

**Romare Bearden:  
Commemorating the Centennial Birthday of the Man of Many Parts**

**Rita Sorrentino**  
Overbrook Elementary School

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**Overview**

Romare Bearden was a man of many talents. Although best known for his artwork, he was also a respected writer and an eloquent spokesman on the artistic and social issues of his day. His personal life experiences as well as the African American experiences of 20th Century were the subjects of his work. He was a man always at the beginning, always learning and trying new things. He incorporated literature into his canvasses, wrote poetry, illustrated books by influential authors, and composed songs. His collages will appeal to the children who have had some cut-and-paste experiences of their own. His work is rich in cultural and historical themes revealing the life he knew in the rural South and the urban North.

I am the computer teacher at Overbrook Elementary School. My assignments include enhancing the curriculum with technology and working with students on projects to develop and extend their technological skills. This curriculum is designed for elementary school students to commemorate the centennial birthday of this great artist. The multidisciplinary unit will incorporate language arts, social studies and technology in learning about the life and work of Romare Bearden throughout the year. Students will investigate significant aspects of Bearden's life and his artistic style, notably selected collages. Lesson plans for each month will include material and activities for students in either Grades K-2 or Grades 3-5, and in some instances both.

**Rationale**

For many students in today's classrooms, art education is at best enrichment but not an essential learning activity. Budget cuts and emphasis on test scores have pushed the arts to the back of the room or the bottom of the budget. However, the arts can help children

develop their potential. Through the arts they learn more about their world, their culture and the cultures of others. In our multimedia age, visual literacy is an important 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skill. Today's wealth of digital media and web content require that our students become active participants in interpreting, evaluating and creating works of art. Having contact with the arts through classroom instruction, museum visits, virtual tours and art activities, students will experience art's ongoing value. Learning with and through the arts helps students acquire creative and technological knowledge and skills necessary for employment and enjoyment in the 21st Century.

At my school there is no art teacher or scheduled art instruction. With a 99% African American population, I decided to focus my attention on helping students experience the arts by examining the work of Romare Bearden, an extraordinary African-American artist of the twentieth century. Since he created scenes from his childhood using materials familiar to the students, I thought they would find his life and his work interesting. Additionally, the experiences and works of this talented man could offer students a deeper understanding of themes in African America history; namely, Great Migration, Civil Rights Movement, and Harlem Renaissance. In Bearden's art, students will discover everyday events in the lives of African Americans: church gatherings, school life, tending a garden, visiting friends, an evening spent at home, music, trains, and involvement in political life. His experiences as a 20<sup>th</sup> Century African American shaped his work. In studying his life and art, students will find a celebration of their own life and heritage.

Too often, our students wait until Black History Month to learn and laud the accomplishments of African Americans. I think it is important to go beyond this spotlight approach and give students a deeper understanding and appreciation of the achievements of African Americans. The life and work of artist Romare Bearden will be a valuable resource in developing lessons about black history, art appreciation, and hands-on creations of individual and collective pieces of art. Hopefully, this school wide and year-long approach will extend the learning and the conversations to family members as students discuss, create and share their "parts" of Bearden's life and work.

## Background

Romare Bearden, fondly called "Romie" by family and friends, was a man of many parts who used "many parts" in creating his art. By gluing bits of paper, fabric, photographs, and images from print media onto his canvass, he poured his life into his art telling stories that drew attention to the African-American experience. Bearden combined his keen observation and active memory to infuse the sights and sounds of his life's journey into his art. His representations of African American experiences render his art an instrument for understanding social issues in black history and the culture of American life.

### *Early Years*

Romare Bearden, the only child of Howard and Bessye Bearden, was born on September 2, 1911 in Mecklenburg County near Charlotte, North Carolina in his great-grandparent's house. Besides owning their own home, this prominent family owned a general store and rental properties. Since Romare's grandfather died before he was born, his great-grandfather became a grandfather to him. It was from his great-grandparent's house that Romare stored up memories that he would later transform into his collages of Mecklenburg County.<sup>1</sup> His memories of time spent with his maternal grandparents in Pittsburgh were another source of inspiration. They ran a boarding house for migrant workers in the steel mills. Many Southern black workers migrated to the industrial cities of the North to find work along with immigrants from Europe. His grandmother's boardinghouse was popular because it was close to mills and because she was known to be a "good cook and a good nurse."<sup>2</sup> Bearden incorporated both rural and urban scenes of African-American everyday life into his works of art.

Romare and his family were part of the Great Migration when many African-Americans escaped the tensions and segregation of the South and moved to industrial cities of the north seeking jobs and a better life. Bearden's parents moved to Harlem in 1914 hoping to live and raise their son in a less fearful environment.<sup>3</sup> The Bearden family arrived in New York just as the Harlem Renaissance was starting to develop. Romare's family was well educated and their love of art, literature and music enriched Bearden's growing up years. Overtime his parents entertained well-known black musicians, such Paul Robeson, Duke Ellington, and Cab Calloway, and writers like W.E.B Dubois and Langston Hughes. Romare would call New York home for the rest of his life.<sup>4</sup>

Romare was well accustomed to a city life but he still liked to remember the people and places of the South along with the colors and rhythms of his experiences there. Throughout his childhood, Romare went back and forth between New York, Charlotte, Pittsburgh and Baltimore. Romare attended most of his elementary school and first two years of high school in New York Public Schools. He completed his last two years of high school in Pittsburgh living with his grandmother. By Romare's last year in high school, he began receiving awards for posters he designed.

