



## Welcome to the My Dog Sighs teaching resources!

We hope this pack will ignite a creative spark in some young people as they explore the work of My Dog Sighs and his latest project *Inside*. We hope it provides them with the creative tools needed to find hope in difficult situations.

While we have prepared tasks for specific key stages, they all focus on different aspects of My Dog Sighs' work, and any of them can be easily adapted to suit your pupils, depending on what aspect of the artist's work you would like to explore.

Most lessons explore the subject of emotions, so please use your professional judgement and be aware of any impact to your young people, particularly those known to be in difficult home situations or have mental health problems.

Each key stage pack includes:

- A PowerPoint presentation with notes to introduce the artist and his project *Inside*
- A lesson plan with options of activities – one aimed at the very busy teacher who has almost no time to prepare and the others for those who have a little more time!
- Photocopiable worksheet templates
- A double sided photocopiable take home activity with further details of My Dogs' work

## About My Dog Sighs

My Dog Sighs was a primary school teacher who wanted to follow his dream to become a professional artist and make a living doing what he loved doing. After spending a year painting what he thought galleries wanted, he took them to the galleries but none of them were interested in art that looked like other art they exhibited. Disheartened, he got back into teaching, got a wife, a mortgage, a family-sized car and a family. That dream was lost.

However, in 2002, on seeing a Banksy painting on a wall in London he reassessed his idea of what art is. He realised it was the joy of stumbling across something unexpectedly that made you stop and think. But, as a family man, he didn't feel he wanted to cause damage to people's walls or risk getting arrested! So he started to create art and leave it in random places for people to find. Every Friday he would take the latest piece of his art as he headed to work, leave it somewhere and take a photo of it. He dubbed it Free Art Friday. Each Friday he would go through emotions of sadness about losing some of his art but excitement about the journey that piece was going to go on along with the person who found it.

After a while this morphed into using rubbish that he found on the street, taking it home to create art on, and then putting it back onto the street for someone to find. My Dog Sighs started to post online what he was leaving out each week, and soon other artists started to follow suit. A Free Art Friday community began to grow online, with artists taking the idea and adjusting it to suit themselves and their environment. Soon these artists started sending each other their pieces of art to leave out in their home towns, and through this My Dog Sighs' outdoor 'galleries' included Hawaii, New York and Japan. He soon started running workshops and exhibiting in galleries across the world.

One day he stumbled across an old baked bean can and that was the start of a new style of his art. He squashed it and painted the base with a face that represented the eyes down look of a homeless person who feels lost and hopeless. He realised that that can mirrored his creative journey – from being lost and dejected, to being found and given a new lease of life, a new purpose, and being left to travel on its own journey, at the same time encouraging other to open their eyes to the fact that being lost can lead them to an exciting new journey.





From media interest in Free Art Friday it went crazy. My Dog Sighs quickly went part time in his teaching job then gave in his notice and started painting full time. He is best known for his naive Everyman, my painted crushed cans and glassy reflective eyes.

To hear more about My Dog Sighs and his journey you could watch his 15 minute TED talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaTNwJLOBiA> (or search for My Dog Sighs TED talk).

### **What is *Inside*?**

My Dog Sighs had been feeling for a few years that he wanted to bring a street art show indoors where he could control the environment but still make it feel street. He scoped out a number of abandoned buildings across Portsmouth but none of them had quite what he was looking for. However everything clicked when he found this building. The owner was incredible giving him the building for 18 months to do what he chose with it. First he had to make it watertight, then evict 300 pigeons, get specialist companies to clear the aftermath and make it safe while still keeping the aesthetics of an abandoned building.

*Inside* is My Dog Sighs' most ambitious project to date. He wanted to return to a time when street artists were invisible ghosts. In this abandoned building he has created a world where My Dog Sighs is a community of his quiet little voices, each sharing elements of the human condition and creating everything that is My Dog Sighs. He has transformed the derelict building into an immersive world inhabited by these creatures, his 'Quiet Little Voices'.

These anthropomorphic creatures have been given free rein to take over the multi-storey space, finding shelter, creating their own language and making artwork. Each creature represents a different aspect of the human experience; some are joyful, playing on swings and causing mischief, while others appear lost, confining themselves to dimly lit corners.

Like us, these creatures are not perfect nor are their lives perfect. They struggle, they make mistakes, they fail. But like us too, they don't give up. Even among the decay they use their creativity to find hope – a powerful message in these turbulent times.

The creatures started life as scribbled doodles in the margins of My Dog Sighs' sketchbooks and were inspired by the artist's own life experiences and emotions. From these naïve sketches the 'Quiet Little Voices' grew and took on a life of their own. They can be found in every nook and cranny of the space in the form of paintings, sound installations as well as My Dog Sighs' first ever series of sculptures.

*Inside* responds to the building itself and finds beauty amongst its dilapidated floors and crumbling walls. The project extends My Dog Sighs' street art practice where he uncovers the beauty of these forgotten spaces and demonstrates the power of creativity to inspire and uplift communities. The works also look back on the evolution of the artist's own style, featuring childlike sketches which are slowly transformed into photorealistic images.

The artist has worked closely with both sound experts from Portsmouth University and a renowned creative lighting company to create a unique and immersive street art experience.

*Inside* takes place Friday 16 July – Sunday 1 August 2021. Tickets can be bought from My Dog Sighs' website: <https://mydogsighs.co.uk/> After that date video footage will be available from the website.

To hear from My Dog Sighs himself about *Inside* watch this 20 minute interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHt2cwVVn1o>

Or watch this 2 minute video to get an insight showing elements of My Dog Sighs at work

<https://vimeo.com/566575238> password **mds**

