

National Art Gallery of The Bahamas

Lesson: Bahamian Identity



The Immigrants No.3 (c1990), Maxwell Taylor, artist's proof woodcut print on paper, 32 x 48. Part of the National Collection.

**Adaptable to all age groups*

Overview:

The overarching theme of storytelling through art will continue in this lesson. Piracy and the Eleutheran Adventurers will be touch on and artists' response to the arrival of the Loyalists, slavery and emancipation through their work will be explored and discussed. Through group and individual projects students will explore symbolism as an important component of visual narratives.

Objectives:

Students will:

- Recognise symbolism as a storytelling tool.
- Identify symbolism in the work of selected artists.
- Create an individual work that communicates their interpretation of historical events in this period through symbolism.
- Reflect on the work they have created.

Content:

- **Symbolism**- an artistic and poetic movement or style using symbolic images and indirect suggestion to express mystical ideas, emotions, and states of mind.
- **Colonialism**- the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.
- **Migration**- Human migration is the movement by people from one place to another with the intention of settling permanently in the new location. The movement is often over long distances and from one country to another, but internal migration is also possible; indeed, this is the dominant form globally.
- **Piracy**- the practice of attacking and robbing ships at sea.
- **Eleutheran Adventurers**- a group of Puritans who sailed from Bermuda in search of religious freedom and settled on Eleuthera in the 1640s.
- **Loyalists**- American colonists who remained loyal to the British Crown during the American Revolutionary War

- **Slavery**- refers to a condition in which individuals are owned by others, who control where they live and at what they work. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade took place between the 1400s and 1800s and was responsible for the forced migration of 12-15 million people from Africa to the Americas.
 - **Emancipation**- any effort to procure economic and social rights, political rights or equality, often for a specifically disenfranchised group, or more generally, in discussion of such matters. Slaves in The Bahamas were emancipated in 1834.
 - **Obeah**- Obeah, which has been defined as a mixture of European superstitions, African (especially Yoruban) religion, and Judeo-Christian beliefs, retains similarities to the voodoo of Haiti, the Santeria of Cuba and Brazil, and the Shango of Trinidad. Steeped in the mythic traditions of West Africa, it is an important part of Bahamian national heritage. Magic is divided into black and white spheres, with white magic being the more potent and the less evil.
 - **Junkanoo**-The true origin of Junkanoo is unknown. However, its roots can be traced back to West Africa. The most popular legend states that the name originated from John Canoe, an African tribal chief who demanded the right to celebrate with his people even after being brought to the West Indies in slavery. During pre -and post -slavery days, Christmas was the greatest time for celebration in the Bahamas, and Junkanoo was the highlight.
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Complementary colours

Age group: 5-7 years

Discussion:

Students review the story of the Eleutheran Adventurers and discuss those things that made them happy or sad while on their journey to The Bahamas. They also discuss migration in the past and the way people move between countries now (reference Max Taylor). Students look at the work of Blue Curry and discuss the symbolism used in the work to tell the story of the straw market fire. Students identify and discuss complementary colours. They participate in a brief exercise where they fill in circles using the colours discussed. They are asked to place complementary colours side by side.

Activity:

Students draw a sketch that illustrates the journey of the Eleutheran Adventurers to the Bahamas. They then choose two elements from their sketch to exaggerate. They are reminded to choose those parts of their sketch that will best communicate their stories e.g. if they want to show that the day is really hot, they can make the sun unusually large. Students draw the new sketch on watercolour paper then paint it using complementary colours. They are asked to paint items in their drawings with unusual colours e.g. paint the sky orange instead of blue or the sun blue instead of yellow.

Materials:

- Exercise sheets
- Markers
- Watercolour paper
- Acrylic paint
- Paintbrushes
- Palette
- Water container

**Remember to be flexible with your students and allow them to use different materials based on their needs. Encourage them to use materials in unconventional ways.*

References:



The Immigrants No.3 (c1990), Maxwell Taylor, artist's proof woodcut print on paper, 32 x 48. Part of the National Collection.



Bay Street on Fire (2002), Blue Curry, alternative photography, 24 x 30. Part of the National Collection.

Story Quilts

Age group: 8-11 years

Discussion:

Students review the journey of African slaves from their countries of origin to the new world. They discuss some of the traditions of West African countries and the eventual emancipation of slaves. Students focus on the work of John Beadle and Lillian Blades. They identify the symbols that the artists use in their work to tell their story.

Activity:

Using Lillian Blades' work as inspiration students will create "story quilts" that tell the story of the African slaves who were brought to The Bahamas from their days as free men and women to emancipation. Students will each be given 7-8 canvas blocks of various sizes. They are encouraged to use a variety of materials to narrate a different part of these stories on each block. Students are asked to think about ways to use symbols to tell their stories. The blocks are then assembled to create a "story quilt."

