

Introduction

The Everson Museum of Art presents *Some Assembly Required: Collage Culture in Post War America* (September 27th 2002 through January 26th 2003) and *Pio Galbis*. These exhibitions present a unique forum in which art and general classroom teachers can explore art identity, culture and expression. This packet seeks to facilitate discussion in such a way that concepts can be easily translated for various grade levels and curricular interests.

Our Objectives

The EMA provides this packet to help educators adapt these exhibition offerings to individual curriculum needs. In addition, this packet should enable each instructor to maximize the benefits of a guided tour of the exhibits. We hope that the benefits will be evident in your students' level of participation during and after their museum visit, as well as in your students' ability to transfer the information they learn from these exhibits to other projects.

Overview of Contents

This packet presents *Some Assembly Required: Collage Culture in Post War America* through a variety of projects that include writing, discussions, art making and exploration. Emphasis is placed on observation and discussion, along with suggestions for related projects that address New York State Learning Standards in the Visual and English Language Arts. A number of slides have been chosen for inclusion in this packet for your classroom use.

At the end of this packet is a one-page survey. Please take a minute to fill it out and add any additional comments you may have regarding the usefulness of this packet. We rely on your feedback to best serve your needs.

Visual Thinking Strategies

The EMA utilizes the inquiry based, student-centered Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) curriculum in many of its tours and school-museum collaborations. We encourage educators to use VTS in the classroom to enable students to discuss works of art on their own terms, based on what they see and what they decide is interesting and important. A more comprehensive explanation of VTS can be found at the Visual Understanding in Education website, which we encourage you to visit at www.VUE.org. VTS is a useful tool to use for several narrative works of art in *Some Assembly Required* and *Pio Galbis*. The role of the teacher as facilitator in this process is crucial to its success. If you would like to know more about VTS or are interested in receiving training, please call the Education Department at 474.6064.

Introductory Activity

- **Story Collage**

Standards: ELA #1, 4, Visual Arts #1

Materials: Old magazines with a variety of pictures/topics, tape or glue, paper, scissors.

Collage and assemblage artists work with found materials to create new objects, images, and ideas. In this activity, students create a story collage, working within the limits of given images.

- Working alone, in pairs, or in small groups, students should receive a folder containing a set of magazine pictures.
- A story must be created using at least 5 of those pictures (characters can be “melled,” i.e., all young boys in the set are John even through they look different).
- Stories can be written down, or memorized for an oral presentation. As a challenge, older students can write two versions of the story for two different audiences, such as children and adults or people from your hometown and out-of-towners.

MIRIAM SCHAPIRO

Slide: *Explode*, by Miriam Schapiro, 1972.

Miriam Schapiro uses scraps of fabric and other materials to create collages that challenge our ideas about traditional art materials. Schapiro’s collages are rich in color and texture. Texture is an element of art that refers to the “feel” of an object. Textures can be *real* or *simulated*. *Actual* textures can be felt with the fingers, while *simulated* textures are suggested by the way the artist has painted or drawn certain areas of a picture. Because Schapiro’s work is a collage made out of various fabrics, the textures you see in her work are *actual* textures.

General Discussion Topics

- This collage is an example of abstract art, meaning that it does not show specific people, places, or things that you can recognize. Instead of trying to find a story in this collage, just think about how it makes you feel to look at it.
 - How would you describe the colors and shapes in the collage?
 - What are some of the patterns that you see in the fabric?
 - Do the colors and shapes remind you of anything?
 - The name of this collage is *Explode*. Why do you think it was named that?
 - Do the colors remind you of hot or cold? Why?
 - Do the shapes make you feel calm or excited? Why?
 - How would this collage feel if you could touch it?

Activities

- **Writing about texture**

Standards: ELA #1, 3; Visual Arts #3

- While looking at the slide of the collage *Explode*, by Miriam Schapiro, discuss texture with the students. Start a list on the chalkboard or on newsprint of all of the textures and patterns they can see in the collage.
- Now have them look around the classroom. Can they find more textures to list? If time permits, go on a “texture hunt” outside, or have students bring an object from home that has an interesting texture. Add all texture words to the group list.

