Secondary school education resource

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Teacher’s notes:

The Picasso: The Vollard Suite education resource encourages students to engage with the exhibition’s key concepts and themes through responding and making. The resource engages with the ideas that link the works, offering a cohesive thread that invites the viewer to explore Picasso’s extraordinary suite of 100 intaglio prints in the context of autobiography and art history.

Picasso: The Vollard Suite is designed to foster students’ critical and creative thinking skills. By applying a sequence of thinking skills, students develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the processes of problem solving and interpretation. Through the creation of their own works of art students are required to identify, explore and organise information and ideas.

This resource is designed for:

- secondary students and can be adapted for upper primary or tertiary students
- Visual Arts students, but also has relevance for English, Philosophy and Humanities and Social Sciences students.

This resource may be used to:

- complement a visit to Picasso: The Vollard Suite through activities and ideas to assist with preparation for the gallery visit
- as a reference when you are viewing the works
- to deepen understanding and engagement post-visit.

The resource comprises the following learning activities which are paired with the major themes of the exhibition:

Speak your mind: Talking points or provocations to facilitate discussion and contemplation as well as offer opportunities for students to engage with art history and theory through exploratory research tasks.

Get to work: Creative making suggestions that highlight key concepts.

Think it through: Ideas, considerations and extensions to aid students in their art making.

The NGA values the feedback of students and teachers on the education resources we have produced. To share student work or your feedback on the resource please email education@nga.gov.au.

Content warning

Pages 12–13 ‘The Battle of Love’ contain depictions and discussions of sexual violence. This is contextualised in cultural, historical and contemporary terms.
Background

The Vollard Suite is regarded as one of the greatest, and perhaps the most enigmatic, print suites of the twentieth century. Comprising 100 intaglio prints, the suite was made by Pablo Picasso between 1930 and 1937 in Paris and at the Château de Boisgeloup, a country property near Paris the artist purchased in 1930. Although executed over a seven-year period, the majority of the plates date from 1933. This was the year when modern art dealer and print publisher Ambroise Vollard commissioned Picasso to make the expanded series of 100 plates in exchange for a selection of French Impressionist paintings in Vollard’s private collection. It is thought that Vollard’s original intentions had been to use the works to illustrate a lavish livre d’artiste (artist’s book), and between 1936 and 1937 he enlisted master-printer Roger Lacourière to edition the works in preparation for publication. When Vollard was killed in a car accident in 1939 the project remained unrealised, and with the subsequent outbreak of the Second World War the editioned prints were left unpublished.

At the time of their creation Picasso inscribed the date and place of creation on the plates, but neither assigned titles nor, following Vollard’s death, did he ever specify how the prints should be issued. It was only when the 100 prints were finally released to the public in 1950 that they became referred to as the Vollard Suite.

Technique

Picasso used a variety of intaglio printmaking processes to create the Vollard Suite. Intaglio is an Italian word meaning ‘to incise’. At times Picasso used a sharp drypoint tool and employed physical force to incise his drawing into a copper plate. More often, he used an etching needle to draw fluid lines through a thin, acid-resistant coating before immersing the copper plate in acid. Using acid to incise a drawing into a metal plate creates characteristically precise, fine lines of consistent width. In contrast, drypoint results in furrier lines that are more variable in strength.

In intaglio printmaking areas of tone are achieved by cross-hatching with line or through the aquatint process. Aquatint involves coating the etching plate with a fine acid resistant dust before selectively protecting and immersing areas of the plate in acid, creating a permanently pitted surface that can hold ink. To transfer the drawing from printing plate to paper, printmaking ink is applied to the plate. The ink sits within the lines and/or pits (below the surface of the plate) while the surface of the plate is wiped clean. Paper is dampened to make it malleable enough to be pushed into the incised areas of the plate, picking up ink as it is rolled through a printing press under strong pressure.

More information about the terminology and techniques of printmaking is available at the NGA’s Kenneth Tyler printmaking collection website.
THE PLATES (plates 1–27)

In the mid 1950s art historian Hans Bollinger devised an order for arranging the Vollard Suite that continues to influence how the 100 prints are interpreted and informs how the suite is displayed in the exhibition. By choosing not to follow the strict chronological sequence in which Picasso produced the plates, Bollinger identified seven themes running through the suite, which he grouped under the titles: The Plates, Battle of Love, Rembrandt, The Sculptor’s Studio, The Minotaur, The Blind Minotaur and Portraits of Ambroise Vollard.