### *Adult Life*

Bearden attended Lincoln University, an all black University in Pennsylvania but transferred to Boston University. His athletic talents were recognized and he was even offered a contract by Connie Mack if he would pass for white. He refused, left Boston, and returned to New York University receiving his BA in 1935. Bearden then took night classes at the Art Students League. Bearden continued to be a lifelong learner and studied various painting strategies of Picasso and others to improve the composition of his work.

Bearden earned a living as a caseworker for the New York City Department of Social Services, a job he kept until 1967.

In 1940 Romare rented his first art studio. There a cleaning woman inspired him to work from live models and Romare's interest in the African American female figure continued throughout his career as well as his search for subject matter that was real to him.<sup>5</sup> Later he moved his studio to the Apollo Guild, and had the company of musicians, composers, artists and photographers as he continued to perfect his craft.

Bearden served in the Army during WWII and later utilized the GI Bill of Rights to further his training in Paris and join other black artists and writers who moved there to escape racism in the United States. He returned to New York in 1951. For a time, he tried his hand at song writing in what he thought might be a good way to get rich quickly so he could return to Paris. In 1954 he married Nanette Rohan, a woman with Caribbean roots, who encouraged him to return to his art.

In 1963 Bearden helped organize Spiral, a group of African American artists seeking to respect their heritage and make a contribution to the Civil Rights Movement. Bearden thought it might be a good idea if they created a work of art collectively. When the others lost interest, Bearden persisted. Back at his studio; he pasted photos onto small boards, photographically enlarged them and mounted them onto boards. These large black and white pictures were called "photomontages." He named this powerful new series, "Projections" in keeping with the way the oversized images projected themselves right out to the viewer.<sup>6</sup> During this crucial time in our history, Bearden instilled a sense of pride in authentic black experiences. Through his collages, he documented the history and culture of a people from a "half-forgotten Negro world."<sup>7</sup>

This was a turning point in Bearden's career. Critics saw this work as remarkable. Bearden reinvented the art of collage as a uniquely American art form using African-American subject matter represented with such genius that it became universal.<sup>8</sup> In 1967 after a successful show, Bearden was finally able to retire from the Department of Social Services and devote himself full time to his art.

In 1971 a major exhibition of his work "The Prevalence of Ritual" filled the gallery at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The curator of the exhibition wrote that Bearden's work, "is more than an exhibition. It is an affirmation, a celebration of victory of the human spirit over all the forces that oppress it."<sup>9</sup>

In the fall of 1977, after *The New Yorker* magazine featured a profile on Bearden's life journey, he began a new series of an autobiographical nature, *Profile/Part I: The Twenties*. This series of twenty-eight collages was divided into two sections, "Mecklenburg County" and "Pittsburgh Memories" referencing important people and events in Bearden's life. *Profile/Part II: The Thirties* followed this focusing on his life in

New York. These two series of collage tell the history, not just of Bearden, but also of his people and of all human kind. Bearden's work spanned five decades. He was the recipient of many awards including the prestigious National Medal of Arts in 1987. Bearden died in 1988 after several months' illness with bone cancer

### *Leadership and Legacy*

The legacy of Bearden's life and work continues today in museums, history books, exhibitions, publications, and specifically through the *Romare Bearden Foundation*. Besides his role as co-founder of Spiral, Bearden continued to support many younger minority artists by forming Cinque Gallery that provided opportunities for professional development, networking and mentoring. Bearden encouraged them to work as artists, teachers, directors and museum curators. To young students who flocked to his studio he said, "I think the artist has to be something like a whale, swimming with his mouth wide open, absorbing everything until he has what he needs. When he finds that, he can start to make limitations. And then he really begins to grow."<sup>10</sup>

Bearden also felt it necessary to document the history of African-American art and he did so in his published writing and lecturing. Shortly before his death he wrote and illustrated, *Li'l Dan, the Drummer Boy: A Civil War Story* that was published posthumously in 2003. Both in life and in death Bearden made significant contributions and commitments to leveling the field for black artists.

### *Influences*

Bearden attributed his early artistic endeavors to his childhood friend in Pittsburgh. There, a disabled boy named Eugene introduced Romare to his drawings. Eugene died a year later but during that short time he taught Romare how to draw. His influence was deep and lasting. In *Farewell Eugene*, Romare recalled the funeral of his childhood friend and paid tribute to this early formative experience.<sup>11</sup>

From his summers in the South, Romare formed lasting impressions of people and places. Later he tried to capture these feelings in his collages and did not attempt to produce photographic likenesses. In a poem he wrote about spending time with Mr. Johnson, a blind musician famous around the countryside, he referenced this "old, old July" day and yearned to learn what "unknowing things know."<sup>12</sup> In being true to his feelings of an experience, Bearden would reveal truth in his art.

Music was also a very important part of Romare's life. Guitar players, tambourines and jazz musicians are frequent themes in his art. Bearden played jazz in his studio for its enjoyment and for the new ideas it generated. "I paint out of the tradition of the blues," he claimed, "and I'll call and recall. You know start a theme and you all and recall the patters and rhythms of jazz and blues are at the heart if artist practice."<sup>13</sup>

Bearden 's political education began at home in Harlem where his parents and other leaders played active roles. In college he drew political cartoons. His mentor, George Grosz at the Art Students League, encouraged him to apply social awareness to his art. During the 1960's Bearden's work revealed the social and political issues of these turbulent times in US History. Bearden's first collages, black and white photographic blow-ups were commentaries on the unrest within urban cities.

