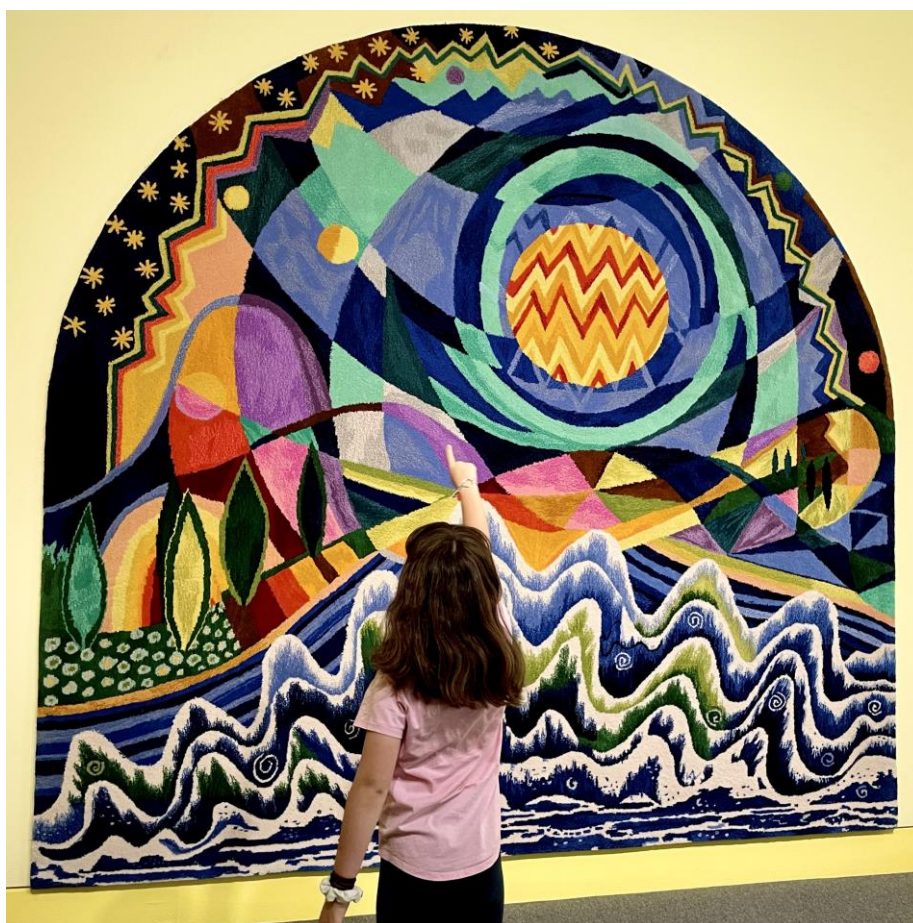


# Primary Teachers Exhibition Notes

Take a Breath

Irish Museum of Modern Art

14 June 2024 to 17 March 2025



Artwork: *Deep Time Day* (2024) by Isabel Nolan, from the exhibition *Take a Breath*, IMMA, Dublin.

# Introduction for Teachers

These notes are for Primary School teachers who are interested in visiting IMMA to experience the exhibition [Take a Breath](#) with their class. The notes are written in a conversational style of inquiry through which IMMA staff engage children in talking about artwork. The notes cover most of the curator's key themes in selecting the artworks for this exhibition, and many of the principal ideas of the artists whose work has been exhibited. The notes are suggested starting points to create dialogue in the class about the children's experience of the artworks and stimulate engagement with the ideas encountered in the galleries. In the online PDF version of these notes there are embedded [links](#) to images or additional information. There are also related links to selected audio pieces in primary school children's own voices as part of IMMA's [Soundcloud](#) playlist [Take a Breath Kids Audio Guide](#)

## Introduction for Pupils

**Take a Breath** is a large exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art which features lots of artworks created by different artists. Even though there are lots of different types of artworks in the galleries—paintings, films, sculptures, tapestries, sounds, photographs—the artworks are connected by one idea: **breathing**.

When we organise different artworks together, we say the artworks have been **curated**. A person in a gallery or museum who organises different artworks together is called a **curator**. When Teacher organises all your class's artworks together in the school corridor, Teacher is being a **curator**. Sometimes we organise things together because we like the way they look together. Sometimes we organise things together because we want to see more clearly how similar or different they are to each other. Do you curate anything in school or at home? Do you have a collection of toys, games, books, rocks, posters which you organise in a particular way which is pleasing to you?

# Now, let's think about breathing ...

Even though we breathe every second of our lives, we mostly don't think about breathing. Breathing is an automatic action of our bodies. Every time we take a breath of air, we pull oxygen into our bodies. Our bodies use up that oxygen to keep everything working inside us, and then we breathe out a different gas, carbon dioxide, which our body doesn't need.

