WILLIAM MORRIS AND THE BAUHAUS
An introduction to the Bauhaus and William Morris with background information, works in focus, classroom activities and a design challenge

This toolkit has been designed to support teachers visiting the *Pioneers: William Morris and the Bauhaus* Exhibition, and to provide inspiration points for teachers who are exploring ideas around everyday design in the classroom. Whilst the information and activities in this resource link directly to the teaching of KS3 and KS4 *Design & Technology* and KS3 and KS4 *Art & Design*, they are also suitable for teachers of all age groups interested in bringing a group to the Exhibition and to the William Morris Gallery. The cross-curricular potential is also broad, with connections to science (materials, forces), literacy (expressing opinions, evaluating ideas), social history (industrialisation, post First World War) and fashion design.

The background information explores the creative ideas at the heart of the Bauhaus, which links back to the vision of William Morris, including craft, simplicity and the importance of art and design in our everyday lives. The works in focus provide discussion points and activities for the Gallery and the classroom, whilst the Design Challenge invites students to take part in a special exhibition at *One Hoe Street*.
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INTRODUCTION TO THE BAUHAUS

“The way we’re running the company, the product design, the advertising, it all comes down to this: Let’s make it simple. Really simple.”

“There’s this idea, in the Bauhaus and in Apple products, of bringing order to something very complex.”
Emily Orr, assistant curator, Cooper Hewitt Museum, 2017

What was the Bauhaus?

The Bauhaus was a revolutionary, interdisciplinary art school of architects, artists, designers and craftspeople who shared a vision of rebuilding society after the First World War, on modern international lines. It was founded in Germany in 1919 but after the Second World War, Bauhaus ideas spread to have an international influence. Learning about its principles helps us to understand more clearly our material world today.

Bauhaus translates into English as ‘House (or school) of building’. It was a creative school that was intent on building a new society: in so doing, it rejected the traditional art school’s hierarchies between the fine and applied arts, in favour of bringing them together. It was founded in 1919 in Weimar, the seat of the new social democratic Weimar Republic. The school moved to Dessau in 1925-26, into a new building constructed by Director Walter Gropius, until moving to Berlin in 1932. Shortly after, in 1933, it was closed by the Nazis.
The Bauhaus had three directors: Walter Gropius (1919–28), Hannes Meyer (1928–30) and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1930–33). Staff included leading creatives of the 20th Century, Marcel Breuer, Anni Alberts, Paul Klee, Marianne Brandt, Wassily Kandinsky and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy among others. At the centre of its syllabus (see below) was ‘Building Design’, in which art and science were taught together and from where the study of materials, tools, colour and form flowed. These integrated design principles were applied to all products, not just architecture.

Five Key Creative Principles of Bauhaus

1) Form follows Function

This means that the appearance of an object should not be led by aesthetics but flow from its function and utility. Decoration was rejected on the grounds that it served no function other than to cover up cheap materials and techniques in the manufacture of an object, or to create the illusion that it was something it was not. For example, a decorative dinner plate like the plate on the upper right would have a surface that would not only be difficult to eat off, but also to wash up afterwards, Whereas a smooth surface was more functional and appeared hygienically smooth and clean For example the plate on the lower right.
2) Truth to materials

This was the hallmark of artistic quality and integrity for the Bauhaus teachers. They believed that materials should reflect the ‘true’ nature of objects and buildings. Honesty as a designer meant that they didn’t modify or hide materials for the sake of aesthetics. There was no need to hide the construction of an object or building, such as steel or a beam, because it was just an integral part of the design. Materials should not be used to create a decorative ‘illusion’.

For example, Marcel Breuer’s iconic *Wassily Chair* reduced chair design to its bare essentials. Breuer was inspired by his bicycle to create the basic planes of the frame by bending light-weight steel tubing used in cycle manufacture, and then adding adjoining leather strips for the upholstery.

3) Less is more

The last director of the Bauhaus, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, felt that simplicity was very important in designing and that “less is more”. This eventually led to minimalism, which distils the complexity of an object, its functionality, technology and appearance, down to its simplest and most optimally useful form.

The minimalist style of Bauhaus was influenced by early 20th Century Modernist art movements edging towards abstraction, for example, Cubism (*e.g.* Picasso or Braque) and De Stijl (*e.g.* Piet Modrian). Bauhaus artists favoured linear and geometrical forms, while floral or curvilinear shapes were avoided. Only line, shape and colours mattered. Anything else was unnecessary and could, therefore, be reduced.
4) Total work of art (‘Gesamtkunstwerk’)

The idea of a ‘total work of art’ aimed to bring together different creative disciplines and unite them, for example, in a single product: its packaging, branding and retail or display context. A building was not just an empty carcass for the Bauhaus school; the exterior was just one part of the design, and everything inside added to the overall concept. Therefore, staff and students represented a wide range of creative fields. Joined to this was the idea of ‘democratic design’, aimed at bringing art back into contact with everyday life, in the design of ordinary people’s homes and products as well as public buildings and the performing arts.

5) Uniting Art & Technology

In 1923, Bauhaus organised its first exhibition with founder, Walther Gropius, announcing a new slogan for the school: ‘Art & Technology: A New Unity’. This shifted the Bauhaus away from a hand-crafted approach, to a new emphasis on technology and mass production. Bauhaus workshops were used as laboratories in which prototypes of products were developed using new and cleaner geometric shapes, easier and cheaper to mass produce. The Bauhaus machine aesthetic refers to the appearance of these new artistic products, such as Wilhelm Wagenfeld and Carl Jakob Jucker’s table lamp, which was given an industrial appearance and title.