### *The Art of Collage*

Bearden worked in a variety of media but his signature technique was collage. The word "collage" comes from the French *coller* meaning to glue or paste. Romare mastered this art form blending magazine clippings, painting, old paper and fabric, like a jigsaw puzzle. But unlike a puzzle, each piece of a Bearden collage has its own meaning and history. In an interview with NPR, Bearden said, "Working with fragments of the past brought them into the present.... When I conjure these memories, they are present to me. Because after all, the artist is a kind of enchanter in time."<sup>14</sup> Bearden captured the richness of black communities in their daily lives. In fleshing out a memory, he gave witness to their culture and traditions.

Collage was, an art form fit for Bearden's desire to keep his boyhood memories whole and true. Bearden recreated the meaning of his southern childhood and northern upbringing by reducing them to artistic style.<sup>15</sup> In some of his work he used photomontage, a collage that incorporates photographs. Bearden cut out pictures of trains, faces, hands, arms, and combined them with patterned papers, to create a busy scene or to blend past and present events. In so doing he communicated how African Americans were trying to hold on to their cultural traditions in new locations and life styles. His uniqueness stemmed from his choices of color, structure and placements of subjects and objects. He experimented with different media, various techniques and a wide range of source materials in the visual language of his signature style.

In art books and online resources, Bearden is pictured dressed in work clothes and standing at a long table, which held printed-paper, paints, pens, brushes, scraps of fabrics, clippings from magazines and newspapers. He first pasted down rectangles of colors on a board; layered bits and pieces of photographic images all cut and rearranged; glued them and pressed them to the board already covered with colored cut or torn paper shapes. He put his final touches with a brush of paint or penned in some lines for shading. This was by no means a simple process. The materials could prove difficult with bubbles, buckling and warping. Romare perfected his work after many years of testing things out.<sup>16</sup> He not only combined techniques in a single work, he also reworded an idea or presented the same images in collage, print or watercolor.

### **Objectives**

Students will engage in activities that reinforce reading, writing, speaking and listening. They will learn and use appropriate technology skills to access information and prepare presentations and reports. They will explore topics that connect the arts and humanities to other parts of the curriculum.

The objectives of the unit will include the following:

- To establish a timeline for the life of Romare Bearden
- To stimulate visual literacy through active viewing
- To respond critically to Bearden's work orally and in writing
- To understand the technique of collage
- To identify themes in collages
- To reflect on childhood memories
- To combine poetry of Langston Hughes with Bearden's "The Block"
- To create an individual digital collage in the style of Bearden
- To assemble a collage in the style of Bearden using multimedia materials

## **Standards**

The School District of Philadelphia's Core Curriculum is aligned to The Pennsylvania Academic Standards. The Visual Arts Standards describe what students should know and should be able to achieve in the visual and performing arts. They recognize the students' need to respond to life experiences through images, structures and tactile works. The arts and humanities are interconnected through the inclusion of social studies, aesthetics, literature and language. The Technology Standards state how students use critical thinking skills to plan and conduct research, manage projects, solve problems and make informed decisions using appropriate digital tools and resources. A list of Standards will be included in the Appendix.

## **Strategies**

This unit will incorporate strategies that use the tools of technology to explore the historical, cultural and social context of an individual artist and to identify themes and techniques in these works of art. In most instances, students will have experience and knowledge of these tools. In a few instances, they will be introduced to and instructed how to use the tools. Throughout the unit students will use a variety of media as they apply spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes. In so doing they will be in keeping with the spirit and style of Bearden.

**Journals and/or Blogs:** All students will keep a journal or blog (TBD in the fall according to grade level and SDP policy) to document their activities, reflect on what they have

learned, compile a glossary of terms and list questions for further learning. This work will assist students in our culminating project of creating a podcast or iMovie on what they have learned about the life and art of Romare Bearden.

**Timeline:** Students will construct a timeline of Bearden's life to make connections and better understand key events of historical, social, and artistic significance. The timeline will be created online or with Microsoft Word. Students will have printouts of key events, books, and online resources to help them organize the timeline by decades. These will be printed out and displayed on bulletin board for reference throughout the unit. Additionally, students will add comments about other historical happenings that correspond to these dates and times.

**Graphic Organizers:** Graphic organizers help students to think visually and focus their thoughts and ideas. Using a combination of visual learning and technology, students can more readily organize and analyze information. We will be using software, *Kidspiration* and *Inspiration*, for these purposes. Other online templates for students' use are available at the website [ReadWriteThink.org](http://ReadWriteThink.org). With these tools students will create Venn diagrams to compare and contrast collages from different periods or create cluster maps to categorize art by themes and style.

*Wordle* is an online tool for generating "word clouds" from text that students provide. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the text. Students can modify their clouds with different fonts, layouts, and color schemes. The images they create with *Wordle* will be viewed as word-collages either in printed form or saved to the *Wordle* gallery to share online.

*Comic Life* is a layout software program that allows students to assemble photo stories from their collection of digital images. For this unit students will use the templates to create collages related to the life and art of Romare Bearden. This very user-friendly application enables reshaping, layering, adding text, inserting images and/or photographs to tell a story in comic book fashion. The shaping and layering is in keeping with the techniques of Bearden.

