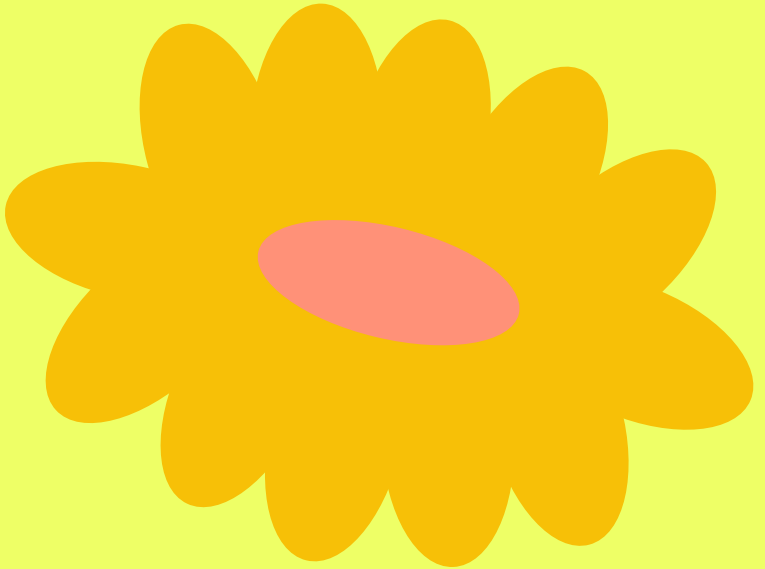


# Yinka Shonibare CBE

ArtSpark



Look out for the below *symbols!*  
They flag up prompts that work especially well with those areas of the curriculum.

 ENGLISH

 DIVERSITY

 MATHS

 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

 SCIENCE

 BRITISH VALUES

 HISTORY


 MENTAL HEALTH  
& WELLBEING

 GEOGRAPHY

 CREATIVE CAREERS  
IN THE ARTS

 ART

 MUSIC

 When you see this icon (hand symbol), you can click on an external link to provide you with more information.


This learning resource is intended to bring you closer to the series of prints commissioned through the TenTen Award.

Bursting with information, you'll find suggestions on how to engage with the artwork in a whole range of ways – from exploring the artist's themes and techniques, to pointers on curriculum links. The wide variety of prompts are intended to ensure the artwork is approachable and relevant, no matter what your teaching specialism! You are encouraged to run with whichever you choose.

Each resource kicks off with 10 interesting facts about the artist – but you don't have to become an expert on everything. Facts have their place, but so do feelings, and one of the most valuable things about art is it gives us space to play, explore and feel.

Anything you think about the artwork, and the words you use to talk about it, it's all good.

# 10 facts about Yinka Shonibare

- 1 Born in 1962 in London to Nigerian parents. Shonibare was raised in Lagos, Nigeria, where he spoke Yoruba at home and English at the private school he attended. Shonibare describes himself as a cultural hybrid – at once African and British.
- 2 At 17, Shonibare returned to the UK to study Art. Three weeks into the course he contracted an inflammation of his spinal cord and was in a coma for a fortnight. When he woke up he was paralysed from the neck down. It took three years before he was able to return to his studies, and he was left partially paralysed. [What I see when I look in the mirror](#) 
- 3 Shonibare studied Fine Art at Byam Shaw School of Art, London (1989) and received his MFA from Goldsmiths, University of London (1991).
- 4 His practice spans painting, sculpture, large-scale mixed-media installations, photography and film.
- 5 Much of Shonibare's art is recognisable by his signature use of Dutch wax fabric, a ubiquitous material inspired by Indonesian batik design, mass-produced by their Dutch colonisers and eventually sold to colonies in West Africa, which has come to symbolise for Shonibare the complex web of economic and racial interactions – and interdependencies – between Europe, Asia and Africa.

