To play The Skeleton Game you need: one willing volunteer in a class who will lie down and pretend to be dead.

1. Find a comfortable position for your volunteer in the wrong postures for the human body. The volunteer should lie down on their back with their head supported by a pillow.

2. The volunteer should be blindfolded and have earplugs in to enhance the experience.

3. Begin the game by asking the volunteer to think about their body parts as they are in the wrong places.

4. Have the volunteer imagine the consequences of their movements, such as their stomach in their head or their legs in their mouth.

5. Encourage the volunteer to express feelings of discomfort or disgust as they move into the wrong postures.

6. The game can be continued for as long as the volunteer is willing to remain in the uncomfortable positions.

7. After the game is over, remove the blindfold and earplugs and allow the volunteer to return to a normal position.

Enjoy the game and remember to take care of your volunteer's health and safety.
Using photographs: exteriors

The article in the last issue of Remnants looked at some of the ways of using old photographs of the interior of buildings. This article deals with exterior shots.

Restored buildings

Archive pictures will sometimes show
ruined buildings before they are restored.
This photograph of Houghton House before it was taken into the care of the then Ministry of Public Buildings and Works shows the vegetation that had first to be removed. The next picture shows the building in its consolidated state.

These photographs throw up important issues of conservation. Do you prefer ruins with ivy growing up them? Are they more romantic? Why do we choose to conserve such ruins? Why are they important? Do we destroy their character in the very act of conserving them? Should time be spent on this kind of work or is it only worthwhile saving furnished buildings?

Working on questions such as these may also create a need in your pupils to find out what the building originally looked like and why some people regard it as special. Conservation issues can be tackled at a variety of different levels; primary children could start by looking at the signs of wear and tear around them whilst at sixth form level students might be interested to read extracts from The Heritage Industry by Robert Hewison.

Dealing with clues

Sometimes photographs will help explain
what can be seen today. A steeply pitched tiled roof with a very tall chimney stack might be the clue to an earlier thatched roof. Old lines in the brickwork may be clues to previously demolished adjoining buildings and patches may indicate blocked doorways or windows. Hypotheses can be checked, if the changes have taken place within the last century or so, by reference to old photographs.

Street scenes

Street scenes like the one of Ware in the early part of this century are fairly easy to get hold of. Children could be asked to study the detail of the building and this picture lends itself especially to looking at the facade boards and trade signs and advertising. A magnifying glass might help. They could start to work out what each of the buildings was used for and then research the subject further in a local street directory. They could decide who the people were and which buildings they might have been associated with. Children could discuss the differences and similarities with life today. Using a Polaroid camera children could take a picture of the same scene today to aid comparison. What changes can they see and why might these changes have occurred? Are they due to changing technology or fashion? Do they reflect changing aspirations?

Sources of photographs of buildings

To obtain suitable archive photographs of buildings contact your local archive office or local studies library. They may well have published books or postcard collections of local sites in the past and will also have originals in their collections. Your museum may have a collection of material or you might be able to make your own collection of old postcards of local views. English Heritage has a photographic library that covers its own sites. It deals with postal and telephone enquiries as well as personal visits, for which an appointment should be made.

Contact:
The Photographic Section
Fortress House
23 Savile Row
London W1X 2HE.
Tel: 01-734 6000 ext 513

A collection you may be unaware of is the National Building Record also housed in Fortress House and run by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England. It was started in 1941 to collect records of historic buildings threatened or already damaged by bombing. There is a large photograph collection covering the whole of England and arranged in box files by county and civil parish. It deals with postal and telephone enquiries and there is a public search room open Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., except public holidays.

Contact:
National Building Record
Fortress House
23 Savile Row
London W1X 2HE.
Tel: 01-734 6000 ext 328 or 329

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Expression and pose

Once dressed and with the artist, the sitter will try to adopt an appropriately meaningful pose. Even where speedy photography is used, even when a natural, strikeable look is desired, it is necessary to pose. Sitters rarely present a totally blank face and body to the artist (unless, of course, that is the point they wish to make to the viewer). This stage is crucial and it can take several sessions to achieve the satisfaction of both artist and sitter.

The facial expression is very important to compose, because people identify and assess each other most readily by the face. If the portrait is only going to show part of a person, it’s the body that will be omitted, not the face. Often it is only the face which is shown, and the artist’s whole representation of the character of the person must be assumed to be contained in it. In making portraits, artists nearly always begin with the face before they work on any other part, because if the face doesn’t work there’s no point in going on.