**Gallery Walk:** The students will move from computer to computer and without any talking, view the work of their classmates. While on their "Gallery Walk," the students should think about the way each group presented information and what questions or comments they may have. After the Gallery Walk we will discuss key points and allow time for students to ask/answer questions about the work.

**Looking At and Writing about Art:** As students explore the works of Bearden, they will be guided through methods of looking at art. A simple beginning will be to list all the things that they see in the pictures. Next, they will take a closer look and consider the colors, shapes, textures and people in the collage. What catches the eye? What shapes



appear closer than others? What do they find interesting?

To conclude the activity they will decide if the art is telling a story, conveying a feeling or sharing an idea. They will respond in writing by answering guided questions included in the lesson plans.

### **Lesson Plans/Activities:**

The following lesson plans will be used throughout the year. The librarian, classroom teachers and myself will be working together to implement the theme with monthly lessons. I have indicated with an asterisk \* the activities that will take place in the computer room.

#### Lesson 1A: Meeting Romare Bearden: September (Grades K-3)

Objective: Students will be introduced to the artist through a picture book and respond through discussion and journal writing.

Procedure: We will begin by introducing students in Grades K-3 to the book, *Me and Uncle Romie* by Claire Hartfield. Although a fictional tale, this picture book introduces children to the life and work of Romare Bearden. We will remind students that this is an example of realistic fiction in which James, a fictitious character, visits his uncle “Romie” Bearden, the famous artist. As we read and discuss the text and illustrations, students will consider the valuable lessons that James learned about his Uncle Romie and the art of collage.

After the reading, students will be invited to make text-to-self connections. They will consider the following passage that Uncle Romie tells James:

*It's a funny thing, James. People live in all sorts of different places and Families. But the things we are about are pretty much the same. Like favorite foods, special songs, games, stories...and like birthdays.*

- What special things do you share with family and friends?
- What special places have you visited?
- What do all people care about?

In another part of the story when James sees his Uncle's studio for the first time, he says to himself:

*What a glorious mess! There were paints and scraps all over the floor, and around the edges were huge paintings with all sorts of pieces pasted together.*

- Why did James call the studio “a glorious mess?”

- What do you know about making collages? Have you ever made one? What materials did you use?

On the last page of the book there are two collages of Romare Bearden. One is *The Pepper Jelly Lady* and the other is *The Block*. I will project large images of these collages for discussion. What places do you think these collages represent? What do you notice that is similar (colors, shapes, people) or different (place, time of day size, materials)?

Students in Kindergarten and Grade 1 will draw and/or label a picture in response to similar questions

Journal or Blog Entry for Grades 2-3: What did you learn about Romare Bearden so far that you found interesting? What family memory/memories would you like to use for a collage?

Lesson 1B: Meeting Romare Bearden: September (Grades 4-5)\*

Objective: Students will be introduced to the artist through a picture-book biography and respond by creating a time of key events

Procedure: We will begin this lesson by sharing sections of the picture-book biography, *Romare Bearden: Collage of Memories* by Jan Greenberg to highlight the people, places, and events in the life of this amazing artist.

Key Points:

- Born in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina into a middle-class, African-American family (1911)
- Family moved to Harlem, New York City when he was 3 years old (1914)
- Spent time with grandmother Cattie in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (1920-1929)
- For most of his youth continued to visit relatives in North Carolina and Pittsburgh but New York was his home for rest of his life
- Parents entertained famous artist, musicians and writers during Harlem Renaissance
- Graduated from New York University and continued his studies at the famous Art Students League in New York City and the Sorbonne in Paris.
- Worked for the New York City Welfare Department from 1938 to 1965 to support himself and his wife, who he married in 1951
- Begins exhibiting his work in 1944, and his artistic career takes off 20 years later when his collages begin to attract notice
- Bearden's memories of past events and favorite places all became inspiration for his artwork.
- Bearden's work is shown in prestigious galleries and museums all over the world

- Death in 1981

Students will work in groups of 3 to create one decade of a timeline (1910-1980) using a printout of the key events. They can use Microsoft Word<sup>17</sup> or an online tool<sup>18</sup> to generate a descriptive timeline that will be used as a reference for later activities. Their timelines will be printed and arranged on a wall or bulletin board for the duration of the unit.

Journal or Blog Entry for Grades 4-5: Have you learned about any other artist, musicians or authors from this time period. What do you know about the Harlem Renaissance? As we use this timeline to learn about Bearden, how can it help you with other subjects you are studying?

Lesson 2: Music, Art and Poetry: October (K-5)\*

Objective: To explore the theme of music in Bearden's collages as we examine the commonalities that we share through art, poetry and music.

Procedure: We will use the book; *I Live in Music* by Ntozake Shange to discover how the language of poetry and music come alive in Bearden's art. Teachers will adopt from the following activities according to the level of the students:

- Before reading ask students: where they find music, how music makes them feel, if they play an instrument, what types of music do they know or like.
- Read the poem slowly allowing time to savor each painting and feel the sounds of each page
- Reread and identify the types of musicians and instruments in each picture
- Describe the mood of each image? How does the use of color contribute to this?
- Which picture and line of poetry makes you feel the rhythm of the words best?
- Prepare the text on sentence strips and have students perform the poem as some read and others provide sound effects to match the mood and sounds
- Select one or more of Bearden's works and have students study it for elements of collage: subjects, materials, time period, connections to self. Can you notice any differences in style from the earlier to later works? Refer to timeline for dates and events in Bearden's life at time of the collage.  
(*Black Manhattan (1969)*, *The Piano Lesson (1983)*, *Fancy Sticks (1987)*)
- How does the author of the poem create a "collage of words?" Do you notice traditional language as well as dialect? How does her blending of language compare to Bearden/s blending of memories, materials and messages?
- \*Copy and paste the text of *I Live in Music* into Wordle ([www.wordle.com](http://www.wordle.com)) to create a visual collage of text. Use the formatting tools to customize your work.

