



How Culture and History Shape the Art We Make

KS3 Ages 11-14 🕒 3 min read

What Does Culture Mean?

Culture is the way a group of people live. It includes their beliefs, traditions, languages, food, clothes, music, and values. When artists grow up in a particular culture, they absorb all of these things, and they naturally show up in their work.

For example, an artist from **Japan** might paint with **ink and water** because that's a traditional Japanese art form they learned about. An artist from **Nigeria** might use bright colours and patterns that reflect the fabrics and decorations they see around them every day.

Think of it like a recipe: culture is like the ingredients an artist has available. If you grow up with lemons, you'll make lemon cake. If you grow up with rice, you'll cook rice dishes.

How Does History Influence Artists?

History shapes art in powerful ways. When big events happen—wars, revolutions, discoveries, or times of peace—artists respond to them through their work.

During the **Renaissance** (around the **1300s to 1600s**), European artists became fascinated with **human anatomy, perspective, and realism**. This happened because people were rediscovering ancient Greek and Roman knowledge. Artists like **Leonardo da Vinci** painted incredibly lifelike portraits and studied how bodies moved.

The **Industrial Revolution** brought factories and machines. Artists responded by creating new styles that showed the energy and sometimes the sadness of this change. **Pablo Picasso** created **Cubism**, a style that broke art into geometric shapes—perhaps reflecting how machines and industry were changing the world.

Think of it like a diary: history is the events written in an artist's diary. If something exciting or sad happens, you'll draw or write about it differently than if nothing had changed.

Culture and History Working Together

The most powerful art happens when culture and history meet. For instance, **African American artists** in the **1960s** created work that celebrated their culture while challenging the injustice of **segregation**. Their art told stories about identity, struggle, and pride—shaped by both their cultural heritage and the historical moment they were living in.

Today, artists still do this. They create work inspired by their family backgrounds, their countries, current events, and their personal histories. This is why art from different times and places looks so different—because the people making it have lived through different experiences and grown up in different worlds.

Understanding how culture and history influence art helps us appreciate why art is so important. It's not just pretty pictures—it's a window into how people think, feel, and see the world.