The first group of 27 prints, often referred to as the miscellaneous group, is less thematically cohesive than the six groups that follow, but includes within it the motifs and interrelated subject matter that reoccurs throughout the complete suite of 100. The themes of history and creativity, ambition and achievement, fear and immortality, moral and physical fallibility, male sexuality and obsession, are explored through references to classicism and Greek mythology, the Matador engaged in the bullfight, the artist and the model. Through these images the Vollard Suite can be viewed as an extraordinary autobiographic document that reflects Picasso’s midlife musings on his own desires and behaviour and on his growing stature as the twentieth century’s most celebrated and influential modern artist.

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Pablo Picasso Faun uncovering a woman 12 June 1936, etching, sugar aquatint, scraper and burin engraving, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1984
DARK AND LIGHT

Speak your mind

• Picasso has used the aquatint technique to achieve strong tonal contrasts in *Faun uncovering a woman*. Examine the visual composition of light and dark shapes in this work. How does Picasso’s use of tone influence the atmosphere of the scene?

• Whether observed or imagined, symbolic or transformative, light has played an important role throughout art history. Compare and contrast the use of light in the work of artists from different time periods, for example Italian Renaissance painter Fra Angelico (1395–1455), French Impressionist painter Claude Monet (1840–1926) and American contemporary artist James Turrell (born 1943).

• Compare and contrast the composition of *Fra Angelico’s The Annunciation* 1425–26 with Picasso’s *Faun uncovering a woman*. How might this historical reference point affect your interpretation of the relationship between Picasso’s characters and/or their intentions?

Get to work

Use a waterproof fineliner pen to draw your own imagined scene where light plays a key role or becomes a character in its own right. In small cups mix four different dilutions of black ink to achieve approximately 20% grey, 40% grey, 60% grey and 80% grey. Use your ink wash to apply blocks of tone to your drawing, leaving the white of the paper to serve as your brightest white.

Think it through

In applying tone to your drawing think about the focal point of your image. What would you like viewers to notice first? Remember that our eyes travel most quickly to areas of high contrast and that light shapes stand out best against dark shapes and vice versa.

Get to work

Create a series of black and white photographs (film or digital) in which light is the focus. Observe light and its effects in your everyday life or experiment with how you can harness and manipulate light and its effects for your own purposes.

Think it through

Consider contrast—darkness is often necessary to emphasise light. Challenge yourself to make captivating abstract photographs, in which light is the primary subject, by paying close attention to the composition of dark and light shapes. Aim to achieve both unity and variety within your series and consider what links your images together.
REMBRANDT (plates 33–36)

Picasso claimed that an image of seventeenth-century Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn appeared to him as he was doodling over the surface of a previously used and marked copper etching plate. The informality and graffiti-like nature of images within this group of four prints, along with Picasso’s habit of recycling old printing plates, makes this a highly plausible explanation. In spite of this playfulness, however, Picasso acknowledges with these works his indebtedness to Rembrandt. Casting an extraordinary shadow over the history of art, Rembrandt redefined in the seventeenth century what it was to be an artist. As accomplished in etching as he was a painter and draftsman, Rembrandt recorded, with unparalleled naturalism and honesty, his life as an artist through successive self-portraits made from youth to old age.
ART HISTORY AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

Speak your mind

- Research seventeenth-century Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn. Why is he such an important figure in art history? What do you think Rembrandt meant to Picasso? Are there elements of Rembrandt’s appearance or character that Picasso has exaggerated?
- Take your time to look at both the abstract and figurative elements of Rembrandt and female heads. How do they relate to each other? In what ways do they make sense to you? In what ways do they balance each other?
- Can you read the playful curving writing across the bottom edge of Rembrandt and female heads? (Hint: in intaglio printmaking everything that is drawn or written on the plate prints in reverse). Why do you think Picasso wanted us to know the exact date that each of his drawings was made?
- Rembrandt also loved to make intaglio prints and made many self-portraits throughout his life. Compare and contrast Rembrandt’s Self-portrait with Saskia 1636 to Picasso’s Rembrandt and female heads.

Get to work

In the 1920s and 30s, Picasso was influenced by his surrealist friends and their ideas. Research automatic drawing and stream of consciousness poetry, which surrealist artists used to tap into their unconscious minds. Elements of automatic drawing can be seen in Picasso’s Rembrandt and female heads, where the hand was allowed to wander and the haphazard marks found on an old etching plate suggested an unexpected subject for Picasso’s image. Have a go at your own automatic drawing or stream of consciousness poem.