6) Creating a better world through internationalism

Internationalism as a principle was represented by the community of Bauhaus staff and students and their shared artistic values. The school aimed to bring together different art and design disciplines and influences from all over the world to create an international artistic movement.
“Simplicity of life, even the barest, is not a misery, but the very foundation of refinement.”

“William Morris pleaded well for simplicity as the basis of all true art. Let us understand the significance to art of that word—SIMPLICITY—for it is vital to the Art of the Machine.”
Frank Lloyd Wright, The Art and Craft of the Machine, speech, 1901

Who was William Morris?
William Morris (1834–1896), was a leading British artist, designer, writer and socialist campaigner.

He was born in Walthamstow in 1834. The family home where he lived from age 14–22 is now the William Morris Gallery. After marrying Jane Burden in 1859, he with his friend, the architect Philip Webb, designed and built the Red House near Bexley Heath. He gathered together like-minded artists to complete all the interior decorations using traditional handcrafted methods.

In 1861, Morris founded his decorative arts company, Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., together with Charles Faulkner and Peter Paul Marshall, Ford Madox Brown, Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Philip Webb, based at 6 Red Lion Square, London. They wanted to reform art and design, inspired by the teachings of the influential artist and critic John Ruskin. By reinstating decorative art as equal to fine art, believing that art should be democratic and affordable.

The Firm later became simply Morris & Co. (1875–1940), with a shop at 449 Oxford Street. The brand still operates today under the retailer, Sanderson, which continues to sell Morris’ designs worldwide.
William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement

Morris led a revival of traditional British craftsmanship through his firm, Morris & Co., which sold interior design products throughout the world. Morris is known as the father of the Arts & Craft movement, an international trend in the decorative and fine arts that began in Britain and flourished in Europe and North America between about 1880 and 1920. This movement was characterised by a revival of traditional hand-crafted values with a social purpose, as a reaction against mid-Victorian mass industrialisation.

American architect Frank Lloyd Wright was inspired by the Arts & Craft movement and his works also forms a link between Morris’ ideas and the machine aesthetic of Bauhaus. You can see in the pictures on the right that Lloyd Wright, like Morris, used panelled ceilings and walls and muted tonality of colour and lighting to create a unified effect.

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright

Green dining room, V&A, 1860s, Morris & Co.

Dining room, Meyer May House, 1908-09, Frank Lloyd Wright
Do these artistic principles sound familiar: internationalism, unity of art, crafts and design, truth to materials and honesty of construction? William Morris articulated these principles, which were later adopted by the Bauhaus and Modern movement in general. He studied Indian and Islamic flat pattern designs for textiles and walls, believing them best suited to the function of decorating flat surfaces. ‘form follows function’ being another principle he advanced. Furthermore, he maintained that design made for a flat surface should not imitate nature by using colour and shading techniques to create a three-dimensional effect that was essentially false.

Morris also admired the “less is more” simplicity of Japanese furniture: for example, a chair stripped down to its essentials produced a more refined sculptural form and showcased the quality of ebonised wood, a Japanese-inspired technique. The natural material of the rush seat with no added padding or decoration made no attempt to hide its true nature. These principles combined exemplified artistic integrity and are illustrated in a display installation in the William Morris Gallery, pictured to the right.

The chair and the wallpaper on the left are examples of what Morris considered to be “false principles of design”, for they show a 3D-effect floral wallpaper and chair with traditionally turned wooden legs and upholstered seat. The chair and wallpaper on the right are examples of Morris & Co. products, a Sussex chair set against a ‘Willow Bough’ flat pattern designed wallpaper to show a simpler more unified design.

Although it is possible to see Morris’s artistic principles in aspects of the Bauhaus, his approach was different in two main areas. The first difference is on the subject of decoration. Morris argued for simplification but he believed that the beauty of the natural word should be the inspiration for his pattern designs, whereas decoration was rejected by the Bauhaus after 1923 when they embraced a machine aesthetic. Secondly, Morris generally opposed machine-made art on the grounds that this impoverished artist-makers, the art itself and consumers who bought low-quality mass produced artistic products, whereas the Bauhaus embraced the machine in the manufacture and industrial appearance of art, but with quality and integrity.

Finally, Morris’ success in creating an artistic community that became the Arts and Crafts movement and integrating its principles into art education and retail nationally and internationally was arguably his biggest legacy that served as a model to the Bauhaus. His vision of making a better world by unifying the creative arts and reconnecting art to people’s everyday lives, continues.
KEY THEMES IN THE EXHIBITION

Celebrating the 100-year anniversary of the Bauhaus

The Bauhaus was the birthplace of modern design and is probably the most influential art and design school ever created. Almost everything we see around us in our everyday lives will have been influenced by the Bauhaus in some way: from our buildings and our furniture, to our kettles, the patterns on our clothes, the fonts we write with and the look of our logos. The Pioneers Exhibition coincides with the centenary of the founding of the Bauhaus in 1919. It explores the connections, and differences, between the English Arts and Crafts movement and the extraordinary and revolutionary Bauhaus school.

By bringing together a range of objects from chairs, ceramics, paintings, photographs and sculpture, to prints, wall hangings, tableware and books – it exemplifies the importance to both William Morris and the Bauhaus of bringing together art, craft and design in our everyday lives. The exhibition focuses on the early years of the Bauhaus, when artists were experimenting with ideas, materials and techniques through handcraft, before designing on an industrial scale.

