

Reading into Rabbit

8th Grade Art Lesson

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Description:

Student will study two art pieces found in the Missoula Art Museum online collection by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith called, **CELEBRATE 40,000 YEARS OF AMERICAN ART** and **IN THE FUTURE WE WILL ALL BE MIXED BLOODS AND MESTIZOES.**)Images can be viewed on the MAM website.)

Students will create a collage portrait of an animal they admire, adding additional personal information and imagery to the mix that speaks to the concept of mystery.

Materials: Paper, pencil, polymer medium, stiff bristle paintbrush, scissors, tempera paint, magazines to cut up, patterned paper such as origami paper, oil pastel or chalk pastel.

Duration:

Six, one-hour sessions.

Goals and Learning Objectives:

Students will study two Coyote works from the online permanent collection, **CELEBRATE 40,000 YEARS OF AMERICAN ART** and **IN THE FUTURE WE WILL ALL BE MIXED BLOODS AND MESTIZOES.**

Students will hypothesize possible meanings they find from the combination of symbols found in the artwork.

Students will evaluate Smith's use of imagery and how she partners with the viewer to explore message or meaning.

Students will read a Salish Coyote story having to do with the origin of the Red and White Races. (Please keep in mind that there is protocol having to do with what time of year a story may be told. When snow is on the ground).

Teacher Resources:

www.missoulaartmuseum.org

MAM's permanent online collection features a wide range of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith's work. Click on "experience", type in the artist's name for keyword search. The images to be used, as spurs for the following lesson are **CELEBRATE 40,000 YEARS OF AMERICAN ART** and **IN THE FUTURE WE WILL ALL BE MIXED BLOODS AND MESTIZOES.** Click on descriptive lists, as well as images.

<http://kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu/islandpress/html/keyIP105.html>

This helps us to learn a bit about Jaune Quick to See Smith's thought process behind **CELEBRATE 40,000 YEARS OF AMERICAN ART**. Click on "associated pictures" for a look at the people who helped make the over large prints and for a human to print size ratio.

http://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/lit_terms/allegory.html

Definition for "Allegory".

<http://members.cox.net/academia/coyote.html>

An informative website which offers wide ranging links to Coyote and other trickster characters from different regions and nations.

http://www.turtletrack.org/Issues00/Co04222000/CO_04222000_Rabbitdance.htm Canku Ota is a newsletter that celebrates Native American heritage. This website takes us to a Mohawk legend telling about the origin of the Rabbit Dance.

<http://www.ucan-online.org/legends.asp>

An informative website from the Cherokee Nation which serves as a library for traditional stories from many Nations. Click on "Plateau Area", scroll down to "Salish", and then find "The Creation of the Red and White Races".

<http://biology.about.com/library/weekly/aa100903a.htm>

A user-friendly tutorial about Gregor Mendel's Law of Segregation

Gregor Mendel: The Friar Who Grew Peas, by Cheryl Bardoe, illustrated by Joseph A. Smith (2006 The Field Museum and Abrahms Books for Young Readers, Harry N. Abrahms, Inc.).

Vocabulary:

Symbol- Something used for or representing something else. An emblem, token or sign.

Petroglyph- An ancient image pecked or cut into a rock surface, not to be mistaken with Pictograph, which is an ancient image painted or drawn onto a rock surface.

Allegory- A form of extended [metaphor](#), in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative, are equated with the meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. The underlying meaning has moral, social, religious, or political significance, and characters are often [personifications](#) of abstract ideas as charity, greed, or envy. Thus an allegory is a story with two meanings, a literal meaning and a [symbolic](#) meaning.

Juxtaposition- two unrelated objects placed next to each other for the purpose of contrast or comparison.

Irony- the use of words or imagery combined in such a way as to convey a meaning unintended in their original and singular state.

Mestizo- a person of mixed American Indian and European descent.

Analogous Color- Colors adjacent to each other on the color wheel, such as orange, yellow-orange and yellow.

Learning Sparks:

Study the works, **CELEBRATE 40,000 YEARS OF AMERICAN ART** and **IN THE FUTURE WE WILL ALL BE MIXED BLOODS AND MESTIZOES** with the class. What clues are found in the imagery, quotes, titles of the pieces, and mood perceived on the whole by the viewer? How do they compare and how do they differ? What theme do they appear to hold in common? What is the significance of the Rabbit figure? What do you think are issues important to the artist?

It is appropriate for this lesson to relay quotes from the Kemper Art Museum article (see teacher resources) where Jaune Quick-to-See Smith talks about her print; **CELEBRATE 40,000 YEARS OF AMERICAN ART**. In the article, Smith talks about her fascination with a petroglyph from the Canadian Shield region of Ontario, found near Stoney Lake near the town of Peterborough. An image which is apparently from the Upper Paleolithic time period dating 10,000 to 40,000 years ago-PLENTY OLD! Paleo imagery of this estimated age is on par with the famous animal images at the caves in Lascaux, France. (Other sources, including the Canadian Peterborough Provincial Park website, relay that the images are dated at 900-1400 A.D.). A carving in the white limestone wall features an anthropomorphized rabbit figure standing on hind legs. Smith refers to Rabbit figures from other cultures worldwide, favoring the universality of the image that so resonated for her when she became aware of the image in the 1970's.