- 6 Shonibare was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 2005, an award that he accepted with some irony, given the critical focus of his work, and a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2019. He has chosen to adopt this title at all times, using it as a platform from which to explore further the colonial legacy, class structure and social justice issues that remain in the country he calls his home.
- 7 In 2010, Shonibare's first public art commission, *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* was displayed on the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square, London. Shonibare said, 'I wanted to do a serious thing for a serious space, but I also wanted it to be exciting, magical, and playful... Nelson's victory freed up the seas for the British, and that led, in turn, to the building of the British Empire. But in a way, his victory also created the London we know today: an exciting, diverse, multicultural city.' The work is now in the permanent collection of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.
- 8 He was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2004, elected a Royal Academician in 2013, and received the prestigious Whitechapel Gallery Art Icon Award 2021. His works are in notable museum collections internationally.
- 9 Shonibare was invited to curate the 2021 Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy, describing it as the most inclusive show in the 250 years of the institution. For three months, the statue of the Academy's founder Joshua Reynolds, which stands in the courtyard entrance, greeted visitors draped for the occasion in a colourful sash of African Dutch wax fabric.
- 10 Shonibare uses his position as a celebrated artist to bring new and diverse voices into the art world. Years ago, he began opening his East London studio to emerging artists. Anyone could pitch an idea and post it in a proposals box outside his studio. Selected artists would then be given a free month and a platform to show their work. He has since developed and built two new artist residency spaces in Nigeria.

# About the print

'I can't be defined without the British-colonial experience of my birth and background. I don't exist without it.'

— Yinka Shonibare CBE

Shonibare describes himself as a 'post-colonial hybrid': these characteristics shape his artistic and political identity, and are major themes in his work. Some of the ways he explores the themes in *Hibiscus and the Rose* are through his use of flowers, duality and Dutch wax fabric.

- What is the significance of Shonibare's choice of flowers?

The rose represents his birthplace and current home of London. The rose is England's national flower, long used to symbolise the nation.



Yinka Shonibare  
*Hibiscus and the Rose*, 2020

The hibiscus represents Nigeria, his parents' home country and the place of his childhood. Growing up in Lagos, he would eat the nectar of the hibiscus, a flower commonly found across the country.

- Which flower do you prefer? Why?
- What do each of the flowers in Shonbare's print make you think of?
- Do you think Shonibare gives the two flowers equal importance? If so, how?



## Duality

The print depicts the two flowers that are significant to Shonibare – because no single flower could encompass the complexity of his experience. Duality is a theme that recurs in Shonibare's work, taking many forms, from magical twins to ballet dancers.

- Shonibare has made other works featuring flowers: take a look at *Tulip Field*, 2017. What similarities and differences are there in his treatment of this flower subject?



Yinka Shonibare, *Tulip Field*,  
2017

# Dutch wax fabric



The diamond pattern in the background of the rose is from Dutch wax fabric – a signature motif in Shonibare’s work ever since a tutor suggested he should be making art that was more ‘authentically African’. Bemused as to what that might be, he recalls going to Brixton market in London in search of his ‘authentic African identity’.

There he discovered that these fabrics were inspired by Indonesian batik design, mass-produced by the country’s Dutch colonisers and eventually sold to colonies in West Africa. Shonibare adopted the fabric as a metaphor for the process of cultural transfer and displacement.



‘I can raise issues, but I’m an artist and I want to produce something poetic.’

— Yinka Shonibare CBE



# Topics to discuss

- Do you think Shonibare succeeds in both raising issues and producing something poetic?
- Does the print address complex issues, or is it simply a picture of two flowers?
- Do you think that it is the job of an artist to raise issues?
- These prints hang in UK government buildings around the world: what message do you think people visiting those buildings get from seeing *Hibiscus and the Rose*?



# Themes and techniques

What is  
a hybrid?

This is how Yinka Shonibare CBE describes the way his identity was shaped by his bicultural heritage, growing up in London and Lagos, shortly after Nigeria achieved independence from British rule. One of the ways he explores this is through duality. Alongside his dual use of flowers in *Hibiscus and the Rose*, here are some other examples:

## TWINS

'In Nigeria twins are considered special and have magic powers in folklore... It's also a metaphor for dual cultures.'

– Yinka Shonibare CBE

Take a look at the way Shonibare uses texture, collage and repetition in these examples of his work on the theme of twins – *Twins I* and *Twins IV*.



Yinka Shonibare, *Twins I*,  
2015



Yinka Shonibare, *Twins IV*,  
2015



## Activity

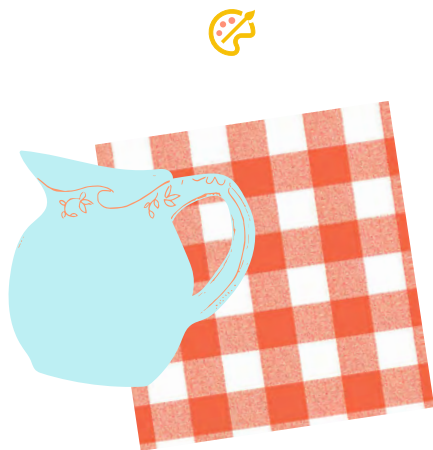
Create your own print using a Tetra Pak, a spoon, an onion bag!