Think it through

In order to make an automatic drawing or a stream of consciousness poem consider the influence of your surrounding environment. You may like to experiment with working in a quiet, relaxing place or a busy place with lots of distractions to see what helps you to let go of preconceived ideas and images. Simply start ‘taking a line for a walk’ across your paper.

Think it through

When searching for found or recycled materials and surfaces you may discover multiple bits and pieces that work well together. Consider combining these scraps in an abstract assemblage or collage as a starting point for your work. Research some of the collages and assemblages that Picasso made throughout his career as inspiration including Nature morte au masque, 4 mars 1937 [Still life with mask, 4 March 1937], a work in the NGA collection.
THE SCULPTOR’S STUDIO (plates 37–82)

The largest of the seven groups, The Sculptor’s Studio sits at the very heart of the Vollard Suite. Of its 46 prints, 40 were made over a six-week period between March and May 1933 at Picasso’s country property in Boisgeloup, where he established a large studio and renewed his engagement with making sculpture. This sculpture studio and the presence in Boisgeloup of Marie-Thérèse Walter, Picasso’s mistress, dominate readings of these works. Recasting himself as the classical sculptor, Picasso evokes the myth of Pygmalion—whereby the sculptor becomes so enamoured with his own creation the figure comes to life at the artist’s touch. As both the subject and object of the artist’s obsession, the model in these images participates in the production and the languid contemplation of her own creation.
Pablo Picasso, Sculptor and two sculpted heads, 26 March 1933, etching, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1984.
Pablo Picasso Resting sculptor and surrealist sculpture 31 March 1933, etching, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1984
**Maker and Muse**

**Speak your mind**

- Picasso has created a large series of etchings focused on the key figures of the model, the sculptor and the sculpture. How does Picasso maintain variety and interest in this theme across 46 etchings? Compare and contrast *Sculptor, model and sculpted bust* and *Sculptor, seated model and sculpted head*. How has Picasso’s drawing style shifted between the two etchings? How has the appearance and body language of the figures changed? How do these elements affect your ideas and feelings about the sculptor, the model, the sculpture and their relationship?

- Picasso is most famous for his contribution to Cubism, a revolutionary departure from traditional representation and a move towards abstraction in the early twentieth century. Research Cubism and identify the visual reference to Cubism within Picasso’s *Sculptor and two sculpted heads*.

- After the First World War Picasso moved away from Cubism towards a more representational style inspired by the classical art and ideals of ancient Greece and Rome. Identify the visual references to Classical Greco-Roman art, architecture and culture in The Sculptor’s Studio series. What might a return to Classicism have symbolised for artists after the First World War?

**Think it through**

- Experiment with moving, rotating, flipping and reordering your pieces of tracing paper to see how many variations you can make. Do some arrangements appear more or less abstract? Are any arrangements more or less interesting? You may choose to place a new piece of tracing paper on top of each arrangement and make a tracing that combines the multiple layers in a single drawing. Rearrange, repeat and rework to create a series of variations.

**Get to work**

- Take the theme of The Sculptor’s Studio, or the artist at work, and make your own interpretation across a series of drawings in your chosen medium (at least three). Begin with a classical naturalistic approach and move towards more imaginative and surreal imagery as your series progresses. Introduce colour if it will help to communicate your concept. If your school has access to an etching press you may like to explore the theme as series of drypoint prints.

- Take time to brainstorm and develop a concept for your series. For example, when depicting an artist at work consider who they might be, what materials they might work with, what environment they might work in, and what era they might come from. Plan out your series using small, rough sketches to test which compositions, settings and perspectives best convey your concept. Consider what changes or transformations will occur throughout your series and what elements link your series together.
THE BATTLE OF LOVE (plates 28–32)

This group of five prints, which Hans Bollinger euphemistically titled ‘Battle of Love’, depicts images of rape. The nature of the subject matter is made more disturbing by the appearance of the distinct profile of Picasso’s young lover Marie-Thérèse Walter as the victim of the bearded perpetrator of this violence. Styled on the image of the ancient Greek god Zeus, the rapist represents the darkest nature of a character whose controlling power, physical strength and virility becomes all-encompassing in the face of sexual obsession. Matched by the manner in which Picasso has drawn the entangled lines of the couple to fill the entire surface of the copper etching plates, this group can be interpreted as an unnerving exploration of how a latent erotic violence, lurking in the subconscious mind, can manifest itself when allowed to come freely and unchecked to the surface.

