

LESSON PLAN TITLE: *What's in Your Memory Box?*

Grades 4-12

TIME REQUIRED: 2 classes (may be adapted to fit timeframe available)

CONCEPT STATEMENT: Students will explore the rich connections and discoveries that arise from combining words, objects, and images as they plan and make expressive works of art using good craftsmanship and assemblage techniques.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will

1. choose found objects, images, and various materials to represent memories, viewpoints, or other concepts, and use the selected materials to transform small, shallow boxes into works of art that symbolize the ideas they develop;
2. practice critical thinking and problem-solving skills; and
3. write artist statements (short narrative descriptions of the works of art including information such as explanations of their concepts, the symbolism within the works, and other information they choose to share.

VIRGINIA STANDARDS OF LEARNING CORRELATIONS:

2013 Visual Arts – 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7, 4.11, 4.13, 4.16, 4.18, 4.19, 4.20; 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.5, 5.11, 5.12, 5.14, 5.18, 5.19, 5.23, 5.24; 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5, 6.8, 6.9, 6.13, 6.14, 6.15, 6.16, 6.18, 6.19; 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.6, 7.10, 7.11, 7.14, 7.16, 7.17, 7.18, 7.19, 7.20; 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.6, 8.8, 8.11, 8.12, 8.15, 8.17; AI.1, AI.2, AI.3, AI.4, AI.5, AI.6, AI.8, AI.11, AI.15, AI.16, AI.17, AI.21, AII.1, AII.2, AII.3, AII.4, AII.5, AII.6, AII.8, AII.10, AII.19, AII.12, AII.23, AII.24; AIII.2, AIII.3, AIII.4, AIII.6, AIII.7, AIII.9, AIII.11, AIII.12, AIII.13, AIII.17, AIII.18, AIII.21, AIII.22, AIII.25; AIV.1, AIV.3, AIV.5, AIV.6, AIV.7, AIV.10, AIV.13, AIV.17, AIV.20

2010 English – 4.7, 5.7, 6.7—Many other English SOLs that relate to writing, research, and literature may apply depending on the parameters of the assignment. For example, the students might be asked to make Memory Boxes that represent poems or works of fiction.

2016 History and Social Science – This activity is easily adapted to history and social science lessons by asking students to make Memory Boxes that represent specific timeframes, events, or social issues.

MATERIALS:

Per Student

Student Activity Worksheet: *Planning and Making a Memory Box*

a small, shallow box

Shared Supplies

pencils

paint (This might be acrylic, watercolor, spray paint, etc., depending on available time and the kind of boxes being used.)

brushes and water containers

magazines / imagery and text / found objects / junk

scissors

stamps and ink pads

pre-cut wood scraps

wood glue, tacky glue, hot glue gun, glue stick refills

VOCABULARY

assemblage – A three-dimensional composition made from a variety of traditionally non-artistic materials and objects. Other terms associated with artists who have used found objects are: Combines (Robert Rauschenberg), Readymades (Marcel Duchamp), and Shadowbox (Joseph Cornell).

iconic image – a visual representation that brings to mind an experience, place, or relationship, usually with an emotional impact, that is shared by people in a given time, place, or culture.

collage – The technique and resulting work of art in which fragments of paper and other materials are arranged and glued to a supporting surface.

found object – An object—often utilitarian, manufactured, or naturally occurring—that was not originally designed for an artistic purpose, but which has been discovered and repurposed in an artistic context.

juxtapose – To place things close together or side by side for comparison or contrast.

symbol – A form, sign, or emblem that represents something else, often something immaterial, such as an idea or emotion; Personal imagery.

OVERVIEW:

Image, Meaning, and Memory: Put It in a Box for Me!

Explain that this assignment is about making Memory Boxes. The boxes will become works of art with individualized meaning as the students apply thoughtfully chosen decorative elements to their boxes.

[Depending on the purpose of the assignment and the subject being taught, the finished boxes might represent personal memories. They could also be associated with people, places, or historical events that interest students. You might also assign poems or works of fiction as inspirations for the boxes.]