Contemporary links

The exhibition also celebrates the enduring influence of Morris and the Bauhaus, by showcasing work by fashion designer Mary Katrantzou, and artist-in-residence Nicholas Pankhurst.

Thematic layout

The exhibition is arranged thematically, using the main principles that underpinned Morris’ work as its jumping off points: Unity, Craft, Simplicity and Community. These themes overlap with each other and with the ideas outlined in the introduction, of ‘form follows function’, ‘truth to materials’, minimalism, ‘total work of art’, uniting art and technology and Internationalism.
1) Unity

“The ultimate aim of all visual arts is the complete building!”
Walter Gropius, Bauhaus Manifesto and Program, 1919

Both William Morris and the Bauhaus believed in breaking down old barriers between art, craft and design, so that decorative and applied arts, such as interior design, textiles and furniture, were seen to be just as important as fine art, such as painting or sculpture. They also believed in the idea of the ‘total work of art’, uniting art, craft, design and architecture. Morris made sure that he understood and practiced as many different techniques and disciplines as possible, including painting, printing and weaving. The Bauhaus taught all subjects through workshops, where teachers (called masters) and students worked side by side. These workshops included sculpture, weaving, metalworking, joinery, ceramics, printing, painting, photography, advertising and graphics.

2) Craft

“Architects, sculptors, painters, we all must return to the crafts!”
Walter Gropius, Bauhaus Manifesto and Program, 1919

William Morris wanted to create objects for our everyday homes which were not only useful but beautiful. He also wanted to make sure designs were artist-led, made from high quality materials, but which were affordable for as many different people as possible. The Bauhaus also believed in the vital importance of craftsmanship, through how they learnt and taught, and they wanted to combine craft with usefulness. Both believed in ‘truth to materials’, making objects that showed or revealed their inherent qualities and features. Later, the Bauhaus made objects for industry, focusing on modern design rather than decoration.

3) Simplicity

“Chuck out your chintz!”
Naresh Ramchandani, IKEA advertising campaign, 1996

William Morris wanted to reject the fussy designs which were popular in Victorian times and aim for designs that whilst decorative were also simplified and stylised. The Bauhaus took this simplification to the next level: stripping back designs to their essentials, leading to a modernist and minimalist style. Clean lines and simple shapes meant that the Bauhaus could design for mass production, uniting art and technology. Both believed in the idea of ‘form follows function’, fusing structure and appearance with purpose. Many of the designs we see in somewhere like IKEA today, have simplicity as their guiding principle.

4) Community

“The role of art for me is the visualisation of attitude, of the human attitude towards life, towards the world.”
Josef Albers, interview, 1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

Creating and learning collaboratively was at the heart of both the Bauhaus and William Morris’s approach to working. Morris worked alongside other artists and designers to experiment and learn, pioneering new techniques and materials. At the Bauhaus, students and masters lived as well as worked at the school, as a learning community: they designed the spaces where they taught, ate and lived. They were international in their backgrounds and outlook, coming from 29 countries, with artistic influences ranging from expressionism and De Stijl to constructivism. Both Morris and the Bauhaus wanted to design a better world. The Bauhaus was formed in the wake of the horrors of the First World War. They literally wanted to design a new and better world. Similarly, Morris had a vision of an ideal society. He campaigned for equal rights, arts education for all, and railed against the poor working conditions caused by industrialization.
QUESTIONING FRAMEWORK

These are questions to ask when exploring any design object.

What is it?
Describe what you see.
Who was it made for?
Who would use this, why would they use it and where would they use it? What is its market or audience?

What was it for? Why was it made?
What is its function and purpose? How well does it fulfil its purpose?

What does it look like?
Can you describe its style, colours, form, structure and size? Do you think it looks good? Does ‘form follows function’? Is it simple or decorative?

How has it been made?
What materials and techniques have been used? Is it handcrafted or mass produced? Do you think it shows ‘truth to materials’? Does it use new technologies?

What’s its impact on the environment?
Can it be produced, recycled, stored or used sustainably?

When was it made?
Does it reflect the time it was created?

Who made it?
Does this tell us anything about its design or style?

William Morris, Table, 1856
Courtesy of The Cheltenham Trust and Cheltenham Borough Council
WORKS IN FOCUS

1) SUSSEX CHAIR, PHILIP WEBB, 1870s, WILLIAM MORRIS & Co.

“Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.”

William Morris, Hopes and Fears for Art: The Beauty of Art, talk, Birmingham Society of Arts and School of Design, 1880

What is it?
The Sussex Chair was designed by William Morris’s colleague, Philip Webb (1831-1915), in the 1870s. It is an everyday chair made from turned, ebonised beech with a rush mat seat. Its name comes from a country chair found in Sussex, which inspired the design. When wood is ebonised, it is stained with iron oxide to become black, so it seeps into the wood, becoming part of it, rather than sitting on top. The wood is turned, which means it is made skilfully by hand, with a lathe and chisel. The warmth of the natural rush mat (from the bulrush, weaved by hand) complements the rich, bold colour of the frame.

This chair shows Morris’s desire to show “truth to materials” and simplicity in design. The wood and weaved rush are gracefully constructed, with no decoration to distract from their natural forms. It also demonstrates the making principle of “form follows function” as the design is about practicalities as well as elegance, with each aspect built to be strong to support the body, to be light to move around and to be robust and therefore long lasting.

Context: Why is it a pioneering design?

William Morris was passionate about making furniture and interior designs from high quality materials, which could be affordable to a wide range of people. He hated the cheap materials often used for manufacturing on a large scale in Victorian England, which led to terrible working conditions and poor-quality items. The Sussex chair became a best-selling item off the shelf from his shop in Oxford Street.

