

Classroom Activity

Imagining the Subconscious through Collage

Enduring Understanding	Artists often use artmaking to communicate messages about their interior life and personal thoughts.
Grades	K–12
Time	One to two class periods
Visual Art Concepts	Silhouette, drawing, collage, juxtaposition, deconstruction and reconstruction
Materials	Black drawing paper, graphite pencils or white drawing pencils, overhead projector or flashlights, glue, scissors, and collage materials such as art reproductions, newspaper, photographs, magazines, or wrapping, patterned, or decorative paper.
Talking about Art	<p>View and discuss Lola Alvarez Bravo's <i>Sirenas del aire (Mermaids of the Air)</i>, c. 1935-36, printed c. 1958.</p> <p>What do you see? What action is taking place? Who are the main characters and what might they be saying? What are they using to communicate this message? Have you seen this device before? Where and when? Does it give us a clue as to when this photograph was made?</p> <p>Like the typewriter, art, too, is a medium for communicating messages. What message do you think the artist, Lola Alvarez Bravo, might have been trying to communicate in 1935 through this photograph? What communication devices do you use today? If you replaced the typewriter in this image with your device of choice, how would it change the intended message?</p> <p>Elaborate on this message by writing a caption for this photograph in the form of a tagline, a dialogue, or a story that explains what <i>you</i> think is happening. Retitle <i>Sirenas del aire (Mermaids of the Air)</i> with a title of your choice.</p> <p>This photograph is a photomontage, meaning it is a composite photograph made from more than one image. What steps do you think Bravo took to create this artwork? Where might she have sourced her images?</p>

The 21st century version of this process is often calling "photoshopping," but both are essentially multi-media collage. A collage is simply an artwork comprised of different shapes, texts, or images layered on top of each other. The term "collage" derives from *colle*, the French word for "glue." The process made its appearance as a formal art medium with the surrealist movement.

Making Art

Use collage as a device for communicating a message about you by creating a multi-media silhouette portrait. Prior to the birth of photography, silhouette profiles cut from black card were the easiest and most inexpensive way of recording a person's appearance. Using your silhouette and favorite images, this metacognitive self-portrait will record your personality and intrapersonal thoughts.

Divide students into groups of three. One student will serve as the portrait sitter, one will handle lighting, and the third will draw the outline of the sitter's head. Consider using your classroom overhead projector or flashlights and white drawing pencil or graphite pencil on large black paper.

Cut the profile out of the black paper. Distribute pieces of large white paper for the collage surface and ask students to brainstorm a list of favorite colors, shapes, animals, images, and places on the back of the white paper. Use this list as inspiration for selecting images from magazines, newspapers, or artwork reproductions. Create a composition using these images and the silhouette cut-out to create a visual landscape of intrapersonal thoughts and interests. Layer the silhouette and images with decorative, patterned, or wrapping papers.

Reflection

Write a short description about yourself to accompany your meta-cognitive self-portrait. Display portraits in the classroom for a "gallery walk" and ask students to match the description with the appropriate collage.

Classroom Activity

Image & Identity: Painted Self-Portraits

Enduring Understanding Artists make many choices about how to represent themselves in a self-portrait. Carefully planned facial expression, body gesture, costume, and accessories can tell us more about the artist's personality or identity and can evoke a certain mood, emotion, or experience.

Grades 3–12

Time One to two class periods

Visual Art Concepts Portraiture, contour drawing, painting, color

Materials Pencils, mirrors, tempera paint such as Alphacolor Biggie Cakes, brushes, watercolor paper, cups of water, and paper towels.
Optional: dry-erase markers, tracing paper, graphite, and hairdryers

Talking about Art A portrait is a picture of a person, where the figure is the focal point of the composition. Artists capture portraits in many media, such as drawing, painting, and photography.

View and discuss Frida Kahlo's *Las Dos Fridas*, 1939. What is similar about these two figures? How are they different? Do you think they represent two separate people or one person? What do you see that makes you say that? Craft an argument using visual characteristics to support your point.

Visual characteristics such as setting, costume, posture, and facial expression can tell us more about the sitter, Frida Kahlo. This is a self-portrait, which means Kahlo painted this portrait of herself, making many important decisions about how she would present her identity. What can we tell about her personality by examining her expression, gesture, and posture? What can we tell about her heritage by examining her dress? Notice that the woman on the left wears a Victorian, or European, style dress with delicate details such as lace and ruffles. Compare and contrast this outfit with what her counterpart wears. The juxtaposition of regional dress may reference Kahlo's *mestiza* or mixed heritage, the product of her European father and Mexican mother. What other messages does Kahlo communicate about her life?

Making Art

Have you ever made a portrait, of yourself or with others? What kinds of decisions went into the creation of your portrait? If you were to paint a self-portrait that expresses a particular emotion, which emotion might you choose and why?

Recall an emotional experience, such as happiness, excitement, frustration, or sadness and brainstorm some possibilities for depicting this experience in a portrait. What type of pose or gesture will you take? What facial expression will best express this emotion? What will you reveal about this experience and what will you choose to conceal through these artistic choices?

What additional elements will you include to tell your story? Consider significant colors, such as warm and cool colors, to create mood. Add information about setting such as place and space, to tell the viewer where you are. Costume and accessories can tell us more about you and your personality. You can also include important symbolism from your culture or heritage to tell about both the past and present.

Now that you have brainstormed ways to represent yourself through a self-portrait, use a mirror to help draw your face or bust. Look in the mirror and trace the outer edge of your reflection, either on watercolor paper with pencil or directly on the mirror with a dry-erase marker. Remember to focus on your image, as opposed to the paper, by tracing the contour of your head, hair, and facial features. Examine and sketch the shapes of your eyes, lips, nose, and ears. Try closing one eye to help you focus.