- Have the students choose five words from the texture list to turn into simple poems. For younger students, these can be unstructured poems. For older students, haiku or cinquain poems can offer more of a challenge.
 - Poems should discuss the texture, what sort of object (or person or animal) has the texture, and how that texture makes the student feel.
- **Fabric History**
Standards: ELA #1; Visual Arts #3

Miriam Schapiro chose fabrics for her collages that were significant to her own life, and the lives of other women.

- Have students look carefully at the slide and choose one piece of fabric to think about.
- Have them free-write for 5 to 10 minutes on what the history of that piece of fabric might be. Where did it come from? Was it worn, or used in some other way? Was it part of a piece of clothing made for a special event, or for everyday use? How old is it? Who wore it or used it?

JOSEPH CORNELL

Slide: *Untitled*, by Joseph Cornell, ca. 1950s

Joseph Cornell was called the “Poet of the Scrap Heap” because of his interest in creating artwork from found objects. He is most famous for his shadow boxes, which consisted of found objects placed inside of a found container, usually a round or rectangular box. Cornell was interested in the symbolism of the objects and the associations created between the objects when placed together in a box. He often imagined the histories of the images and objects that he found.

General Discussion Topics

- How do we decide what to throw away? Is it possible that what one person thinks is garbage could be considered valuable by another person?
- What are the things you throw away the most every day? Could there be another use for any of those objects?

Activities

- **Imagined Histories**

Standards: ELA #1, 3

- Find an object that has been discarded (at home, at school, on the street, etc.) Imagine a history of that object. What was its use before it was discarded? Was it part of a larger object? Did somebody own it and take care of it at one time? How did it end up where you found it?
- Have students write a narrative, either from the point of view of the object, the previous owner, or the finder.

- **Found Fiction** (adapted from an activity developed by Judy Shasek)

Standards: ELA #1, 3, 4

Materials: Containers (shoe boxes, cigar boxes, old lunch boxes), 8-12 found objects, flip chart or white board for group talk/mind mapping

- Invite your class to look for some object (at home, on the street, etc.) that they find to be interesting, curious, odd or idea provoking. It could be anything that catches their eye—a scrap of paper, a gizmo, a piece of cloth, an abandoned toy. The object should be brought into class by the assigned day. (Discuss appropriate and inappropriate "collectibles" if you think that might be necessary).
- On the day of the lesson, line all the objects on a table. Each writing activity will require 8-12 objects. (For children in grades 2-3, three or four objects may be easier to work with.) Have the students group and re-group the objects into “families” of 8-12. Discuss why they want some grouped together. As you get all of the objects organized into groups, tuck them into their "treasure box." This can be any sort of box, but the more interesting the box, the more the entire collection gains in writing intrigue.
- Line up the collection of 8-12 objects your group has decided to work with first. Be sure each child can see the collection. Begin to have the students arrange the objects (kinesthetic/spatial) in the order the objects could be used in a story.
- As ideas, words, thoughts and possible titles are offered, have a teacher or student write these on the board or flip chart. Once a story thread has been started, create a title for the story or poem. Use that as the center of a mind map. Allow the children to pick up and touch the objects as they offer their thoughts and ideas for the mind map.
- After the discussion, you can have the children create the story in many ways. They can develop it orally or in writing, in groups or individually. Be sure that the words, ideas and mind maps they created as a group are visible to all as they write.
- Once a story has been developed with this collection, the other collections can be used as writing station prompts at other times.

ROMARE BEARDEN

Photocopied image: *Before the Dark*, by Romare Bearden, 1971

Romare Bearden was a social worker in New York City. His artwork reflects the people and situations he encountered in his life, especially at work.

General Discussion Topics:

- How might Romare Bearden’s job have affected his artwork?
- Who can be an artist? Do you have to work full-time at your artwork in order to be an artist, or can you have another job, as well?
- What might the benefits be of having another job in addition to being an artist? The drawbacks?