As a concluding activity, students can create an individual or class poem of how they, too, live in music. Play music from the CD *Bearden Revealed* as children experience the way Bearden often worked. When time allows, have them take a sheet of paper and draw lines as they listen to music. This can be later used for a collage with photographs taken from the home and school community.

Journal or Blog Entry for Grades 3-5: How do you live in music? What sounds and rhythms do you hear each day? What do you like/dislike about them?

Lesson 3A: Stories and Art: November (Grades K-3)\*

Objective: To investigate the narrative element of Romare Bearden's art through the theme of trains

Procedure: I will begin by asking students about their experiences with travel and trains. Since our school is close to the Overbrook Train Station, I expect students to have experiences and/or observations. When do you ride on a train? Where are you going? Are all trains the same? Do trains do different things (carry passengers or freight, run local or express) Did you ever wave good-bye to someone going away on a train or welcome them back?

I will show students the opening illustration from *Me and Uncle Romie* when James and his cousin are having a "good train-watching day." We will then look at several collages depicting trains. Trains were a big part of Bearden's life and he used them in his art and wrote about them in comments. We will look at a slide show featuring *Daybreak Express*, *Sunset Limited* and *Moonlight Express* that tell stories about different times the trains ran and different times in Bearden's life. Students will have time to comment on what they notice about subjects, objects, and color. I will read them comments Bearden wrote about these pieces.<sup>19</sup>

Students will use *Kidspiration* to create a scene that includes the use of train. They will have the option of adding or recording text.

Journal or Blog Entry for Grade 3: What is your earliest memory of trains? Do you ever hear the train whistle and wonder where the train and the people are going? Why do you think some people prefer train to airplanes when traveling?

Lesson 3B: Stories and Art: November (Grades 4-5)\*

Objective: To investigate the narrative element of Romare Bearden's art through the theme of trains

Procedure: We will begin by reviewing the meaning of *collage* and introduce the term *photomontage* as a collage that utilizes photographs. Then we will look at *In Watching the Good Trains Go* (1964) to notice the use of photographs, cut out pictures, and colored paper to create the scene. Who are the people watching the train? Could Romare be in this picture? What is the location? Why is the man in the straw hat appearing sad?

Trains were real to Bearden. They were also metaphors. After looking at some of his works with trains from bookmarked websites, they will think of what these trains represented. (Possible responses: jobs, Great Migration, schedules, timekeepers, journeys, music makers, Underground Railroad, childhood pastime, hopes and dreams)

Bearden wrote this about one of his paintings: “Sometimes I remember my grandfather’s house, a garden with tiger lilies, my grandmother waving a white apron to passing trains on that trestle across the clay road.”

Journal or Blog Entry: Think of your experiences with trains, trolleys or subways. Write a brief memory about what was happening: where were you going, who was with you, was this something you did often, or was it only a one-time event? How did things look and sound? Students will add this piece to their blogs so they will be able to share, respond and compare experiences.

Lesson 4A: Let’s Walk the Block: December (Grades K-2)\*

Objective: Students will identify Bearden’s subjects and objects in *The Block*

Procedure: The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s website offers students an “Explore and Learn” Component. One section is an interactive presentation of Bearden’s *The Block* (1971).<sup>20</sup> After showing students the book, *The Block*, in which Bearden shows the sights and Langston Hughes gives us the sounds, they will then use the “Things to Do” section. This contains “Can You Find It?” which is an interactive activity to locate specific people, places and things in *The Block* (1971).<sup>21</sup>

We will conclude the lesson by brainstorming a list of people, places and things on the block that surrounds our school. I will demonstrate the use of *Kidspiration* to make lists of things mentioned and sort them into categories. We will use our Philadelphia block to compare and contrast to Bearden’s New York Block.

Lesson 4B: Let’s Walk the Block: December (Grades 3-5)\*

Objective: Students will learn more about the art and techniques of Bearden

Procedure: The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s website offers students an “Explore and Learn” Component. One section is an interactive presentation of Bearden’s *The Block*

(1971).<sup>22</sup>

Students will be invited to take the ‘Guided Tour’ of “Let’s Walk the Block” focusing on the theme of each of the six panels and concluding with an inventory of materials used and the imaginativeness of Bearden’s work. We will follow this with a guided discussion of first impressions: people, places, settings, themes, colors, and design.

For the next activity, students will use the ‘Look Closely’ section. As they begin to enjoy zooming in on panels and getting a closer look at the artwork, I will call attention to the quote that begins this section, and ask them to figure out what Bearden meant by “I x-rayed the facade with my imagination.” After sufficient time, I will ask them

- Is *The Block* a real city street?
- Are these real people and real places?
- What was Bearden’s purpose in creating this?
- Do you see any connection between the buildings and a piano keyboard?

To conclude the lesson, students will visit the “Things To Do” section inviting them to find selected people and objects in the collage: a barbershop, a church, animals, children playing, people sitting in front of building, etc.

