



## THE OVERLORD EMBROIDERY – A COMMEMORATION OF THE D-DAY LANDINGS

### Context

- **History**            The Commemoration of the D-Day landings;
- **Art**                    Commemorative and narrative Art;
- **PSHE**                Cooperation and collaboration;
- **Geography**        The location and terrain of the Normandy beaches.

### Objectives

- Learn about the D-Day landings and the massive task of organisation requiring cooperation and collaboration between nations and people;
- Set the landings in national and international context as well as a time perspective, by relating to other historical events in a timeline;
- Look at the work of other artists with reference to commemorative and narrative art;
- Explore a range of techniques and media to create a piece of narrative art;
- Use maps, atlases, globes and digital/computer mapping to locate countries and describe features;
- Developing positive relationships, decision making, communicating and listening to others' opinions.

### Input

This is supported by a PowerPoint presentation with images. All the images on the PowerPoint show examples of collaboration and the background organisation and planning for the invasion. Please discuss this in your discussion.





After almost five years of war, Germany controlled most of mainland Europe, driving Allied forces back to a defensive position in Britain. On Tuesday, 6 June 1944 that began to change. British, American and Canadian Forces supported by troops, navy personnel and aircrew from Australia, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, France, Greece, New Zealand, Norway, Rhodesia and Poland, embarked on the invasion of Normandy which was to lead to the Liberation of Europe and the end of World War 2. The invasion was given the codename '**Overlord**' and the date for the start of the invasion was known as **D-Day**.

This may remind us of an invasion which took place almost 900 years before, but in the opposite direction!

In **1066 Duke William of Normandy** led his forces across the English Channel and landed near Hastings on the South Coast in East Sussex. Following the famous **Battle of Hastings**, during which King Harold was killed, possibly by being shot in the eye with an arrow, and the defeat of the Saxon forces, Duke William became King William I of England, known as **William the Conqueror**.

Following the invasion, the Norman Conquerors had a special piece of commemorative artwork made. **The Bayeux Tapestry** is a 70-metre-long piece of embroidered fabric which tells the story of the build up to the invasion, the battle and the Coronation of King William.

This world famous piece of art was the inspiration for a similar commemoration after the Normandy landings. **The Overlord Embroidery** tells the story of the **D-Day Landings** in a series of pictures hand stitched onto fabric. It was commissioned by **Lord Dulverton** in 1968 and was embroidered by **The Royal School of Needlework** from large paintings by artist **Sandra Lawrence**. The embroidery is now housed in the D-Day Museum near Portsmouth and the original paintings are in The Pentagon, the Government Building in Washington DC., USA.

*'The embroiderers chose fabrics carefully, matching the colours in the designs as closely as possible. They cut out the shapes they needed and stitched them onto the panels. Sometimes they stitched several layers of fabric on top of each other. Sometimes they added stitches on top of the fabric to show extra detail.'*

*More than 50 different materials were used in the Overlord Embroidery, including actual uniforms. Everything was stitched by hand.*

*It took five years to stitch the Overlord Embroidery. The final panel was finished in January 1974'.*

Quote from <https://thedaystory.com/discover/overlord-embroidery/>





The Embroidery is a bit like a huge comic strip, which tells the story of the landings and battles, commemorating the bravery of the soldiers and sailors involved. An extremely important part is the preparations for the invasion and the massive organisational task in putting together such an enormous invasion force.

Collaboration was essential to a successful mission and this came at many levels.

Collaboration between:

- Governments;
- Forces from different countries;
- Services (Army, Navy, Airforce);
- Military, Scientists and Industry;
- Transport;
- People and organisations, in factories, on farms, in families. Dock workers, mineworkers, transport workers etc.

So many different groups of people needed to be put together. The two examples below show this.

1. A particularly interesting story you might wish to research relates to the importance of weather forecasting. SEE METEOROLOGY AND JAMES STAGG
2. Another is the use of dummy tanks and aeroplanes to fool the enemy into thinking the attack was going to be somewhere else. SEE SPIES AND SUBTERFUGE

**Activity: working with your group, make lists answering the following 3 questions:**

- If you look at the examples of this collaboration and cooperation, in what way might these groups of people and organisations need to cooperate?
- What skills did these people need for collaboration?
- What skills do YOU need to work collaboratively with others?