A look into the traditional stories of the Algonquin tribe, which hails from the Peterborough region, suggests that the petroglyph is a Rabbit Spirit who is interested in helping humans communicate with the spirit world and teaches them ways to do this. In fact, local Native elders refer to the prodigiously inscribed rock walls of the Peterborough area as “the rocks that teach”. Among other American Indian tribes, Rabbit is like Coyote or Raven, something of a trickster. Upon first seeing Quick-to-See Smith's image of the rabbit, you might immediately think of the familiar shape of the cartoon character, Bugs Bunny, who also shares some of the same penchant for playing tricks on his enemies and using humor while trying to survive hunting season.

What is striking about seeing **CELEBRATE 40,000 YEARS OF AMERICAN ART** in person is that it is large. Standing next to the looming black silhouette of the rabbit, who leads a line of five other rabbits who diminish in size the further back in line they go, is like regarding another human being right in front of you. The background of the print is gritty and drippy and quite textural, sort of like a rock or cave wall. It is evocative of the ancient origin of the Rabbit Spirit image. While looking through some leads on Rabbit stories I came across a few versions of a Mohawk legend called "The Rabbit Dance", which tells of two hunters who are taught the steps and rhythm of a dance by a Rabbit Chief, who thumps his foot to assemble his tribe. They proceed to dance in a line, and then disappear. The hunters go home and relay this to their mother, who tells them to remember the rhythm made by the thumping of Rabbit Chief's foot, and the steps made by the Rabbit tribe then teach them to the people in order to remember and honor rabbits in the future.

Quick-to-See Smith uses the rabbit image in her other artwork; **IN THE FUTURE WE WILL ALL BE MIXED BLOODS AND MESTIZOES**. A standing red rabbit figure, which appears to have flaps at his feet like a paper doll, is superimposed over scientific illustrations and writing which describe aspects of a theory brought forth in the 1860's by Czechoslovakian monk and scientist, Gregor Mendel. A black silhouette which looks like it would fit onto the rabbit like a paper doll garment is shown in high contrast in the background of the image. Although the word "segregation" is one fraught with controversy, Mendel's Theory of Segregation was intended as a scientific quest for a Universal Law and was created using green and yellow pea plants. Here Smith has shown red and white for the botanical illustrations in her artwork. Mendel's work with peas was all about genetics, and how dominant and recessive genes can show up in plant breeding over successive generations. Plants bred to maintain their original features are considered homogenous, where plants with mixed features are considered heterogeneous.

Clearly, Smith is speaking to the genetic mixing of people of different tribes, and races in her artwork. There are likely some strong feelings about such a notion as losing genetic purity, especially if it means losing touch with one's bloodline and by extension full exposure to one's culture. A person from another country such as Denmark might just say that their parents are Danish and their grandparents are Danish and so on up the line. A typical mainstream American might list different nationalities in her genetic make-up, and proudly so. But mainstream America needs reminders of other worldviews among people right here on this continent. We are fortunate to have artists such as Jaune Quick-to-See Smith lend us her glasses, so we can try to see issues through her eyes.

Smith has certain imagery that she uses repeatedly in her large body of work, such as horses, or rabbits or coyotes. She chooses them because they resonate to her personally, and they seem to be the correct language to suit her message

at the time. Many contemporary artists have a special affinity for certain animals, which appear time and again in their work.

Steps and Procedures:

Have your students think of an animal that they particularly admire. It can be one they have known personally, or one that they admire for its beauty, speed, grace, temperaments, etc.

Begin by having the students work with a bit of text from the magazines. Think of adjectives that describe the animal you wish to honor and see if you can find those words in the magazines, if not, are there images you find that describe the animal? Don't let the students get too bogged down with the magazines, as trolling through them can be overly stimulating, time consuming and a good way to lose focus. Set aside a small pile of text material and when ready, begin to play with the composition on a piece of mat board or cardboard. Paste them down using a layer of polymer medium or glue, then the paper, then go over the top with a second layer to anchor it down.

Add a thin, wash-like layer of paint, limiting the range of color. The idea is to allow important words or images to peak through, but be subordinate to the next layer. By limiting the students to two colors, they can explore the territory in between them by mixing them in differing amounts or create a textural white canvas by layering over with a thin white. At any rate, the color will be another subordinate layer for the animal image that will go on top.

The student may portray the animal how they see it in their mind. It may be anthropomorphized or realistic or cartoon or stick figure, or a pastiche of physical features from magazines or patterned paper.

A good creative spur is to look through some haiku or tanka poems that describe the animal in question or to have the students write one in honor of their animal, brief snapshots that help the student to think in a more sensory or emotional manner. This might solve the problem of getting bogged down in a random search for text trolling through magazines and of course their collage is the perfect place to paste down the words to the poem.

Another creative spur is to do a web quest on the animal they chose and pay close attention to traditional stories that come from around the world. There might be some details that resonate and could be channeled into the collage.

Assessment:

The introductory material is a way for the teacher to go deep with the issues presented in the two works by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith. I encourage the teacher to facilitate some research by the students and to see what kinds of animal stories they come up with. The artwork could be shown next to the story, whether original or traditional.