Be sure to ask students to document their ideas and thought processes using the Student Activity Worksheet: *Planning and Making a Memory Box*. They will need to use these sheets as they write artist statements about their boxes.

Class Discussion:

Introduce the lesson by conducting a class discussion about symbols and symbolism. Here are a few suggestions designed to encourage analysis and inquiry:

- Discuss symbols associated with people, places, and things with the class.
For example, there are visual symbols we associate with Superman, the Queen of England, and Sherlock Holmes. Describe these symbols? Ask the class to think of other examples.

Symbols associated with places might include flags, local landmarks (the Eiffel Tower for Paris, the Big Apple for New York City), or products made in the area (a potato for Idaho).

A symbol that works well for initial discussions in almost any grade level is the eagle. It's been used as a symbol of power since ancient times in cultures all over the world. How many other symbols can students list in a short period of time?

- Does the perception of an object or image change as its context changes?
Here's a prompt if the class needs an example: Does an apple on your teacher's desk have the same meaning as the apple that the witch gave to Snow White? Ask for other examples.

➤ Discuss iconic images.

The word icon comes from a Greek word meaning “likeness” or “portrait.” An iconic image is a visual representation that brings to mind an experience, place, or relationship, usually with an emotional impact, that is shared by people in a given time, place, or culture.

Examples: The Mona Lisa has become an iconic image that almost everyone recognizes. A picture of Judy Garland costumed as Dorothy Gale makes us think of *The Wizard of Oz*—and probably evokes memories of childhood for some generations of Americans. Harry Potter might create the same kind of feeling for younger generations.

➤ Can combining words and images create new meanings or narratives?

Tell the class about the French artist Marcel Duchamp, who lived 1887 to 1968. He once displayed a snow shovel as a work of art by giving it the title “In Advance of the Broken Arm.” Does his combination of those words with the shovel suggest a story?

In a number of cultures, writing (calligraphy) actually becomes art. Words become images. Investigate the work of Chinese artist Xu Bing: <https://xubing.wordpress.com/category/square-word-calligraphy/>

➤ Can combining objects in a picture or placing them together within a setting create meaning?

Artists have placed objects together to create meaning for thousands of years. Objects often have a history that immediately evokes memories, thoughts, and/or emotions. These reactions can be personal or shared by a group. A child’s teddy bear will have a meaning for its owner that might not be shared by others. The meaning of a political bumper sticker, however, will likely be clear to those who see it—regardless of the reaction it evokes.

Examples of meaning conveyed by collections of things might include objects placed carefully in tombs, the sacred vessels used in various religions, or the plates of food and jugs of wine in a still life. Ask students to begin thinking of objects related to their Memory Box assignment.

Explain that the term “found object” is used for an object that was not originally designed for an artistic purpose, but which has been discovered and placed in an artistic setting. These objects can be manufactured or naturally occurring—and often have practical uses.

A number of works by Pablo Picasso include found objects—such as *Bulls Head*, a sculpture he made in 1942 by combining a bicycle seat with handlebars.

- Explain that there have also been many artists who have referenced the work of artists from earlier times to create new meanings.

The work of contemporary artist Kehinde Wiley is an excellent example of this practice. Wiley paints portraits of African Americans in contemporary clothing who stand in for powerful individuals in recreations of famous paintings from past eras. A typical example is the large canvas that substitutes rap artist Ice T for Napoleon in a painting that is visually similar to *Napoleon Enthroned*, a work by French artist Jean-August Ingres. Wiley's interesting choices for the type of clothing the figures wear, the background decorations and patterns, and the objects he places in his painting lead to interesting conversations about race, power, identity, and importance of visual literacy.

If possible, show students some of Wiley's work and ask them to discuss how images have shaped perceptions of the world.

- Finish the introduction by introducing the work of Joseph Cornell.

