

# Arts Assessment For Learning

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VISUAL ARTS — 7<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

## RESOURCES: COLLAGE - SELF-PORTRAIT UNIT

### ART MAKING

The students study the life of Romare Bearden and learn the art of collage making.

**Lesson I.** Who was Romare Bearden, and what is a collage? With slides the life of the artist is examined. His collages are discussed and the technique of collage explained.

### Background

#### Romare Bearden (1911-1988)

Romare Bearden was born in Charlotte, North Carolina into an educated, middle-class African-American family. In 1914 the family joined the Great Migration of African-Americans from their home in the south to the northeast. Like other African Americans the Beardens were eager to leave behind the injustices of the Jim Crow laws which restricted their voting rights and opportunities in education, employment and landownership. The Beardens settled in the Harlem section of Manhattan at the beginning of what was later known as the Harlem Renaissance.

In the 1920's Harlem became the center of great cultural and intellectual development. An unprecedented outpouring of literature, the arts and music made Harlem the hub of black culture. Because his mother was the editor of a popular African-American newspaper (The Chicago Defender), the young Romare was privy to the world of the black intelligentsia. Their home became a meeting place for artists, writers and jazz musicians. It was then that the young Bearden developed his interest in jazz, which would remain a life-long passion.

Romare spent summer vacations with his grandparents at their boarding house in the industrial city of Pittsburgh. Bearden absorbed the images of factories and laborers and was later to incorporate them, along with the rural images of Charlotte and the city scenes of NY into his work. Bearden graduated from NYU in 1935 and became a social worker while studying art at night at the Art Student's League. He married a dancer and choreographer whose family origins were based in St Martin.

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As an artist he became a founding member of ***Spiral***, a group of African-American artists who met to discuss civil rights. It was with them that he conceived the idea of doing a collective collage based on the African-American experience. Since he alone was interested, he proceeded to do his first collage. He found that the medium suited him well. His collages were to become his great contribution to American. It is in his collages that his artistic spirit found a unique voice and he continued to work in the medium for the rest of his life. It is for them that he is ultimately remembered. His work evolved with the years, later incorporating images of the Caribbean from his experiences in St Martin, where he bought a house and spent much of his later years. Through his life the images of Charlotte, Pittsburgh and Harlem remained vital sources of inspiration to his unique and fertile imagination.

**Vocabulary:** Collage, The Great Migration, Jim Crow laws, Harlem Renaissance, renaissance, jazz, rural, innovative, evolved, privy, intelligentsia

**Lesson II-Technique-** Review of the tools and techniques used in collages.

**Homework** -Write a story that will be illustrated by collages. Students may work in pairs.

**Lesson III-** Storyboard-Create a storyboard deciding what text and images will go on each page.

**Lesson IV-Collage-**Develop main characters in collage and make sure sufficient supply of material needed is available. Begin collage illustrations. **Homework-**Type text for book.

**Lesson V-Collage-**Complete collage pages and assemble the books.

**Literacy in the Visual Art:** Students write their own books.

**Making Connections through the Arts:** Knowing something about the life of Bearden, students examine the slides and make observations citing details to substantiate their opinions. Who are the people? What are they thinking/feeling? What are the other images in the work? What is the artist telling us about the world in which these people live? What is the artist's point of view?

**Community and Cultural Resources:** The students visit the Romare Bearden show at the Whitney Museum.

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**Careers and Life-Long Learning in Visual Arts:** A professional photographer, Fernando Souto, addresses the students as part of the *Lecture in the Arts Series*. Mr. Souto shows examples of his photo-collages and explains his technique and inspiration. He tells the students how he became a photographer and the steps he took academically and professionally to make his career successful. He stresses timetables, deadlines and self-motivation. Mr. Souto also discusses his upcoming book on cowboys.