

# FOUND: Vernacular Art & Gee's Bend Quilts

## Gadsden Arts Center & Museum

### Standards-Correlated Lesson Plans

Featuring Art Lessons on **Thornton Dial** and Florida Artists:  
**Purvis Young, O.L. Samuels, and Ruby Williams**

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Dear Educators,

These lesson plans were created by the Gadsden Arts Center & Museum in conjunction with the exhibition FOUND: Vernacular Art & Gee's Bend Quilts. Please use these tools to teach students about the artists in the exhibition, and about Vernacular Art, a unique genre of art in which Southern American artists, primarily African-American artists, were inspired to create art based on their lives, histories, communities, and struggles.

The Gadsden Arts Center & Museum's Permanent Collection is available to view at [www.gadsdenarts.org](http://www.gadsdenarts.org) and Gadsden Arts will gladly send quality image files to teachers for use in the classroom. Additionally, please contact Education Director Anissa Ford to schedule a guided gallery tour of the exhibitions ([anissa.ford@gadsdenarts.org](mailto:anissa.ford@gadsdenarts.org) or 850-627-5023).

Thank you,  
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**Objectives:** Students will create personal works of art using imagery to narrate a significant personal experience.

**Time Needed:** 1 class period

**Standards:** VA.K.C.1.1, VA.K.O.2.1, VA.1.S.1.3, VA.2.C.1.1,

**Materials:** paper, colored pencils, crayons, paint, markers

**Featured artwork:** *I Am Ruby* by Sylvia McCardel Thomasson in our studio or Ruby C. Williams, *Piano Playing Cow I Give Better Buttermilk* in the classroom.

**Directions:**

1. Introduce students to the concept of Vernacular Art and show them examples of work. Explain that vernacular artists created art in response to their environment— their home, their community, their family—and the experiences they shared with each.
2. Read *I Am Ruby* by Sylvia McCardel Thomasson to the students, emphasizing how artist Ruby C. Williams used images of people, places, and things from her personal life in her illustrations.
3. Ruby C. Williams often used images of animals, produce, family and farms to illustrate her produce stand signs because they represent her life, her surroundings, and the things she enjoys.
4. Ask students to think about a personal experience or their personal environment and think about the people, places, and things involved. Then, using the materials provided, ask students to create their own illustration that represents their environment and the things they enjoy in a similar manner to Williams' illustrations.
5. Have students create a series of 5 illustrations and incorporate a few lines of text to create a small storybook, like *I Am Ruby*.
6. When everyone is done, have the students read their stories to the rest of the class.

**Objectives:** Students will create personal works of art using found materials in order to compose their own assemblage.

**Time Needed:** 1-2 class periods

**Standards:** VA.3.S.2.1, VA.4.S.1.1, VA.4.S.2.1, VA.5.S.2.3

**Materials:** found materials, glue, cardboard/foam core, paint

**Featured artwork:** Thornton Dial, Sr., *Big Black Bear Trying to Survive* or Thornton Dial, Sr., *The Spirit of Ella James Prince*, 1995

**Directions:**

1. Introduce students to the concept of Vernacular Art. Show students examples of the work and explain that each artist is creating art in response to their environment and often with objects found in that environment.

Thornton Dial, Sr. was known for taking found objects and merging them to create abstracted and unique compositions. He would then paint them all one color resulting in something new entirely.

2. Discuss with students what "found objects" are- the types of materials they can use that would be unconventional. Discuss the types of materials used and how the artists used them to add texture to a composition.
3. Instruct them to ask their parents for help collecting them around the house. Each student should bring approximately 10 objects for their assemblage in addition to a piece of cardboard or foam core. Teachers should provide a list of appropriate objects.

Found Objects to consider: toilet paper rolls, yarn, twigs, buttons, fabric, paper, cardboard, plastic, fake flowers, wood, jewelry, aluminum

4. Students will arrange their objects and glue them down onto their cardboard or foam core. Students should be instructed to think abstractly when designing the composition of their assemblage, considering the shape of objects as well as their textures and how they work together.
5. Allow the glue to dry. Then, have students choose 2-3 colors and paint over the entire assemblage.
6. When the students complete their artwork, have them present it to the class and describe what the art means or represents to them, explaining their choices in composition.

**Objectives:** Students will design and construct their own mythical creature and write a story of existence to accompany its creation.

**Time Needed:** 2-3 class periods

**Standards:** VA.68.H.3.2, VA.68.O.1.3

**Materials:** Foundational-cardboard, toilet paper/paper towel rolls, construction paper, foam core, masking tape, newspaper, water, glue, brush, bowl. Other-paint, glitter, found materials.

**Featured artwork:** O.L. Samuels, *Godzilla*

**Directions:**

1. Introduce students to the concept of Vernacular Art. Show students examples of the work and explain that each artist is creating art in response to their environment and often with objects found in that environment.

O. L. Samuels works mostly with found wooden objects like tree trunks and old furniture. He later paints his sculptures with a mix of paint, glitter, sawdust and glue. Each imaginary, dreamlike figure is given a story of existence by the artist, who favors animals or anamorphic sculptures.

Discuss Samuels' work, the materials he used, and how he creates his art from reclaimed wood.