Activities

- **Story Circle**

Standards: ELA #1, 4; Visual Arts # 3

- Have students sit in a large circle, with one person holding the copy of Romare Bearden’s collage, *Before the Dark*.
- The first person invents the opening line of a story that this image could be an illustration of. The picture is then passed around the circle, each person contributing a line of the

story. The story might veer considerably from the visual information in the picture, but if a student gets stuck for ideas, he or she can always refer to the image for prompts. Creative craziness counts!

- For older students, this exercise could be done in small groups, with the story written one line at a time, then passed to the next person.

- **Job Journal**

Standards: ELA #1, 3; Visual Arts #4

- Romare Bearden took many of his ideas for images from situations he encountered at his job.
- Have students research a specific occupation and create a character that has this occupation. Then have them write a journal that details this person's life for three days.

- **Found Poem**

Standards: ELA #1, 2

- Have students go to a particular environment—for example, the cafeteria, a grocery store, a shopping mall, a public park—and walk around for a while.
- Have them keep a list of sounds or write down things they overhear—conversations, bits of songs, loudspeaker announcements.
- These notes can then be worked into a poem that suggests the atmosphere of the place, or their feelings about the place.
- Have students practice dramatic readings of their poems. Perform them to the class or at a back-to-school night.

THE MUSEUM VISIT

- **A Question of Comprehension**

Standards: ELA # 1, 3

This activity is designed to make students aware of the importance of careful reading, comprehension, and fact retention. It resembles the “telephone game.”

- Divide the class into rows of several students. Make sure each student has a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Also, each child who writes an original letter should receive a paper clip.
- The first student in each row writes the original letter, each one working on a different theme related to the museum visit. Some theme suggestions:
 - A letter written home to parents explaining what they should know about the field trip.
 - A letter written to a docent thanking her for the tour.
 - A review of the show for a local newspaper.
- After the first child in each row pens his or her original letter, they should write #1 on the back of the letter, and pass the letter to the next child in the row. Child #2 can read that letter only once, turn it over, and then copy the letter from memory. When finished, child #2 should turn his or her letter over, and write #2 on it, paper clip that letter on TOP of letter #1, and pass it up. The process should be repeated until the letter gets to the front row.
- Collect each packet of letters, choosing students to read the first and last letter in each letter collection, so kids can compare. Discuss the importance of reading carefully, and conveying information accurately. Why is it important to read carefully? Compare the

first letter to the last letters. What kind of wrong information would the recipient of the last letter have gotten? Why is this important?

- Tape up each set of letters on the wall, indicating which is first. Assign letters A, B, C, etc. to the remaining letters in the chain, and hang them in random order below the first letter. Let all the children walk around the classroom and write down what they think the order was for each group of letters.

- **Send a postcard**

Standards: ELA #1, 4, Visual Arts #1

- Hand out pieces of tag board cut to the size and shape of a postcard.
- Lead students through a writing preparation exercise (such as clustering or idea webs) about their visit to the museum. What did they see? Do they remember a specific piece of artwork? Who did they go with? What was their favorite part of the day? Would they want to visit again?
- Have students write four sentences that best communicate their main ideas about the day on the back of the postcard, then have them create a drawing or collage about the day (or about a specific piece of artwork) on the front.
- Hang the postcards from string on a bulletin board in the classroom (so that both sides can be viewed), or have students mail them to the people for whom they were written.

- **Our day at school, compare/contrast**

Standards: ELA #1

- Ask students to fold a sheet of paper in half length-wise. The left hand side of the paper will be used to write about a typical day at school, the right hand side will be used to write about the day they visited the museum.
- Have students brainstorm specific elements of a typical school day (how they got there, who they saw, how they started the day, what they ate, where they ate, etc.). After writing short phrases about those elements on the left hand side, have students compare and contrast those same elements on the right hand side, referring to the day they visited the museum.
- Phrases may be developed into full sentences or a narrative.

Sources:

- www.proteacher.com
- <http://serv1.ncte.org/teach/Shasek21131.shtml>
- *Writing with Multiple Intelligences*, by Edna Kovacs. Blue Heron Publishing, 1999.