

Introducing the poster

Use the following talking points and art activity to encourage children to explore the painting



Gather the children on the carpet and show them the poster, *Bonfire Night* by Barry Watkin. The following are suggested talking points:

- Why are all these people standing here? What kind of weather is it? (Note the bulky clothes, hats and the way the wind is blowing the flames.)
- Have they just arrived or have they been here for a while? (Notice their static, relaxed stance.) Has the fire just been lit?
- Why do the figures in the middle seem clearer than the ones at the edges? (This is a result of the background colour – the paler it is, the clearer the figures appear.)
- Are the figures actually black? Are they painted with clear edges? Why do you think the artist has not painted them absolutely black or clear? (Shadows and dark colours vary; smoke and heat would blur edges.)
- Why has the artist painted little bits of white on the figures on the left? (To show the fire lighting up their faces.)
- How does the artist draw our attention to the firework? (He uses white, the lightest colour in the painting, to pick out the firework. Also the figures on the left are slightly bent inwards, leading our eye in towards the firework. The boy on the left is pointing, so our eye naturally follows the direction of his arm.) Notice that he has not put the firework right in the middle – a painting often looks better if the main thing in it is slightly to one side.

- What colours has the artist chosen for the sky? (There is only a slight amount of blue in the colour – the rest is black or brown, because of the smoke.)

Introductory activity

Get the children to try painting their own versions of the picture.

- Provide only reds, blues, yellows and white to encourage experimental mixing. Trays or plates are better than palettes as colours can be dragged freely into one another. Show children how to mix in small blobs so that lots of colours can be fitted on the tray.
- Always mix a tiny amount of the darker colour into the edge of a pale colour, pulling in as much of the paler shade as you need. For the flames, start with a blob of white, and add tiny amounts of yellow to vary the colour. Then add tiny amounts of red to a blob of yellow to make a range of oranges. For the dark areas, experiment with mixing browns from yellow, red and blue. A dark (Prussian) blue paint is more effective and natural for darkening colours than black for this picture.
- When appropriate colours have been mixed and the children are ready to paint, begin with the palest area of the fire, then work into the darker fire colours, then paint the sky around it, perhaps using the fingers to smear further flames over the edges when the sky has dried. Paint in the ground and the people, and finally add the firework with pure white paint when the picture is completely dry.