2. Instruct students to ask their parents for help collecting a few "found objects" from around the house. Each student should try to bring 5-10 objects with which to adorn their sculpture.

Objects to consider: yarn, toothpicks, buttons, beads, glue gun, clay, sequins, pushpins, yarn, costume jewelry, rope.

3. Using foundational materials, have students design and construct their imaginary creature. Once the framework is complete, have them cover the sculpture with papier-mâché. Allow to dry for one day. If it needs a second layer, repeat the papier-mâché process and allow to dry an additional day.
4. Have students decorate and style their sculpture, adorning it with paint, glitter, and their found objects.
5. After the sculpture is complete, have students write a story of origination for the creature, approximately 1-2 pages in length, and have them share it with the class!

**Objectives:** Students will collect photographs of six works while at the gallery and create a journal in which they will discuss the artwork, how it made them feel, and create reciprocating art.

**Time Needed:** 2 class periods

**Standards:** VA.68.S.1.4, VA.68.S.2.3

**Materials:** composition notebook, photographs of six artworks from the exhibit, crayons, paint, markers, colored pencils.

**Featured artwork:** Selected by students from the exhibition

**Directions:**

1. Introduce students to the basic concepts of artistic formal elements, symbolism, visual narratives, and abstract expressionism.
2. Introduce students to the concept of Vernacular Art. Show students examples of the work and explain that each artist is creating art in response to their environment and often with objects found in that environment.
3. Students will become familiar with the work on display through a guided gallery tour. After viewing all the art, students will take and print out photographs of six of the exhibited artworks of their choosing (with a minimum of 8 different artists if they choose more than one work of art per artist).
4. Students will use a composition notebook as a reflective journal, chronicling their experience with the exhibit. Within their composition notebook, they will create separate sections and adhere their ten photographs within these sections.
5. After separating the photographs, students will research their chosen artists and write about their life, artistic inspirations, and personal struggles (students may use exhibit catalog if needed).
6. Using the biographical information gathered from both the exhibit tour and their own research, students will then discuss each artwork formally using accurate artistic terms, how it made them feel, and why they selected it.
7. Students will then create their own artwork in the journal, expressing their reaction to the piece, a personal experience that relates to that of the artist, or any other connection they experienced while viewing or researching the artwork. This will be done for each of the six pieces.
8. Students will then share their journals and the experience with the class.

**Objectives:** Students will be assigned a featured Florida artist and read their biography, focusing on their inspirations and artistic style. They will then write their own short autobiography and create a corresponding artwork in the style of their assigned artist.

**Time Needed:** 1-2 class periods

**Standards:** VA.912.O.2.2, VA.912.C.1.3, VA.912.O.1.3

**Materials:** craft paper roll, drawing pad, pencils, paint, glitter, glue, colored pencils, markers, crayons, pastels, paint brushes

**Featured artwork:** Selected by students from the exhibition

**Directions:**

1. Introduce students to the concept of Vernacular Art. Show students examples of the work and explain that each artist is creating art in response to their environment and often with objects found in that environment.
2. Students will be assigned one of the six Florida artist exhibiting within *FOUND*. They will receive a brief biography on the artist and their artistic career. The student will carefully review this information and consider how it presents itself in the art produced by the artist.
3. The student will then write an autobiography about their life and their inspirations, approximately one to two pages in length.
4. Adopting the style and method of their assigned artist, they will create original artwork that reflects their own personal life and environment.
5. If a student received an artist that works in sculpture, such as O.L. Samuels, they may choose to create it or draw a largescale likeness of the sculpture.
6. Students will present their artwork and autobiographical essay to the class for critique.

**Objectives:** Students will study the art of Purvis Young and select a social issue that concerns society or their community. They will create a small scale mural to illustrate the problem or their reaction to the problem.

**Time Needed:** 1-2 class periods

**Standards:** VA.912.H.1.1, VA.912.O.3.2 , VA.912.H.2.4

**Materials:** poster board, markers, paint, crayons, colored pencils, pencils, paint brushes

**Featured artwork:** Purvis Young, Untitled, Organization of Black American Culture, *Wall of Respect*, O'Brien Thiele and Miranda Bergman, *Culture Contains the Seed of Resistance that Blossoms into the Flower of Liberation* or other activist murals

**Directions:**

1. Introduce students to the concept of Vernacular Art. Show students examples of the work and explain that each artist is creating art in response to their environment and often with objects found in that environment.
2. Purvis Young lived his whole life in the Overtown neighborhood of Miami, FL, an area that witnessed great urban struggle during the height of the Civil Rights movement. He painted images of urban life and social injustice and created a mural capturing the African American experience in the South in Overtown's Goodbread Alley.

Discuss Young's background in class and how he used art to express his displeasure with social vice and self-destruction. Show samples of his work.

3. Have each student select a social issue, whether on a national, state, or community scale, about which they feel strongly. Have them research the issue, taking notes and making comments about why they selected this issue, what the debating sides are connected to this issue, what is being done about it, and how it affects them on a personal level.
4. Once their research is complete, students will create a poster board sized mural reflecting their feelings on the issue, whether they illustrate the problem itself, their reaction to the problem, or the parties involved.
5. Have the students write a short paragraph describing the work and why they chose this issue and have them present it along with their completed artwork to the class.

