

## Children's Art Day: The National Portrait Gallery

Famous and important people from down the centuries are immortalised here - but visiting was not at all the stuffy experience our young reviewers expected.

*For Children's Art Day, July 3 2003, Children's Express journalists from London and Sheffield spent the day shadowing key members of the art world...*

Sandy Nairne would make an interesting subject for a portrait because his smiley face hints at his charismatic character. We were expecting a patronising art bore whom we wouldn't be able to understand and we were flabbergasted when he turned out to be the total opposite. The National Portrait Gallery needs to offer better links to underprivileged schools such as after school activities.

Another surprise was that pictures in the gallery were not just of British kings and queens but also featured some modern subjects too. Our original perceptions of one of Britain's famous galleries began to change.

On a lightning tour we discovered underground passageways, which led to paintings and photographs spanning from the reign of Henry VIII to the reign of David Beckham. The gallery was divided into sections such as scientific, Royalty and contemporary portraits. In a special interactive section we were able to view all the portraits in the gallery and hear what some of the famous artists have to say as well as making printouts of some of our favourite pictures.

We definitely could have spent the rest of the day there; instead we were whisked off to a curatorial meeting where decisions were being made about what to add to the collections. With 1.3 million visitors to satisfy each year, this is a serious job. We were discussing paintings worth thousands of pounds and at certain instances we were less than centimetres away from them!

In an exclusive interview with the charismatic director we found out his views on getting more young people into art. Surrounded by some of his favourite portraits such as the Irish writer James Joyce and the philosopher Stuart Hall, who he refers to as a 'hero figure' Mr Nairne said: "The National Portrait Gallery needs to offer better links to underprivileged schools such as after school activities. This would open up more art opportunities for young people."

We noticed the lack of ethnic minorities represented in the gallery, except for Ms Dynamite and Zadie Smith in the "diversity" section of the interactive system. We thought Meera Syal would make a good subject as she is someone a lot of young people recognise and respect. It would be nice to see their portraits in the main gallery.

The NPG is a great place for all ages and all types of people, because everyone recognises someone different. We thought it would be a shame for young people to keep missing out on the experience, especially things like the BP Awards, which this year was won by a 21 year old.

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### About the team

This story was produced by Annabel McLeod, 16, and Nazia Driver, 12. It was published in Starworks, the annual [Artworks](#) magazine.

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