It was pioneering for two reasons: firstly, that it was simply made with good materials, which made it more affordable than many design items which were only for wealthier people, and secondly, its design appearance was much simpler than most Victorian chairs at the time. It also brought together Morris’s creative principles – simplicity, community (a designer, a woodturner and a rusher would be needed to make the chair) and craft – with its fine, handmade details. Its huge success led to offshoot designs for corner chairs.
1) SUSSEX CHAIR, PHILIP WEBB, 1870s, WILLIAM MORRIS & Co.

Discussion Points

1. What do you think of this chair design: have you seen anything like it before?
2. How would you describe its style? Do you think it looks new or old, modern or old fashioned?
3. What do you think it would be like to sit on or to touch? Where would you put it in your own home? Have a vote: who would like to take it home and who would like to leave it in the Gallery?
4. Imagine it is made from different materials such as brightly coloured plastic or shiny steel: how would that change its look and feel?

Gallery link
See several Sussex chairs on permanent display in Gallery 3 at the William Morris Gallery.

Exhibition link
Compare the Sussex chair with chairs by Erich Deickmann and Marcel Breuer in the Exhibition.

Beyond the Exhibition
The Sussex chair, with its light frame and compact size, had an influence on subsequent designs. See the department stores Liberty London and Heal’s, who have produced their own versions e.g. the Argyll range at Liberty London.

Classroom Activities

These activities could be used for a single lesson or for a half term project:

1. Look at the chairs in your classroom:
   a) Can you describe their appearance and see what materials they are made from?
   b) Are they colourful or dull, angular or rounded?
   c) Do you think their design matches how they are used and who they are used by?
   d) How are they different to the chairs you have at home?

2. In small groups, or individually, design your own ‘everyday’ chair for your home. Think about what would make a chair comfortable, interesting to look at and affordable. Make a spider graph with key words to develop ideas for the materials, colours and shapes. Make and label two or three different drawings.

3. Choose one of the above designs to develop. Make a model out of card and get feedback on what people like or don’t like.
What is it?

This small altarpiece was created by sculptor and graphic artist Gerhard Marcks, with his close friend, painter Alfred Partikel. Part sculpture, part painting, part devotional object, it shows the spirit of the early Bauhaus, when it was dedicated to combining art and craft, rather than focusing on technology and industry. The work is religious in nature, both in its format as a painted altarpiece, and in its Christian subject matter. It is believed that the artist made it for his own personal use and that this coincided with the death of a child.

A Triptych

This three-part work is known as a triptych. It is reminiscent of church altarpieces from the Middle Ages. Smaller versions such as this were made for people to use for prayers at home. The background is painted in gold, designed to flicker in candlelight. In the central panel, figures gather around Jesus, who is shown as a gold figure in the centre, set against a green, square background. It appears to be celebrating the resurrection. There is an angel flying above him and people playing instruments at his side. Jesus looks like he is floating but at the same time, he appears solidly entombed.

A Modernist style

The figures are simplified, emerging from the carved wood, alongside crosses, curved abstract shapes and an oversized flower. The side panels are flat, showing scenes which recall Jesus’s life. An angel in the right-hand panel stands with a sheep, symbolic of Jesus as the lamb of God sent as a sacrifice, whilst in the left panel, a figure stands holding a large crucifix. The style here is different to the central panel – the paintings are more detailed and lighter – but they are strongly connected and unified throughout by the composition and use of colour.

Context: Why is it a pioneering design?

This altarpiece is a remarkable example of the Bauhaus’s ambition to work collaboratively and unify the arts to create a ‘total work of art’. By combining painting, sculpture, woodcarving and joinery, it focuses on handcraft and uniqueness, creating a one-off artist-led design, instead of something to be mass produced. The sense of movement and emotion also shows the wide range of influences upon the Bauhaus artists at the time, in this case, of Expressionism, figurative art and spirituality. In that sense, this work also marks the differences that were to appear later within the Bauhaus, with some artists preferring to make more traditional, decorative objects, whilst others moved towards minimalist, industrial design. Marcks left the Bauhaus in 1925.
2) SMALL ALTARPIECE. GERHARD MARCKS, PAINTING BY ALFRED PARTIKEL, 1920

Discussion points

1. Have you ever seen anything like this altarpiece before? If so, where was it?

2. How do you think the two artists make sure that even though they have different styles, all the pieces of the altarpiece work together?

3. The colours of this altarpiece are bright, lively and shining, but do you think this altarpiece is joyful?

4. Below the middle panel, can you see the words ‘STIRB SO LEBE’ carved into the wood? This means ‘Die in order to live’. What do you think this refers to? You should consider not just the subject of the paintings, but also the date the altarpiece was created.

Classroom Activities

1. This altarpiece is small and intimate: its scale is designed to draw you in to look closely. Explore how its format has similarities to a folding picture frame, or a book, which hold precious memories or stories.

2. Use this altarpiece as inspiration to create a photograph frame with hinges so that it can open and close, or a concertina/accordion book with intricate folds.

3. After researching ideas and drawing designs for activity 2, make your prototypes out of card. If you are designing a photograph frame, you could develop your final ideas using wood, papier mâché or modroc plaster, finding interesting ways to connect the different parts, and decorate.

4. As an alternative, use the triptych format to tell a story in three parts, using paint, collage or mixed media.

Gallery link

See examples of carved and decorated music cabinets and an oak settle in Galleries 5 and 8 at the William Morris Gallery.