Journal or Blog Entry: From our study of *The Block* what did you learn about Bearden’s collages?

- Why do you think he uses a wide variety of materials?
- How does he blend old and new images?

Lesson 5: Looking and Writing about Art: January (Grades 3-5)

Objective: To stimulate visual literacy through active viewing

Procedure: will model an activity for Looking and Writing about Art. Students will view *Early Carolina Morning* featured on page 7 of the book, *Romare Bearden: Collage of Memories*. A larger image will be projected for students to view as they participate in the activity

- What is the title and date of the work: *Early Carolina Morning* (1978)
- What is happening in the work: A black mother is seated with a child standing next to her: a cat is looking straight out at the viewer; the bright sun shows through a back window; the rounded shapes of the figures soften the right-angled geometry of the floor and walls. The attentiveness of the child, neatness of scene, mop on floor, and the dishes on the table tell the daily life of women.

- What parts of the collage seem realistic and what parts seem imagined? The mother talking to her child looks real but one hand is larger than other.
- What materials were used to create it: Some images are cut from magazines and others are from different colored paper.
- How is it related to Bearden's life: Bearden spent time with his mother and grandmother
- Can you make a connection to your experiences: My mother talks to me before I go to school each day.

Journal or Blog Entry: Select one of Bearden's collages and write a reflection using some of the guiding questions listed above.

#### Lesson 6: *Li'l Dan, the Drummer Boy: A Civil War Story*: February (Grades K-5)

Objective: To use this picture book written and illustrated by Bearden to explore themes in African American History. Teachers will adopt from the following activities according to the level of the students:

#### Procedures:

- Before reading, ask students what a drummer boy might be.
- View Photograph of an Unknown African American Drummer Boy (<http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/cwdoc060.html>)
- Read the story to class or have older students go into lower grades to read story
- Listen to the CD of the story (comes with book( narrated by Maya Angelou.
- Show pictures of Clinque (Slave Ship)
- Identify themes in story (hero, courage, slavery, war, freedom,)
- Discuss the situation of freed slaves after the Emancipation Proclamation
- Discuss how and why young African American children were involved in the Civil War
- Dan's talent was drumming. What other ways did children participate in the war
- Discuss Bearden's artistic style in this book: mixed media (water colors, markers and some collage.) use of bright colors and dark outlines, effect of white space, balance of text and paintings.

As a concluding activity, students will brainstorm a list of feelings and facts from the story including artistic style. Each student then selects 5-10 words (depending on grade level) to write a poem or paragraph. The original list will be put into *Wordle* to create a "word-collage" representing the book. This will be printed out and displayed along with student work.

For an extended activity, have students look at children's books by illustrators inspired by Bearden. The following are modern day African American illustrators using the collage style to interpret the black experience.

- *Uptown* by Bryan Collier (2000) A young boy gives his readers a picture book personal tour of Harlem. Collier's watercolor and collage illustrations are reminiscent of *The Block*.
- *Black Cat* and *Wings* by Christopher Myers. Student can find similar style and in these books with some of Bearden's collages. (And of course Bearden loved cats.)

Lesson 7: Romare Bearden Collage with *Comic Life*: March (Grades 4-5)\*

Objective: Students will learn more about the art and techniques of Bearden using technology to create a collage.

Procedure: Bearden used a wide variety of materials and techniques in his collages. If he were alive today, perhaps he would use the tools of technology. For this lesson we will begin using *Comic Life* to create a collage. I will demonstrate the basics of *Comic Life* and allow students time to explore the various panel layouts. Students will learn to do an advanced Google Search for Bearden images. They will learn to use the zoom in and zoom out tools to provide emphasis to an image. They will decide if they want their collage to be in the portrait or landscape mode. They will select from the following options and search for appropriate images.

For this activity students will have several options:

- Option 1: They may choose to create a collage that pieces together biographical information: picture/s of Romare, key places in his childhood and adult life, symbols/materials of his art, at least one example of his art work.
- Option 2: They may choose to create a collage according to theme: women, musicians, children, family gatherings, urban scenes, trains, gardens, steel mills, or religious figures.
- Option 3: They may choose to create a collage from historical depictions: Northern Migration, Harlem Renaissance, and/or Civil Rights Movement
- Option 4: They may come up with their own creative way to create a collage

Finished collages will be printed and displayed on a Bulletin Board.

Journal/Blog entry: : Students will reflect on the type of collage they created in *Comic Life* and post any questions or comments about Bearden's life of art.

For an extended activity, students will export their collage from *Comic Life* to iPhoto.



From there it will be available in other computer applications. We will divide the class into small groups (3-5 in each). Students will prepare short scripts to narrate the collages. They will use a storyboard organizer to plan the narration and learn to add credits for the sources of their images. Some will use iMovie and others will use GarageBand to complete the activity. They will add music from the CD *Bearden Revealed* for an added dimension. The movies will be burned to a DVD to share with other classes. The podcast will be published on the School District of Philadelphia's website. A sample script/storyboard might include:

- Meeting Romare
- Statement of Theme
- Message of Collages Chosen
- Fun Fact if (appropriate)
- Concluding Remark

#### Lesson 8: Art and Poetry: April (Grades K-5)

**Objective:** To explore how the words and images of two Harlem Renaissance artists work together to depict life experiences.

**Procedures:** I will begin by reviewing previous lesson using the online resources for "Let's Walk the Block." (Lesson 4 above) I will share several illustrations from the book and allow children time to comment.

