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Lesson Theme: Memory Boxes: What's the Story?

Grade Level: Exploratory Art 7/8

Time: 8 class periods, 90 minutes each

Lesson Overview: The students will explore narratives and story telling through imagery. They will discuss their previous experience with narratives in visual culture (i.e. comics in the newspaper), discussing the ways in which artists use imagery, symbols, and motifs to convey a story, memory, or event. Next, they will discuss the work of Faith Ringgold and Joseph Cornell, and compare and contrast the ways in which the two artists convey memories and narratives through their work. Students will then choose a personal memory of an event that is meaningful to them, and create at least three thumbnail sketches to illustrate the memory through symbols and imagery. They will choose one of these ideas to develop into a plan for a clay slab box, which they will build and glaze. Finally, they will participate in a class critique to discuss their own work and that of their peers.

Visual Culture Component/Relevance: Narratives are present throughout visual culture. Each day in the newspaper, comic strips tell short stories with just a few images and words. Students could probably understand the meaning of most of these comics without the words, because the artists who created them used certain exaggerations or other methods of expression such as symbols, motifs, and imagery to communicate the story or event. Students will view a wordless Garfield cartoon and then use their knowledge of cartoons to further their group discussion on narratives in art.

Virginia Standards of Learning:

Visual Art Standards

- 7.4 The student will communicate ideas, experiences, and narratives through the creation of works of art, using traditional and contemporary media.
- 7.9 The student will create three-dimensional works of art, using various processes to include clay hand-building techniques.
- 7.14 The student will identify subjects, themes, and symbols as they relate to meaning in works of art.
- 7.15 The student will apply processes of art criticism to evaluate works of art.
- 8.6 The student will communicate ideas, experiences, and narratives through the creation of original works of art, using selected media.
- 8.11 The student will create three-dimensional works of art by combining a variety of techniques and processes.
- 8.15 The student will analyze how visual organization in works of art affects the communication of ideas.

Lesson Objectives:

The students will:

- Contribute to a class discussion about narratives. (See “Narrative Discussion” under Questioning Strategies)
- View images of the work of Faith Ringgold and Joseph Cornell and compare how each artist uses imagery and motifs to tell a story or convey a memory.
- Create at least three thumbnail sketch ideas for a clay slab box to convey a personal memory through imagery and symbols.
- Develop one thumbnail sketch into a plan for a slab box (each side of the box must be planned)
- Create a slab box using clay that makes use of motifs and symbols to express a particular memory or event that is meaningful to the student
- Contribute to a final class critique: speak using proper art vocabulary about their work and the choices they made to portray their subject, and also critique the work of their peers

Vocabulary Words for Visual Analysis:

- **Narrative-** the representation in art of an event or story
- **Sculpture-** the action or art of processing (as by carving, modeling, or welding) plastic or hard materials into works of art, *b (1)* : work produced by sculpture *(2)* : a three-dimensional work of art (as a statue)
- **Motif-** a usually recurring salient thematic element (as in the arts); *especially* : a dominant idea or central theme
- **Slab Method-**
- **Score-** to scratch lines into clay to aid in the attachment process
- **Slip-** a mixture of wet clay and water which, when applied to score lines in clay will help attach the pieces of clay together
- **Appliqu  ing-** to apply (as a decoration or ornament) to a larger surface (with clay, slip and score will be necessary)
- **Incising-** to carve into a surface
- **Leather-hard-** moist but not sufficiently so to be plastic
- **Greenware-** clay that has been shaped but has not been fired
- **Bisqueware-** clay that has been fired and is now ceramic
- **Glaze-** glaze usually contains silica in order to form glass when fired.

Historical/Cultural/Artist Information:

- **Faith Ringgold** (b. October 8, 1930) is an American artist best known for her painted story quilts. Ringgold was influenced by the fabrics she and her mother (a fashion designer) worked with at home, and she often incorporates them into her work. Her art blurs the lines between fine art and crafts, and often communicates narratives from her own memories and experiences. Ringgold is also a writer, having written sixteen children’s books including “Tar Beach”.
- **Joseph Cornell** (December 24, 1903 - December 29, 1972) was an American artist primarily known for his assemblages, referred to as Cornell Boxes. He had no formal training, but displayed an early interest in collecting. He was influenced by the symbolists, and used the physical objects he collected to portray abstract ideas such as memories, dreams, and fantasies.

Image Descriptions:



Homage to the Romantic Ballet,
1942



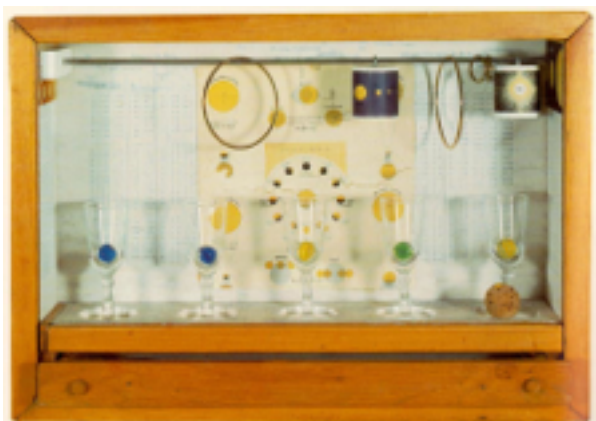
1937-38.