A great way of exploring duality is through printing, because the same image can be repeated.

A duality is a situation in which two opposite ideas or feelings exist at the same time (eg. war and peace). Whereas opposites are two things which are completely different from each other and don't share similar qualities (eg. far and near).

Follow these **step-by-step** instructions to create a collagraph (a type of print that can be made without a printing press) using household and recycled materials.

What will you choose as the subject of your print?  
How will you incorporate texture, collage and repetition?

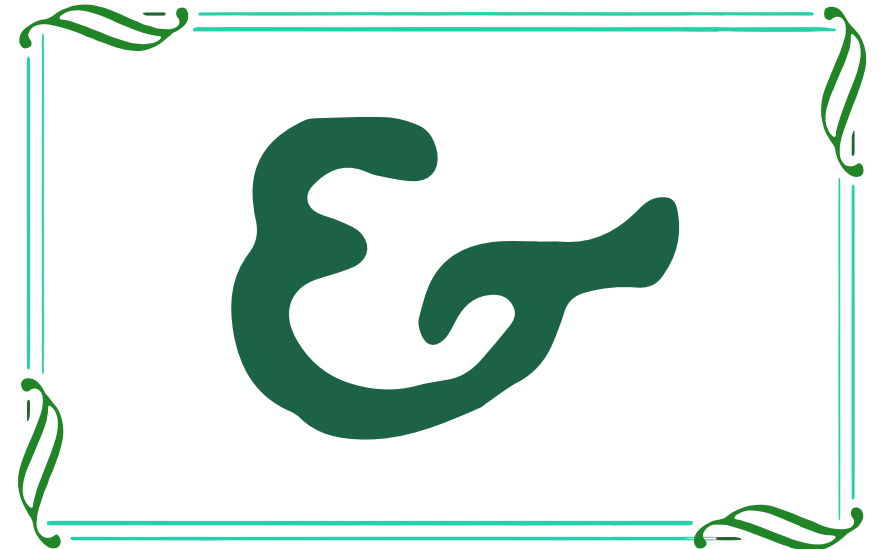


## What is the difference between opposites and duality?

Can you think of other examples in art, books and films that explore the theme of duality?



This **Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde analysis** considers how the story examines duality – good/evil, science/supernatural.





## Activity

# Curry and chips! Create a fusion menu

'Fusion food as a concept is kind of trying to quite consciously fuse things that are sometimes quite contradictory, sometimes quite far apart, to see if they'd work.'

— Chef Yotam Ottolenghi



What are your favourite food dishes?  
Do you ever mix up ingredients and recipes from different places and cultures?

Create a menu celebrating your own fusion food. Here are some suggestions to get you started **falafel tacos, a donut burger, mac and cheese pizza, a sushi burrito...**

Organise an event where you can prepare some of your fusion dishes and share!



## Activity

# Create your own cut-up



'Life is a cut-up.'

— William Burroughs




Take a look at [this article](#) to see how generations of writers, artists and comedians have made new works by mashing together old works – from *The Apprentice* to *The Sound of Music*.

### How to make a cut-up

Select a piece of writing – anything from a newspaper article to a page of your own notes.

Version 1: Fold the paper vertically down the centre, and shift the right side of the page up or down a line or two. Stick the two halves back together in this new position.

Version 2: Cut the page up into sentences, put the strips of paper into a bag, pull out the strips at random and reorder (this is the Bowie method: [David Bowie explains his cut-up technique](#)) 

Now read your resulting text.

## Activity

# Write a hybrid poem (or a Cento)

Centos are sometimes called ‘patchwork poetry’ because each line is taken from a different poem.

### How to write a Cento

Read some poems. Find a line you especially like, and make that the first line of your patchwork poem. Add more lines. Choose your lines carefully – your poem must make sense.

Can you make your poem rhyme? It’s up to you.

Try to make the beats sound right.

Tenses should agree – so all in the present tense, or the past, or even future.