## What does breathing mean to us?

### 1. Life

Breathing is **a sign of life**. We need to breathe to be alive. When we have just been born, the first thing we do is cry. That cry tells everyone around that we are breathing for the first time! Sometimes you will hear someone say they are “breathing new life” into something. This means they are fixing up something or giving it a makeover.

### 2. Speech

Talking and using **words and language** make human beings quite different from the other creatures in the world. We control and use our breathing, without even thinking about it, to make special sounds that are understood as words by other human beings. We take in a breath and then we say a sentence as we breathe out. Breathing and speaking are connected like this.

### 3. Music

**Singing** and breathing are also connected. When we sing, we also need to control our breathing. Some musical instruments make sounds when we use our breathing: trumpets, recorders, flutes, saxophones ... can you think of any others? We call these “wind instruments” because they are connected to our breathing.

### 4. Physical Wellbeing

When we run too fast for too long, we say we are “**out of breath**.” Our breathing speeds up when we do exercise, or play sports, or run to catch the bus. When we are

out of breath, we need to sit down and really try to completely relax in order “to **catch our breath.**” Athletes learn how to control their breathing so that they can perform well in sports. Sometimes when people become ill, they can have difficulty breathing. Coughing or wheezing can be caused by a virus or bacteria or an allergy. When our breathing is affected by **coughing or wheezing**, it is very unpleasant for us. It makes us appreciate when we can take a breath again without coughing and wheezing. People who have asthma may need to take puffs of an inhaler to help them start breathing easily again. When something “**goes against your breath,**” it can be uncomfortable and make you cough a lot until your lungs are clear again. When this happens, we feel relieved and, maybe for a little bit, we realise how important breathing is to us.

## 5. Mental Wellbeing

Sometimes when something is stressful or frustrating, our breathing speeds up. Our breathing is connected to our **emotions and thoughts.** When we need to calm down, we “**take a breath.**” When we take deep breaths and slow down our breathing, we can clear our mind of stress and frustration, and perhaps see things in a new light or from a different angle.

## 6. Air Pollution

When chimneys on buildings put smoke up into the sky, or when there is a lot of traffic on the road with exhaust fumes, the air we breathe is polluted. **Pollution** makes breathing difficult. Over a lengthy period of time, it can damage our lungs and make us ill. When forests go on fire, or storms blow dust and sand into the air, it affects people’s ability to breathe properly too. Our climate is changing due to the gases, fumes and smoke caused by many human activities. The **changing climate** is making many places in the world hotter and hotter, and that rising heat is making forest fires and storms more frequent. This is the reason so many people right now are trying to change the way we are affecting our environment and make sure we have less pollution and damage to the natural world around us. What things do you think we can do to make our air cleaner and protect our environment?

## 7. War

**Wars** also affect the environment badly. Explosions, smoke, fumes, and dust from fighting make the air polluted. The air can stay polluted long after the war has ended. Some explosions, like nuclear ones, can pollute a place so badly that people cannot return to live there safely again.

## 8. Our Natural Environment

**Plants and trees** are connected to people through breathing. People breathe in the gas oxygen in the air and then we breathe out a gas called carbon dioxide. The leaves of plants and trees do the opposite. They can take in the carbon dioxide and then let go of oxygen back into the air. Then we breathe in the oxygen and the cycle starts all over again. You can see how connected human beings' lives are with the life of plants and trees all around us. You can think of a forest as a big leafy lung, "breathing" in carbon dioxide and breathing out some of the oxygen we need to live! Trees and forests can help ease how climate change is impacting our environment.

## Let's take a closer look at four artworks in the exhibition ...

### 1. The Journey of One Breath

The first artwork we see at the start of the exhibition is called "[The Journey of One Breath](#)." It was created by the artist Alex Cecchetti. This artwork is an installation: you can walk into the gallery and be surrounded by the artwork, before you, above you, behind you. This artwork is made with projections on see-through silk curtains showing underwater dives in the Philippines. We can see the beauty of the ocean, with turtles and clown fish. (Have you ever seen an animated movie about a clown fish?) There is blue paint on the walls and blue filters on the windows so that the gallery really makes us feel like we are under the sea. Listen: you can hear singing as part of this installation. The installation has two real hammocks. How do you use a hammock? What would you think about if you were lying in this hammock? Can you imagine being in a hammock under the sea, looking at all the underwater life around you? Imagine what you would be able to see all around you as you lie down relaxing? Name three things you can imagine seeing all around here at the bottom of the sea.