Bear, etc." motif, 1950's-60's.



*Fortune Telling Parrot
(Parrot Music Box)*

Space Object Box: "Little



Untitled (Solar Set) c. 1956-58

- This comic will be used on the first day of the lesson, corresponding with the questions under the “Narratives” section of the questioning strategies. It is a simple demonstration of how cartoon artists use symbols, images, and motifs to convey stories.



Questioning Strategies:

Narrative Discussion:

- What is a narrative?
- There are many ways to tell stories and narratives. What are some examples?
- Looking at this comic, can you tell what’s happening? How did the artist convey the story? What symbols were used?
- If you have an important story or narrative to communicate, how do you normally do it?
- What if you wanted to communicate a narrative to a large group of people?
- Can you name any artists who use their work to communicate narratives?
- How do artists use their mediums to tell stories? Can you name some examples?

Faith Ringgold Images:

- What are some observations you have about this piece?
- What does it remind you of?
- What style would you use to describe it?
- Why do you think the artist included color and pattern? How does it inform the piece?
- What do you think the story is behind the painting?
- Do you think there could be a metaphor involved? What would it be?
- How did the artist convey the narrative?

Joseph Cornell Images:

- What do you notice about this piece? How do you think it was made?
- Do you think this piece could tell a story? How?
- How do you think Cornell went about choosing objects to use in his boxes?
- How is Cornell’s work different from Ringgold’s? How is it similar?
- How could you use symbols in your art to tell about a memory?

Final Critique:

- What kind of story do you think (student) conveyed through (his/her) box?
- What about (student)'s box makes you think so?
- What was the narrative you intended for your box to convey at the beginning of this project? Did it change at all as you worked?
- How did you manipulate the medium to convey your story? Do you think you were successful?
- What elements of your box are the most successful? What do you think you could have improved?

Lesson Procedures:

Day 1:

- When the the students enter the classroom, begin class by facilitating a group discussion using the questions listed under the “Narratives” section of Questioning Strategies. When they arrive at the question about the cartoon, show the students an image of the Garfield cartoon listed under the Image Description section.
- Next, facilitate a class discussion about Faith Ringgold and Joseph Cornell using the images from “Image Descriptions”. The questions listed in the corresponding sections of Questioning Strategies should be used here.
- Introduce the project by explaining that the students will be using one of their own personal memories as inspiration for a clay box. Ask for volunteers to share a memory that they might want to work with. Also, show the class an example of the finished project, explaining how all of the visual symbols contribute to the meaning of the piece.
- Instruct students that their first task is to create three thumbnail sketches of different memories that they might use for their project. Each sketch should be about half of a 9x12 piece of sketch paper, and should show the memory through symbols and motifs. Explain that they will be choosing one of these sketches to develop into a plan for their slab box. Students will have the remainder of the class period to work.
- Ten minutes before class is over, direct students to clean up, placing all materials back where they belong. Explain that the students should finish their sketches for homework, and come to the next class prepared to begin work on their plan.

Day 2:

- Begin class with a review the concepts of narrative, motif, and symbols. Ask for volunteers to share their thumbnail sketches.
- Remind students that today they will be developing one of their thumbnail sketches into a plan for their slab box. Show them how to trace the template set for the slabs onto sketch paper and plan each side of their box.
- Students will have the remainder of the class period to work on their plans.
- Five minutes before class is over, direct students to clean up, placing all materials back where they belong. Remind students that if they have not

finished their plans, they should do so before next class and come prepared to work with clay.

Day 3:

- When the students arrive, briefly review the concepts of storytelling through art, along with the vocabulary terms concerning narratives. Next, gather them around one table for a demonstration. Although most students should have previously worked with clay, a refresher might be needed.
- Show students the following basic methods of handbuilding: rolling a slab and attaching separate pieces of clay using slip and scoring, emphasizing the importance of kneading the clay to remove air bubbles if it is not fresh from the block.
- While demonstrating, be sure to explain and define the vocabulary terms regarding clay listed under the Vocabulary section.
- Give a brief demonstration of incising and appliquéing, showing the variety of tools students can utilize to create textures and patterns if they choose.
- Explain that any students who have not finished sketching their plans will need to do so before beginning their project with clay.
- The students will work on their projects for the remainder of class.
- Ten minutes before class is over, direct the students to clean up, storing any unused clay in a sealed bag with wet paper towels, and cleaning all clay tools and surfaces with wet sponges. Slip containers should be covered and put away, and works in progress should be covered in wet paper towels. Students should place a plastic bag over their work, and then place their work carefully into their cubbies or shelves.
- After everyone has cleaned up, dismiss the class.

Days 4 - 5:

- The students will be allowed to work on their sculptures for these class periods. All clay work must be completed by the sixth class period in order for it to be fired on time.
- Clean up will be the same as Day 3 for Day 4, but on Day 5, students should not cover their pieces. They should instead place them on their shelves to dry and reach the Greenware stage.

