

## Curious Creatures – Frans Post & Brazil

### Ask an Expert tour – Art, Animals and the Environment

#### Teachers' Notes

<b>Session duration</b>	1 hour
<b>Summary</b>	The workshop will be conducted by an art historian and an environmental scientist. An explanation of the exhibition will be given. The students will observe and discuss the drawings and paintings of Frans Post. They will also observe the taxidermy animals on loan to the National Gallery of Ireland from the Natural History Museum. Environmental issues such as climate change, deforestation and endangered species will be discussed in relation to the exhibits. Sugar plantations, slavery and animals in captivity will also be considered. The students will be encouraged to be curious and to engage with the exhibition.
<b>Year groups suitable for</b>	Primary & Post-Primary (discussion to be tailored to the age of the group)
<b>Session itinerary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The art historian and environmental scientist will be introduced</li> <li>• General information about the exhibition will be given</li> <li>• Some of the animals in the exhibition are endangered, discussion on why this is the case.</li> <li>• Why Frans Post (a Dutch artist) was in Brazil</li> <li>• Brazil and its biodiversity</li> <li>• The students will observe the paintings and drawings of animals and landscapes. Characteristics of the animals will be discussed.</li> <li>• How the animals have adapted to their environment</li> <li>• Compare and contrast the drawings/paintings with the taxidermy animals</li> <li>• Environmental issues affecting animals and habitats and sustainability</li> </ul>
<b>Objectives</b>	The workshop aims to combine the areas of art and the environment by thinking about how these drawings and paintings came to be and what effect that may have had on the people, animals and environment at the time.
<b>Themes explored</b>	South American animals, animals in captivity, slavery, sugar plantations expansion (deforestation), biodiversity, rainforest, sustainability
<b>Methods</b>	Visual observation and discussion.
<b>Curriculum links</b>	<b>Primary</b> <b>Visual Arts</b> - Drawing: looking and responding

**History** - Eras of change and conflict: Traders, explorers and colonisers from Europe (fifth and sixth class)

**Geography** - People and other lands; Environmental awareness

**Science** - Plants and animals; Environmental awareness

### **Junior cycle**

#### **Visual Art**

1.1 analyse their work, or that of another, using appropriate vocabulary and knowledge

1.2 respond to an artwork using critical and visual language

1.3 critique an artwork using critical and visual language

1.7 examine the method of a number of artists and the artwork they created

1.8 discuss examples of historical and contemporary visual art

1.9 debate the value that they and society place on an artwork

1.10 identify the use of art elements and design principles within an artwork

1.13 identify media which are used to create artwork

#### **Science**

Strand one: The nature of science

Science in society

9. research and present information on the contribution that scientists make to scientific discovery and invention, and its impact on society

10. appreciate the role of science in society; and its personal, social and global importance; and how society influences scientific research.

Strand two: Earth and space

Sustainability

7. illustrate how earth processes and human factors influence Earth's climate, evaluate effects of climate change and initiatives that attempt to address those effects

Strand five: Biological world

Systems and interactions

5. research and investigate the adaptation, competition and interdependence of organisms within specific habitats and communities

Sustainability

10. evaluate how humans can successfully conserve ecological biodiversity and contribute to global food production; appreciate the benefits that people obtain from ecosystems.

#### **Environmental and Social Studies (ESS)**

- issues relating to the world's natural resources and to conservation
- patterns and examples of human settlement, past and present, rural and urban;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contemporary social, cultural, environmental and economic issues.</li> <li>Using Information Sources - drawings (illustrations, cartoons, etc); artefacts (buildings, archaeological finds, memorabilia, etc);</li> <li>Impact of settlement on the environment - positive and negative</li> <li>Land ownership in Brazil and its impact on the global environment</li> </ul> <p><b>History</b></p> <p>Working with evidence</p> <p>1.6 debate the usefulness and limitations of different types of primary and secondary sources of historical evidence, such as written, visual, aural, oral and tactile evidence; and appreciate the contribution of archaeology and new technology to historical enquiry</p> <p>1.8 investigate a repository of historical evidence such as a museum, library, heritage centre, digital or other archive or exhibition</p>
<p><b>Learning outcomes</b></p>	<p>Students will develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listening skills</li> <li>Observational skills</li> <li>Critical thinking skills</li> <li>How to think globally-how actions in Brazil or Ireland affect the rest of the world.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Background information to share with students before your visit</b></p>	<p><b>Frans Post 1612-1680</b></p> <p><b>Who was he?</b></p> <p>A Dutch artist of the 17th century. He had a famous brother called Pieter Post who was an architect and who possibly taught him to draw and paint. While Frans was in Brazil, Pieter was supervising the construction of Mauritshuis in the Hague, now an important museum (<i>Girl with a Pearl Earring</i> by Vermeer is there). Frans Post was a wonderful draughtsman (good at drawing) and painter. He wasn't famous before he went to Brazil. His paintings were unique because he painted things no one in Holland had ever seen before.</p> <p><b>What was he doing in Brazil?</b></p> <p>He was invited there by a man called Johan Maurits</p> <p><b>Who was Johan Maurits?</b></p> <p>He was Governor-general of the Dutch colony in Brazil from 1637 to 1644. He was quite a character. He created South America's first museum, first observatory, first botanical gardens. His motto was <i>Qua patet orbis</i> meaning 'as far as the world extends'. He was endlessly curious and enthusiastic. He brought scientists and artists with him to Brazil so they could record, learn and share their knowledge of the 'New world', that is to say a world that was new to them. Some of this knowledge was shared by the publication of</p>

