

## William Blake Teacher's Notes **A2** **B2**

The current Tate Britain exhibition on William Blake explores the world and work of this talented artist whose poems and paintings may have sunk into oblivion had they not been modern and pregnant with meaning – though sometimes against the flow- in a changing 19<sup>th</sup> century society.

The Tate's website offers a rather thorough insight into the artist's world and- depending on your students' level and interest- you may find it relevant to explore more than offered here, ie explore the “ Blake's London” or the “Blake's cast of characters” pages.

This work on William Blake can be used in relation with a sequence on the Gothic or the Romantic movements, for example *Shine Bright 1<sup>ère</sup>* Advanced File 1 “Freaky dreams”.

Here are 2 worksheets to help your students -no matter what their level is- to get a glimpse of the artist's work. The articles and activities range from an A2+level to a B2+ level, all on the same artist.

### Vocabulary and structures

- Art in museums: *curator, exhibition...*
- Religion & faith: *God, angels...*
- Vocabulaire de l'analyse: *it implies, suggests, it is reminiscent of...*
- The 19th-century society: *machinery, industries, industrial revolution...*
- linkwords:
  - contrast (whereas, yet...) and paradox (however..)
  - cause (as, because...) and consequence (that's why, therefore...)
  - adding ideas: *moreover, what's more, furthermore...*
  - Past / preterite
  - Voicing your opinion: *In my opinion, I find it...*
- Expressing surprise/ admiration: *What a ... , It's so... + adjectives (amazing, puzzling , disruptive...)*

### Listening, speaking, writing

- We suggest starting with a speaking activity to check if the students have heard of, or seen, Blake's works before. Show the slideshow of the following works that appear in the trailer to be watched afterwards:  
*Satan smiting Job, Europe, God of a Flea, The Good and evil angels, Newton* and have them react:  
Have you seen these works before? Help them focus on the colours + type of characters: impression conveyed? What world are we drawn into?  
Do you know the artist? The period?
- Then, have the whole group read the introductory paragraph on the Tate's website and complete the first reading activity, followed by the listening / watching activity using the trailer in order

to help them understand Blake's world (a world imbued with religion in which poetry and images interact and enrich one another) and as a whole before dividing the group and ascribing different tasks.

■ Then, divide the class into 2 different groups. Each one will be in charge of a different webpage, with a different worksheet to focus on some of Blake's characteristics and take notes. This will enable differentiated teaching as each article/ page varies in length and difficulty. Yet, as there are common points in the elements they have to pick, a collective answer sheet will be provided and used after their group work so they all have the same written summary and basis for the final task.

**NB:** depending on the students, their levels and your objectives, you can choose not to divide the class into two groups and / or to use the "Blake's London" or the "Blake's cast of characters" pages, asking the students to spot the places on a map of London for instance or to find some common points in the characters and identify them in the different paintings on the site.

■ Depending on time available and the skills you want to have pupils use, we have suggested different options of Final task. If you are using *Shine Bright 1ère*, another option could be to use Blake's paintings to inspire your students to write a freaky story (which could, in turn, be included in the final task on Blake!)

## Final task options

**NB** No matter which option you choose, we recommend you use a padlet or other collaborative writing tool to make it easier for the students to post / share their work while keeping an eye on what's done

**Option 1 Speaking:** After visiting the exhibition, some visitors are asked to voice their impressions using a video booth when leaving the Tate. Record your one-minute video in which you quickly tell about your opinion on Blake's works and the reasons for it. You can give examples / explain using a specific work of art.

**Tip:** make a list of ideas using the elements found in the articles. Then, organise your ideas in a logical way (linkwords!) Don't forget to use the new words Don't write full sentences but use your notes when talking.

**Option 2 Writing:** After visiting the exhibition, you leave a comment on the Tate's website. Quickly tell about your opinion on Blake's works and the reasons for it. You can give examples / explain using a specific work of art.

**Option 3 Writing (long form):** You are a journalist for an art magazine. After visiting the exhibition, you write an article on Blake, his life, his world and works.

**Tip:** make a list of ideas using the elements found in the articles. Then, organise your ideas in a logical way (linkwords!) Don't forget to use the new words

**Option 4 More complex: writing, speaking, video...:** The Tate is advertising the exhibition to schools and young people in general. They asked you and your teammates to prepare a web page about Blake for teenagers.

In groups of 5, prepare:

- an article about Blake, his life, his world and works.
- short videos of visitors giving their opinions after visiting the exhibition at the

Tate

- short reviews / online comments

### Tips:

- First, choose your role.
  - Then, make a list of ideas using the elements found in the articles. Then, organize your ideas in a logical way (linkwords!)
  - If you shoot a video, make sure you don't write full sentences but use your notes when talking (you must sound natural!)
- !! Don't forget to use the new words/ concepts.

### Trailer transcript

<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/william-blake-artist>

**Voiceover:** To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour [...]

Every Tear from Every Eye  
Becomes a Babe in Eternity  
This is caught by Females bright  
And return'd to its own delight [...]

The Bleat the Bark Bellow & Roar  
Are Waves that Beat on Heavens Shore [...]

It is right it should be so  
Man was made for Joy & Woe  
And when this we rightly know  
Thro the World we safely go [...]