Draw one of the things you can see in your imagination. Listening to the singing and looking at the blue and gold colours, this is a peaceful and restful place, but we are reminded also of the richness and importance of our oceans. Pollution is harming our oceans, the life they contain, and how the sea provides us with food, oxygen, and most of all, nature's beauty. Why do you think this artwork is called "The Journey of One Breath"? What kind of journey might you make with just one breath? Think about this and have another look around at this installation ...

Listen to [Alex Ceccetti, The Journey of One Breath \(2024\)](#), presented by Maia aged 8, Take a Breath Kid's Audio Guide - Audio 1

## 2. shhh.... | fuar anocht beanna boirche

There's a room with lines on the wall of electric white light. What do you think about when you see this bright light? It's neon. The same light you see on signs outside buildings or advertising something in a shop. What do you feel when you look at the light - is it good to look at or does it feel too bright to look at for long? Look at its shape. Do you see anything in the shape? See the shapes at either end of the middle line? See how the middle line goes up and down? Write down or draw what the shape makes you think about ... The artist Niamh McCann made this artwork. It's called "shhh.... | fuar anocht beanna boirche." The lines refer to Ogham, an ancient Irish writing system which used a main line with lines branching out on either side at different angles. Even though this writing method was used over a thousand years ago in Ireland, we can still see Ogham signs on stones and rocks today. Usually, people think an Ogham carving is telling you the location you're in or who used to own the land around you. Languages and ways of writing are like animals and plants: they are unique, but they can also go extinct. If people stop speaking a language or stop using its alphabet, that language or alphabet will be forgotten and eventually die out. The title of this artwork is "shhh.... | fuar anocht beanna boirche" Do you know what "fuar anocht" means in English? The Irish name for the Mountains of Mourne in County Down is *na Beanna Boirche*, which means in English "the peaks of the peak district." Why do think the sound "shhh" is in this artwork's title? Have a look at the artwork again, now that you've thought about the title ... In English, the title means 'The Mourne Mountains are cold tonight' When making this artwork the artist was thinking about an Irish tale from about 700 years ago called *Buile Shuibne*. A king was cursed and transformed into a bird-man, flying around Ireland, restlessly and without a home.

Listen to [Niamh McCann, shhh.... fuar anocht beanna boirche \(2023\)](#), presented by Éanna aged 8, Take a Breath Kid's Audio Guide - Audio 4

### 3. Sun[set] provisioning

There is a room with a [big, sideways TV](#). It looks a bit like a giant mobile phone. It's on a small metal scaffold, like a table. There are parts of a computer's inside on the tabletop. The sunset on the TV screen moves and changes. Watch. How does it change? Which is your favourite sunset that you can see as the colours change? Why? Write down or draw your favourite colours in your favourite sunset. Do you remember an actual sunset that was beautiful? Can you remember the colours you saw in the sky? This is an artwork by the artist Yuri Pattison. The artwork uses pollution data and turns it into virtual sunsets. While the colours of the sunsets can be beautiful, this artwork makes us think about how pollution affects our environment, particularly the sky.

Also in this room, there is another image of a sunset. It is a painting by the artist J.M.W. Turner. He was famous for the way he painted sunsets. We now know the colours of these sunsets from long ago were affected by the natural air pollution of volcanic eruptions. This artist's paintings remind us of how connected our natural world is. The beautiful colours we see in the sky as the sun goes down can occasionally be caused by a volcano exploding far away, sending ash, smoke, and dust up into the atmosphere.

Listen to [Yuri Pattison, Sun\[set\] provisioning \(2019\)](#), presented by Freddie aged 12, Take a Breath Kid's Audio Guide - Audio 5

### 4. [Deep Time Day](#)

There is a room that is really very yellow. Sit down on the floor of this room and relax for a minute. Take a breath. Can you see a colourful artwork? It looks a bit like a rug. What's different about this rug? It's not on the floor, it's hung on the wall. We call this a tapestry. Look at all the colours in the tapestry. Look at all the different shapes in the tapestry. Have you ever seen something that looks like this artwork? Where have you seen it? Pick your favourite shape and pick your favourite colour. Why do you like that particular colour and shape so much? What do you think about when you see all this yellow in one room like here? How do you feel, surrounded by yellow? Write down

or draw your favourite colour and shape here. The artist Isabel Nolan created this tapestry. It's called "Deep Time Day." What do you think "Deep Time" might mean? The age of our planet Earth is thought to be, after many stages and changes in its development, about four and a half billion years old. There are eight billion human beings alive right now on this four and a half billion-year-old planet. That's a lot of people and a lot of time. Does this information make you think differently about what a "Deep Time Day" might be?

Listen to [Isabel Nolan, Deep Time Day \(2024\)](#), presented by Penny aged 5, Take a Breath Kid's Audio Guide - Audio 6

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