

What do *you* feel?

USING CONTEMPORARY ART TO BUILD AN EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY

This resource has been designed by Lyn French to be used with the emotional learning cards from the set entitled '**What do you feel?**' Purchase the cards online at www.inivacreativelearning.org

The descriptions on the pages to follow identify feelings and emotionally resonant experiences which match artists' images from the set entitled '**What do you feel?**'. You can use this resource in individual or group therapy sessions, workshop settings or in the classroom. If you are facilitating larger groups or working in the classroom, you may choose to ask participants to divide into pairs or small groups. Here are some examples of how this resource can be used:

- Cut the pages into strips with each one featuring an artist's name, the text describing his or her work and the related questions. Put the strips into a large envelope or place them text-down in a small box. Your client(s), student(s) or workshop participants can be asked to take a strip, read the description aloud (or you can read it) and then find the card it matches. The questions posed can be explored together and expanded on to include related themes. Repeat the exercise until the end of the allocated time or continue over a number of sessions. You may wish to go through all the artists' work featured over regular sessions (eg. weekly) or dip into this exercise when your client is stuck or, in the classroom/ workshop setting, when you want to focus on emotional learning. You can also write your own questions.
- You may want to suggest to your client(s), student(s) or workshop participant(s) that they make an **Illustrated Dictionary of Emotions**. Prepare blank cards beforehand by cutting coloured or white card to the same size as those in the boxed set of emotional learning cards. Ask your client(s), student(s) or workshop participant(s) to make an image on the front to illustrate an emotion relating to a letter of the alphabet. Then ask them to write descriptions on the back of situations in which one might feel that way and when one could feel the opposite. As a starting point, draw on the emotions and 'felt experiences' highlighted in this resource. You may wish to use more than one card for each letter of the alphabet (eg. A= ACCEPTED (opposite: REJECTED or UNWANTED); A = ASHAMED (opposite: PROUD) A = ANGRY (opposite: CALM) etc). This exercise can focus on traditional art materials or use photography, found images (eg. images from the internet or magazines), photoshop or mixed media. A box can be made and decorated or you can make a small artist's portfolio for them from card and ribbon and decorate the front. If you are working in a group, you can make a collective set by choosing one or more cards from each client/ student/ participant and laminating them or mounting them in a book. You can also photograph them and create a poster to promote emotional learning or frame the images along with their text and hold an exhibition.

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INTRODUCTION

We all can all have uncomfortable feelings such as anger, envy, jealousy, anxiety or fear as well as good ones. Experiences such as being excluded, not fitting in, being embarrassed or humiliated or being emotionally hurt in some way are common to us all. None of us behave well all the time nor are we all 'good' or all 'bad'. Sometimes we know when we have stepped out of line or when we are provoked into a hurtful response. At other times, we might be unaware of behaving thoughtlessly or do not admit to ourselves that we have bad thoughts about others.

We can all benefit from becoming more aware of what triggers our strongest feelings and how best to express them so that we don't hurt ourselves or others. Knowing that from time to time everyone has uncomfortable or painful feelings can leave us feeling less alone. Looking at art and exploring the emotions pictures or sculptures evoke helps us to learn about feelings and make sense of our experiences. Answering the questions posed below will help you to build your emotional understanding. If you cannot think of examples from your own life, or do not feel comfortable revealing personal experiences, describe more general situations when people might feel the emotions highlighted.

Laylah Ali

In this picture, the two child-like figures who are being picked up could feel **Wanted / Loveable / Secure**. The third child-like figure might feel **Left Out/ Hurt/ Upset / Missing out/ Overlooked**.

- **When have you felt wanted?**
- **When have you felt the opposite - left out and jealous - or when might someone might feel this way?**

Janine Antoni

In this photograph, the person hiding underneath of the woman's skirt could feel **Protected/ Soothed / Warm & Cocooned/ Safe**.

- **When have you felt protected?**
- **When have you felt the opposite - on your own with no support - or when might someone might feel this way?**

Gayle Chong Kwan

The building structure in this photograph doesn't look very secure. If we were in it, we might feel **Unprotected/ Exposed/ Vulnerable/ Insecure**. We can also feel this way if we are in an unfamiliar place or when we don't fit in.

- **When have you felt you didn't fit in or when might someone might feel this way?**
- **When have you felt left the opposite - a sense of belonging?**

Mónica de Miranda

The punching bag in this image has a knitted cover over it with the word 'Freedom' sewn onto it. Combining a punching bag with a knitted cover suggests bringing male and female identities together and freeing us from gender stereotypes.