Exhibition link

Compare the style and use of colour of this altarpiece to:

- *The Movement of Chimneys* by Paul Klee
- *Colour Study* by Wassily Kandinsky
- *Vessel in the form of a head* by Gerhard Marcks.

Beyond the Exhibition

Find European altarpieces, expressionist paintings, and concertina artist books.
“Structure is not just a means to a solution. It is also a principle and a passion.”


3) ARMCHAIR, MARCEL BREUER, DESIGNED 1922, MADE 1924

What is it?
This is an armchair designed by Hungarian Marcel Breuer (1902–81), who joined the Bauhaus in its very early days at Weimar. He took part in its preliminary course and carpentry workshops, and later became a master of furniture. The armchair was created in the cabinet-making workshop and made from cherrywood, with upholstery created in the weaving workshop, made from horsehair and cotton. It is startlingly modernist and angular in its appearance. Breuer was an outstanding student and created this when he was just 20.

Context: Why is it a pioneering design?
This armchair is a design classic because of its starkly modernist style. Even though Breuer was equally interested in architecture, he is best known for his modernist furniture designs, of which this is a very early example. He was influenced at the time by a group of abstract Dutch artists, called the ‘De Stijl’ group, who made work using strictly geometric shapes, particularly horizontals and verticals. (See Red Blue Chair by Gerrit Rietveld.)

The armchair is stripped down to its basic angles, looking more like a structure than a chair, with no decoration. Breuer wanted to make a chair with a simplified style which could be easily manufactured. He also wanted to provide some comfort and ergonomic support, hence the stretched material on the inclined seat. This demonstrates a key Bauhaus aim: to make designs that were both practical and functional, where ‘form follows function’. Breuer was pioneering not just because of his passion for modern design, but also because of his use of new technologies and materials. For example, he was the first person to use tubular steel in his furniture designs (inspired by the handlebars of his bike). He later went on to make designs for mass production, using steel, glass, plywood and aluminium.
3) Armchair, Marcel Breuer, Designed 1922, Made 1924

Discussion Points

1. Write down the first word you think of to describe this armchair on a post-it note. Share and discuss your responses with other people.

2. This armchair is usually described as a modern or ‘modernist’ design. What do those words mean to you?

3. What do the armchair’s shapes remind you of? Some say it’s like a skeleton or the lines in an abstract painting. What do you think?

4. Would you like to sit on this armchair? What do you think makes an armchair inviting: is it comfort or style?

Classroom Activities

1. Design an armchair for the future. Marcel Breuer’s designs were influential because of their modern look and because he wanted to create designs that could be produced on a massive scale. Challenge students to make an armchair design that seems just as modern and useful in today’s world.

2. Encourage students to explore the iterative design processes shown in this pack below (defining need, researching ideas and experimenting, making prototypes, getting feedback, refining ideas, making a final design).

3. Invite students to think not just about the armchair’s purpose (who for and where for), appearance, materials and cost, but also new technologies and its impact on the environment, linking to the AQA contextual challenges. After researching ideas and drawing designs for activity make your prototypes out of card. If you are designing a photograph frame, you could develop your final ideas using wood, papier mâché or Modroc plaster, finding interesting ways to connect the different parts, and decorate.

Gallery link

Compare this armchair with chair designs in Gallery 3 at the William Morris Gallery.

Exhibition link

Compare this chair to Erich Dieckmann’s chair and Philip Webb’s Sussex chair.

Beyond the Exhibition

Look up Breuer’s other design classics, such as the Wassily chair (see below). Find links with modernist furniture by Gerrit Rietveld, Le Corbusier or Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and with De Stijl painters like Piet Mondrian. Consider how much of today’s furniture, whether from IKEA, Habitat, The Conran Shop or Heels, with its minimal shapes and clean lines, is hugely influenced by the Bauhaus.

Left photograph: Erich Dieckmann, chair, 1926: a design with simple modular parts;
Right photograph: Philip Webb, Sussex chair,
Context: Why is it a pioneering design?

This chair design was extremely influential. Not only was it the first time that Breuer had made a chair using bent steel tubes, it is the first known chair ever to have been made using tubular steel. This makes it revolutionary. It was made possible because of advances in German manufacturing, which meant seamless steel tubing could be made (steel with seams would collapse when bent) and so this opened up a whole new world of possibilities. It is also pioneering because the modern design and inventive use of materials have been so incredibly influential ever since: it is almost impossible to imagine the world without minimalist, steel-framed chairs. The Wassily chair is still manufactured today, but there are thousands of similar designs with curved steel and simple shapes that we now see everywhere, whether in cafes, hotels, offices, airports or our homes.

The date of this chair is important because it was when the Bauhaus school moved from Weimar to Dessau: it was part of the furniture collection designed for the new Bauhaus building. At this point, the Bauhaus started to focus on fusing art and technology and designing for industry. Using ready-made steel tubes meant the chair was light, easy to assemble and therefore ideal to mass produce.
4) WASSILY CHAIR, MARCEL BREUER, 1925–6

Discussion Points

1. Whilst familiar now, at the time the chair’s ultra-modern, streamlined appearance, although elegant, was somewhat shocking to people. Do you think it still looks fresh or has it dated?

2. What do you think Breuer meant when he said this chair was ‘a design for a new lifestyle’?

3. Using tubular steel was a design breakthrough. What other materials do you think have been as influential (e.g. plastic or carbon fibre) or might be in the future (e.g. eco-friendly materials)?