Joseph Cornell (1903–1977) was a self-taught artist who became known for his collages, assemblages, and box constructions. He had a gift for combining things that he found interesting or beautiful in compelling compositions within the prepared setting of a shallow, glass-covered box. His methods of construction included traditional skills such as woodworking, painting, drawing, and papering. He also used string to suspend things. He filled containers with colored liquids, made words with Scrabble® tiles, and carved chambers inside books. He was open to any means of construction his imagination could devise.

For this intensely shy, reclusive man, art became a way to communicate. His collections of photographs, printed images, maps, clocks, children's toys, and broken things provided him with endless opportunities for exploration as he formed three-dimensional, poetic still-lives—and boxed kinetic sculptures. His creations have been called shadow boxes, poetic theaters, and memory boxes. He was fascinated with certain themes to which he often returned, including time, the color blue, games, ballerinas, children, art, architecture, games, navigation, compartments, and repetition. Making art led him to discover new ways of seeing the world. His constructions often have the same effect on us as we experience his creations.

Learn more about Cornell at <http://www.pem.org/sites/cornell/> and www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/joseph-cornell.

ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS:

After the introductory discussion, have the students complete the Student Activity Worksheet: *Planning and Making a Memory Box*. This document will help them generate and refine their ideas.

It might be helpful to have students share the ideas and sketches that result from the “What Is Your Concept? Idea Generator” section before proceeding to the “Reflection and Revision: Have Your Ideas Changed?” section.

Once students have clearly defined concepts for their boxes, have them gather the materials and supplies they will need. Also, depending on the age and ability level of the group, you may want to discuss the best sequence of steps for making the boxes. For example, is it best to paint first or glue things on first? How will each choice affect the outcome?

Closure:

Once students have completed the boxes and written their artist statements, display them together in the classroom and let the students present their Memory Boxes to the class.

Evaluation: Did the student . . .

- ◆ complete an assemblage using found materials?
- ◆ establish a concept and attach appropriate items in the construction to reflect the chosen theme?
- ◆ complete worksheets, sketches, and meet all deadlines?

Student Activity Worksheet: *Planning and Making a Memory Box*

Name: _____

In this assignment, you will use visual images, found objects, and various materials to create a Memory Box that has meaning for you. The box might represent a personal memory. It could be associated with a person, place, or historical event that interests you. You might also find inspiration in a poem or work of fiction.

You'll begin by completing the "What Is My Concept? Idea Generator" activity sheet (on the next page) using your imagination and visual literacy skills. Next, you'll make a few sketches of the box you are visualizing.

The next step will be to refine your ideas by completing the "Reflection and Revision: Have Your Ideas Changed?" section of this student activity sheet. Once you've completed that step, you'll be ready to make your box.

As you work, use imagination, good craftsmanship, and the elements of art (color, form, line, shape, space, texture, value) and the principles of design (balance, contrast, emphasis, movement, pattern, proportion, rhythm, unity, variety) to build a meaningful Memory Box.

You may incorporate:

drawings

text

found images

found objects

paint and stamps

3. List other images, colors, and patterns that you think you might use in your box.

4. Sketch your box construction idea(s) below.

Reflection and Revision: Have Your Ideas Changed?

1. Are there any objects or images that don't seem to fit with the others? Explain.
2. Did making sketches and/or eliminating some objects or images change your concept? Make a note of how your ideas changed as you planned your box.
3. What is your revised concept?
4. Make a sketch of your new concept:

Now, you are ready to make your box! Be sure to have all of your materials and tools organized and ready before you begin. Think about the best order for the various treatments you want to give the box. For example, should you paint or glue first?

Once you've finished, prepare the following information to display with your box:

Memory Box Information

Artist _____

Title of the work _____

Date (of completion) _____

Medium _____

Artist Statement: An artist statement is a short narrative description of your work of art. It should include an explanation of your concept, the symbolism found in the work, and any other information that you choose to share. It should be 1-2 paragraphs. (Be prepared to read this statement aloud to the class.)

Find VMFA resources online at <http://vmfa.museum/learn/>

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