Point of view should agree – pick lines that have been written either all in first person (‘I’), second person (‘you’), or third person (‘he/she/they’).

Give credit! At the end of your Cento, list each of the featured poets full name.

Try writing a Cento as a group, each adding a line. Set the group Cento you have created to music, and perform it.



## Additional activity

Listen to this recording by Cameron Awkward – Rich reading his poem: [Centos Between the Ending and the End](#)



The poem is composed of language ‘scavenged from the works’ of over a dozen poets – ‘All of whom have made for me a world and for whom I wish the world.’

### Discuss

- Does the Cento sound like it’s made up of many writers?
- Does it make you want to find out more about those writers?
- Why does Awkward-Rich say they have made him a world?
- How has the poet used the Cento to say something about himself?
- What do you imagine are some possible benefits of repurposing words written by others?



## Flowers & symbolism

Where does the rose originally come from?  
Even though it is a symbol of Englishness, the rose actually originates in Asia.

Flowers have traditionally held symbolic significance - particularly in the Victorian era, when the 'language of flowers' was used as a sort of code. Shonibare's interest in the Victorian era began as a student during Margaret Thatcher's years as Prime Minister, when he became familiar with her call for 'a return to Victorian values'.

During the reign of Queen Victoria, the British Empire aggressively extended its colonial control around the world, especially on the African continent. It was this the association that struck Shonibare, and led him to research the period, and to explore in his work.

We can find much more recent examples of the language of flowers. At King Charles III's request, the wreath for Her Majesty's funeral in 2022 included foliage chosen for its symbolism:

Rosemary, an emblem of remembrance begins Ophelia's famous speech in Act IV of Shakespeare's Hamlet.

Myrtle, the ancient symbol of a happy marriage, cut from a plant that was grown from a sprig of myrtle in The Queen's wedding bouquet in 1947.

English oak, a national symbol of strength, is a nod to The Queen's constancy and steadfast duty. It also symbolises the strength of love.

Symbolism in the flowers chosen for

**Queen Elizabeth's funeral**

**11 plants Shakespeare would have known well**

**If you had to describe yourself as a flower, what kind of flower would you be?**

- What is it about the flower that you identify with, and why?
- Do you like its colour or scent, or is it perhaps a flower you have at home?
- Do you know where the flower originated?  
**List of national flowers**
- Look up the botanical name of your flower.  
**Botanical plant names**
- How do you think it got its common name?

## Activity

# Walking and Chalking

Take an hour-long wander in your local neighbourhood, perhaps on a route you think you know well.

- Ever noticed plants growing in unexpected places – pushing up through cracks in the pavement, or sprouting from gutters?
- Ever wondered what they're called, and where they came from? If so, this pavement prowl is for you! An ideal walk for towns and cities, it's a way of paying attention – hunting down what's under your nose, and then telling the world about it.

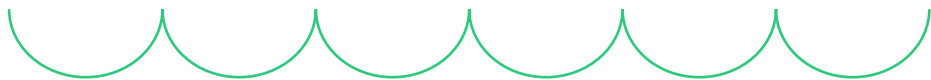


### You will need

A guide for identifying plants and flowers.

Chalk – regular sticks of chalk will do just fine.

A free iNaturalist app is useful but not essential. If you prefer to keep it analogue, get a plant identification book. Choose one with plenty of illustrations.



This walk is best when the weather is fine – and while it *can* be done at any time of year, you'll have more luck plant-spotting in spring and summer.

Decide on your route.

As you walk, look around for plants that haven't been deliberately planted – so not flowerbeds or hanging baskets, but behind the bus stop, in the brickwork, between paving stones, or popping up through lawns.

Stop and look up.

Stop again and look down.

Take care when crossing roads, and be sensible about where you choose to stop (there might be some very interesting weeds on the edge of the kerb, but there'll also be traffic!)

When you find a plant – don't pick it!

- Use your guide to identify it. What's it called?
- Does it have a common name as well as a Latin name? Which do you prefer?

Find a spot close to the plant to chalk the name. If you want to, take a photo of the plant and of your chalk writing. These photos can be collected on a webpage, or printed and displayed in school.



'A weed is a plant growing in the "wrong" place' - Discuss!

Struggling with an ID? The Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland ([BSBI.ORG](https://www.bsbi.org)) website has resources to help identify wild plants, whether you're a beginner or an experienced botanist.