Classroom Activities

1. The Wassily chair is still considered to be fashionable and desirable. Design objects are about what they are for and how they are made, but they also send messages about our personal taste and personality: think about your choice of clothes, bag, watch or trainers. Design a chair that you think would be fashionable today, but which also reflects your personality. How could your chair reflect who you are? What shapes, colours, materials and details would it have?

Gallery link

Compare this chair with furniture designs in Gallery 3 at the William Morris Gallery.

Exhibition link

Whilst the Wassily Chair is not in the Exhibition, it can be compared to chairs which are by Philip Webb and Erich Dieckmann, and to shapes in images by Wassily Kandinsky, Herbet Bayer and Paul Klee.

Beyond the Exhibition

Look for similar designs in places such as IKEA, Dwell, The Conran Shop or Knoll.
What is it?

This lively, colourful woven wall hanging is by Benita Koch-Otte (1892-1976), who was a brilliant weaving student at the Bauhaus from 1920-25. She went on to become one of Germany’s leading modernist textile artists. This wall hanging is woven on a hand loom, created before the Bauhaus started to work more closely with industry to mass produce designs. The textile technique is called ‘half gobelin’ and was an extremely rare and experimental technique used at the Bauhaus.

Benita Koch-Otte loved to experiment with natural dyes, geometric forms and patterns, playing with symmetry, abstraction and balance. She was influenced by the abstract paintings and colour theory of Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky and Johannes Itten, all masters at the Bauhaus, but she created her own distinct style. She was also influenced by her friend Piet Mondrian and his simple–complex compositions.

There are distinct patterns and repeated rhythms in Koch-Otte’s wall hanging but also asymmetry, making the design full of movement and life. Some details are replicated regularly, whilst others chime a few steps out of synchronization, making it hard for the eye to rest. This sense of energy is emphasised by a kaleidoscope of bold and faded colours, some of which sit well together, whilst others clash and dance side by side. This adheres to the Bauhaus principle of truth to materials and craftsmanship, whereby the different textures of woven threads can be clearly seen.

Context: Why is it a pioneering design?

This wall hanging was inventive due to its experimental approach to working with abstraction, colour mixtures and pattern sequences. This would have been quite a radical thing to put on your wall at the time, and a very complex design to plan. Koch-Otte had an incredible handling of composition and created an abstraction people hadn’t seen much before. By combining order and disorder, careful planning and instinct, the outcome is both unsettling and compelling. This was also pioneering, considering the conditions in which it was developed. Whilst the Bauhaus encouraged students to experiment and share ideas openly, where masters and students were learning together, in the weaving workshop, most of the students were self-taught. The weaving workshops were also under resourced: they borrowed equipment and used scraps of donated materials.

Despite this, Koch-Otte, along with Gunta Stölzl and Anni Albers, made the weaving workshops one of the most successful parts of the Bauhaus school. The Bauhaus said men and women were equal, but encouraged women to do traditionally female crafts, but Koch-Otte used this to her own advantage. She later became a director of a textile mill and her designs are still produced today.
Discussion Points

1. How would you describe this wall hanging? Does it remind you of anything? Is it minimalist?

2. Would you like to have this wall hanging on your wall? Explain why you would or would not want it on your wall.

3. What else could you make with this wall hanging e.g. curtains, skirt, cushion, blanket, chair upholstery?

4. Do you think that weaving is a craft more associated with men or women or both? Does it matter?

Classroom Activities

1. Creating the effect of bold, dramatic and intricate weaving can be achieved using strips of coloured card. Encourage students to choose a range of colours and geometric patterns, using sketchbooks to plan ideas. Students should make a base and then use a series of card strips to weave a unique design. There are lots of instructions for how to do this online.

2. Alternatively, make a simple hand loom using corrugated cardboard. Weave using different threads. You could create a batch of small swatches before making larger designs that could be decorative or useful.

Gallery link

Find repeated patterns and textiles by William Morris, particularly in Gallery 1 and Gallery 4 at the William Morris Gallery.

Exhibition link

Compare this woven wall hanging with designs by Anni Albers and Gunta Stölzl.

Beyond the Exhibition

Look for tapestries by artist Grayson Perry (who used to have a studio in Walthamstow), textiles by designers such as Lucienne Day, Zandra Rhodes and Eleanor Pritchard, as well as paintings by Piet Mondrian and Johannes Itten. You can also see a tapestry by William Morris, *The Woodpecker*, in Gallery 1 at the William Morris Gallery.
6) COMBINATION TEAPOT, THEODOR BOGLER, 1923

“Bauhaus workshops are essentially laboratories in which prototypes of products suitable for mass production... are carefully developed and continually improved.”
Walter Gropius, article, “Bauhaus Dessau—Principles of Bauhaus Production”, 1926

What is it?
This is a combination teapot made of fired red earthenware (pottery), covered with a creamy-white, tin glaze. It was made by Theodor Bogler when he was a student at the Bauhaus pottery workshop, which he later managed.

The individual pieces of the teapot were hand thrown, using clay which was cut and then assembled together. The tin glaze is made using a lead glaze with iron oxide, which makes it glossy and white when fired in the kiln.

The teapot has simple, basic forms, with a compact, rounded body, a flat top, lid and knob, and a small pouring spout. Its repetition of circles recalls the Bauhaus reliance on geometric shapes. To the side, rather than to the back, is a handle shaped like the rounded, open end of a trumpet. The placement of a side handle shows that Bogler was inspired by classical Japanese teapot designs.

