DISOBEDIENT OBJECTS
TEACHERS’ RESOURCE

Learn more about the exhibition
Disobedient Objects at the home of creativity
26 July 2014 – 1 February 2015
Key Stage 3–4: Art & Design, Citizenship, DT

Illustrations by Marwan Kaabour at Barnbrook. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London
**Introduction**

Disobedient Objects focuses on the art and design of grassroots social movements. It includes exhibits borrowed from activist groups from all over the world, highlighting the role of objects used in protest and campaigning. The exhibition shows how objects are used to influence and improve situations or to shed light on challenging and important issues.

From the Suffragette movement of the early 20th century to recent pro-democracy campaigns, the exhibition explores the idea of the active citizen, coordinated protest and the use of objects to bring about change.

The objects in the exhibition are mostly handmade and many of them are constructed from simple everyday items that are instantly recognisable, cheap and accessible. They are powerful symbols for social justice, liberty and change from the bottom up.

**Pre-visit activities**

- Think about a campaign you have seen recently in the media or one you have been involved with. How was the message of the campaign conveyed? What types of objects were used? Was there a slogan, logo or colour for the campaign?

- Pick one civil liberty you have today as a citizen living in the UK. This might be freedom of speech, the right to vote, or the right to an education. Imagine if it was taken away. Discuss how this might impact on your life.

**The Museum visit**

Use the following questions to discuss key themes in the exhibition. We recommend that teachers make a pre-visit to the exhibition because some of the content may be unsuitable for certain groups.

*Why do you think the exhibition is called Disobedient Objects?*  
The word ‘disobedient’ refers to the rebellious and anarchic nature of the objects. From a banknote with a subversive watermark to a remote-controlled graffiti writer, the objects in the exhibition were cleverly designed to disrupt and undermine authority.

Many of the objects on display were cheap and relatively simple to make. Why do you think they have been made in this way? Objects used in protest are often improvised and made in response to a rapidly changing situation. Cheap and readily accessible materials allow people to take direct action immediately. Plastic bottles were used as tear-gas masks to protect people in Istanbul. A rice bag was turned into a T-shirt and worn by a Korean farmer demonstrating against the globalisation of food markets.

**Activist movements often use humour or shock tactics to draw attention to their campaigns. Find examples of this in the exhibition.**

Feminist organisation Guerrilla Girls use gorilla masks and humorous and shocking posters to draw attention to sexism in the art world. Inflatable objects have been used in demonstrations to defuse tension between riot police and protestors. An app called ‘Phone Story’ introduces scenarios of injustice into a game.

**What other methods do campaigners use to spread their message and maximise the impact of their campaign?**  
Objects, slogans and colour can unify a campaign message. A red square became the symbol of protestors in Canada campaigning against a rise in tuition fees. The figure of the ‘Goddess of Democracy’ represented pro-democracy protests in China. Providing a talking point can be another way to raise the profile of an issue. The colourful and dramatic Tiki Love Truck opens up a way to talk about the difficult subject of the death penalty.

Now visit the V&A’s Rapid Response Collecting gallery (Room 74a, Level 3). Explore the objects on display. Identify any social issues or injustices highlighted by the objects.

www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/r/rapid-response-collecting

**Follow-up activities/find out more**

- The exhibition introduces the idea of ‘utopia’, a perfect society in which everyone works well with each other and is happy. Set up a utopia for your class or group of friends. What principles would you put in place? Discuss in groups to come up with your top three principles.

- Create a campaign to highlight one of the issues you researched in the Rapid Response Collecting gallery. Design a playful or disobedient object to use in your campaign.

- Design your own ‘How to’ guide for your disobedient object. Post it online for others to download and make.

- Visit the Disobedient Objects hub page on the V&A website to find out more www.vam.ac.uk/disobedientobjects