(If you drew your sketch on the mirror with dry-erase marker, lay a sheet of tracing paper on the mirror and trace the sketch onto the tracing paper with pencil. Take the tracing off the mirror and lay it face down on a sheet of watercolor paper. Rub graphite on the back of the tracing paper and the sketch will transfer onto the watercolor paper.)

Load your brush with water and apply it to the dry tempera cakes to activate the paint. Apply a thin wash to the background area of the self-portrait, with the symbolic color that you chose, to create an overall mood or tone for your painting. Use a dry paper towel to blot or lift color off the wash area to create a textured effect.

Next, try mixing paint to create secondary and tertiary colors for your face, facial features, dress, and accessories. Layer colors on top of each other in short quick strokes. Clean brushes thoroughly in between colors, as tempera is rather opaque. Tempera dries quickly, but, if necessary, use a hairdryer to accelerate drying.

Reflection

Write a short autobiography to accompany your self-portrait. Compare and contrast portraiture in the visual arts with the genre of biography in literature, using classroom texts as examples. What are the benefits and challenges of using art versus writing to tell stories about people?

Surrealism and Women Artists

Selected Resources

Related Curriculum Materials

Evenings for Educators resources include an illustrated essay, color images or overhead transparencies, classroom activities, and related resources. Printed curriculum is available for purchase through LACMA's Education Department or browse selected curricula online at www.lacma.org (Programs /Education/Evenings for Educators).

Artists' Perspectives: Envisioning the World
April 2009

Dali and Surrealism
December 2007

Image and Text: Magritte and his Impact
February 2007

Mirror Image to Masquerade: Photographic Portraits
November 2006

Online Resources

"Surrealism" on the Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/surr/hd_surr.htm

Learn more about the movement in the context of art history through interactive timelines, thematic essays, maps, and images.

Surrealist Art

Centre Pompidou

<http://www.cnac-gp.fr/education/ressources/ENS-Surrealistart-EN/ENS-Surrealistart-EN.htm>

Explore the origins of surrealism, important surrealist artists, and iconic works.

Teacher's Guide to *The Life and Times of Frida Kahlo*

Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)

http://www.pbs.org/weta/fridakahlo/guides/teachers_guide.pdf

An educational accompaniment to this intimate biography of Kahlo, including standards-based lesson plans and discussion questions.

Louise Bourgeois on *Art21*

Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)

<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/louise-bourgeois>

Documentation of the late Bourgeois' life and work from *Art21*, the television series and chronicler of contemporary art and artists.

Feminist Art Base

Brooklyn Museum

http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/easca/feminist_art_base/index.php

The first online digital archive dedicated solely to feminist art, created by the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum.

Educator's Guide for *Lauren Greenfield's Girl Culture*

Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona Libraries

<http://www.creativephotography.org/education/educatorsGuides>

A selection of photographs and first-person narratives from the Center for Creative Photography's 2002 exhibition, which examined the social and emotional lives of adolescent girls and their relationships to contemporary media and conceptions of beauty.

Books for Teachers

- Bernhard, Ruth. *Ruth Bernhard: The Eternal Body*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2011. A monograph of Bernhard's most celebrated photographs of the female form.
- Chadwick, Whitney. *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1991. A comprehensive review of the lives and works of women who shaped the Surrealist movement.
- Coxon, Ann. *Tate Modern Artists: Louise Bourgeois*. London: Tate Publishing, 2010. A survey of Bourgeois' experimentation with a plethora of media and techniques, from painting and assemblage to sculpture, paper, and beyond. Quotations and interviews with the artist provide insight into her artistic process.
- Ferrer, Elizabeth. *Lola Alvarez Bravo*. Tuscon: Aperture/Center for Creative Photography, 2006. The first English-language monograph documenting the Mexican photographer's career, including previously unpublished works, little-known photomontages, and portraits of friend, Frida Kahlo.
- Fort, Ilene Susan, Tere Arcq, and Terri Geis. *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States*. New York: Prestel Publishing, 2012. Catalogue for the LACMA exhibition, featuring the work of 48 Mexican and United States-based women artists whose contributions to the surrealist movement span more than four decades.*
- Rapaport, Brooke Kamin (Ed.). *The Sculpture of Louise Nevelson: Constructing a Legend*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. The most extensive study of Nevelson's work, from her origins as a Ukrainian-born Jewish immigrant to the United States, to her groundbreaking works of the 1940s, her influence on the public art revival of the 1960s, and her complex architectural works from the 1980s.

Books for Students

- Alarcon, Francisco X. *Poems to Dream Together/Poemas para Sonar Juntos*. New York: Lee & Low Books, 2005. A bilingual collection of short poems about the power of dreams.
- Novesky, Amy. *Me, Frida*. New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2010. An account of Kahlo's move to San Francisco with husband Diego Rivera, her first time leaving Mexico, and her search for artistic inspiration.*
- Raimondo, Joyce. *Imagine That!: Activities and Adventures in Surrealism*. New York: Watson-Guptill, 2004. An introduction to surrealism highlighting the work of six famous surrealists. Includes easy-to-follow activities on techniques and media such as collage, watercolors, printmaking, sculpture, and more.
- Ryan, Pam Munoz. *The Dreamer*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2010. The story of a young boy, Neftalí, who follows the call of a mysterious voice into the fearsome sea, under the canopy of the lush rain forest, and through the persistent Chilean rain. A combination of magical realism with poetry and illustrations.

* Books available in the Museum Shop