**We are going to create our own piece of artwork commemorating the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the D-Day Landings, concentrating on the way people have to work together to achieve success.**





## **MAIN ACTIVITIES**

These art activities are a range of ideas developed from one simple idea. They are not necessarily intended as a progression, more as a menu from which to choose, depending on time and resources.

The photographs included in the Power Point will help you to lead discussion about collaborative activities which went on in preparation for the D-Day Landings.

We also suggest that, as the main thrust of this project is collaboration, you make these pieces collaborative in themselves. By encouraging the students to work in groups, they have the opportunity to benefit from this approach. It also gives you, the teacher, a chance to make the benefits and skills of collaborative learning explicit in your discussions with children, linking art and history activities with PSHE.

### **1. Simple Comic Strip**

This is an activity which could be completed in a lesson or two if you wish to work these up to a finished piece. This could also be a first step if you wish to do one or more of the more complex versions, (although you may wish these to be draft work in this case).

Following discussion and research of the collaboration in preparation for D-Day children select an aspect to represent in images. Create a short simple story and represent it in pictures and captions. This is also a good step into collaborative work if the students work in pairs. These can be simple pencil drawings or more elaborate pieces using colours. These can also be developed into larger pieces using, perhaps, watercolour paint or pastels.

***Template included, but this can easily be achieved by folding a sheet of paper into eighths.***

### **2. Group comic strip** – A similar task to Task 1 but working larger in a collaborative piece.

In groups, students do research as above, in order to create a large picture story. This can range from a piece of A1 sugar paper to a larger piece on wallpaper lining paper. Students may work straight on to the large paper or make individual images on smaller paper which is stuck on to the larger piece. They should discuss how their own collaboration should work, e.g. Is each student going to take a different part of the story or are they going to allocate tasks across the whole piece? For instance, some might do the drawing, others the colouring, or perhaps some write captions while others draw. Allow students to find ways in their groups of deciding their approach.





***A template for a single page comic strip image with space for Caption is attached.***

Additionally this could be used to reference work by artist **Roy Lichtenstein** who used comic strip images, often of war, in his large paintings. Look particularly at his use of primary colours and his approach of painting in dots to replicate print techniques of the time.

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/lichtenstein-whaam-t00897>

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/lichtenstein-explosion-p01796>

### **3. Using Different Media – Use the same approach as in Activity 2 to create pieces in other media such as paper or textiles.**

These activities can allow students to create a large class piece, with each group cooperating on one picture as part of the whole creation, rather than a group story. Ideal for corridor display or school hall perhaps?

#### **a. Paper or card collage**

Creating the large group comic strips in paper and card and other mixed media items. You could use random papers, cards, foils, cellophanes etc. to create the images from scratch, (try tearing paper rather than cutting it), or you could use magazines and old books to allow some images to be cut or torn out such as photographs of soldiers or workers. Contemporary photographs could also be used to make the images, collaged onto the surface.

In terms of art skills there are plenty of opportunities for children to explore fixing materials. Allow the children to explore different adhesives etc. in their planning, rather than simply tell them what to use. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different combinations.

Going more abstract?- looking at some of the Overlord Embroidery images, you can see some of the images and water use a simplification of form to make the images slightly more abstract.

#### **b. Textile collage**

Using a range of fabrics to collage as in activity a. This is another good opportunity to explore practical skills such as cutting and tearing fabrics and selecting and using adhesives.

Both a and b are great opportunities to let children engage in investigations of materials and fixing.



- c. **Stitched textiles** - Similar to, and possibly working onto the textile collage, stitch key shapes. This is clearly the most time consuming but will produce very striking pieces. There are two important considerations. Firstly, reference the sewing techniques on the Overlord Embroidery of cutting out textile shapes and stitch them around to attach to the backing, using coloured threads to make them stand out and make a feature of the stitches. Secondly, don't attempt to stitch it all down in this way – there just would not be time. Simply glue down as in the collage and carefully select just a few key shapes to stitch, this will give those elements more impact.

This process is explained in the explanation of the needlework on the Overlord Embroidery website:

*'The embroiderers chose fabrics carefully, matching the colours in the designs as closely as possible. They cut out the shapes they needed and stitched them onto the panels. Sometimes they stitched several layers of fabric on top of each other. Sometimes they added stitches on top of the fabric to show extra detail.'*

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