books and also by works of art, such as Post's paintings.

### **But what were the Dutch doing far away in Brazil at that time?**

The Dutch had colonised a part of Brazil. They left their own country in ships, travelled as far away as possible and landed in Brazil. They had more powerful weapons than the people who lived there already and they took over part of the country by force. Portuguese ships had already landed there too and taken other parts by force. They wanted to own the country so they would have power and money which they made from taking the land and using it to grow crops or take out minerals from the ground. They also took things from the people there and enslaved them. This made the Dutch people very rich. Nowadays colonisation is of course morally wrong.

### **What are these drawings?**

These drawings were found in a place called Haarlem in Holland. There is a special library there called the Noord-Hollands Archief. A folder was found in 2010 with 34 drawings. There were no signatures on the drawings. A man called Alexander de Bruin decided he would find out who they were done by. He recognised the animals from Frans Post's paintings. He was a kind of art detective.

### **How did Frans Post do the drawings?**

Since it was such a long time ago we cannot be sure, but we can look closely at the drawings and make some good guesses. We know what materials he used, for example gouache, watercolour and graphite. Gouache and watercolour are types of paint which dry quickly, graphite is more or less pencil. As for how he went about drawing the animals, again we can guess; some of the animals were dead, we can see that in the drawings, some were in captivity. Some were possibly stuffed.

### **How do you know?**

Well two reasons. Firstly we can see a rope around the neck of the capybara for example. And secondly, in the case of an animal like a jaguar it would be too dangerous and impossible to draw it unless it was in a cage, it would eat you or run away.

### **But in the watercolour of the capybara there is no rope**

The artist decided not to put that in in some pictures. He used the animals in paintings of the landscape so it wouldn't look natural if the animal had a rope around its neck in the painting.

### **So he drew some animals more than once?**

Well we think he did one drawing and used it a number of times because the drawings and paintings are identical. Sometimes the drawings are reversed so the animal can look upside down.

### **What about the writing on top of the drawings? What does it say? Why did he put it there?**

Well the writing is in Dutch because he was a Dutch artist of course. Apparently he wrote some information about the animals on the drawings so that the information and the image stay together. We can put that information into a few categories;

- **Size** (to give us the size he compared the animal to other animals that people in his country would recognise eg. It's bigger than dog but smaller than a pig);
- **Friendliness/cuddliness**
- **Dangers**
- **Edibility** (if you can eat this animal or not!)

### **How did Frans Post work as an artist?**

*"He took in and depicted what he saw"*

*"Someone who looked and painted with such infinite care. .."*

So Frans Post looked with great care at what he was drawing.

*"A characteristic of Post's sketching style is the combination of different techniques-pencil, pen, brush- to describe the object exactly"*

### **Discovering Brazil**

FAST FACTS

OFFICIAL NAME: Federal Republic of Brazil

FORM OF GOVERNMENT: Democratic federal republic

CAPITAL: Brasilia

POPULATION: 183,888,841

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE: Portuguese

MONEY: Real

AREA: 3,286,470 square miles (8,511,965 square kilometers)

MAJOR MOUNTAIN RANGES: Serra do Mar, Serra do Espinhaço

MAJOR RIVERS: Amazon, São Francisco, Paraná, Tocantins

New settlers brought disease with them, which the local people had no resistance to. This resulted in numerous indigenous tribes being wiped out. Sugar was introduced in 1530. It remains one of Brazil's largest crops.

The sugar plantations used slave labour. Brazil had ten times the amount of enslaved people from Africa than the US. Brazil was the last country in the world to abolish slavery.