Materials:

- Small canvas blocks of varying sizes (alternatives: cardboard)
- Fabric scraps
- Glue (Elmer's glue & glue sticks)
- Glue gun
- Acrylic paint
- Paintbrushes
- Pencils
- String
- Scissors
- Coloured paper scraps
- Sand and shells

**Remember to be flexible with your students and allow them to use different materials based on their needs. Encourage them to use materials in unconventional ways.*

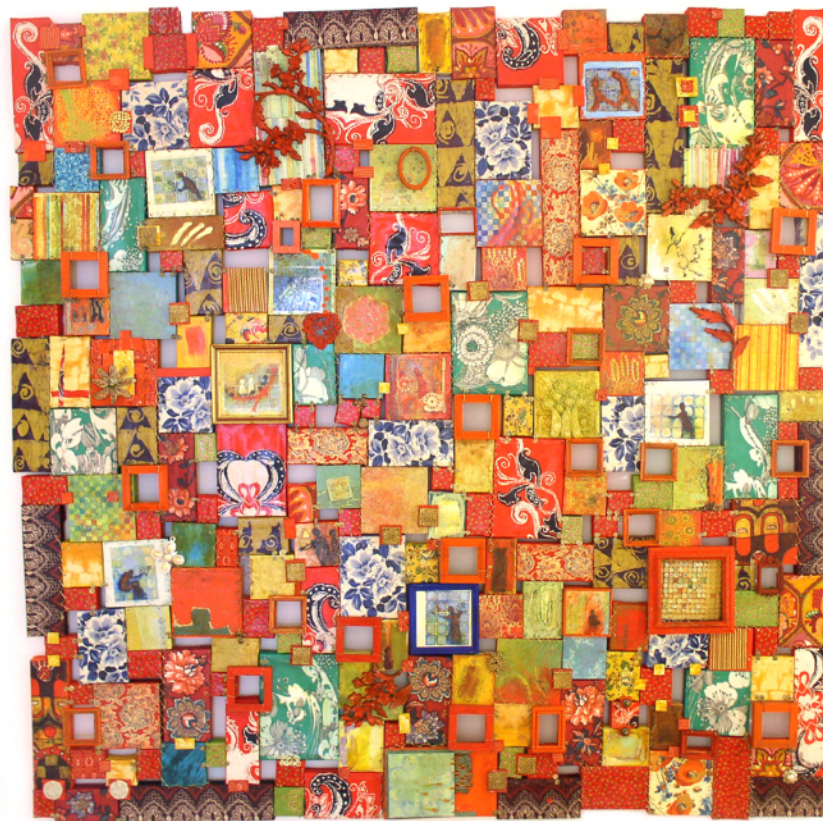


Digital adaptation: Using Microsoft Word or other digital software, students can create "story quilts" by assembling images and symbols of different sizes to mimic Blades' work.

References:



Conjure Woman (1990), John Beadle, Oil on canvas, 36"x30". D'Aguilar Art Foundation.



Things to come (2003), Lillian Blades, Mixed media assemblage, 78" x 78" x 3". Part of the National Collection.

African Masks

Age group: 12-14 years and 15-18 years

Discussion:

Students discuss ceremonial masks from West Africa, the materials used to make them and their purpose. They are asked to pay particular attention to the symbols used on the masks. They also discuss the obeah and its relationship to West African traditions. Students look at contemporary Junkanoo headpieces and masks and identify similarities with traditional African masks. They review the history of Junkanoo and its origins.

Activity:

Students design and construct a mask that blends designs used in West African masks with those of Junkanoo. The masks are constructed using cardboard and organic found material. Students are encouraged to use symbols in their designs to tell the story of Junkanoo.

Materials:

- Cardboard
- Glue (Elmer's glue & glue sticks)
- Glue gun
- Acrylic paint
- Paintbrushes
- Palette
- Bowls for water
- Tape
- Found organic materials (dried leaves, shells, sand, coconut bark etc.)

**Remember to be flexible with your students and allow them to use different materials based on their needs. Encourage them to use materials in unconventional ways.*

References:



Conjure Woman (1990), John Beadle, Oil on canvas, 36"x30". D'Aguilar Art Foundation.



Emanon/not known (New Obeah Series) (1999), John Beadle, mixed media, 18" x 12". Part of the Dawn Davies Collection.



Mass Transportation (1998), John Beadle, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 71”x53”. Part of the National Collection.

Links to other resources:

- [D'Aguilar Art Foundation: John Beadle Biography & History](#)
- [From the Collection: John Beadle's "Mass Transportation"](#)
- [Lillian Blades' website](#)