As we read the poems, I will project the corresponding image on the screen. Students will have copies of the text for selected poems:

- Grades K-2: "Testimonial"
- Grades 3-4: "Juke Box Love Song" and "Stars"
- Grade 5: "To Be Somebody" and "Harlem Love Song"

As we read the poems and view the collages, I will ask students to share their thoughts on the connections between text and image. In what way do the poems magnify the collages with meaning? What themes are narrated in the poems? Do any of these occur in your neighborhood or on your block? Do the poems tell us more about individual people in the collages? We will use a variety of ways to read or perform the poems: individual, coral, or a dramatic rendition.

**Extended Activity;** Since remaining poems in *The Block* are a little mature for my students, I will have an another source for pairing painting and poetry. From the Book *Words with Wings: A Treasury of African American Poetry and Art* selected by Belinda Rochelle we will extend the lesson with

- Grades K-2: “My People” by Langston Hughes and *Into Bondage* by Aaron Douglas
- Grade 3: “Aunt Sue’s Stories” by Langston Hughes and *Sharecropper* by Elizabeth Callett; “Women” by Alice Walker and *Harriet Tubman* by William H. Johnson
- Grades 4-5: “We Alone” by Alice Walker and *The Banjo Lesson* by Henry O. Tanner; *Little Brown Baby*” by Paul Lawrence Dunbar and *Family* by Romare Bearden

For a closing activity, students will either select a poem and interpret it with their original drawing or select a painting and write their original verse. These works will be displayed on bulletin board. Students can use their poems for a Poetry Podcast – one for each grade.

#### Lesson 9: Collage Machine: May (Grades K-5)\*

Objective: To assemble a collage in the style of Bearden using the Collage Machine from the National Gallery of Art’s interactive Art Zone Procedure:

Procedure: I will introduce students to the National Gallery of Art ‘s Kids Art Zone. (<http://www.nga.gov/kids/zone/zone.htm>) I will give them time to explore the menu of images and experiment with the tools: resizing, rotating, layering and making transparent. They can also view samples from an archive. Students in Grades K-2 will use Collage Machine 1 and students in Grades 3-5 will use Collage Machine 11. Then will then have time to create their individual online collages. There is no option to save or print so students will need to learn how to take a screen shot and save it for printing purposes.

We will conclude by reading the directions for creating a real collage and examining the illustrated steps. This will be a segue for our final lesson.

#### Lesson 10 Putting It Together: June (Grades K-5)

Objective: To assemble a collage in the style of Bearden using multimedia materials.

Procedure: I will remind students how we often try to “Model the Master” as we write in the style of a poet or author. For this activity we will create a collage using the style and techniques of Romare Bearden. At each grade level, teachers will guide students to choose a theme for their art recalling and reviewing the collages that we viewed and discussed. Some possible choices are: city blocks, landscapes, gardens, trains, musical experiences, inside homes, particular room, and memories of time spent with relatives portrait of a special person in their lives, Black History themes or current events.

Students will sketch out an idea on paper with an understanding that their ideas may change and evolve as they work on them. They will create their collages on poster board (9x12 – half of a standard poster board) Students in lower grades will have some pre-cut shapes but will be encouraged to also tear the paper for the shape desired.

### Guidelines

- Cover poster board with rectangular shapes of color
- Refer to sketch for large areas (sky, grass, building)
- If there are people in the collage, put in a picture of a person's head or upper body
- If there are objects, cut out and include picture of train, musical instruments, table, etc...
- Move things around as you work. Think of balance and importance of size
- Use magic markers, scraps of material to fill in your space.
- Glue your pieces together – you can still add on – Bearden worked in layers.
- In the spirit of Bearden's leadership in the arts, older students can help with the lower grades.

When collages are completed, they will be displayed throughout the school. I will choose several from each grade to transform to digital versions (scan or take picture).. These will be used in a podcast, uploaded to the student's blogs or put into Voice Thread so that students can comment on their work, what they were thinking, why they choose their subject. And they can receive comments from others who are invited to comment.

The Home and School Association has offered to have an end-of-year celebration with cupcake and juice for each class. My seminar students will present a play adapted from *The Art of Romare Bearden-Screenplay*.<sup>23</sup>

### Reading List For Teachers

Bearden, R. (1993). *History of African-American artists from 1792 to the present*, New York; Pantheon Books. A good reference to understand the struggles and accomplishments of African American artists

Bernier, Celeste-Marie. (2008) *African American Visual Arts*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press. Bearden is one of the 21 artists that Bernier analyzes to document struggles and contributions of African American artists.

Fine, R. (2003). *The Art of Romare Bearden*. Washington: National Gallery of Art  
This book was published on the occasion of a major retrospective of Romare Bearden's work at the National Gallery of Art.

- L & S Video Inc. (1998) *Romare Bearden: Visual jazz*. N.Y. Chappaqua  
The collages of Romare Bearden are integrated with the artist's comments and footage from interviews. The documentary is narrated by Wynton Marsalis who draws interesting parallels between jazz and the art of Bearden. I would choose to use only snippets of it for the students.
- Moore, Carol, Director. (2004) *The Art of Romare Bearden - DVD* acted out by Glover, Danny, Morgan Freeman, Wynton Marsalis, and Emma Amos. Although the DVD is currently unavailable at Amazon, there is a script for a screenplay available at <<http://www.american-buddha.com/romarebearden.screen.htm>  
Accessed on 6/1/10. Older students can act it out or even rewrite the script for lower grades to understand.
- Schwartzman, Myron. (1999) *Romare Bearden: Celebrating the Victory*. New York, Franklin Watts. The author draws on his own conversations with Romare Bearden to help us understand the fascinating life of this African-American artist. Includes many anecdotal and personal stories.