Some are Born to sweet delight  
Some are Born to Endless Night [...]  
Extracts from "Auguries of Innocence",  
William Blake, c.1803

### Solutions

**These are examples of what students can say.**

**NB:** Step 1 and 2 are common to all the students. They'll then have different tasks on their worksheets for Step 3, but will have to work together again for Step 4 and the final project. So, make sure you give a different worksheet to each group.

#### 1.a. Réponses selon les élèves.

*Eventuellement introduire les expressions:* it rings a bell, it looks familiar

**b.** Dark colours prevail / dominate: a dreadful, gloomy, tormented and threatening / menacing world/ atmosphere. Religion pervades / permeates the paintings with references to biblical figures, God and Angels, good and evil. Some characters look like dark figures from the underworld  
A tormented world / a dream-like / nightmarish imagery?

**c.** You can draw a parallel with the Freaky Dreams chapter in *Shine Bright 1ère* to help them better understand the world / period Blake lived in, from an artistic, political and social perspective

#### 2.a. painter, printmaker and poet

**b.** Radical and rebellious (= he challenged the conventions of his time) + technical innovations and political commitments

**c.** an inspiration to visual artists, musicians, poets and performers worldwide: a source of inspiration for artists in different fields all around the world

**b.1.** London + famous paintings by Blake: his paintings merge into the real city / they are superimposed on the city: merging / mixing/ blending fiction and reality, as if his art were part and parcel of London itself

**2.** What you hear sounds like a poem / the

lyrics of a song / the poem is scanned by the voiceover: bewitching / captivating / spellbinding / enthralling the listeners

**NB:** The full version of the poem can easily be found on line.

**c.** This trailer suggests/ implies that both Blake's poems and paintings are London-based and / or tell something about this city. We can infer that he drew inspiration from London or at least offers his vision of the city in his works.

### 3. GROUP A (A2+-B1):

<https://www.tate.org.uk/kids/explore/who-is/who-william-blake>

**a.** William Blake: 1757, London-1827

**1.** angels in trees

**2.** Romantic age/ massive changes: industrial revolution

**3.** very religious man / against science and rational thinking for fear it may destroy / erode people's religious faith

**4.** a craftsman , a man equal to others

**5.** total contrast / utterly different from the artists of his time/ didn't follow the trend and was not influenced by others

**b.** His characters betray his religious faith and his use and choice of colours is evocative / reminiscent of the romantic age in which the artists expressed their tormented feelings through colours or words

### GROUP B (B1-B2):

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/william-blake-39/blakes-songs-innocence-experience>

**a.1.** from youth to old age: as you grow old you learn and acquire wisdom

**2.** The characters in the first title page are 2 young children and a young adult (who is bound to be their mother / a (close) relative?), the colours are quite bright, light

and suggest spring . On the contrary, in the second title page, we can see two young adults (who may be the children in the first page) kneeling by a bed . They are mourning and praying / keeping a vigil over a dead person (who may be the young adult in the first page). The colours are quite dark and remind us of death and / or autumn. This second page thus implies the passing of time and suggests nothing is eternal, we're all bound to die. Those 2 pages encapsulate the cycle of life in a simple yet harrowing/ heart-rending/ heart-wrenching / moving way. We can guess the poems in those books illustrate this passing of time / cycle of life / the changes that occur in a lifetime.

**b.** The colours are rather lively in the first version whereas they are darker / greyish in the second one.

We can see many characters – dressed in colourful clothes / warm hues – in the first page, thus rendering a lively scene / event while there only is a single character in the second page, which is in sharp contrast with the first one .Besides, the words themselves depict a festive event in the first poem.

Contrary to the first page, we are given to see a landscape at sunset in the second page. This may convey the idea of an end: either the end of the day, the end of life or of a cycle. What's more, the dull and dark colours allude to / hint at a sorrowful moment, which is backed up by the words used in the poem itself as they refer to poverty, hunger and the plight of many English people.

**c.** That tallies with what I had thought when first seeing the title pages. The artist / Blake seems to ponder over some subjects, using the power of hindsight.

## 4.a.1. painting + poetry

2. Religious characters, against the tide, innovative, illuminated books

3. his visions, a rejection of his time, his faith in God )

## b.1. Rebellious, committed

2. Romantic period / reacted to the industrial revolution.

3. Didn't correspond to the standards of his time / not recognized during his lifetime YET he inspired the following generations

c. Even though he was not recognized during his lifetime he inspired many generations of artists after him and is still remembered today.

As he was a strong believer, his works are steeped in religion, yet, he used his poetry to denounce the inequalities fostered by the 19th century society.

**4. Art & the art world:** exhibition, museum, curator, paintings, poem, illuminated books, illustrations...

**Religion and spiritual life:** God, angels, ghosts, pray, monks, good & evil, faith, belief, holy...

## 5. HELP

### Linkwords (cause, consequence, paradox...):

as, yet, even if...so, that's why, therefore, consequently, as a consequence / because, as, since / yet, even if, though, although, even though, ...

**Voicing your opinion:** I think , in my opinion...I find it (+adj).. , I reckon, I believe, I consider it (+adj)..., to my mind, I feel...

**Showing admiration/ surprise:** what a.../ it's so.../ it's such a.../ how (+adj) this is../ I can't believe it / it's amazing/unbelievable...

You may give them adjectives like:  
breathtaking/ flabbergasting / mind boggling...

*Production libre des élèves. Les inciter à réutiliser le vocabulaire travaillé au cours de la CE et mise en commun.*