2023 with Popeye [artist Simon Wheeldon] called Pink Panther Town. He told me loved my artwork. Bamm-Bamm visited Studio A this year and I asked him if I could paint his portruff [portrait] and he said yes. I sketched him then, in lead pencil. When he came to the studio he loved my cow sculpture and asked to buy it. I said "sure!" and I used the money to buy coffees! I think Bamm-Bamm looks a bit like my dad Buddy Brown Boy [Frank]. Many years ago he had moustache like Bamm-Bamm but he shaved it off in the Philippines.'
– Thom Roberts

Connected	Sad	Welcome	Admired	Uncomfortable
Lonely	Respected	Proud	Disappointed	
Happy	Unsafe	Acknowledged		Valued

Think and Discuss!

- Would you describe Thom and Ken Done's **relationship** as a positive or negative relationship? What makes you say that? Spend a moment talking about different kinds of relationships and why they are important.
- Why do you think Thom chose Ken Done to be his **subject**? A subject is the focus of a painting or artwork, so for portraiture it is the sitter.
- How does Thom use **colour** to communicate his ideas and feelings about Ken Done? Use the next page to explore the concept of colour symbolism and how colour can create meaning.

Revisit this page to colour in Thom's sketch!



Choosing a 'Sitter'!

Using colour symbolism to communicate meaning.

Colours can create **meaning** in art because all colours have different feelings and ideas associated with them. This means colours can be **symbolic**. When an artist chooses a colour, they are trying to **communicate** an idea in a secret way. Across different cultures some of the symbolic meanings can change, so it's important to learn the different colours and respect everyone's **perspectives**. Below is a list of some colours and what they symbolise; this list is based on several different cultural perspectives.

Colour Symbolism and Meanings:

RED

Power, strength, energy, heat, love, passion, danger, warning, anger

PINK

Compassion, sweet, beauty, youth, hope, inspiration, sensitivity

ORANGE

Focus, excitement, confidence, encouragement, healthiness, adventure

PURPLE

Creativity, luck, spirituality, fantasy, intelligence, vision, dignity

YELLOW

Joy, friendliness, cheerful, vibrant, knowledge, caution, pleasant, kindness

GREEN

Healthy, reassurance, growth, natural, balance, jealous, fresh

BROWN

Organic, comfort, nature, durability, order, genuine

BLUE

Peace, calm, loyalty, security, trust, fear, cold, stability, integrity

NAVY

Sad, loneliness, isolation, strength, trust, wisdom, seriousness

WHITE

Clean, honest, easy, empty, soft, simple

GRAY

New, independence, sophisticated, balanced, mature

BLACK

Strong, nervous, mysterious, serious, lost, empty, protective

Can you identify the colours Thom Roberts used on Ken Done's T-shirt? What words and meanings do you think Thom was trying to communicate through these colours?

Your Turn...

Now it's your turn to choose a sitter! Brainstorm important people in your life.

*Think about their personalities, how would you describe them?
How do they make you feel?*