Content warning
This section contains depictions and discussions of sexual assault and/or violence.

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Pablo Picasso Rape 23 April 1933, drypoint, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1984
LANGUAGE AND GENDER

Speak your mind

- The particular kind of lines and shapes that Picasso has used in Rape are unique among the Vollard Suite. What elements of the image has Picasso emphasised through the use of line and shape? How does Picasso lead your eye around the image? How and why has he distorted the human bodies?

- In this confronting image Picasso exposes troubling aspects of his own mind and character, as well as the political turmoil in Europe, which was on the verge of the Second World War. Discuss how Picasso uses art as a vehicle to explore extremes such as morality and immorality, peace and violence, human and animal.

- Discuss the appropriateness of Hans Bollinger’s mid 1950s title ‘Battle of Love’ for Picasso’s images of rape. Consider gender roles and rights in the 1950s as compared to today. Compare Picasso’s prints on this theme with depictions of rape throughout art history. Reflect on the impact of language and euphemisms in shaping societal and cultural norms. Reflect on the aims and impact of the current #metoo movement. The article ‘From Victim to Victor: Women turn the representation of rape inside out’ by G Roger Denson provides some useful background on this complex and difficult subject. However, some viewers may find images in the article disturbing.

Get to work

- How does Picasso’s Rape make you feel? Write an emotion on a slip of paper and swap with a friend or classmate. Using only lines draw your own portrait of Marie-Thérèse Walter, focusing less on likeness or realism and more on emotion. Experiment with different kinds of lines, as well as ways of layering lines, to find the approach that best expresses the emotion written on your slip of paper.

- Think it through

Think about how many different types of lines and marks can be made with a pencil or a pen. The way that you hold the pencil or pen, how much pressure you apply, the energy with which you draw and the density of your marks will all influence the emotion expressed in your drawing.

Get to work

- Political posters addressing social issues have played a strong part in Australian printmaking, art and activism, particularly from the 1960s to 80s. Research Australian screenprinted posters related to gender roles and rights, such as The Sydney University Feminists’ Sisterhood is Blooming c1973 in the NGA collection. Create your own political poster about the #metoo movement or another social issue that is important to you.

- Think it through

Consider what kinds of colours and shapes will make your poster stand out from a distance. The relationship between text and image is important in poster design. Spend some time brainstorming, editing and sketching to select and design text that is short and sharp. Use language thoughtfully, evocatively or playfully as in Sisterhood is Blooming.
THE MINOTAUR (plates 83–93)

The Minotaur, the half-man and half-bull of Greek mythology, is one of the most immediately recognised and powerful of Picasso’s representations of the artist’s alter ego. In direct contrast to the controlled and detached classicising artist in The Sculptor’s Studio, the Minotaur represented for Picasso the competing forces of man’s rational behaviour and latent impulses, as well as encapsulating in a single figure the theatre of masculinity and sacrifice acted out during the ritualistic sport of Spanish bullfighting. The first image of the Minotaur to appear in the Vollard Suite was made in May 1933 and coincided with the cover illustration Picasso designed for the first edition of the surrealist magazine that took its name, Minotaure. For surrealists, who held Picasso in the highest esteem, the Minotaur celebrated the triumph of subconscious desires over rationality. The inaugural issue of Minotaure also included an essay by André Breton on the sculptures Picasso made at Boisgeloup of Marie-Thérèse Walter, illustrated with photographs taken by Brassaii.
Pablo Picasso, *Vanquished minotaur*, 29 May 1933, etching, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1984
NARRATIVE AND ALTER EGO

Speak your mind

- Research the mythological character of the Minotaur and the concept of an alter ego. What characteristics does the Minotaur represent? Why might Picasso have identified so strongly with the Minotaur? What can we learn about Picasso’s personality, his strengths and his struggles, through this choice of subject matter?

- In Vanquished minotaur and Dying minotaur we see the powerful Minotaur at his most vulnerable, suffering a ritual death at the hand of a matador in the bullfighting arena. What do you notice about the way that Picasso imagines the death of his alter ego? Look closely and interpret the more subtle elements of the narrative. Why have the faces in the crowd changed from one moment to the next? Do you recognise any of the faces? What could the spectators say about society more broadly?

- While growing up in Spain Picasso regularly attended bullfights. Historically bullfighting has been seen as an important symbol of Spanish culture and even an art in itself. Today bullfighting is a highly controversial practice. Research bullfighting and consider cultural significance, ethics and animal welfare before debating with your class. Is bullfighting an art? Does bullfighting meet contemporary ethical standards?