Day 6:

- All work will have been fired before this class period. Gather students around one table for an underglazing demonstration.
- Show the students how to use glaze, emphasizing the importance of keeping the layers of underglaze even and covering all spots. Explain that the glaze will melt in the kiln to form glass. The teacher should also keep a color chart handy, so that the students will know what each glaze color will look like when fired.

- The teacher should also be sure to remind students to not underglaze the bottoms of their pieces, as they will fuse to the kiln and most likely have to be broken in order to remove them.
- The teacher will allow students to use the remainder of the class period to underglaze their pieces.
- Ten minutes before the end of class, the teacher will direct students to clean up, placing their projects on their shelves and putting all supplies back where they belong. Students should be sure to replace the glaze lids tightly, and clean all brushes and table surfaces thoroughly.

Days 7-8:

- Day 7 will follow the same procedures as Day 6, except for a brief glazing demonstration at the beginning of class. Show students how to cover their project with at least two even coats of glaze, and explain that the glaze will melt in the kiln to form glass. Emphasize that the bottoms of the boxes should not be glazed, because they will fuse to the kiln and have to be broken in order to be removed.
- Day 7 is the last day for students to underglaze projects. As they finish, after their underglaze dries, they may apply glaze.
- Day 8 is the last day for students to complete their glazing. By the end of this class, all boxes must be turned in and ready to fire.
- Cleanup will be the same for days 7 and 8. Ten minutes before class is over, direct the students to put away all supplies, clean all brushes, and be sure to place lids tightly back on glaze and underglaze bottles and jars.

Day 9:

- At the beginning of class, tell students that they will be having a class critique. All of the finished boxes should be at the front of the room on the table.
- The teacher will begin the critique, using questions from the “Final Critique” section of Questioning Strategies to facilitate discussion about each student’s work. Each student should contribute to the discussion of at least one of their classmate’s work, and also answer the questions about their own work.
- After each piece has been critiqued, the teacher will direct the students to place their artwork on the back table to be graded.

Evaluation: (Total Points Possible: 50)

Did You...	Accomplished	Emerging	Not Yet Observed
Contribute to a class discussion about narratives, Faith Ringgold and Joseph Cornell 3 points	Thoughtful and relevant contributions were made 3	Participated in discussion but did not add a lot 2	Participation was minimal 1
Create at least three thumbnail sketch ideas for a clay slab box to convey a personal memory through imagery and symbols. 7 points	Sketches are thoughtful, neat, and demonstrate three different ideas 6.5-7	Sketches are complete, but do not show three different ideas or could show better craftsmanship 5-6	Sketches are either not all complete or demonstrate severe lack of craftsmanship 4.5 or below

Develop one thumbnail sketch into a plan for a slab box (each side of the box must be planned) 10 points	Sketch is well-developed and shows a great deal of thought, planning, and craftsmanship 8.5-10	Sketch is mostly complete, but could use better craftsmanship or more detail 7-8	Sketch is either incomplete or demonstrates lack of craftsmanship 6.5 or below
Create a slab box using clay that makes use of motifs and symbols to express a particular memory or event that is meaningful to the student 25 points	Sculpture meets the listed requirements, and demonstrates good craftsmanship and conveys a specific narrative or memory. 22.5-25	Sculpture is lacking in concept or craft, but is complete. 19-25	Sculpture is unfinished, or exhibits a severe problem with craft or complete lack of concept 18.5 or below
Contribute to a final class critique: speak using art vocabulary about your work and the choices you made to portray your subject, and also discuss the work of your peers 5 points	Contribution was thoughtful and showed serious reflection on both your work and the work of your peers 5	Contribution was acceptable, but did not demonstrate a lot of reflection. 3-4	Contribution was incomplete or not thoughtful. 1-2

Materials and Preparation:

The materials needed for this lesson are:

- White clay
- Wire cutting tool
- Clay tools: fettling knives, needle tools, texture tools, and other tools to create textures or embellishments in clay
- Container of slip for each table
- Pencils
- Kneaded erasers
- Glazes or Underglazes (if underglazes, clear glaze will also be needed)
- Chart showing the appearance and colors of glazes once they are fired (or fired test tiles)
- Kiln
- Drying Rack for clay
- Paper towels
- Plastic bags
- Images to show to class (powerpoint format)
- Books and computers to use for research
- Sketchbooks

Resources:

- "The Joseph Cornell Box." *The Joseph Cornell Box*. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Nov. 2013.
- "Guggenheim." *Collection Online*. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Nov. 2013.

- "Faith Ringgold." *Faith Ringgold*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 Nov. 2013.

Special Populations:

Accommodations may be needed for students who have difficulties with abstract planning. They may require extra help from the teacher in the form of drawn patterns for them to sketch their plan inside, or additional help in assembling their slab box. Students who have difficulties with motor skills may also need help assembling their box or cutting slabs. Gifted students may take this project farther by adding more detail on each side of their box, or creating a more challenging pattern to complete.