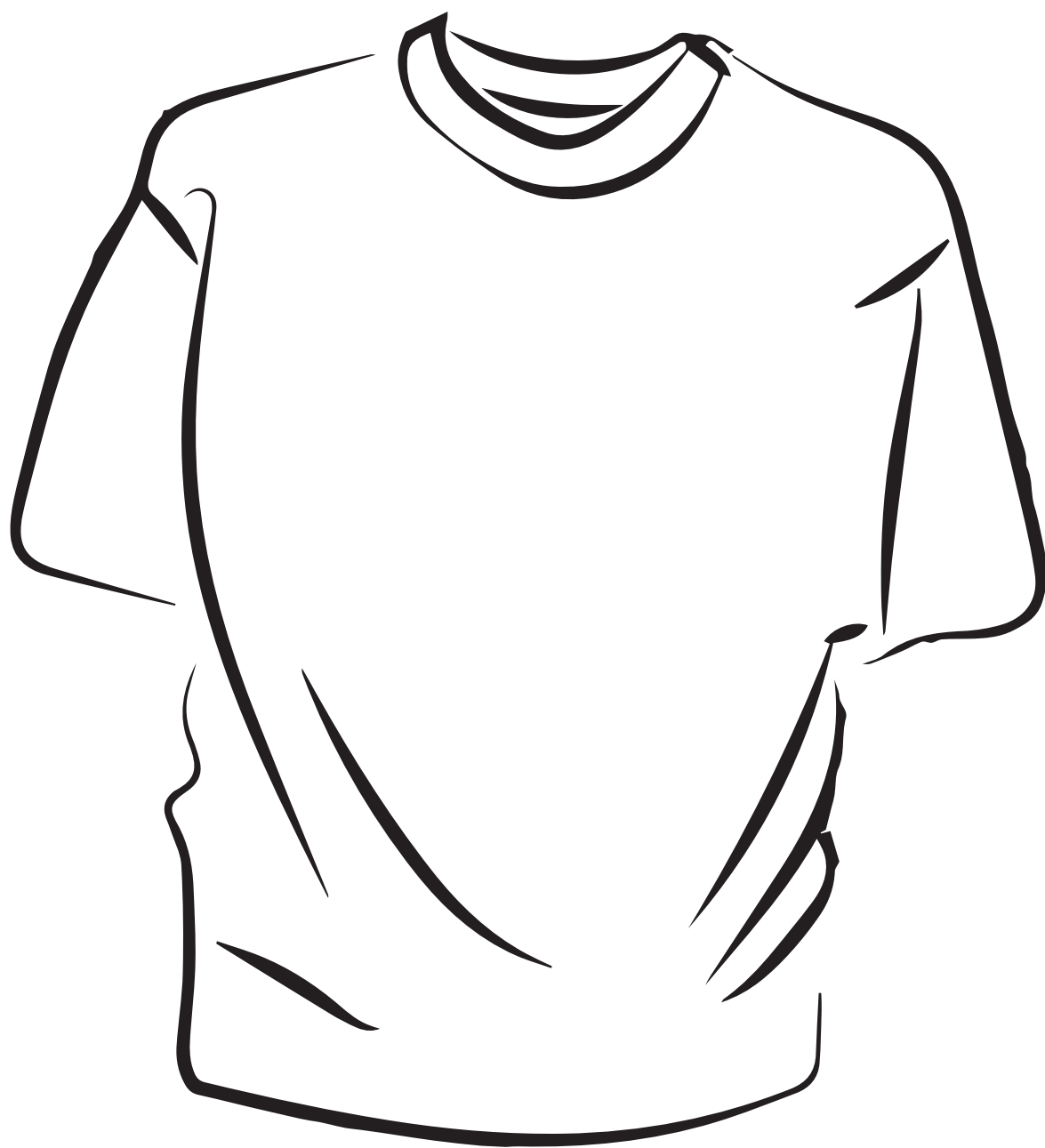
This will help you find the sitter for your portrait. Discuss as a class or make a mindmap on a piece of paper listing all the different relationships in your life. Next to each person write a list of some words that describe that person and your relationship with them.

Artists get inspired by the people and places around them. Who makes you feel inspired?

It's time to sketch your sitter! Do a quick 'Thom's Way' sketch of your chosen person below:

In the space below create an artwork of your chosen sitter!
The t-shirt will help you draw your person on the page. Use colour symbolism to create meaning and communicate your relationship with this person!

Don't forget to draw it Thom's Way.



My sitter is:
Words and colours I connect to them are:

What makes up a face?

Lesson Plan 3

Making faces with clay dough.

This is a quick and playful activity that can be completed over one lesson. The intention is for students to begin thinking about the structure of the face. Using clay dough (or a similar material such as Playdoh, airdry clay or modelling clay) students explore shape as an Element of Art to build faces.

This lesson is designed for all ages and can be differentiated through material selection and complexity in detail. Kindergarten to Year 2 are encouraged to use clay dough or soft molds, whereas older years can create more detailed faces using clay and glazes.

First attempt to remake Thom's *Big Bamm-Bamm* portrait using clay dough. On your second attempt you can create an artwork based on your chosen sitter or someone in your class!

Step one:

Create a flat rectangle. This will be your background to frame your face.

Step two:

Using any colour, create the base of your face - this is the skin of your face.

Step three:

Begin to build your eyes, nose, hair and ears using different coloured clay. Mold them into different shapes. Revisit *Thom's Way* to creating a portrait to ensure your face has multiple eyes and unique features.

Step four:

Design a t-shirt using colour symbolism.

Teacher's notes...

As students are creating, ask them to respond to the below questions to practise thinking and discussing artist intentions and choices.

- What shapes are you using to create your portrait?
- How did you approach this task - where did you start?
- Which colours have you chosen to use, why?



student examples - clay dough