Artists paint, draw, and sculpt to share ideas and feelings. They show us how they see the world—the night sky, waves in the ocean, mountains, and people. They can make us see things in new ways or notice things we never noticed before.

But once artists share their work, they can’t always control what happens to it. Other people can copy, imitate, and use it. Why? How? And is it ever wrong?

Let’s find out.
Look at the drawings on this page. The original drawing was made by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, a well-known Dutch artist in the mid-1560s. The rest are copies drawn by different artists. Artists often make copies of original art to practice and learn from famous artists. Can you see differences between the original and the copies?
When you look at a piece of art, one of the things you might think about is how the artist did it. How did he make the colours so bright? How did she make the eyes or skin look so realistic? By studying and copying an artist’s work, students can learn and practise different techniques.

What are some other reasons that people might copy a piece of art?
Hundreds of years ago, the only way to see a piece of art was in person. If you wanted a copy of a painting or sculpture for your house you could ask the original artist, or another artist, to make a copy for you. Today, people still commission artists to reproduce a favourite piece of art. Modern technologies such as cameras, scanners, and video recorders allow us to share and reproduce art even more widely and more affordably. An original painting, especially one by a famous artist, can cost thousands or even millions of dollars! A print of the same piece of art—on a poster or postcard, for example—gives many people a chance to own and enjoy a copy of the artwork.
Popular Reproductions

The reproduction of artwork in books helps us learn about famous art and artists. But, you can find popular pieces of art on everything from T-shirts to ties and laptops. You might even find it on a mural in your neighbourhood!

A Starry Night Cake

The Starry Night by Vincent van Gogh is a famous painting that is often reproduced.
This reproduction of *The Starry Night* on a wall in Venice Beach, California, is much larger than the original painting, (page 5). How might you feel walking past this mural if it was in your neighbourhood? Why do you think the artist who painted it chose to reproduce a painting instead of creating something original?
Reproductions are also used to sell things. How would you feel if a piece of your art was used to sell something?

Fortunately, there are laws to protect artists. Before anyone can reproduce a piece of art, they have to ask permission—and usually pay a fee.

What if the art used in an ad is very old and the artist is dead? This ad uses the *Mona Lisa*, one of the world’s most famous portraits painted by Leonardo DaVinci in the early 1500s.
In May 2000, two identical-looking paintings by Paul Gauguin appeared in the sales catalogues of two different auction houses. One had to be a copy...but which one? The people who owned the paintings had paid a lot of money for what they each thought was an original painting by a well-known artist.

The police discovered that an art dealer had bought the original painting a few years earlier, hired an artist to make an exact copy, and then lied about it. He sold both paintings as originals—and made a lot of money.

Deception

This is the original painting by Paul Gauguin called *Vase de Fleurs*. An art expert familiar with Gauguin's work studied the painting and determined it was the original.
This kind of copy is called a forgery; it is made and used to deceive, or trick, others. It’s unfair...and it’s illegal. Think about how forgeries hurt the original artist, as well as the people who buy, sell, and study art.

Making an exact copy is only one way that art forgers deceive people. They might sign a famous artist’s name to an unsigned painting that looked like one the artist might have painted. Or they could make a sculpture and then lie about how old it is. No matter what is made or copied, if a person lies about who made the art or when it was made, the art is a fake.
Experts use visual, scientific, and historical clues to identify fakes and forgeries. Here is one example:

Double portraits—portraits of two people at once—were rare in the fifteenth century. This one is definitely a fake, created by copying and combining the people in the two unrelated portraits from that time, at right.
Artists don’t just copy, they also borrow and imitate. They might see something in another artist’s work that they like and then adapt it in their own. This famous print is called *The Great Wave Off Kanagawa*.

Here are some reinterpretations of this print. The artists who made them haven’t tried to copy the print exactly, they’ve used it to create something new. If you were an artist and you saw your work used to create something new like this, how would you feel?
How is using a piece of art in this way different from copying it? What has each artist used from the original? What has each artist added or changed?
Long after artists have died, people will be looking at their paintings and sculptures—in galleries, in books, in ads, and on postcards. Some people will like the art and some won’t. Some people will make copies with good intentions, and some will make copies with not-so-good intentions. And someone, somewhere, might be inspired to create something completely new and different.
The black lines and primary colours in these objects were inspired by the abstract paintings of artist Piet Mondrian.