

# Models of Excellence

Learning Expeditions at XP Trust



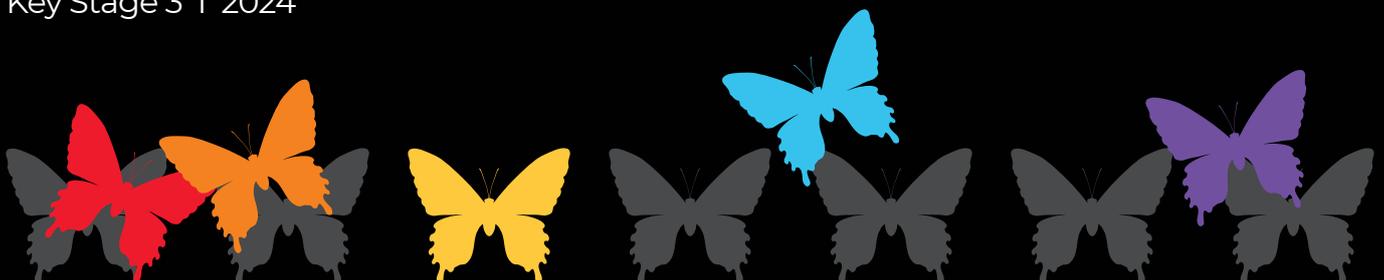
## Being Human

What does it mean to be human?



**XP Gateshead School**

Key Stage 3 | 2024





**XP.**  
GATESHEAD

# Being Human

What does it mean to be human?

**Key Stage 3 | 2024**

## **Expedition Leads**

Michelle Ross and Emmy Tatters

## **Expedition Authors**

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This expedition has been iterated for a few years now, having been led by Michelle Ross and Emmy Tatters.

## **Case Studies**

- 1 What is a human?
- 2 What can we learn from our differences?

**[xpgateshead.org](http://xpgateshead.org)**





# Expedition Summary

In the Autumn term of 2025, the KS3 students at XP Gateshead embarked on a Learning Expedition called 'Being Human', where they aimed to answer the Guiding Question 'What does it mean to be human?'

This was a cross-curricular expedition involving HUMAN, Arts, and STEAM. The expedition begins with an immersion which looks at human anatomy with a focus on Peter Scott-Morgan who seeks to replace parts of his body after his diagnosis of motor neuron disease. Students also consider a range of stimulus materials through a gallery walk which culminates in reflection on a TED talk by Erwin Raphael McManus titled 'What Makes Us Uniquely Human?' In arts students begin to look at aspects of portraiture.

The Final Product was an immersive art installation which was designed and placed in one of our local hospitals. Previous versions of this installation has students' beautiful anatomical drawings placed onto a series of mirrors. This collective piece aimed to raise awareness about organ donation while encouraging viewers to reflect on this by seeing other people's organs reflected onto their own bodies. It is of note that we are able to say to our Year 8 students that - without doubt - their artwork will one day save a life.



# Expeditionary Learning Targets

**I can describe** humans and our shared humanity, making reference to the structure of a human and different perspectives on our purpose.

**I can describe** how humans have far more in common than that which divides us.

**I can explain** how diversity and variation within humankind is a strength.

**I can explain** the importance of heritage to our shared humanity.

**I can describe** how humans and our cultures develop.

**I can evaluate** the importance of diversity and belonging to humans.

# Subject Learning Targets

**I can explain** the causes and responses to global variation in development. (Geography)

**I can analyse** sources which explore different perspectives of the transatlantic slave trade. (History)

**I can analyse** how a writer presents a theme in an extract. (English)

**I can explain** how religious believers use sources of wisdom and authority to provide answers when engaging with questions of meaning, purpose and truth. (RE and Ethics)

**I can describe** how the human body is organised into different systems and describe how those systems work. (Science)

**I can describe** how natural selection leads to differences and variation between species, including humans, and how over time these adaptations evolve. (Science)

