

*There, on the pendent boughs
her coronet weeds...
incapable of her own distress'*

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act IV, Sc. VII

The imagery of the famous painting by John Everett Millais evokes Ophelia's death in a Danish river

Learners

High school students, adult learning programmes

Subjects

Art, English, Natural Sciences/Botany, Music, ICT

Objectives

The project aims at encouraging the students to find connections between school subjects; widening their cultural perception; deepening their knowledge of Shakespeare's work, *Hamlet*; exploring its profound meaning about the concepts of life and human relationship; enhancing the study around Millais' painting and its context; finding the botanical references present in the text; walking around the Botanical Garden to find out the related plants and flowers; studying their botanical characteristics; acquiring information, selecting, organizing; writing and communicating in the English language. Cross-curricular, methodological interaction

Competences

To enhance creativity, perception, reflection; to encourage observation and search for details; to share data and facts; to raise awareness and interest in culture and study; to be responsible and inclusive; to stimulate critical thinking and an attitude to problem solving; to be able to communicate in a foreign language; learning to learn



Tools and materials

Online and printed texts; digital programmes and devices

Duration

The project can be completed over a period of three/four months

Development

Brainstorming session among the teachers to establish tasks, activities, time schedule, etc.

Presentation of the project to the class with related explanation about activities, development and targets; formation of groups

Steps suggested:

-Art

Ask general questions about the XIX century English artistic currents to test the students' preparation

Preliminary observation of the painting, *Ophelia*; first considerations

Research of information about John Everett Millais, his artistic context and current of belonging, inspirational motifs to the creation of the painting

In-depth survey of the Pre-Raphaelite movement

-Literature

Warm-up: elicit information about the work *Hamlet*, the characters, the story

Enlightening the students about the complexity of the work *Hamlet*, and the range of elements, feelings, human and dramatic dimensions it embraces: doubt, love, madness, loyalty, friendship, the supernatural, theatre in the theatre, etc.

Reading of Shakespeare's tragedy with particular attention to the character of Ophelia and all the episodes where she is present on the stage or is referred to

In-depth study around Ophelia, inferences from the play about her nature and her role of daughter, lover and sister

Class debate and essay commenting on the character of Ophelia and her feminine features as they can be inferred from Shakespeare's play

Looking for the plants and flowers mentioned in the text and related to Ophelia's character

Considerations on how nature is a constant element in the work and how its presence contributes to creating imagery and define some characters and passages

Out of the Ophelia's context but yet important: attentive reading of the famous lines 'To be or not to be'. Considerations on Hamlet's predicament and the complexity of his character; the ever-present view on man's existence

-Botany

Making a list of the plants and flowers present in *Hamlet* and check their characteristics during the Science classes

Creating tables subdividing the plants/flowers on the basis of their botanical properties

Draw graphs to define the data about their origin, growth and season of blooming

Observing Millais' painting. What is amazing about the presence of so many and varied flowers? Class debate

Visit to the Botanical Garden to find out the correspondence between the plants, narrated and painted, and the actual ones

-Art

New close observation of Millais' work to find the relevant details about it

Essay: Describe the portrait in all its pictorial details and the particular mood and pose characterizing the figure of Ophelia

Depict, draw, sketch a personal representation of Ophelia, or of the plants (one or more details) or other elements present in the picture

Investigate on how influential Millais' work has been on subsequent works created by famous painters

Written comment on the outcomes of the research with references and details

-Music

Guess from Ophelia's expression what kind of song she is likely to sing choosing among the music or songs you are acquainted with

Explore the music of the XVI, XVII centuries (Shakespeare) or of the XIX century (Millais) and find the one that better fits the image of the drowning Ophelia. Class debate to decide about it

If feasible: composing brief musical passages, songs, poems, lines in Ophelia's honour

-Literature and Art

Essay: Connect the use of imagery in Shakespeare's play to the luxuriant imagery of Millais' painting to highlight how it is relevant in both works and how it is congenial to the description of Ophelia's death in Millais' portrait in line with the Pre-Raphaelite canons

-Final steps

Creation of an e-book (to be uploaded on the school website and diffused through social media) made up of the outcomes (essays, drawings, tables, music, etc.) from the study and exploration of the different sections, completed with an accurate bibliography and a presentation of the teachers of each subject involved accounting for the motivations and the methodology exploited

Uploading on the website of a video with a gallery of the visual works created by the students to the accompaniment of music

Products

Creation of an e-book: *Ophelia's Symphony*

Exhibition of the visual works created by the students in a gallery of images with the same title

If feasible, arrangement of a mini concert, *Ophelia's Symphony*, with music, words, lyrics dedicated to Ophelia, at school, in a proper place, at the Botanical Garden...

Evaluation and validation

See introduction