Bogler took on the early Bauhaus design principles developed at the Weimar school, of creating objects which were characterised by clear forms, functionality and beauty, that could be affordable for everyone. He also wanted to shift pottery into the direction of larger-scale production, linked to the Bauhaus slogan in 1923 of ‘Art & Technology: A New Unity’. In fact, this teapot, with its plain design and lack of decoration, is an early prototype for a so-called ‘modular’ design to be reproduced at scale.

Context: Why is it a pioneering design?
Bogler intended this combination teapot to be like a ‘kit’, where the different moulded and cast parts could be combined in a range of different ways, giving alternative versions of the usual format. Unfortunately, reproduction in this way did not work, even though several copies of it were made. This was because of various reasons: the poor facilities in the ceramics workshop; the uneven quality of the parts; and because the different parts, even if industrially-manufactured, needed to be assembled by hand. However, even though the prototype did not work on this occasion, it was a pioneering idea to try to create ceramics in this way. Bogler believed their geometric shapes could be suited to industrial production, but in reality, they were too fiddly to be manufactured in this way.

This teapot is also pioneering because it represents some of the tensions and contradictions of the Bauhaus: Bogler seemed to sit in the middle. He experimented constantly with his techniques which were rooted in handcraft, but at the same time he wanted to produce them at scale. Unfortunately, the ceramics workshop did not survive the move from Weimar to Dessau. Marianne Brandt, who was the first woman to work in the metal workshop, later designed a tea infuser and strainer, ash trays, lamps and coffee sets, which went on to be produced and copied successfully.
6) COMBINATION TEAPOT, THEODOR BOGLER, 1923

Discussion Points

1. Not every design is successful. Do you think this combination teapot is a good or a bad design?

2. Play and experimentation sat at the heart of Bauhaus creation: why do you think it is important to keep testing and trying out different ideas?

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of both ‘one-off’ designs and mass-produced designs?

Classroom Activities

1. Creating a teapot is a major challenge with so many different parts. Design and make a clay teapot:
   a) Research different designs, including Bauhaus designs by Bogler and Marianne Brandt;
   b) Draw sketches to create your design shapes and styles and work out what materials you will need. Make sure that you think about your teapot’s structure, how the parts will be attached and its surface decoration.

   Gallery link
   Compare this combination teapot with teapots in Gallery 8, the Arts and Crafts room, at the William Morris Gallery.

   Exhibition link
   Find other ceramic works by Marguerite Wildenhain, Otto Lindig and Gerhard Marcks.

   Beyond the Exhibition
   Look for designs by Marianne Brandt, Alessi, Louie Rigano, Droog, Miyake Design and traditional Japanese teapots.

Marianne Brandt, tea infuser and strainer, 1924

Theodor Bogler and Gerhard Marcks, teapot design, 1923
7) AUTUMN/WINTER COLLECTION, MARY KATRANTZOU, 2018

“The collection explores an intermingling of two different breeds of aesthetic, using their components to discover a new hybrid.”
Mary Katrantzou, Autumn/Winter collection, 2018

What is it?
These dresses by fashion designer Mary Katrantzou are displayed at the William Morris Gallery to celebrate connections between William Morris, the Bauhaus and contemporary design.

These striking dresses from Katrantzou’s 2018 Autumn/Winter collection are named after key Bauhaus designers, but also feature classic Morris designs. They are made from velvet, organza, beads and jacquard woven damask. The Bayer dress was inspired by Herbert Bayer, a Bauhaus student who later became a director of the printing and advertising workshop. He worked in typography and invented the Universal alphabet, which has had a major influence on graphics ever since. Across the middle of this dress are the names of Bauhaus locations. The bold blocks of line and colour are contrasted with a 1912 ‘Leicester’ design by a Morris & Co. designer, John Henry Dearle.

The Oskar dress was inspired by Oskar Schlemmer, a very versatile Bauhaus master: he taught painting, sculpture, life drawing and stagecraft. His multimedia approach is reflected in the busy, patchwork design of the Oskar dress which includes layers of colour and texture, fusing Victoriana with modernism. The dress has John Henry Dearle’s 1899 ‘Golden Lily’ design sitting next to an abstracted face, designed by Schlemmer in 1922. The Barrett dress is named after the family firm Barrett’s in Bethnal Green Road, who made Morris & Co. prints using hand woodblocks. Morris’s ‘Snakeshead’ design runs throughout, covered in beads and embroidery. The dress is made from velvet and organza panels, which explore different weights and opacity in one design. It mixes asymmetry and abstraction, intertwined with Morris’s decorative designs based on nature.

Context: Why is it a pioneering design?
Mary Katrantzou mixes Victorian and modern references and creates something new. Like Morris and the Bauhaus, she is also looking to create a ‘total work of art’ in itself. Covered in beads, embroidery and collage, the dresses are remarkable examples of a vision which sets out to combine art, craft and design, merging the boundaries between high fashion and art.
Discussion Points

1. Does Katrantzou manage to combine both her inspiration points: Morris and the Bauhaus? Which do you think comes across more strongly in the design, and why?

2. Do the designs meet Bauhaus ideals of craft, simplicity, ‘truth to materials’ and ‘form follows function’?

3. Can you think of other fashion designers who draw upon historical movements?

Classroom Activities

1. Make a design for an item of clothing e.g. a dress, jacket, trousers, T-shirt, shoes, hat, which is inspired by both old and new influences.

Consider who you will choose as your inspiration points and how you will reflect and combine them: will it be through colour, shape, texture, materials or pattern? When you have done your research and sketches, create a highly finished, fashion mood board, or make the actual garment.

Gallery link

Compare these dresses with print designs by Morris and see how these print designs were made in Gallery 4 at the William Morris Gallery.