## Activity

### How many daisies in a field?

Find an open space - a playing field, or a park - with some daisies in it.

Guess how many daisies there are in the whole field.

Count them! OR...

[This LINK](#) shows you how to estimate population size, as well as how to observe changes in population.

Whose guess was closest?

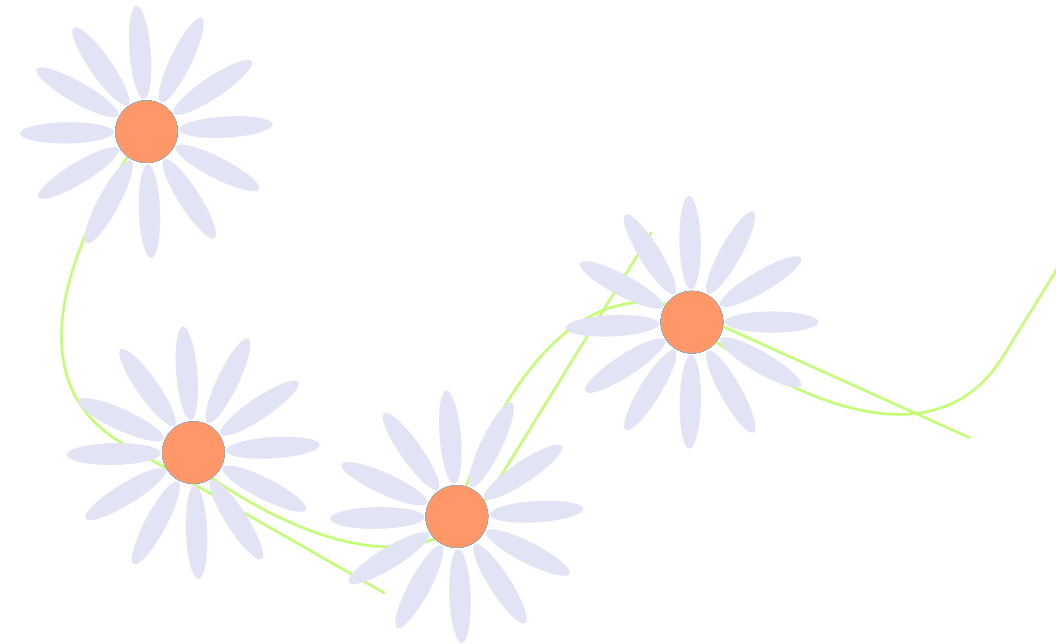


## Activity

### Make a daisy chain!

*This is a simple necklace or bracelet using daisies*

*Here's a dandelion crown*



# Batik

## Dutch Wax Techniques

‘By exposing people to other cultures and other ways of doing things, it expands their horizons and their imagination. That’s what I’m trying to do in my work.’

—Yinka Shonibare CBE



African Dutch wax fabric is the wax-dyed batik fabric that the Dutch were unable to market successfully in Indonesia and then began exporting to Africa. Shonibare has adopted it as a metaphor for the process of cultural transfer and displacement that has contributed to fabricating an authentic African style.

## What is batik?

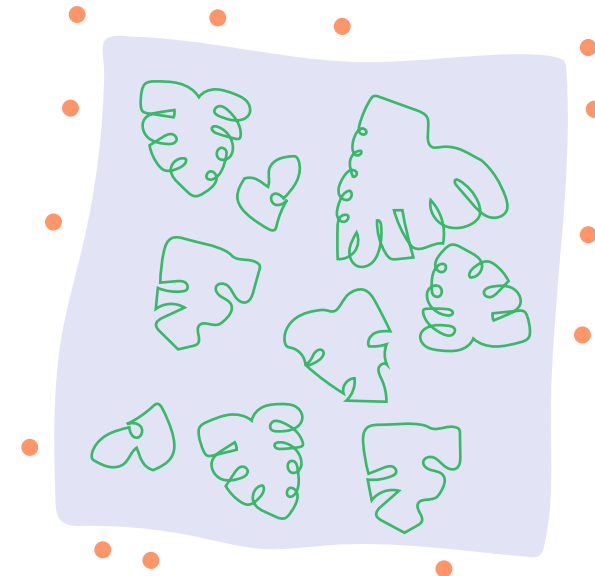
Batik is the art of decorating cloth by painting patterns & blocking out areas using a substance that resists dye, e.g. wax.