- Which of these feelings or ways of being do you associate with male identity and which with female? **Aggressive/ Assertive/ Tearful/ Strong/ Warm/ Confident/ Protective/ Soft & gentle/ Reassuring/ Understanding.** We can have all these feelings or possess these qualities and others like them regardless of our gender.
- Sometimes we get the message that boys/males and girls/ women are very different but we all share the same set of human emotions. **What feelings do you find hardest to show?**

Gonkar Gyatso

The Buddha figure in this picture is made up of hundreds of tiny stickers representing characters or themes from popular culture. Does it look Confusing or Intriguing? It may symbolise Eastern and Western cultures coming together. Some of us have a mixed heritage while others have a family history associated with only one country or culture. Feelings which come up in relationship to our family history or our self-image can include **Pride/ Confusion/ Shame/ Confidence/ Self-Value.**

- **What do you feel most proud of?**
- **What aspects of yourself do you feel uncomfortable with or want to work on? Or, what kinds of personality traits or ways of behaving might people want to change?**

Anish Kapoor

The sculpture made by this artist seems to be bursting through the wall. It could convey how strong feelings might break through our natural defences and take us by surprise. We might unexpectedly feel **Shocked/ Humiliated/ Embarrassed/ Exposed** or the opposite – **Complimented/ Valued/ Admired/ Excited.**

- **Give some examples of when you've had uncomfortable feelings bursting through or when someone might feel this way.**
- **Now describe a time when you've been taken by surprise by a compliment or by praise.**

Chila Kumari Burman

This artist's picture includes sweet wrappers, cut-out pictures from magazines / images downloaded from the internet, drawings, doodles and scribbles. It could convey **Greed/ Self-Indulgence/ Over-excitement** or the opposite – **Celebrations/ Special Events/ Good Childhood Memories.**

- **Describe an experience which left you feeling you'd been greedy or when someone might feel this way.**
- **Now give an example of when you have been generous or when you have thought of others before yourself.**

Yayoi Kusama

By painting an entire room red, installing big rounded 'shapes' and covering everything in white polka dots, this artist has created what is called 'an installation.' Her work can be walked into and experienced, not just looked at. The room she has created could suggest an 'alien' land or an unfamiliar environment. The unknown can bring up feelings of **Uncertainty/ Fear/ Curiosity/ Panic**. Or this artist could be reminding us of good childhood experiences, such as being at a funfair or an adventure playground, calling up feelings of **Delight/ Excitement/ Pleasure**.

- *Describe a time when you've been in an unfamiliar place or been new when everything felt strange or the kind of situation that might leave someone feeling this way.*
- *Now describe a childhood memory that brings a warm glow.*

Neeta Madahar

The winged seeds in this photograph are whirling in the air against a bright blue background. As seeds, they could represent growth and new beginnings. The new can represent **A Fresh Start/ Possibilities/ A Change for the Better**. Or the seeds could symbolise changing seasons. Change always triggers mixed emotions. We can feel a Hope and Excitement but also a Sense of Loss/ Uncertain about the Future/ Displaced / Lost without what is Familiar to us.

- *Describe a time when you were in a new situation or with new people and full of hope.*
- *Describe a time when you knew a big change was coming up that you were anxious about or when someone might feel this way. How did it turn out?*

Chris Ofili

The woman in this picture is created out of watercolours. She seems to be looking down. She could be **Surprised/ Shocked/ Frightened** of what she is seeing. Or she could be looking down with a **Loving/ Affectionate/ Hopeful** gaze.

- *Describe a time when you were shocked or when someone might feel this way.*
- *Now describe an experience of being looked at with love and affection.*

Heta Patel

This photograph shows a man with flowers almost covering his whole body and face. The image could remind us of **Death/ Losing Someone/ A Funeral**. Or it could suggest a **Celebration of Life/ The Gentle Side of Masculinity/ Tenderness**.

- *What feelings might death of a loved one bring up? Why is it important to talk about death?*
- *Why is it important for boys and men to develop their tender, gentle, more emotional side?*

Freddie Robins

The glove created by this artist has four fingers stained blood red. One 'finger' has been cut out and is on its own. Taken together, this could suggest **Violent Feelings/ Conflict/ Anger/ Uncontrolled Hostility/ Death or Murder**. Or the finger on its own could convey an emotional 'wound' such as is felt when we are **Separated from Loved Ones/ Left out/ Isolated/ Lonely/ Rejected** by someone we are close to.

- *Describe what kind of situation or experiences might stir up intensely hateful feelings which could lead to serious conflict or war between countries.*
- *Now describe an experience of conflict being resolved.*

Franklyn Rodgers

The man photographed in this picture is emerging from water, as if coming up for air. He could have had a **Frightening/ Terrifying/ Overwhelming** experience. Or the artist could be using the image to symbolise how it can be a **Relief** to let out bottled up feelings, just as it is a relief to breathe again after being under water.

