

**Teachers’ notes**

**The Superpower of Looking:**

**A Scottish Sikh hosts a special gathering**

**How to use this resource**

[In class, open a full-screen version of the zoomable image in a new window](https://superpower.artuk.org/zoom/full/336381.html).

Use the prompts in these notes to guide your students through the lesson.

**Contextual background for teachers**

**Lesmahagow Durbar (2000)**

The Singh Twins

Poster paint, gouache and gold dust on mountboard

H 32.5 x W 25.5 cm

National Museums Scotland

<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/lesmahagow-durbar-6-of-6-from-the-iqbalnama-series-336381>

The Singh Twins’ work draws heavily on the tradition of Indian miniature painting. The small scale, bright colours and meticulous attention to detail seen here are just a few of the characteristics of this tradition which the artists bring to their contemporary art practice. The artists even include themselves in this painting, just as Indian miniature painters sometimes featured in their own works. Can you spot them, one sister holding a paintbrush, the other clutching a camera?

*Lesmahagow Durbar* is the final work in The Singh Twins’ series, [*The Iqbalnama*](https://www.singhtwins.co.uk/artwork/paintings-categories/iqbalnama-series.html): a set of paintings celebrating the life of Sardar Iqbal Singh, a Sikh man from Lahore, India, who made Scotland his home and embraced Scottish culture as his own. In this painting, at home in Lesmahagow, Scotland, Baron Singh hosts a party – or *durbar*, a court or gathering commonly depicted in Indian miniature painting. The Baron himself can be seen in the bottom left of the painting, inviting a guest to plant a tree in his grounds.

In this joyful scene celebrating Scotland’s multicultural heritage, how do the guests at this party express the different aspects of their cultural identity?

**Tip:** if you'd like more insight into the painting before teaching the lesson, an [audio description](https://artuk.org/learn/learning-resources/audio-description-of-lesmahagow-durbar-by-the-singh-twins/view_as/grid/search/2024--keyword%3Aaudio-description--lrresource%3Aaudio-description-of-lesmahagow-durbar-by-the-singh-twins/page/1) is available. It is accompanied by a full written transcript which can also be used to describe the painting.

**Look, describe and discuss**

You can start by showing the whole image, and then use the zoom feature to explore details of the painting. Or you might like to start by using the zoom feature to show a detail from the image, and then zoom out to see more.

Encourage your students to look carefully – this is their superpower! It’s best to not give too much background information about the artwork at this stage, so students can develop their own ideas and opinions.

**Nudge questions**

Now when looking at the painting, ask more specific ('nudge') questions:

* What do you think is going on here?
* What is the mood in this scene?
* How do the artists express the identities of the different figures?
* What smells and sounds might you experience if you were transported into the painting?

**Watch this video**

In this video, filmmaker Michelle Tofi uses her own 'Superpower of Looking' to explore *Lesmahagow Durbar*.

Ask your students these questions before watching the video to support close looking and listening:

* Look closely at the painting. Did you spot anything Michelle missed?
* Michelle spotted one person holding a camera. Did you spot any other details which give us a clue about the identities of the various figures?
* Michelle wished she’d had an invitation to this party! Would you like to be invited? Why/why not?

You can also [watch the video on YouTube](https://youtu.be/QV96tz7yZYo?si=6m2T76Y1K3LoKA4i).

**Questions from The Superpower of Looking Kit**

Now we can start to explore the 'elements' of the painting. For this artwork, you will focus on [composition](https://artuk.org/learn/learning-resources/the-superpower-of-looking-kit#Composition), [colour](https://artuk.org/learn/learning-resources/the-superpower-of-looking-kit#Colour) and [space](https://artuk.org/learn/learning-resources/the-superpower-of-looking-kit#Space).

Ask your students to evidence their points:

* Where exactly are they looking when they make a statement?
* Can everybody see what they see?
* Slow down, take time to really look closely

You can introduce knowledge from the contextual background for teachers while asking these bespoke questions with helpful responses below.

**Composition**

* Where are your eyes drawn to?

*Everyone might suggest something different. This is a busy painting without one focal point drawing our attention. Invite children to think of a gathering of their own family or friends – would this be just as busy, and perhaps even a bit messy?*

* Do any of the figures help show you where to look?

*Can you spot figures looking or gesturing towards the middle? Who is watching the dancing girl, drawing our eyes towards her? You might even spot the camera pointed towards her. Is there anyone who isn’t watching the performance?*

* If you drew a line down the middle of the painting, what would you find there?

*This imaginary line down the middle is called the central vertical axis. Usually we would find something important there (look out for this in other paintings). Here, we mostly find empty space. But if the artists didn’t leave space here, would the girl in the kilt have enough room to dance?*

* Can you see the same shapes repeated?

*Look for rectangles. How many can your students spot? Don’t forget the windows and frames on the walls, plus the blue frame which surrounds the whole painting.*

* What is the effect of this?

*There is a lot going on in this busy painting, but repeating geometric shapes with straight lines brings harmony to the composition.*

* Are we able to see the whole party?