## Activity

### Try out batik using hot wax



**Practical Introduction to Batik**



## Batik in Africa

Evidence of batik has been found from over 2000 years ago, and there are examples of batik textiles in many parts of Africa, but the most developed skills are found in Nigeria where the Yoruba people make adire cloths. Different materials are used as a resist, e.g. cassava paste (root plant), rice paste, river mud.

### Batik techniques in Africa



A resist prevents dye from reaching all the cloth, and creates a pattern.

### Activity

## Try out batik using wheat flour paste

### Wax-free batik techniques



### Youtube demo of flour batik



- What are some of the differences between using wax and using a flour paste as a resist?
- How long do each of these batik processes take?

## Batik in Indonesia

In 2009 Indonesian batik was awarded a place on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

### Batik in Indonesia



### Discuss

- Why do you think batik thrived in Indonesia?
- How did batik fabric find its way from Indonesia to Holland?

## Activity (class)

# Create your own 'Double Dutch' wall of batik

What does Michelle Obama's handbag have in common with a fly swat?

Take a look at these [Dutch wax fabric designs](#) to find out.

Have a go at designing your own - you could use one of the themes you've been exploring in this resource for inspiration.

Create a 30cm square of your design.

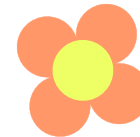
Mount the fabrics onto squares of recycled packaging card. Display together in a grid on a bright pink wall like this - [Shonibare's Double Dutch, 1994](#)

NB. Batik projects using either flour or wax resist will require a series of sessions. If this is not practical, explore using collage, or wax crayon resist with paint.



# What do artists do all day?

*'Art can make the world better'.*



*'There is no line between the personal and the professional.'*

*'To be a great artist requires more than creating compelling images, objects, spaces, or scenarios - one must be a kind of visionary, an enchanter, and grapple with issues of an entirely different order.'*

—Yinka Shonibare CBE

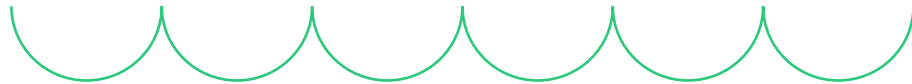




## Activity

# What factors made Yinka Shonibare the artist he is today?

Working in small groups, consider the following statements, and decide on their order of importance in shaping Yinka's career. Compare your results with the other groups - did you reach the same conclusions?



Born in London in 1962.

His mother looked after the four children.

At 17 he returned to the UK and went to Wimbledon College of Art for his foundation year. 'Three weeks into the course I fell ill... When I woke up I was paralysed from the neck down.'

His London studio is where he develops most of his projects, and where his team of three work. 'And it's where I meet with sculptors, costumiers, photographers, printmakers - the people I collaborate with.'

His father was a corporate lawyer.

In the early 1990s, he worked for Shape Arts, a disability-led arts organisation, then based at Battersea Arts Centre, where he came into contact with a diverse range of arts practices.

A key material in Shonibare's work since 1994 are the brightly coloured 'African' fabrics (Dutch wax-printed cotton) that he buys himself from Brixton market in London.

'I have a proposal box outside the building where artists can post their ideas. The best ones get a residency in the studio for a month.'

He spoke Yoruba at home, but only English at his private school.

# Feeling inspired?



Here are some suggestions for extending the themes you've been looking at. These can be done outside school, and work equally well as solo activities or with friends and family.



## Activity

# Organise a fashion show on a shoestring

Design a catwalk show on the theme of HYBRID MASHUP CULTURE CLASH without spending any money!

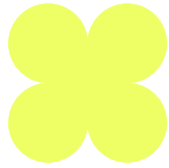
Work together on your creations, thinking about your choices of fabrics, styles, materials, colours, textures.

Borrow, make, recycle, mix up, double up, and mashup to create something unexpected and fabulous.

- What can you use that plays with themes of duality?
- Can you incorporate flowers?
- How will you show off your creations on the catwalk?