- *Describe the kind of feelings people might feel they can't or won't express. Can you give an example from your own experience?*
- *Why do we resort to bottling up feelings rather than sharing them?*

Yinka Shonibare

The figures created out of fabric by this artist look like aliens. They might be reminding us that we all have differences which can make us believe we don't fit in. This leaves us feeling **Isolated/ Excluded/ Conspicuous/ Self-Conscious**. Or the figures could be suggesting that we might see others who are different from us as 'aliens'. When we see things in this extreme way, we are usually trying to convince ourselves that we are 'normal'. This is not healthy behaviour – deep down, even if we are not aware of it, we are left feeling **Ashamed/ Judgmental/ Uncompassionate/ Guilty**.

- *When might someone feel they are alien or that their family is being judged as 'different'? Describe a time when you haven't belonged.*
- *What differences between people are visible? Which are invisible?*

Lorna Simpson

The woman in this photograph is holding two jugs. As one is plastic and one seems to be made of silver, the artist could be inviting us to think about their comparison. The plastic one could suggest poverty or difficult circumstances and the silver one, being better off. We can feel 'poor' or 'deprived' if we **Don't feel Loved/ Feel Inadequate/ Feel Left Behind**. We might feel 'better off' or even 'rich' if we **Value our Personal Qualities/ Have Close Family Relationships/ Have Good Friends**.

- *What makes people feel impoverished?*
- *What makes family members feel close to each other? What about friends?*

Do-Ho Suh

The sculpture displayed in this photograph is of a large foot about to crush a group of small figures who look like they are fleeing. It could remind us of the way that those in power might try to **Dominate/ Overpower/ Control** others. Or it could suggest that we might easily be **'Crushed' by Hurtful Comments or criticism** leaving us with the impression that our feelings are being 'walked all over'.

- ***In what kinds of situations might people feel controlled or forced to be a certain way?***
- ***What kind of criticism or teasing comments hurt most and why?***

Frances Upritchard

The lamps lined up on a side table in this piece of art might suggest home. Home can make us feel Safe/ Looked After/ Cared for/ Protected. If things aren't going well in our family, home can make us feel Insecure/ Lonely/ Worried/ Frightened.

- ***Describe ways in which family members show they care for each other.***
- ***Life can have ups and downs for everyone - what kinds of problems or difficulties might families be faced with?***

Leticia Valverdes

This artist has taken the figure out of this photograph, leaving only the shape of a person on the bridge. The blank, white space could suggest absence or loss. When someone close to us moves out of our life or dies, we can be left feeling **Distraught/ Empty** (as if we have a hole inside that can't be filled)/ **Desolate/ Unwanted/ Scared/ Confused**. The blank space could also symbolise the future and people we've yet to meet. New friendships or relationships can make us feel Connected/ 'A Part of' / A Sense of Belonging.

- ***Why might people leave our lives?***
- ***What makes friendships work? What makes them last?***

Kate Walters

The girl or woman in this painting has covered her ears reminding us of times when we don't want to hear what's going on around us. Perhaps family members are arguing which could cause us to feel Scared/ Disappointed/ Angry. Or maybe the artist is reminding us that sometimes it is hard to take in praise or compliments.

- ***What do families commonly argue about and why is it difficult to experience this?***
- ***Why might we feel uncomfortable accepting praise or being complimented?***

Zosienka

The boy in this picture is hiding behind an elephant's leg. Maybe he feels **Shy/ Vulnerable/ Lost**. Or perhaps he is **Excited** and **Enjoying** a game of hide and seek.

- ***When have you felt shy or lacking in confidence?***
- ***What about the opposite- in what situations do you feel out-going and confident?***

What did you think of this resource? Go to the next page to find out how to give us your feedback.

Contact Us:

✉	info@inivacreativelearning.org
☎	+44 (0)20 7749 1247
🌐	www.inivacreativelearning.org Rivington Place London EC2A 3BA UK

About Iniva Creative Learning

Iniva Creative Learning is a not-for-profit partnership between A Space (arts and therapy service, Hackney) and Iniva (the Institute of International Visual Arts). We share a commitment to producing art-based resources and delivering initiatives which promote emotional learning, personal development and psychological growth.

Emotional Learning Cards

It is now widely recognised that well-being in every part of life depends on successfully building understanding, insight and emotional resilience. **A Space** and **Iniva** have been co-publishing **Emotional Learning Cards since 2008** and they now occupy a leading position in the growing fields of **emotional learning and psychological therapies**.

Each boxed set of Emotional Learning Cards includes 20 cards:

- **On the front:** visually rich images of a contemporary artwork by a variety of culturally diverse and emerging artists known for their engagement in social or political enquiry.
- **On the back:** open questions and discussion prompts around the theme 'What do you feel?', 'Who are you? Where are you going?' and 'How do we live well with others?' for group or one-to-one use.

Suggestions for using the cards in different contexts such as school, home, gallery workshops and individual or group therapy settings are offered in a **fold-out leaflet**.