

Zara's Still Life Masterclass

Learning objective: To analyse the elements of composition, light, and shadow in a still life arrangement, and to apply these techniques to create a balanced artistic study.

Zara the Zebra has curated a collection of objects in her studio. Study the principles of composition below. For each question, consider how an artist makes choices to guide the viewer's eye. Then, use your observation skills to plan your own balanced arrangement.

Word bank: Composition · Shadow · Highlight · Perspective · Texture · Foreground · Contrast · Balance

1. Explain why an artist might choose to overlap objects in a still life arrangement rather than placing them in a straight line. How does this affect the sense of depth? (3 marks)

2. Compare and contrast the effects of 'soft light' versus 'harsh light' on the shadows cast by an apple. How would this change the mood of your artwork? (3 marks)

3. Justify your answer: If you were arranging a collection of items that cost exactly £10.00 in total (e.g., a £4.50 vase, a £2.50 fruit, and a £3.00 book), how would you position the most expensive item to ensure it remains the focal point of the composition? (3 marks)

4. What might happen if your still life composition lacked any areas of deep shadow or 'negative space'? Describe the visual impact on the viewer. (2 marks)

5. Describe how you would use the 'Rule of Thirds' to position a jug and a bowl so that the arrangement feels dynamic rather than static. (2 marks)

6. Select two objects with contrasting textures (e.g., a smooth glass bottle and a rough, woven basket). Explain how you would use your pencil to show the difference in how light reflects off these surfaces. (2 marks)

Draw: Find three objects at home or in the classroom with different heights and shapes. Arrange them on a table. Sketch your arrangement, paying close attention to where the light source is coming from and drawing the shadows to show volume.



Extension challenge: Challenge: Research the 'Vanitas' style of still life painting. Write a short paragraph explaining why artists included items like wilting flowers or hourglasses, and create a list of three modern objects you could include in a 'Modern Vanitas' piece to represent the passage of time today.