## Activity

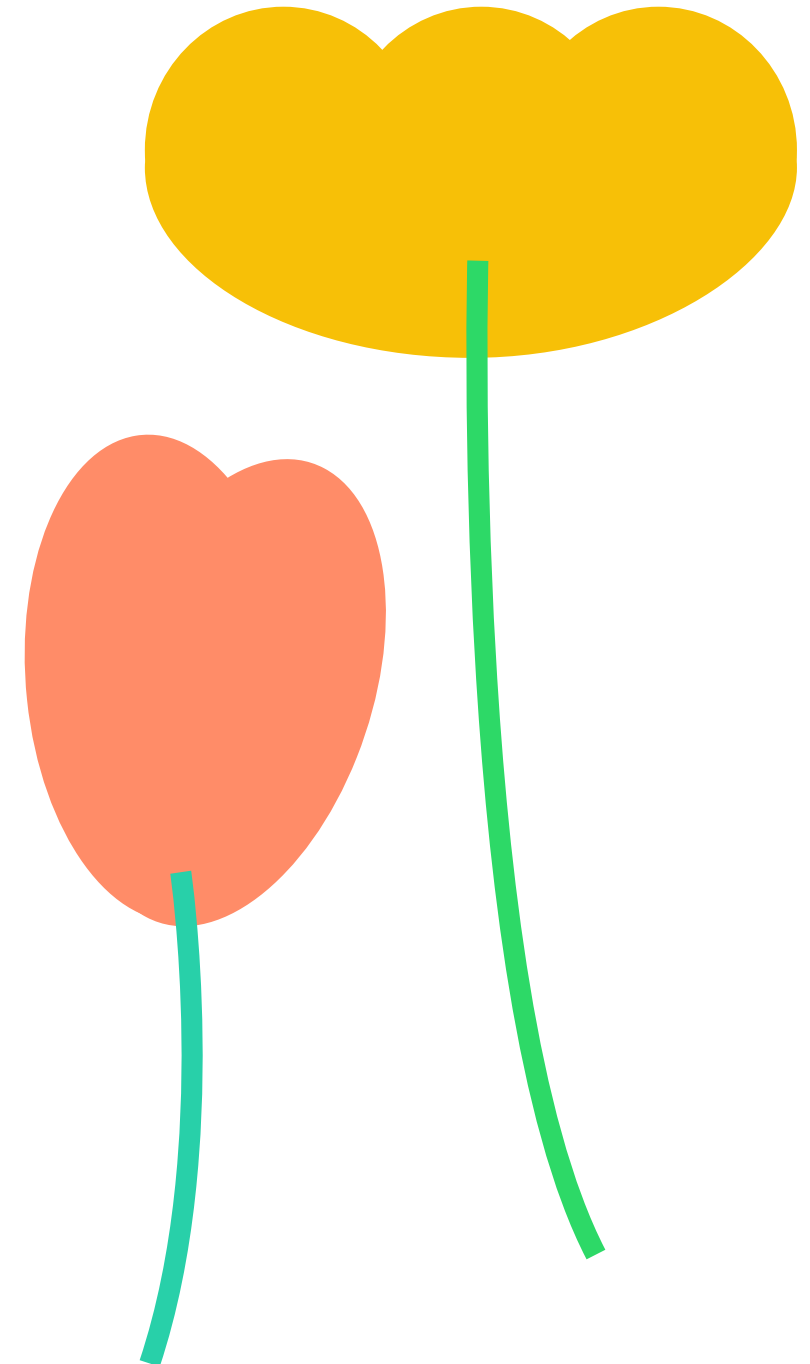
### Create a playlist



In a **playlist** of his own musical choices, Shonibare includes Kanye West and Amy Winehouse alongside Fela Kuti and opera. When he curated the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy, there was poetry and music alongside visual art.

- What would you put on your own playlist?
- Can you incorporate a variety of styles and influences?
- How about recording sounds that are meaningful to you - maybe spoken word, or birdsong?


Make a playlist for someone close to you. You could also invent a playlist for a fictional character or historical figure.




# Further reading and links

## Shonibare's Practice

In his London studio, Shonibare reflects on what it means for him to be an artist, how he views his occupation as a utopian pursuit.

[I'm realising my dreams and that is my profession](#) 


## Royal Academy talk


[Shonibare talks about his preoccupations, his influences, his identity, and his work.](#) 

## Shonibare & Guest Projects


[About Guest artist space foundation](#)

## Dutch Wax Print

[Yinka Shonibare and Wax Print](#) 

[Wax prints: Africa's pride or colonial legacy?](#) 

## Royal Academy Summer Show

[Listen to Linton Kwesi Johnson's poem as part of the Summer Exhibition Sound Programme here.](#) 

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