

## Arts and cultural engagement 'linked to slower pace of biological ageing'

### Level 3: Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

- a. There are many different activities that can have a positive impact on our physical, mental and emotional well-being. Think of the activities you, your friends and your family enjoy. Sort the activities into the categories below. Then discuss which of the activities has the biggest impact on you and why.

Creative & Cultural	Physical	Social	Educational

#### 2 Key words

- a. Choose the correct word or expression to match each definition. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context. Some words may appear in a different form in the article.

engagement   assessment   flourishing   optimism   pursuits   sentiment  
gloom   confer   instinctively   predictive   tonic  
initiative   enduring   longevity   convene   yield

- to give or grant, as though a gift \_\_\_\_\_
- to generate, produce or supply \_\_\_\_\_
- deep sadness, hopelessness or despair \_\_\_\_\_
- an attitude, opinion or view shaped by emotion \_\_\_\_\_
- a long, full duration of life \_\_\_\_\_
- a hobby or profession, a goal chased over time \_\_\_\_\_
- a system of gathering, testing and analysing data \_\_\_\_\_
- related to or use for making future predictions \_\_\_\_\_

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9. a mental attitude of hope and positivity \_\_\_\_\_
10. a project or programme to address a concerning issue \_\_\_\_\_
11. long-lasting or continuing for a significant period of time \_\_\_\_\_
12. the state of being deeply involved with or committed to something \_\_\_\_\_
13. to come together as a group \_\_\_\_\_
14. automatically or innately, without conscious thought \_\_\_\_\_
15. the quality of growing, prospering or thriving \_\_\_\_\_
16. something that strengthens or improves the body or mind \_\_\_\_\_

#### b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. Many language schools do \_\_\_\_\_ to place students in the right lessons.
2. Business at the new café is \_\_\_\_\_ – there's always a crowd.
3. Do you believe that health and happiness is the key to \_\_\_\_\_?
4. The university has a new \_\_\_\_\_ to recruit international students.
5. Most animals \_\_\_\_\_ know how to protect themselves.
6. Each year, the committee \_\_\_\_\_ a prize to the top researcher.
7. We're planning to \_\_\_\_\_ a meeting of all shareholders next month.
8. Texting apps often use \_\_\_\_\_ technology to complete user's messages.
9. There was a sense of \_\_\_\_\_ in the air after the everyone lost their jobs.
10. My mum's recipe \_\_\_\_\_ at least a dozen servings of pudding.

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c. Use the remaining words from task a to write your own sentences.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

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*Research from UCL suggests visiting art galleries or museums, singing and painting can help improve health outcomes*

**Denis Campbell**

**12 May, 2026**

- 1 Singing, painting or visiting a gallery or museum helps people age more slowly, according to the latest study to link taking an active interest in art and culture with improved health.
- 2 The findings are the first to show that both participating in arts activities and attending events, such as viewing an exhibition, lead to people staying biologically younger.
- 3 "These results demonstrate the health impact of the arts at a biological level. They provide evidence for arts and cultural engagement to be recognised as a health-promoting behaviour in a similar way to exercise," said Professor Daisy Fancourt, the lead author of the research and the head of the social biobehavioural research group at University College London.
- 4 However, slower ageing does not necessarily mean someone will live longer. The "epigenetic clocks" used in the study to assess biological ageing are predictive of future morbidity and mortality, and previous studies have suggested a link between arts engagement and longer lifespan, but much more research would be needed to establish potential causal effects on longevity.
- 5 Those who take part in artistic pursuits the most often slow the pace of their biological ageing the most. Under one of the study's methods of assessment, those who did so at least weekly slowed their ageing process by four per cent, while monthly engagement led to it slowing by three per cent.
- 6 Similarly, another of the tests showed that those who undertook an arts activity at least once a week were on average a year younger biologically than those who rarely engaged in such pursuits. Those who exercised once a week were only six months younger by that measure.
- 7 The benefit the arts confer on the pace at which people age is so dramatic that it is comparable to the difference between smokers and those who have given up smoking, the researchers say.
- 8 "Our study provides the first evidence that arts and cultural engagement is linked to a slower pace of biological ageing," said Dr Feifei Bu, a senior author and also a UCL academic. "This builds on a growing body of evidence about the health impact of the arts, with arts activities being shown to reduce stress, lower inflammation and improve cardiovascular disease risk, just as exercise is known to do."
- 9 The results, published in the journal *Innovation in Aging*, are based on blood test and survey response data from 3,556 adults taking part in the UK Household Longitudinal Study. It uses blood samples to estimate people's biological age and the pace at which they are ageing.
- 10 Participants were asked how often over the last year they had taken part in singing, dancing, painting, photography or crafting, or had attended an art exhibition or event, visited a heritage site such as a monument or historic building or park, or been to a museum, library or archive.
- 11 "Many of us know instinctively that taking part in creative and cultural activities is vital for a happy, flourishing life," said Hollie Smith-Charles, the director of creative health and change programmes at Arts Council England. "These impressive new findings are further evidence that arts, museums and libraries help us live well for longer, and demonstrate how vital it is that everyone, everywhere has access to excellent and affordable culture on their doorstep."
- 12 Evidence is emerging that the arts can improve both mental and physical health. In 2019 the World Health Organization published a report, by Fancourt and Saoirse Finn, which highlighted initiatives such as playing music to patients before surgery and using the arts with people with dementia.
- 13 In the latest study, the middle-aged and older adults aged 40 or above received the biggest boost to the pace at which they aged as a result of taking part in the arts.
- 14 "Across the arts sector we have known for a long time that getting creative yields extraordinary benefits for our health, and this latest research adds a vital new piece to the puzzle, proving that arts and culture can even slow down the biological clock," said Mark Ball, the artistic director of the Southbank Centre, a multi-arts venue in London.