Get to work

Create your own comic strip or simple concertina book featuring a Greco-Roman mythological character in a contemporary setting. Aim to communicate a short wordless narrative by considering body language, point of view and cropping.

Think it through

Take time to brainstorm and develop a concept. Identify the key moments and visuals needed to communicate your narrative. Plan out your series using small, rough sketches to test which compositions, settings and perspectives best convey your concept. Consider including an element of mystery or an unexpected sub-narrative like we see in the changing faces of the spectators in the background of Vanquished minotaur and Dying minotaur.

Get to work

In ancient Greece scenes from mythology and daily life were painted in black onto terracotta ceramic vessels. Important details and contours were incised into the black figures with a sharp point to reveal the terracotta underneath. Strong connections can be seen between these ancient vessels, such as examples in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York, and Picasso’s classical, linear etchings.

Research Greco-Roman mythology. Choose a character that you identify with as an alter ego or that represents aspects of your personality. Portray your character in a short narrative that unfolds around the three-dimensional surface of a ceramic vessel.

Think it through

Ask your teacher for advice if your school has access to ceramic slips or underglazes, incising tools and kilns. If you don’t have access to specialised ceramic materials and equipment try using air-drying clay to make a vessel and use the point of a biro or pencil to incise your drawing into the damp clay. Use a wet sponge to keep the clay damp while working. When your vessel is dry you can use acrylic paint to add black shapes as needed.
THE BLIND MINOTAUR (plates 94–97)

Made towards the end of 1934 and the beginning of 1935, the four images of the blind Minotaur are a poignant summation of the subjects and themes that Picasso explores throughout the Vollard Suite. Bringing to an end not only the continuous narrative of the suite but the end of this particular period of the artist’s life, these prints encapsulate Picasso’s exploration of history and creativity, ambition and achievement, fear and immortality, moral and physical fallibility, sexual desire and obsession. These themes are explored through references to Greek mythology and classicism, and through Picasso’s self-referential acknowledgment of his own formidable artistic achievements and unprincipled personal life. Blinded and vulnerable, the once powerful Minotaur is led through a mythical landscape overlooked by an androgynous youth and two bearded seafarers by the hand of Marie-Thérèse Walter in the guise of a young girl.
CHARACTER AND CONSEQUENCE

**Speak your mind**

- In *Blind minotaur led by a little girl at night* Picasso used aquatint to roughen his entire etching plate to print as a solid, rich black before drawing by scraping and burnishing the metal to smooth out all the light areas of the image, essentially drawing light into dark. Why might Picasso have chosen this technique to create this particular image? Describe the atmosphere and the feeling Picasso has created by working light into dark. Where does the light appear to come from?

- Examine the collection of archetypal characters crammed into the image. Who and what might each character represent? Where could they be going? What might the dove symbolise? Can you see connections to other famous stories?

- In late 1934 Picasso’s wife left, with their son, after learning of his lengthy affair with Marie-Thérèse Walter. How might the consequences of Picasso’s infidelity have influenced the direction of his work and his focus on the Minotaur? What might Picasso be saying about his own life and/or character by portraying the Minotaur in such a vulnerable state?

**Get to work**

Set up a collection of toys or figurines against a dark background (for example black cloth or cardboard) and shine a lamp on the scene. Consider what narrative could be suggested by the way you arrange your toys or figurines. Look closely and observe the way that light falls on each object. Where is the light brightest? Do the objects cast shadows? With a white pencil on black paper do your best to draw your collection of toys or figurines shading only where you see light falling, pressing hardest with your pencil where the light is brightest and avoiding visible outlines.

**Think it through**

When drawing three-dimensional forms it can help to break up what you see into categories of light: highlight (brightest light on the form), light, shadow, core shadow (darkest shadow on the form), cast shadow (the shadow that a form casts on another form or surface) and reflected light (often found on the opposite side of the form to the highlight, for example where some light has bounced off a surface and is reflected back onto a form). By identifying the different categories of light and how they relate to each other you will know how strongly or subtly each one needs to be drawn.

**Get to work**

Sight would have been one of Picasso’s most valuable senses, yet in *Blind minotaur led by a little girl at night* he depicts his alter ego, the Minotaur, having lost his sight. How would you represent an experience like fear or loss? Create your work of art on a piece of black scratchboard, which can be sourced from an art supply shop or online. Use a sharp tool to scratch through the black coating and expose the white or a colour underneath. Scratchboard tools primarily create fine lines so you will need to cross-hatch or build up overlapping lines to achieve tone or shading.