### **For Students**

- Bearden, Romare. (2003) *Li'l Dan, the Drummer Boy: A Civil War Story*. New York: Simon and Schuster. This is the only children's book both written and illustrated by Romare Bearden. Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr. has written a personal introduction to the book, describing his own memories of the artist. On an accompanying CD, Dr. Maya Angelou reads the text. It tells the story of a little boy who follows the Union soldiers after they tell him he is no longer a slave.
- Bolden, Tonya. (2004) *Wake Up Our Souls: A Celebration of Black American Artists*. New York: Abrams books. The author presents a history of African American visual artists from slavery to the present.
- Greenberg, Jan. (2003) *Romare Bearden: Collage of Memories*. New York: Abrams, This beautifully illustrated picture-book biography tells highlights from Bearden's life and intersperses his collages throughout the engaging text.
- Hartfield, Claire (2003) *Me and Uncle Romie*. New York: Dial. A boy from North Carolina spends the summer in New York City visiting the neighborhood of Harlem, where his uncle, collage artist Romare Bearden, grew up. Includes a biographical sketch of Bearden and instructions on making a story collage.
- Hughes, Langston (with collage by Romare Bearden). (1995) *The Block*. New York: Viking, The poetry of Langston Hughes and the art of Romare Bearden express the vitality and excitement of an urban neighborhood

Metropolitan Museum of Art: *Romare Bearden: Let's Walk the Block*. Accessed at < [http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/the\\_block/bio.html](http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/the_block/bio.html) > on 6/1/10, The Metropolitan Museum of Art presents a narrated video that explores the artist's life and works.

National Gallery of Art. *The Art Zone*. Accessed at < (<http://www.nga.gov/kids/zone/zone.htm>) > on 6/1/10. This website offers students of all ages opportunities to experiment with different forms of art activities and projects.

Rochelle, Belinda. (2001) *Words with Wings: A Treasury of African American Poetry and Art*. New York: Harper Collins, Amistad. This beautiful collection pairs twenty poems by distinguished African-American poets with twenty works of art by acclaimed African-American artists.

Shange, Ntozake (paintings by Romare Bearden). (1999) *I Live in Music*. New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, This book is a lyrical poem that celebrates the language of music and is brought to life through the paintings of Romare Bearden.

Stephens, Pamela. (2007) *Dropping In on Romare Bearden*. Illinois: Crystal Productions. This book and DVD is a fictional interview of Romare Bearden and how he uses a variety of media to make his unique images. It is part of a series called "Dropping In" aimed at introducing elementary students to artists and their work.

## **Appendix/Standards**

### *Pennsylvania Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities*

Students will have opportunities to study and create works of art.

- 9.1.5 B Art Elements and Principals
- 9.2.5 Historical, cultural and social context of an individual
- 9.4.5 Media, technique, form, subject matter
- 9.4.5 Identify themes that communicate the artist's philosophy.

### *Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Science and Technology*

Students will use a variety of technological and information resources to gather and synthesize information, and to create and communicate knowledge

- 3.6 Technology Education (B)
- 3.7 Technological Devices (C, D, E)
- 3.8 Science, Technology and Human Endeavors (A, C)

*Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening*  
Students will have opportunities to read and understand essential content of informational texts and documents; use, understand and evaluate a variety of media; and use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes

- Learning to Read Independently (A, B)
- Reading Critically in all Content Areas (A, B, C)
- Types of Writing (A, B, C)
- 1.6 Speaking and Listening (A, D, E)
- 1.8 Research (A, B)

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<sup>1</sup> Schwartzman, 24

<sup>2</sup> I Schwartzman, 34

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 30-31

<sup>4</sup> The Art of Romare Bearden A Resource for Teachers. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. <<http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/bearden/glance1.shtm>

<sup>5</sup> Schwartzman 53

<sup>6</sup> Greenberg, 33

<sup>7</sup> Schwartzman 81

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 88

<sup>10</sup> The Art of Romare Bearden: National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Schwartzman, 29-30

<sup>13</sup> Bernier, 175

<sup>14</sup> NPR interview. "The Art of Romare Bearden" (9/14/03) accessed at <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1428038> > on 3/22/10

<sup>15</sup> Ralph Ellison, "Introduction," in Romare Bearden: Paintings and Projections (Albany, NY: The Art Gallery at the State University of New York, 1968), unpaginated.

<sup>16</sup> Greenburg, Collage of Memories, p44

<sup>17</sup> Directions on Microsoft Website for Educators . Accessed at <https://www.microsoft.com/Education/TimelinesWord.msp>>

<sup>18</sup> ReadWriteThink. Accessed at <<http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/timeline>> on 6/1/10.

<sup>19</sup> Schwartzman, 103-125

<sup>20</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art. Accessed at [http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/the\\_block/index\\_menu.html](http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/the_block/index_menu.html) on 6/1/10

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Moore, Carol, Director. Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2003. The Art of Romare Bearden- A Screenplay. Accessed at

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<<http://www.american-buddha.com/romarebearden.screen.htm>> on 6/1/10.