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- 15 The Southbank complex was born in 1951 out of the Festival of Britain. Its description as “a tonic for the nation” was not a coincidence, Ball said. “It was an explicit recognition that, after the destruction and gloom of the second world war, the country needed to be convened through the arts to find a sense of optimism and healing. That sentiment is enduring and is needed now, more than ever.”

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Read the article again. Complete the summary. Use one word for each gap.

A new study in the UK examined the relationship between engagement in the (1) \_\_\_\_\_ and culture and overall physical health. The results suggested that artistic pursuits can slow the (2) \_\_\_\_\_ process. In other words, people who regularly partake in the arts are (3) \_\_\_\_\_ younger than those who do not. Individuals who participated in an arts-related activity at least once (4) \_\_\_\_\_ slowed their ageing process by four per cent while those who participated (5) \_\_\_\_\_ slowed the pace by three per cent. These results were even more surprising when compared to the impacts of other behaviours on physical health. For example, people who did arts weekly were roughly a year younger biologically than those who rarely participated in the arts. In contrast, people who did (6) \_\_\_\_\_ weekly were about six months younger than those who did not. In fact, researchers suggest that the benefits of the arts on ageing are so dramatic that they are comparable to differences between people who (7) \_\_\_\_\_ and those who have given it up. Other studies have suggested that the arts can reduce stress, lower (8) \_\_\_\_\_ and even improve risk factors for (9) \_\_\_\_\_ diseases. Advocates argue that the study is further evidence of need for people everywhere to have greater (10) \_\_\_\_\_ to a variety of arts and cultural endeavours.

#### 4 Key language

a. This article uses specialised language to discuss health and medicine. Find the words below in the article. Guess the meaning from the context. Then match the words to the definitions.

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. biological level _____  | a. the study of how actions and the environment affect the body         |
| 2. biobehavioural _____    | b. the fact that all living things must die                             |
| 3. epigenetic _____        | c. a measure of the daily repeated processes in the body                |
| 4. morbidity _____         | d. a focus on the physical part of a human (not the psychological part) |
| 5. mortality _____         | e. related to the heart and the blood system                            |
| 6. lifespan _____          | f. the condition of being unhealthy or having medical problems          |
| 7. inflammation _____      |   |
| 8. cardiovascular _____    |   |
| 9. dementia _____          |   |
| 10. biological clock _____ |   |

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- g. an area science that studies the link between the body and behaviour
- h. a medical condition that affects the brain, behaviour and memory
- i. the total length of time a person or animal lives

#### b. Complete the sentences below with a word from the exercise above.

1. Dogs have an average \_\_\_\_\_ of 10 to 15 years.
2. Bob used ice to heal \_\_\_\_\_ in his arms and shoulders.
3. The woman in my favourite film had \_\_\_\_\_ and didn't recognise her husband.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is a fact of life – and something many poems and novels explore.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ exercise increases blood flow to your heart and brain.

### 5 Discussion

#### a. Discuss these questions.

1. The article talks about 'biological' age. What do you think this means?
2. Do you think arts and culture always slow ageing? Why or why not?
3. What other factors (physical, social or emotional) affect ageing? How?
4. How else do we measure age? What do the different measurements show?

### 6 In your own words

#### a. Different cultures around the world have different concepts of ageing. Work in pairs. Choose a country or culture that is different from your own. Do research online or in the library. Then prepare a short presentation. Include at least one visual element, like a photo or a graph. Answer the questions below.

- How is age measured? At what age is a child considered at birth?
- Are there any rites of passage that people in this culture experience at a certain age? What are they?

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- At what age is someone considered a legal adult? What rights does that give them?
- How are older people generally treated by society? Are they respected? Are they given any special privileges?
- What can your own country learn from the attitudes or behaviours of the culture you researched?

**b. Share your presentation with your class. After everyone has finished their presentation, make a class list of the five most interesting facts you learnt from the presentations.**