

# Exploring Themes in Richard Goodwin's *Rhinoceros*

While these activities have been written with upper primary and lower secondary students in mind, the concepts addressed can be made accessible and adaptable to learners of all ages and abilities. Teachers are free to adapt these learning activities to suit their context and their students. This resource has considered Australian curriculum links, accessed here: <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/#>

## Overview

Richard Goodwin's *Rhinoceros* (1989) is a thought-provoking sculpture that explores themes of power, vulnerability, memory, and environmental concern. Made from clothing, steel, and acrylic resin, the artwork challenges our understanding of structure, identity, and the impact of human actions on the natural world.

This resource will help students engage with *Rhinoceros* through discussion, creative activities, and research-based inquiry.

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## Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Understand key themes in *Rhinoceros*, including power and vulnerability, memory, and environmental concerns.
  - Analyze the materials and techniques used in the artwork.
  - Explore connections between art, architecture, and the natural world.
  - Create a personal response through writing or visual art.
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## Discussion Questions

### 1. Power and Vulnerability:

- How does Goodwin's *Rhinoceros* represent both strength and fragility?
- Why do you think Goodwin chose to use second-hand clothing? How might this material connect to the idea of vulnerability?

### 2. Memory and Identity:

- Used clothing holds traces of past owners. How does this idea affect the way we view the sculpture?
- How does this artwork make you think about the relationship between humans and animals?

### 3. Environmental Impact:

- The rhinoceros is an endangered species. How does this artwork make a statement about conservation and extinction?
  - Do you think art can inspire change in the way we treat nature? Why or why not?
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## Creative Activities

### 1. Texture and Structure Experiment

- Gather materials like fabric, wire, and glue to create a small sculpture inspired by *Rhinoceros*.
- Explore how soft materials (fabric) can be made rigid, just like Goodwin's use of acrylic resin.
- Reflect: How does changing the texture of a material change its meaning?

### 2. Writing Reflection: "If This Rhino Could Speak"

- Imagine the rhinoceros in Goodwin's sculpture could tell its story.
- Write a short poem or monologue from its perspective. Consider:
  - What has it seen?
  - How does it feel being made from human clothing?
  - What message does it want to share?

### 3. Research and Debate: Art as Activism

- Research another artist who uses recycled or found materials in their work (e.g., El Anatsui, Vik Muniz, or Ai Weiwei).
  - In small groups, discuss: Can art make a real difference in environmental or social issues? Why or why not?
  - Present your argument to the class.
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## Extension: Connecting Art and Architecture

Goodwin is also an architect, meaning he thinks deeply about structures.

- Find examples of buildings or sculptures that use unexpected materials.
  - Sketch a design for a public artwork that raises awareness about an environmental issue.
  - Consider how materials, size, and location would influence the message.
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## Reflection & Assessment

- **Exit Ticket:** In one sentence, describe the most powerful message *Rhinoceros* conveys to you.

- **Class Discussion:** How does this sculpture challenge the way we think about strength and survival?
  - **Art/Writing Submission:** Share a drawing, sculpture, or short written response inspired by the artwork.
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## Conclusion

Richard Goodwin's *Rhinoceros* is more than just a sculpture—it is a conversation about memory, material, and the fragile balance between power and vulnerability. Through creative exploration, students can connect with its themes in meaningful ways, deepening their understanding of both art and the world around them.

# Educational Resource: Exploring *Rhinoceros* by Richard Goodwin

This resource aligns with the **NSW Board of Studies Curriculum** for Visual Arts, English, and HSIE (Human Society and Its Environment), supporting critical thinking, creative exploration, and discussion on environmental and social issues.

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## Curriculum Links

### Stage 4 & 5 (Years 7–10) - Visual Arts

#### Outcomes Addressed

- **VAS4.1 / VAS5.1:** Uses the frames to make informed interpretations of artworks.
- **VAS4.2 / VAS5.2:** Explores the practice of artists and considers the use of materials and techniques.

- **VAS4.4 / VAS5.4:** Investigates the relationships between artists, artwork, audiences, and the world.

### Connection to *Rhinoceros*

- Students analyze how Goodwin's use of found materials creates meaning.
- They explore themes of memory, environmental conservation, and the impact of structure and materials.
- The sculpture is discussed through different frames (e.g., structural, cultural, and subjective) to develop critical analysis skills.

### Suggested Activities:

- **Art Practice:** Students experiment with fabric, resin, or other materials to explore texture and form.
  - **Critical and Historical Studies:** Compare *Rhinoceros* with works by artists like El Anatsui or Ai Weiwei, considering social and environmental messages in contemporary art.
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## Stage 4 & 5 (Years 7–10) - English

### Outcomes Addressed

- **EN4-2A / EN5-2A:** Effectively uses and critically assesses a range of texts.
- **EN4-3B / EN5-3B:** Uses language creatively and imaginatively.
- **EN4-7D / EN5-7D:** Demonstrates understanding of different perspectives and cultural contexts.

### Connection to *Rhinoceros*

- Students write reflective and creative pieces responding to the themes of identity, memory, and conservation.

- Discussions and debates on the role of art in activism help develop persuasive and analytical skills.

#### **Suggested Activities:**

- **Creative Writing:** Students write a monologue or poem from the perspective of the rhinoceros.
  - **Debate:** “Can art create real social or environmental change?”
  - **Analytical Essay:** How does Goodwin’s choice of materials influence the meaning of *Rhinoceros*?
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### **Stage 4 & 5 (Years 7–10) - HSIE (Geography & History)**

#### **Outcomes Addressed**

- **GE4-3 / GE5-3:** Explains how interactions between people, places, and environments shape societies.
- **GE4-5 / GE5-5:** Examines environmental challenges and ways people respond to them.
- **HT4-3 / HT5-3:** Examines the significance of individuals, groups, and ideas in history.

#### **Connection to *Rhinoceros***

- Students explore the environmental crisis of endangered species.
- The sculpture is analyzed in the context of conservation efforts and historical attitudes toward nature.
- Discussions on how artists document and respond to historical and contemporary issues.

#### **Suggested Activities:**

- **Research Project:** Students investigate the rhinoceros as an endangered species and propose conservation strategies.

- **Case Study Comparison:** Compare *Rhinoceros* with historical and contemporary artworks that address environmental issues.
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## Assessment & Reflection

- **Visual Arts:** Artwork creation inspired by *Rhinoceros*, demonstrating experimentation with materials.
- **English:** Written reflection or persuasive piece on art as activism.
- **HSIE:** Research project or presentation on conservation and the role of public art.

This resource fosters cross-curricular connections, encouraging students to think critically about the power of art in shaping conversations about identity, memory, and the environment.