Exhibition link

See Herbert Bayer’s postcards, which show his graphic designs.

Beyond the Exhibition

Look for Vivienne Westwood fashion designs and modern typography and poster designs.

Bayer dress

Oskar dress

Barrett dress
Get Inspired by Design

Look at designs all around you today or be inspired by these objects created by Bauhaus.

Clock, The Usual Design

Chess set, Josef Hartwig

Composition with large red square, Piet Mondrian

MT8 table lamp, William Wagenfeld and Carl Jakob Jucker

Bauhaus Archive, Walter Gropius
The Design Process

"Play becomes joy, joy becomes work, work becomes play."
Johannes Itten

Developing your designs

There are lots of exciting ways to design new things and generate new ideas. Using an iterative design process means that students can move and jump between the different design planning stages, in any order, any number of times, until the final product is made. It is a cyclical process of researching, prototyping, testing, evaluating, refining and improving.

This design process is similar in many ways to how the Bauhaus school ran things: their workshops were laboratories of experimentation and play. Below is the syllabus at the Weimar Bauhaus, which includes experimentation with, and understanding of, different materials, techniques, colour, composition and construction. These approaches have informed design planning ever since.

Design Process Models

Design, by its very nature, is iterative: in other words, doing something again and again to improve it. Below are some design process diagrams which your students might find useful to look up when creating their Bauhaus inspired design objects.
BEYOND THE EXHIBITION: INFLUENTIAL BAUHAUS DESIGNS

The Pioneers Exhibition celebrates the links between the Arts and Crafts Movement and the Bauhaus. It focuses on the early years of the Bauhaus when it was based at Weimar, from 1919-25, when its emphasis was on individual designs, craftsmanship and experimentation. In later years, in particular from 1924, Bauhaus makers went on to design for industry, with many of their designs becoming more minimalist and modernist in nature. This is usually what springs to mind when we think of ‘classic Bauhaus’.

It is hard to believe that the Bauhaus was only active for 14 years, (1919-1933), given its enormous and lasting influence on modern design. During that time, and after it was closed, the masters and students went on to practise their work across the world, setting up design and architecture businesses, directing weaving studios, developing their painting practice, or continuing to teach. The long-lasting effect of Bauhaus designs is impossible to overestimate.

Find out more about these Bauhaus design classics and Bauhaus inspired designs below to inspire your own ideas. Consider in particular: ‘form follows function’, ‘truth to materials’, simplicity and uniting art and technology.

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Penguin Pool, London Zoo, Berthold Lubetkin, Tecton Group, 1934

Barcelona chair, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich, 1929

Baby cradle, Peter Keler, 1922

Wassily chair, Marcel Breuer, 1927
Wall hanging, Gunta Stölzl, 1927-8

Bruno chair, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 1930

Villa Savoye, Le Corbusier, 1928-31

MT8 table lamp, Wilhelm Wagenfeld and Carl Jakob Jucker, 1923-4

Marianne Brandt, tea infuser and strainer, 1924

Nesting tables, Josef Albers, 1926/7
CURRICULUM LINKS

The information and activities in this resource link directly to the teaching of KS3 and KS4 Design & Technology and KS3 and KS4 Art & Design.

KS3 Design & Technology

- Develop specifications to inform the design of innovative, functional, appealing products that respond to needs in a variety of situations

- Analyse the work of past and present professionals and others to develop and broaden their understanding

- Understand developments in design and technology, its impact on individuals, society and the environment, and the responsibilities of designers, engineers and technologists.

KS4 Design & Technology

- The work of other designers and other design companies.

KS4 Design & Technology AQA contextual challenges

- Providing and safe and comfortable home

- Working towards a sustainable future

- A high-profile activity (e.g. Bauhaus Centenary, Waltham Forest London Borough of Culture).

KS4 Art & Design

- Critical and contextual studies

- Textile design/3-dimensional design/fashion design.

KS4 Design & Technology AQA specification

- Investigate and analyse the work of past and present professionals and companies;

- Explore, create and evaluate design outcomes: iterative design process, prototyping, testing, analysing, and refining a product or process;

- Analyse and respond to contexts, linking to AQA contextual challenges.
LINKS TO OTHER BAUHAUS EVENTS AND RESOURCES

You can find out more about the Bauhaus at the following sites:

**bauhaus100.com**
- This website has information, articles, images and events about the Bauhaus, as part of the centenary celebration.

**dezeen.com/tag/bauhaus/**
- This is a design website packed with features about the Bauhaus, from top 10 designs to famous buildings and their influence on website design, logos and fashion.

**wmgallery.org.uk/learning/resources**
- You can find on this William Morris Gallery website resources on running a design business:
  - *Running a Successful Design Business* (Teacher notes and student activities)
  - *William Morris & Co.* (Interactive online activity)

**wfculture19.co.uk**
- This website has creative activities across the Borough, celebrating the theme of Radicals, Makers and Fellowship.

https://www.data.org.uk/for-education/secondary/gcse-textiles-rescue/
- This website has weaving ideas from the Design and Technology Association.

https://www.theartstory.org/artist/breuer-marcel/artworks/
- This website focuses on Marcel Breuer’s Wassily chair.

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/bauh/hd_bauh.htm
- This website has a summary from Alexandra Griffith Winton about the Bauhaus from 1919–33.

https://www.catawiki.com/stories/5263-5-characteristics-of-bauhaus-art-architecture-and-design
- This website has information on the five characteristics of Bauhaus art, architecture and design by Rosanne Schipper (23rd May 2018).