

Are some **types of knowledge** more useful than others?
(Knowledge and the knower)

Object 1: Painting of a human brain



This is a painting of a human brain that featured in an exhibition of art by people who had suffered from brain tumours and brain injuries.

Personally, I take Biology and Chemistry and have knowledge about the structure and functions of the brain to a certain extent. When I saw this painting at first I felt dissatisfied and angry towards the scientific inaccuracy and misrepresentation of the brain in the painting. I would much prefer a scientific representation of a brain that presents this key part of a human body in a much more accurate and precise manner.

Before being introduced to TOK classes, I was told by everyone surrounding me that scientific knowledge is the only type of knowledge that gives us truths about the world and I should only trust science, believing it gives the most important and useful type of knowledge. Meanwhile, I should ignore 'unimportant' areas of knowledge such as Arts and Religion. Through exploration in TOK classes as well as discussion in and outside of classes with people who have different perspectives, I have shifted my thinking into accepting the usefulness of different types of knowledge, even though I still believe that scientific knowledge is the most useful.

This painting shows that the knowledge I have in the field of Biology and Chemistry has clearly affected the way in which I receive this piece of art that may perhaps be an expression of certain emotions. This painting was created by a person who'd had a brain tumour, which was a traumatic experience for them. This made me think it could be more important to that person that they are communicating their emotions and experience through the painting, rather than being worried about being strictly accurately scientific about it. This showed me that perhaps my personal view that scientific knowledge is more important and useful than all other types of knowledge is not the view that everyone has.

Object 2: Scientific model of a brain from a textbook



My second object is a scientific model of a brain in a biology textbook, which I have included because of the contrast with object 1 presented earlier.

This model shows that scientific knowledge can be very useful. The model helps us to visualise the structure and different parts of the brain such as the frontal lobe. Knowing the physiology of the brain can then help us to understand how it works and the impact of different things such as injuries or illnesses like brain tumours. So whereas the painting by a person who'd had a brain tumour might help us understand their emotions about that, scientific knowledge of the structure of the brain might help us to understand the medical reasons why people get a brain tumour or might help doctors to cure them.

Unlike the painting, some people might find this scientific model rather disgusting or visually unpleasant. Hence, they would not look at it for a long time or bother to investigate themselves into knowledge about the brain, as we as human beings are commonly attracted to things that are visually appealing. This shows that scientific knowledge such as this model of a brain is very useful for people who are doctors or who are working on brain research. But for other people it might not be so useful, and actually the way that it is presented in a visually unpleasant way might actually stop some people engaging with it. So this object also shows that whether or not something is useful often depends on who it is for and what purpose it is for.

Object 3: Child model



My third object is a photo of a child model. This is an image that I personally studied in Language and Literature class, and that I have included because it shows how having additional knowledge can be useful because it can totally change how you initially saw something. Many might find her pretty and some might even be jealous of her, however, with the idea of child slavery in mind, would people still perceive her or the image the same as before?

My first impression of the image is probably similar to how other people would perceive it and having comments such as “she’s pretty” or “it’s very successful of her to be popular at such a young age”. However, after I got introduced to the idea of child slavery and child labour, it changed how I view this image. I no longer find the image appealing and no longer find the child to be the lucky one selected. Instead, I feel anxious and dislike the idea of using children to sell products.

This object is an example of how extra or wider knowledge and experience might significantly change the way in which we view knowledge. Not everyone is aware of the social issues such as child slavery or child labour. Without this knowledge, the viewer might simply be attracted to its visuals. So this photo is important because it shows that we can’t just think about things in isolation. Sometimes the most useful knowledge is the knowledge of the background or the context.

This photo also made me see that even though I still think scientific knowledge is the most useful type of knowledge, knowing and caring about wider social issues is important and can change how we think about things. It shows that if you have extra knowledge of the negative social issues that go along with something it can make you feel negative about it even if at first you felt positive about it, so that is a useful type of knowledge to have.

Photo Sources

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