### **NATURE**

Brazil has the greatest variety of animals of any country in the world. It is home to 600 **mammal** species, 1,500 **fish** species, 1,600 **bird** species, and an amazing 100,000 different types of **insects**. Brazil's jungles are home to most of its animal life, but many unique species also live in the pampas and semidesert regions. In the central-western part of Brazil sits a flat, swampy area called the Pantanal. This patchwork of flooded lagoons and small

islands is the world's largest wetland. Here live giant [anacondas](#), huge guinea pig relatives called capybaras, and fierce South American alligators called [caimans](#).

For thousands of years, people have been exploiting the jungles of Brazil. But since Europeans arrived about five centuries ago, forest destruction has been rampant. Most of Brazil's Atlantic rainforest is now gone, and huge tracts of the Amazon are disappearing every year. The government has established many national parks and refuges, but they only cover about 7 percent of the country.

The rainforest is said to be *the lungs of the earth*. It takes in carbon dioxide and releases oxygen. Depletion of the rainforest causes climate change, loss of habitat and species depletion.

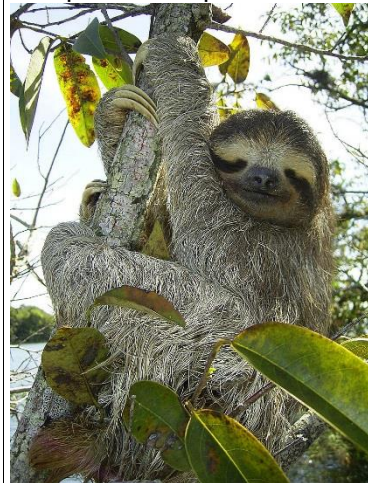
**For more information and images go to National Geographic Kids-Brazil**

<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/countries/brazil/#brazil-soccer.jpg>

### **BRAZILIAN WILDLIFE**

#### **Three-toed sloth**

What? These slooow, furry, long-limbed mammals spend 80% of their time snoozing; when they do move it's at a heady two metres a minute. They sleep curled up in trees or hanging from branches.



How to spot it: The two three-toed species are the types most frequently seen; they are well camouflaged (algae grows in their fur) and largely stationary; they favour trees of the Cecropia genus. Sometimes they're seen crossing rivers (they're good swimmers).

#### **Jaguar**

What? Resplendent rosette-spotted cat, the largest member of the panthera family on the continent – males weigh up to around 110kg. The

name comes from the indigenous Guaraní word jaguar – ‘he who kills with one leap’.



How to spot it: Be very, very lucky.

**Watch this Video** about jaguars in Brazil

National Geographic Episode 1

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGOCxMUBg\\_k&t=](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGOCxMUBg_k&t=)

**For more information about animals in Brazil**

go to this site National Geographic Kids Mammals

<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/animals/hubs/mammals/>

**Before your visit** - activities

### Geography

Locate Brazil on a map.

Look up images of a Brazilian sugar mill from 1600s.



Atlas van Stolck, Frans Post, 1612-1680, Sugar Mill with Two Rollers Pulled by Oxen, c.1640

	<p><b>Science</b>  What is biodiversity?  Why is the rainforest so important for planet earth?  What role does the rainforest have in relation to climate change?  Which animals live in the rainforest?</p>
<p><b>After your visit</b></p>	<p><b>Discuss</b>  Did the students learn anything new from the exhibition?  Did the students discover any animals they haven't heard of before?</p> <p><b>Environment</b>  Would anything you heard on the tour encourage you to change your behaviour?</p> <p><b>Practical ways to help the environment:</b>  <i>What is the main reason for deforestation today?</i>  Land clearance for agricultural use. Soy crops are grown, most commonly, to produce animal feed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consuming less meat has a positive impact on the planet's climate. This is because cows emit methane which is a greenhouse gas. If demand for meat is reduced the demand for land (for both grazing pastures and soy crops) would also be reduced.</li> </ul> <p><i>The rainforest is a carbon sink</i>  It absorbs carbon dioxide which is a greenhouse gas. The destruction of the Rainforest means that we are losing a carbon sink and climate change is more likely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read the labels and avoid buying products that use palm oil. This worked successfully in Norway. Unfortunately palm oil is still being produced and used but if more countries boycott palm oil then fewer people will use it. Beware: labels can be deceiving and might not state explicitly that 'palm oil' is used rather 'vegetable oils'.  <a href="https://youtu.be/M1e-FcWRzhE">https://youtu.be/M1e-FcWRzhE</a></li> </ul>