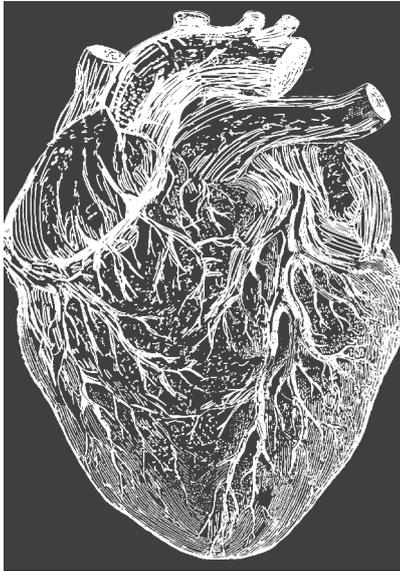
**I can create** meaning in my artwork through the use of human form. (Art)

**I can use** domain specific strategies to solve problems. (Maths)

**I can make** meaningful contributions to classroom workshops in a range of styles, genres and traditions (Music)

**I can explain** how 24-bit digital images are encoded. (Computing)





# Immersion

During the Human immersion, students start by examining a selection of quotes, including:

“To start a school is to proclaim what it means to be human.”

## Tom James

Following this, students carry out a gallery walk, examining various photos depicting the conditions during the Middle Passage and the atrocities of the transatlantic slave trade. Students then watch mystery clips that explore the concept of humanity and identify links between them.

Next, students delve into the exploration of scientific and religious beliefs about creation and the sanctity of life. Additionally, students examine the front covers of the anchor text ‘Noughts and Crosses - The Play,’ alongside poignant extracts from Malorie Blackman’s novel and the trailer for the BBC drama adaptation.

Finally, students explore the features of effective speeches and watch models of excellence, including a TED Talk by Erwin Raphael McManus titled ‘What Makes Us Uniquely Human?’

During immersion in their Science lessons, students watch the documentary ‘Peter; The Human Cyborg’ and reflect throughout Case Study 1 about the bodily functions that Peter is losing, due to his Motor Neurone disease, and how this does not make him any less human. Students also explore the difference between humans through comparative anatomy and embryology.

Students also read an extract from Bill Bryson’s book ‘The Human Body: A Guide For Occupants’ to contemplate what scientifically makes up a Human being. Students finally use comparative embryology and anatomy to begin to consider the relatedness of humans to other species.

Students also practice portraiture drawing, building up their speed and repertoire in being able to draw figures quickly and accurately using appropriate proportions, building on their work from Year 7.





# Anchor Texts

The anchor text, 'Noughts and Crosses - The Play' adapted from Malorie Blackman's novel by Dominic Cooke,, explores divisions in society through the interracial relationship between the two key protagonists, Callum and Sephy. Through the play, students examined how society can be divided by political beliefs, intolerance, and bigotry. Students explored the belief that more unites us as humans than divides us.

This was achieved through character study, using dramatic readings and performances of the play, interleaved with corresponding extracts from the novel 'Noughts and Crosses'. This led them to a textual exploration of themes of diversity and belonging, using inference and analysis, and linking to how beliefs can impact on how individuals would consider what it means to be human.

In Crew students read 'Show Us Who You Are', a book that explores diversity and belonging through the experiences of a neurodivergent character with autism. This book supports that notion that having unique personalities and emotions is part of being human and that individual differences and variation are what make people unique. The story also emphasises that friendships and relationships are essential aspects of humanity.



# Case Study One

## What makes a human?

In Science, students study the common organization and functions of human organ systems, exemplified by the circulatory, gas exchange, and reproductive systems. They undertake a dissection of a sheep's heart to understand its adaptation for transporting oxygen-rich blood, realizing a human is more than its component parts.

Students also investigate the key processes of diffusion and aerobic respiration, and explore the relationship between height and lung volume, using spreadsheets to analyse data and look at ratios.

In Art, students study portraiture by examining facial features, their proportions, and the subtle differences that create a unique likeness.

The HUMAN component starts by considering beliefs from Abrahamic faiths about being human and the sanctity of life, including hearing from a practising Christian and studying the Humanist perspective on the Golden Rule.

Students examine the transatlantic slave trade to understand the consequences of ignoring shared humanity, looking at the strength of the human spirit to retain culture, which prompts reflection on heritage as a defining human trait.

In Geography, they learn about development measures and the causes of uneven development through Case Studies of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic. The Case Study concludes with an ethics perspective, exploring the conflict between slave traders and abolitionists, and studying the abolishment of slavery as a shift in the definition of what it means to be human.

