

Suggested Answers



The word 'utopia' originated from writer Thomas More, who used it to describe an island that represented the idea of a perfect place and society. The exhibition *After Utopia* asks where our utopia is, and how we have tried to recreate utopias we wish to live in.

Follow this route to discover different understandings of utopia and reflect upon what you might consider to be the perfect place.

Name: _____

School: _____

 **Head to Gallery One**

1. What is your utopia?

Free response.

2. Come up with 5 other synonyms for utopia:

Paradise, Eden, Dreamland, Heaven, Perfection, Shangri-la, Wonderland, Ideal place, Garden, Atlantis, etc.

You have just arrived at **Other Edens**.

3. Look for an artwork that has framed cushions with preserved butterflies.

N.A.

4. Write down the title of the artwork:

Ella Amo' Apasionadamente y Fue Correspondida (For She Loved Fiercely, and She is Well-Loved)

5. Who is the person the title is referring to?

The solitary female figure with downcast eyes in the centre of the portrait can be Mexican artist Frida Kahlo OR a projection of the artist's own anxieties and aspirations.

6. What do you think is Kahlo's emotional state of mind?

Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, 1940, Oil on canvas, 61.25 x 47 cm, Harry Ransom Center, Texas, U.S.A.

Free response.

She could be feeling **pain** from her divorce from her husband Diego, as shown by the necklace made out of thorns and a dead hummingbird. The symbols of **bad luck** (black cat) and the devil (pet monkey) around her shoulders could be a reflection of the situation she is in currently, while the butterflies and green lush leaves could represent the **hope**.

Frida Kahlo, *Tree of Hope, Remain Strong*, 1946, Oil on Masonite, 55.9 x 40.6 cm, Collection of Daniel Filipacchi Paris, France

Free response.

She seems **strong** and **determined** despite the situation, as shown by her confident sitting posture in a red costume. She seems **hopeful**, holding a flag which says "Tree of Hope, keep firm". She is also in **pain**, with the threat of death looming behind her, as shown by her injured self on a hospital trolley and the cracked landscape.

7. What similarities and differences do you notice?

The image of Frida Kahlo is the same in both the photograph and the painting. However, the background of the artworks are different; Guzman's photograph shows Kahlo in what appears to be a domestic setting, while Javier's painting shows her to be standing in the middle of a luscious garden.

8. What do you think gardens represent?

The garden is often used as a metaphor for beauty, fertility, etc.

9. What do you think the preserved butterflies symbolize?

Free response.
The preserved butterflies references beauty and death – a symbol of vanitas.

10. Who do you identify with? Why?

Free response.

11. If you were to paint a portrait of this person, where would you place him/her? Describe or draw it here:

Free response.

12. If you were to include mini-frames in your picture, what would be in them? Sketch or write them in the frames below:

Free response.

13. Walk out from the garden and find a work that shows a forest that looks like this an dis constantly changing.

N.A.

14. There are many different types of forests. Identify them:

T R O P I C A L forests are found near the equator. They have year-round high temperatures, abundant rainfall and the most diverse plant and animal life.

M E D I T E R R A N E A N forests are found along coasts. Almost all the trees have green leaves throughout the year.

T E M P E R A T E forests have well defined seasons with a mix of deciduous and evergreen trees.

C O N I F E R O U S forests occupy cold, windy areas. The trees can withstand the drought-like conditions of long winters.

M O N T A N E forests are known as cloud forests as they receive most of the water from mist or fog that comes up from low-lying ground.

15. What type of forest do you think the artwork features? What makes you say so?

Free response.

Note: These images of forests are taken from 18th and 19th century lithographs; their composition is fictive, not documentary.

16. Next, look for a box that contains the image of a tropical forest.

N.A.

17. The artist **Donna Ong** layered paper cut-outs of flora and fauna to create otherworldly landscapes in a box. What is this type of art called?

Dioramas or collage.

18. Within the gallery themed **Other Edens**, the artworks features have drawn on the symbolism of the garden to express different narratives and ideas. What do you think a garden is for?

Free response.

 **Head to Gallery Two**

You have just arrived at **The City and its Discontents**.

19. Look for a video projection of a block of flats and notice the change of scene from day to night.

N.A.

20. What colours can you see in *Block B*?

Red, orange, yellow, blue, white, black, grey, beige, brown, etc.

21. Who do you think lives in *Block B*?

People of different races and cultural heritage – Hindus, Muslims, etc.