**Think it through**

Take time to brainstorm and develop a concept. Are you focusing on fear or loss? What ideas and images come to mind when you imagine, or recall, these subjective experiences? Your response can be abstract or representational. If you plan to represent three-dimensional forms in your scratchboard drawing make sure to consider your light source. You might use an imagined light source as Picasso has done in *Blind minotaur led by a little girl at night* or you can use a real light source by taking your own photos of a model or environment to use as a guide for your drawing.

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Picasso
The Vollard Suite
AMBROISE VOLLARD (plates 98–100)

By 1937 Picasso had made 97 plates. When asked to round the number up to 100, he responded by making four portraits, three of which were chosen to complete the suite. Although incongruous with the narrative that runs through the group, these three portraits make a fitting end by acknowledging one of the most important art dealers of the twentieth century, Ambroise Vollard, the man who commissioned the works. An early supporter and collector of avant-garde art, Vollard gave the young Picasso his first exhibition in Paris in July 1901. While Vollard was openly unimpressed by Picasso’s cubist phase, he was the subject of a cubist portrait Picasso painted in 1910 (Pushkin Museum, Moscow, Russia) and purchased many paintings and prints made by Picasso during his lifetime. Significant among them were Picasso’s first 14 etchings made between 1904–05, published by Vollard in 1913 under the title La suite des Saltimbanques [The suite of acrobats], and 12 etchings made in 1927 that Vollard used to illustrate the 1931 edition of Honoré de Balzac’s Pygmalion inspired story, Chef d’œuvre inconnu [The unknown masterpiece], and which served as inspiration for the Vollard Suite.

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Pablo Picasso Portrait of Vollard 4 March 1937, sugar aquatint, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1984

Pablo Picasso Portrait of Vollard 4 March 1937, sugar aquatint, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1984
Pablo Picasso Portrait of Vollard 4 March 1937, sugar aquatint, National Gallery of Australia, purchased 1984
PATRONAGE AND PORTRAITURE

Speak your mind

- These three portraits of Ambroise Vollard were all made on the same day (4 March 1937). Examine the similarities and differences, both dramatic and subtle, in the way that Picasso has approached the portrait. Does Picasso reveal anything of Vollard’s personality? What might the direction of Vollard’s gaze say about him? How does Picasso’s alternate use of line, tone and texture affect the mood of the three portraits?

- Vollard was an important art dealer, publisher and patron of modern art in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Research Vollard and find out the other artists that he supported. Did any other famous artists create portraits of Vollard? How do their portraits compare to Picasso’s?

- Research the roles of art dealer, publisher and patron. What skills and resources might be helpful in these roles? Consider how the roles have developed throughout history. For example, how did patronage and publishing in the Renaissance compare to Vollard’s lifetime? How might new technology and new forums transform the role of art dealers, publishers and patrons in the future?

Get to work

Use the linocut printmaking technique to create a portrait of a person who has supported you. Make prints from your linocut block at three different stages during the process. In the first stage start off with a minimal line drawing then print. Add more tone and texture and print. In the final stage add additional tone and texture and print again. If your school has access to an etching press you may choose to create a series of drypoint intaglio prints following the same process.

Think it through

Remember that in a linocut the lines you carve will leave white (or the colour of paper you use). Make sure to be minimal with your carving in the first stage. Leaving yourself plenty of space, carve further and transform your image in the second and third stages. Who is the subject of your portrait? What is it about them that you would like to convey? Facial expression, body language, gaze, costume, composition and style all need to be considered.

Get to work

Carry a small sketchbook with you throughout the day or download a drawing app to your tablet. When you find yourself in an in-between moment, for example waiting for the bus or watching TV, take out your sketchbook or tablet and practise drawing the faces of those around you. Capture a private moment in which your subject hasn’t realised that you are drawing them. Aim to make at least one drawing every day for a month.

Think it through

Make it a habit—you will be amazed how much your drawing improves if you practise regularly, dedicating even 15 minutes a day to your sketchbook. Make it fun—personalise your sketchbook, be playful and experiment with your drawing style and materials, make it a record of your daily life. Don’t stress—aim not to use an eraser or agonise for too long about whether your drawing is perfect, be brave and put down a confident mark, work with it and make it your own.

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The Vollard Suite