Faces are very mobile, but face muscles are not strong enough to hold any one expression for long without rather disfiguring consequences. Try it. About the most that can be achieved is a slight tension or relaxation of brow and mouth. However, eyes can be directed to one spot indefinitely, and the combination of the set of the head with the direction of the eyes can be varied immensely. Try it, finding as many positions for your head to hold as you can. In each, try moving your glance around: down, your nose, up to the left, dreamily, chin up aggressively, and so on. Add to this tension or relaxation of the brows and mouth and a vast gallery of expressions is possible.

When studying a portrait to see what expression, what facial alignments, have been chosen, remember that you will usually need to look quite studiously to savour what the expression offers. The longer you look, the more you will tend to see.

The sitter’s body is similarly arranged in a significant way, and again needs to be studied slowly because often the smallest details — fingers, shoulder alignment, weight distribution — are the most potent ones. Does the sitter lean towards you, or retreat? Are the legs sturdyly set or elegantly crossed? We almost instinctively recognise the poses of basic body language which suggest to us that sitter have certain physical qualities or mental states — grace, confidence, grief, pride and so on. Seventeenth and eighteenth century artists and intellectuals produced books and essays illustrating ideas of dress for use as reference works. Often these specified the poses of polite deportment for everyday life such as bowing, standing or walking. Bewigged eighteenth century gentlemen frequently adopt positions which we look surprisingly silly, but were to them part of a system of graceful posture in both movement and repose. What rules of polite deportment affect your own movements today?

Exercise on pose

Study the pose of the sitters in these illustrations. What adjetives would you select to describe each sitter? Can you analyse what, specifically, in each pose causes your response?

Suggested reposes

The sitter (left) holds a very taut pose of some stiffness, lips are pressed together, legs together, his hand presses rather than rests on the table as if about to rap on it. Because he is not relaxed, one senses impatience, as if this were a very temporary pose, not a long-drawn-out movement. The tightness of the pose recalls the military training corroborated by the medals; despite his years, this man remains confident in his physique and himself.

The lady (below) is in a pleasantly reflective mood, distracted in the middle of reading. She is lost in her own thoughts with a slight smile on her lips, but the angle of her head seems to suggest worldliness. Her hand draws attention to her heart and her throat while it plays with the chin of the miniature. Her body is seated but in no sense languorous or relaxed; she is too upright to convey abandonment of a more sexual kind; she turns away from the sail of a distant ship.

In front of a mirror strike suitable poses which would convey the following professions or interests: clerk, teacher, doctor, politician, athlete. Don’t rush. Think about that part of the body which would convey the following states or qualities: Parenthood, determination, grace, optimism, authority.

Suggest some other abstract qualities that you feel would be possible to convey by a pose for a portrait; what qualities, for example, would you wish to express about yourself?

Colour observation and description

To improve colour observation and description, take some paint manufacturers’ colour charts for the pupils to use when you ask them to make a list of all the colours in a particular costume or portrait. This helps them to develop awareness of not only all the different tones of, say, green, but also of where artists use unexpected colours such as grey, olive green or purple on faces.

Improving observation skills

Observation of different profiles: in a darkened room, sit a person between a lamp and some papers pinned on the wall so that a shadow of their profile is accurately cast. Draw round the profile of the whole head with a thick black marker, or transfer it to a black and cut out a silhouette being very careful to keep the exact lines. The identity of the sitter has to be carefully concealed, because the next step is to display the profiles and have pupils guess whose profile is whose.

Members of staff make good subjects!

(If you charge a fee for guessing and prizes, this makes an entertaining open-day type activity...)

Daily alteration of appearance: set up an environment including chair, backdrop and lighting which will remain as nearly constant as possible day after day. Take a Polaroid photograph once a day or once a week of the same face. Take as many as you can in this way — ten at least — and more than one face if possible. Display the results sequentially and observe differences in mood, skin condition, hair condition and so on. Which does the sitter think is the best/worst? Why does he/she choose that one out of so many nearly identical ones? Which do others think is the best or worst?

A Teacher’s Guide to Using Portraits costs £5.50 inclusive of postage and is available from English Heritage Postal Sales, PO Box 45, Ruslip, Middlesex, HA4 0XW

(Author's note: This is a partial transcription of the document. The full content is not provided here.)