22. Block B is a shot of urban life in the Brickfields neighbourhood of Kuala Lumpur. Have you seen anything similar? Where? Write it down below:

Neighborhoods in Singapore. Residents put up decorations during different festivals such as Christmas, Hari Raya, Deepavali, Chinese New Year, etc.

23. How would you express your cultural heritage at the entrance of your home? Write or draw it here:

Free response.

24. Explore the inner recesses of this gallery and find a work called *Sembawang*.

N.A.

25. How many objects can you spot in this installation? List them here:

Four mongrel skeletal dogs, stage with topographical details, etc.

26. What do you think the artist is trying to depict?

Past scenes in Sembawang – Tang Da Wu's four mongrel dogs, myths and legends, topographic elements, etc.

27. Why do you think the artist wishes to depict Sembawang?

Sembawang was the place where The Artists Village (TAV) was located in the 1980s. It was the first artist colony, of which the artist was the founder. It was both his home and the artist community; an area located in the far north of Singapore, at the fringe of urban development. This recalls the tradition of utopian societies founded in sites far removed from the traditional centres of civilization.

28. Why did Tang Da Wu present the dogs in monumental proportions?

They serve as massive and menacing guardians to watch over the legacy of TAV.

Did you know: The hand gestures of the four dogs are modeled after that of mudras – symbolic hand positions of Hindu and Buddhist rituals. Try to find out the different meanings they encompass.

 **Go up to Gallery Three**

You have just arrived at the gallery of **Legacies Left**.

29. How do you feel when you are in these rooms? Write them in the boxes below:

RED

Free Response.
Anger, war, passion, fiery, dark,
turmoil, unrest, etc.

WHITE

Free Response.
Purity, peaceful, calm, clean, friendly,
love, etc.

30. Stay in the white room for a while and watch the *Television Commercial for Communism* by **The Propeller Group**.

31. What activities are the people in the video engaged in? List them here:

Helping the blind, giving fruits, playing a ball game, building a building together, eating together, singing in a group, raising a flag,

32. What do you understand by the word 'communism'?

Communism is a social system in which all property is owned by the community. Often referred to as socialism and collectivism, this social system proposes that everyone contributes and receives according to their ability and needs.

33. The commercial ends with the tagline: This is the new communism. Everyone's welcome. Why do you think this is called the new communism?

The entire commercial is immersed in a sea of pristine white. There is no sight of the traditional blood red that is the signifier of socialism and of revolution, which is evident in the previous room, where leading leaders of the communism lie around.

The mood evoked is less confrontational, its gentleness more suited for a younger and contemporary generation. New communism is sleek, savvy and sophisticated.

34. Walk back to the red room. What do you see in the room?

Five corpses in glass boxes, one breathing. Each corpse is a leading figure of leftist politics, clothed in their respective country's uniform. The boxes are placed in a semi-circle as if they are having a meeting.

35. What does it remind you of?

A meeting (G8 summit), a wake, memorial halls, etc.

36. What are some important issues you think that world leaders should be discussing now?

Free response.



Head to Gallery Four

You are now in the gallery titled **The Way Within**.

37. Notice the large metal sphere in the gallery. Watch the video installation next to it.

N.A.

38. Where did the artist journey through over 6 days?

He walked from his home in Siem Reap to Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia and the site of harrowing purges during the reign of the Khmer Rouge.

39. The artwork is titled **Mon Boulet**, which means My Ball in French. Look closely at the metal sphere. What can you see on its surface?

Note: Teachers to direct students to watch the video for clues.

You can see dents and scratches on the metal sphere, as well as questions scratched onto its surfaces. There used to be writing in black ink on the sphere, but it faded off over the course of the journey.

40. What do you think the metal sphere signifies?

The metal sphere signifies the artist's baggage of his past, both personal (he was raised in refugee camps) and national (the horrors of war and its effects on the lives of many). The 80kg sphere represents the weight of his painful past, and also a testament to the human spirit in completing the arduous task.

41. Walk into the adjoining room and sit down with your legs crossed for 1 minute. Do not talk or move.

N.A.

42. How did you feel after sitting still and silent in that posture for 1 minute?

Free response.

43. What were you thinking about during a minute of silence? Draw or write it here:

Free response.

44. Why do you think people turn away from the external world and look within oneself for inner peace? Will you do it? How will you do it?

Free response.

45. Now, it's time to re-imagine your own utopian society.

Free response.