

Pre- and Post-Visit Activities: Romare Bearden Collage



Overview:

These activities, which support the Staten Island Museum's lesson "Romare Bearden Collage," introduces students to the life of African-American artist Romare Bearden.

Three components:

1. **Background:** Information about Romare Bearden to prepare yourself and your students for your trip to the Staten Island Museum.
2. **Pre-Visit Activity:** Before your visit, students will analyze a work by artist Romare Bearden (Pre-K-5) OR read a newspaper article about the life and death of Bearden (6-12). These will provide context for the visit and also help students complete the post-visit task.
3. **Post-Visit Activity:** Back in the classroom, students will draw on the first two components of the activity to complete an explanatory writing task about Romare Bearden and collage.

Materials:

1. Background information for teachers.
2. Article link, "[Romare Bearden, Collagist and Painter, Dies at 75.](#)" *New York Times*. 13 March, 1988.
3. Student writing task.
4. Image of Romare Bearden's "The Piano Lesson."
5. Graphic organizers.

Background Information:

Romare Bearden was born in 1911 in Charlotte, North Carolina, Mecklenburg County, where he spent the first three years of his life and where he repeatedly visited until his grandmother's death in 1925.

By 1920, the Bearden family had moved to Harlem, New York. After graduating from New York University in 1935, Bearden attended the Art Students League where he studied with the German artist, George Grosz, who was known for his political satire. Grosz's work introduced Bearden to the social function of art and encouraged him to develop a social commentary about the African-American experience. Bearden worked with a variety of media including: watercolors, oils, screen-prints, lithographs, ink and pencil drawings and collage.

The 1920s marked the birth of the Harlem Renaissance. Bearden loved the pulse of Harlem and the sounds of Jazz music. In 1942 he enlisted in the all-black 15th Regiment, 372nd Infantry Division of the United States Army. Between 1942 and 1945 he was represented by the Samuel Kootz Gallery. In 1950 he studied in Paris and became acquainted with the author James Baldwin.

During the 1930s, he painted with tempera on brown paper and portrayed figurative scenes of urban life. In the 1940s, he produced work in the social realist style that explored the black experience. By 1950 he was working with oils. The 1960s witnessed a complete capitulation to collage and marked the beginning of three decades of creativity and public recognition.

Vocabulary:

- Abstraction Expressionism - art that originated in New York in the 1940s and 1950s. This type of art does not attempt to represent external reality, but seeks to achieve its effect using shapes, forms, colors, and textures while conveying attitude and emotion
- Collage - a type of art work in which different kinds of materials are pasted onto a surface to make a picture. These materials can be anything from paper and photographs, to cloth and buttons.
- Cubism - an early twentieth-century movement in painting and sculpture in which objects were represented abstractly by geometrical forms.
- Improvisation – inventing, or making up things as you go along, the strong basis of Jazz music.
- Lithography - the art or process of printing using a smooth stone or metal plate treated so that only the areas meant to print will absorb and transfer ink.
- Memories- things and impressions recalled from the past
- Modernism - artistic production associated with a movement in art that began in the late 19th century and continued through the late 20th century, during which period an interest in realism and the use of traditional materials diminished and an interest in abstraction and experimentation with materials flourished.
- Photomontage - the technique of making a photographic composition by combining parts or elements of more than one photograph, often with the addition of other graphic material.
- Print – a copy that is made by transferring ink onto a surface through mechanical pressure.
- Printmaking - the art or procedure of making prints.

Before Your Visit:

Grades Pre-K – 5:

Using Romare Bearden’s “The Piano Lesson,” students will complete an “I think, I feel, I wonder” graphic organizer (below).

Grades 6-12:

Students will read the *New York Times* article “[Romare Bearden, Collagist and Painter, Dies at 75](#)” about the life and death of artist Romare Bearden. After reading the article, students will answer in the writing task (below).

After Your Visit:

1. After your students have completed their own collage at the Staten Island Museum, post either quote:

“What better medium than collage to express the accumulation of memories?” – Art critic about one of Bearden’s collage series.

Or

“My purpose is to paint the life of my people as I know it.” – Romare Bearden

Ask students if they agree with the quote. Why or why not? Post the image of Bearden's "The Piano Lesson" for students to recall his work.

2a. Hand out the slip below or post on overhead projector; ask students if their collage met some or all of the descriptions.

<input type="checkbox"/> imagine	<input type="checkbox"/> transform
<input type="checkbox"/> personalize	<input type="checkbox"/> release
<input type="checkbox"/> capture	<input type="checkbox"/> symbolize
<input type="checkbox"/> integrate	<input type="checkbox"/> inform

2b. Explain the inspiration for your collage.



Romare Bearden, "The Piano Lesson." (1984).

Name: _____

Date: _____



I feel	I think	I wonder

Name: _____



Date: _____

After reading the *New York Times* article "[Romare Bearden, Collagist and Painter, Dies at 75.](#)" answer the following questions in full sentences.

1. When and how did Romare Bearden die?

2. When and where was Bearden born?

3. List some of the various media Bearden used in his art.

4. Explain what was special about Bearden's art.

5. What other talents did Bearden have?

Name: _____



Date: _____

After reading the *New York Times* article "[Romare Bearden, Collagist and Painter, Dies at 75.](#)" answer the following questions in full sentences.

1. When and how did Romare Bearden die?

Romare Bearden died on Saturday, March 12, 1988 of bone cancer.

2. When and where was Bearden born?

Romare Bearden was born September 2, 1911 in Charlotte, NC.

3. List some of the various media Bearden used in his art.

Bearden used collage, tapestries, oil on paper, prints, drawing, etc.

4. Explain what was special about Bearden's art.

Varies.

5. What other talents did Bearden have?

Bearden's other talents include writing songs and playing baseball (in college).