

Teaching *Who Inspires You?*

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

(one 45 minute class period)

Before Viewing

Begin a discussion about objects and meaning. You may wish to share a personally significant object with your students (a rolling pin that belonged to your grandmother, a dog collar from a special pet, a baseball from a game in which you played very well, etc.). Invite students to tell about objects in their own lives that have special personal significance.

Note with your students that these objects mentioned look like any other of their type. Their significance has little to do with how they look; they are significant because they are connected to a person or an event. The objects have histories. And they represent ideas—family, relationships, accomplishment, for example.

Explain that in the video segment they are about to see, they will learn about some artists who created artworks by combining objects and materials. Invite students to note the various materials used by the artists. Also suggest that they pay close attention to objects that get combined with materials in the artworks they will see.

Finally, explain that as they view the video, there will be a focus on the idea of Inspiration. They will be introduced to Simon Rodia, an artist who lived and worked in Los Angeles in the past, and three generations of women artists--Betye Saar, her daughter, Alison Saar, and Alison's daughter, Maddy Leaser. Invite students to pay attention to who or what serves as an inspiration for each of these artists.

Have students view the segment in the Craft in America INSPIRATION episode.

After Viewing

First, invite students to respond in general to the video. What did they find especially interesting? What questions do they have?

Discuss the following:

- Have students recall the artists featured in the video. Who was Simon Rodia? What did he create? What kinds of materials did he use?
- Who is Betye Saar? What kind of artworks does Betye Saar create? What materials and objects does the artist use in her artwork? Who or what inspires Betye Saar? How do you know?
- Who is Alison Saar? What kind of artworks does Alison Saar create? What materials and objects does she use in her artworks? Who or what inspires Alison Saar? How do you know?
- Who is Maddy Leaser? What kind of artworks does Maddy Leaser create? What materials and objects does she use in her work? Who or what inspires Maddy Leaser? How do you know?



CRAFT IN AMERICA

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Recall with students that they learned about Betye and Alison Saar, both contemporary artists living in Los Angeles. The video presented the artists as they discussed the inspiration for their conceptually rich works of art and the messages they convey. One such inspiration is Simon Rodia whose work, the Watts Towers, had a great influence on Betye Saar's artmaking. After seeing Rodia's work, Betye was inspired by the materials that Simon Rodia used, the broken dishes, sea shells, rusty tools—all pressed into cement to create spires. Alison is also inspired by Rodia, but more importantly, she is inspired by her mother, her grandmother, and the many other strong African American women in her family and community. At one point in the video, she refers to them as "intense ladies."

Recall the idea of Inspiration. Ask the following questions:

- Who or what inspires you? Where do you get your ideas for your artwork? Is there someone, an event or other artists that inspire you? In what ways do family members or artists inspire you? Perhaps materials or objects offer you inspiration. Explain that artists have different sources of inspiration and that they might be inspired by different cultural traditions, family, and other artists.

Share the following comment made by Alison Saar.

"Both of my parents were artists. I think my own work falls in between the influences between both of them." – Alison Saar

Hand out the Worksheet 1: Investigating the Art of Alison Saar. Students may work in pairs or small groups to address the questions. Students may return to the video and/or go online to find examples of the artist's sculptures. Ask students to share their responses to the questions about Alison Saar's art.

Ask them to consider the following quote by the artist as they discuss her work.

"I make art about my African American ancestry." – Alison Saar

- What does the artist mean by this statement? Why is her African American ancestry important to her?

Help students understand why the artists select the materials they use in their work and that they choose materials purposefully.

Help students understand that the artists often begin with an idea, are inspired by family, events, or history, and allow for ideas to change during the process of working.

Explain how each artist uses different materials, techniques, and processes for their artmaking. Discuss Alison and Betye Saar and show examples of their installations and assemblages. Discuss how they both work with found objects and symbolism.



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Studio Production

(three or more 45 minute class periods)

You may wish to discuss and show examples of other artists who use found objects in their works of art. Possible examples include artists Ulla-Stina Wikander, Shih Chieh Huang, and Howard A. Jones.

Have students collect various found objects and materials to use in their artwork. They may choose to bring in objects and materials from home and/or the natural environment. Have them look through the materials gathered and discuss the objects and materials and their possible significance or symbolism.

In their sketchbook, have students sketch possible ideas for their project. Artists put a lot of thought into how they want to organize their artworks. Investigate ways to arrange/create your artwork and record the process and techniques you investigated.

Remind students that their artwork might feature something they care about deeply, and that it conveys a message inspired by someone or something. Suggest that they return to one of the artists' websites and pay attention to the ideas the artists have explored in their artworks. Ask students to brainstorm with each other for ideas.

Once they've settled on an idea, have students sketch their idea with notes about how their object and what materials will convey a message or idea. Encourage students to explore possible ways to construct their artwork and to help each other determine the best way to create it.

Tell students they must use at least one found object as well as different materials. This could be fabric swatches, metal, plastic, newspapers, magazines, book illustrations, images from the internet, photographs, sticks, stones, beads—again, the possibilities are open. Provide materials and tools.

Reflection

Engage students in a discussion or have them write in their sketchbooks about their completed artworks. Are they pleased with their completed work? Why or why not? Do they believe that the object(s) and materials contribute to its meaning?

Have students write an artist's statement to accompany the display of their artworks. Suggest they include the source of inspiration for their artwork. Have students consider how they might display their artworks as a class.

You may also invite students to work in pairs to discuss each other's story/message. Pairs should discuss what it is like to create artwork using found objects and the materials, techniques, and tools they used.



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Extensions

Students may investigate the work of other artists, discovering their inspirations and materials used in their art and the meaning behind the materials and designs. Are their artworks autobiographical, or tell a story? Who or what inspired the artist?

Assessment

By the end of this lesson students should be able to:

- Carefully describe and discuss possible meaning in some artworks by Alison Saar.
- Discuss similarities and differences among materials, techniques, and processes for creating three-dimensional artworks using found objects and materials.
- Choose objects and materials to create an artwork that sends a message or conveys meaning.