*No, the image has been cropped. The blue frame surrounds a close-up of the gathering, but not the whole scene. Compare it with the formal paintings on the wall in this room – they aren’t cropped. But perhaps this is a different sort of image: does it remind students more of an informal photo you might take to remember a party or celebration than a formal portrait like their school photo?*

**Colour**

* [Take a look at the colour wheel in The Superpower of Looking Kit](https://artuk.org/learn/learning-resources/the-superpower-of-looking-kit#Colour). Can you spot any pairs of complementary colours?
*Look for colours which sit opposite each other on the colour wheel. You might spot blue and orange placed together, as well as red and green.*
* What effect does this have?
*Placing complementary colours next to each other makes both colours ‘pop’ within the painting; these colours stand out best when they’re used together.*
* Can you see the same colours repeated? How many times can you see the same shade of blue? And the same shades of red and yellow?
*The artists have used the same shades of these colours throughout the painting. The blue of the dancing girl’s sash is the same as the frames of the paintings and the jeans of the man in the armchair. The same red is used for the twins’ dresses, the Swiss flag and one man’s turban.*
* Does this happen in real life?
*In reality, we’d expect to find different shades of these colours. In this painting, the artists have used colour decoratively: they have chosen to repeat the same colours to create unity in the composition.*

**Space**

* What is the gold rectangle in the middle of the painting? Is it a doorway to another part of the room? Or could it be something else?

*The golden frame surrounds a mirror. Students may find this odd! Is there anything they would expect to be reflected in the mirror?*

* How many different spaces can you find within the painting?

*Invite students to share their ideas. There may be some differences of opinion! They might suggest the room where the gathering is taking place. Some might suggest the space reflected in the mirror is a different space to the one in the main room in the painting. Students might mention the garden seen through the window and the garden in the foreground of the painting.*

* Does the vase look safe on the red table at the back?

*No, the vase looks like it could slide off the table!*

* Why/why not?

*Look closely at the table, the rug and the wooden floor. The artists haven’t painted these in correct linear perspective; for instance, the parallel lines of the wooden floor should recede into the distance towards a vanishing point. This makes the objects look two-dimensional rather than three-dimensional. However, if you look at the rest of the painting, you might spot where the artists have used linear perspective correctly (for example, the windows and cornices).*

**Everyone learning**

You can find out more about The Superpower of Looking SEND/ASD/ALN approach on the [Superpower homepage](https://artuk.org/learn/the-superpower-of-looking).

Now it's time to explore the artwork in different ways. This list of sensory activities encourages students to apply their learning and can suit a variety of learning needs.

**Make**

* Did you spot figures in the painting wearing tartan, a patterned cloth which originated in Scotland? Students could [design their own tartan using coloured paper with this activity from Museums and Galleries Edinburgh](https://youtu.be/fX3Mk_p7yxY?si=BWgMHu2fVGzLlKYU). Which colours will they choose?
* Take inspiration from The Singh Twins by drawing a scene in miniature. Students may like to draw a celebration with their friends, family or school.

**Listen**

* Discover music enjoyed by many Scottish Sikhs during wedding celebrations. [Watch this video from BBC Scotland which brings together traditional instruments from both India and Scotland](https://youtu.be/9trK_N4GQk4?si=ty5yhHqMaR-VaVgX).
* [Listen to the audio description of the painting](https://artuk.org/learn/learning-resources/audio-description-of-lesmahagow-durbar-by-the-singh-twins/view_as/grid/search/2024--keyword%3Aaudio-description--lrresource%3Aaudio-description-of-lesmahagow-durbar-by-the-singh-twins/page/1).

**Touch**

* Feel the different textures in this painting: carpet, teacups, tree bark, plants, clothing, a hat with a pom-pom, a metal watering can. Which are hard and which are soft? Which textures do students like the feel of most?

**Move**

* Like the girl in the painting, have a go at traditional Scottish dance, [the Highland Fling](https://youtu.be/CfE7jHThiUc?si=lkGLeFciPiiSG-g4). [Learn the moves with these young dancers in a video from the Fergus Scottish Festival](https://youtu.be/frA_HK1QOjM?si=ltGde9hQUKhDcdIL).

**Communicate**

* Invite pairs of students to choose two figures in the painting and imagine the conversation the figures are having.
* Learn the Makaton sign or British Sign Language for ‘celebrate’.

**Final stage: review**

Ask your students to:

* share their sketchbooks in groups and discuss the 'elements' they have identified
* choose an element/aspect they find most interesting about the artwork and record it in their sketchbooks
* choose their own name/s for the title of the artwork
* think of a question they would like to ask the artist

**Congratulations!**

You have now completed The Superpower of Looking lesson resource.

There are more resources in this theme to try – have a look in the ‘next lessons’ section below.

**Next lessons**

Now try another lesson resource as part of the identity theme:

[A powerful portrait by Kehinde Wiley](https://artuk.org/learn/learning-resources/the-superpower-of-looking-a-powerful-portrait-by-kehinde-wiley)