Supporting these ideas in Music, through a series of classroom workshops, students learn how musical traditions from West Africa combined with European musics in North America to become the blues - which along with country and western would become the seed for almost all modern popular music.



## Case Study Two

### What can we learn from our differences?

Building on Case Study 1, students explore the biological reality that all human beings share 99.9% of their genetic material. They challenge the view that human differences should be used to divide or discriminate, instead studying the value of variation as an evolutionary strength that allows species to adapt to changing environments. Students distinguish between two patterns of variation and link them to their underlying causes. By investigating sexual reproduction and using Punnett squares, students predict the likelihood of specific characteristics appearing in future generations.

This study of genetic inheritance extends into human development, where students trace the journey from a single-cell zygote to a complex organism. They consider how the uniquely lengthy human developmental period provides a distinct capacity for learning and preparation for adulthood, while specifically examining the biological processes of puberty, implantation, pregnancy, and the function of the placenta. The science curriculum concludes by applying this knowledge of variation to the process of natural selection.

Simultaneously, students examine the historical and social roots of injustice. They analyse modern movements, such as Black Lives Matter, while acknowledging the perspective of privilege and the necessity of empathy when considering discrimination based on unchangeable characteristics. Insights from Humanist experts encourage students to reflect on the responsibility of living a meaningful life that benefits both current and future generations.

The narrative of British history is enriched through the study of the Windrush generation and the origins of the Notting Hill Carnival. Founded in 1966 by London's Caribbean community, the carnival serves as a response to racial tensions and a celebration of the abolition of slavery, embodying themes of resilience and the human spirit.

After exploring the legacy of Jim Crow laws and the Civil Rights Movement, students turn their attention to global equity. They evaluate methods for reducing the development gap, specifically analysing the impact of intermediate technology and various aid strategies on modern nations.



# Presentation of Learning

Students perform extracts from their Ed Talks at their presentation of learning to parents and experts demonstrating our ability to give short talks and presentations, expressing our own ideas and keeping to the point. Those attending also have the opportunity to view the final product display in school before it is then curated in a local hospital.

Students also take part in a marketplace where they use their work from the expedition to answer challenging questions from families about what supported their own personal view of what it means to be human.



# Connection to Community

## Fieldwork

Students carried out fieldwork at our local hospital's emergency room simulation room. They learned how to triage and address a patient's vital signs when they first enter the emergency room. They were also able to see the space where their final product would be curated.

## Experts

Students work with local faith leaders and humanists to better understand how beliefs and teachings impact upon how people choose to live their lives.

Students also have the opportunity to hear from organ donation nurses, organ donors and those whose lives had been transformed by donors. In particular, a family of our G29 student works with students to help them to understand the impact that a heart transplant had on their little girl, who had spent the first 18 months of her life in hospital awaiting a donor.

This is pivotal in helping students to understand the importance of their artwork and Ed talks in promoting organ donation as part of our shared humanity.



# Sharing our Story / Our Final Product

In Computer Science, students learn about encoding information using binary digits. This helps them to understand what is going on 'under the bonnet' of their iPads when they create the digital artwork for their final product.

As a recognition that our humanity does not exist in our physical bodies (which share innumerate features with animals and plants), the final product is an installation aimed at children and their families which encouraged conversations around organ donation.

This artwork contains quotes from students' speeches and a link to excerpts of the recorded Ed Talks which expressed what students think it means to be human and how we plan to be the best version of ourselves.

This is combined to create a stunning display promoting organ donation in one of our local hospitals including the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Gateshead and Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle.

This spoke to the activist element of being human; humans actively pursue progress and show compassion for their fellow human beings.

Without a shadow of doubt, one day, and hopefully not too soon, our children's artwork will save someone's life.





# Models of Excellence

## Learning Expeditions at XP Trust



XP is a multi-academy trust. All of our schools have Crew at the heart of everything they do. We deliver our curricula through cross-subject Learning Expeditions and developing strong links with partners and community. All of this is done through the prism of our Design Principles and three rich Curriculum Seams.

[xptrust.org](http://xptrust.org)

**BUILDING COMMUNITY**  
**ACTIVISM**  
**LEADERSHIP**  
**EQUITY**  
**SHARING STORIES**

**CURRICULUM SEAMS**

