

**Created and written by Professor Donna F. St. John**  
**Editor – Professor Kristen Morrison**

## **Kendall College of Art and Design**

**Grades:** 9 - 12

**Time:** 5 - 6 days - 60 minute sessions

### **Outcome Statement:**

The various components of this unit will challenge the students to develop the skills and knowledge associated with art symbolism and art as a political/social action statement. Students will be exposed to symbolism found not only in art but also in music, literature throughout history.

Students will apply these different symbolism areas into a three-dimensional assemblage piece that emphasizes who they are, what they stand for, or what they believe in regarding social justice. The assemblage is a statement comprised of personal symbols inviting the viewer to decipher.

### **Objectives:**

- Students will properly define the term *art symbolism*.
- Students will understand that artists use their artistic voices to create artwork that promotes social justice and equality.
- Students will understand the connections art symbolism has to music, literature, and history curriculum.
- Students will apply the elements and principles of design when constructing a three-dimensional assemblage piece.
- Students will develop a project focusing on emphasis, rhythm, and movement and a social injustice issue of their choosing.
- Students will properly write a short descriptive written summary on personal or culturally shared symbolism.
- Students will identify how symbols and schemas are used throughout history.
- Have the opportunity to complete the “Fundred Dollar” template to contribute to Mel Chin’s Operation PayDirt.

### **Visual Art Standards:**

ART.VA.I.HS.1 Apply acquired knowledge and skills to the creative problem solving process. (*21st Century Skills: I.4, II.2*)

ART.VA.I.HS.2 Intentionally use art materials and tools when applying techniques and skills to communicate ideas. (*21st Century Skills: I.6, III.3, III.6*)

ART.VA.I.HS.3 Demonstrate understanding of organizational principles and methods to solve specific visual arts problems. (*21st Century Skills: I.4, II.5, III.3*)

ART.VA.II.HS.1 Identify, define problems, and reflect upon possible visual solutions.

*(21st Century Skills: I.2, I.3, I.4)*

ART.VA.II.HS.4 Apply knowledge and skill to symbolize the essence of an idea.

ART.VA.II.HS.8 Explore social and global issues through the application of the creative process. *(21st Century Skills: III.7, III.8, III.9, III.10)*

ART.VA.IV.HS.2 Describe the functions and explore the meaning of specific art objects within varied cultures, times, and places. *(21st Century Skills: I.3, I.6, III.2, III.7)*

ART.VA.IV.HS.3 Analyze the correlation between art, history, and culture throughout time. *(21st Century Skills: I.6, III.1, III.2, III.7, III.8, III.9, III.10)*

ART.VA.IV.HS.4 Use knowledge of art and design history to inform personal artwork. *(21st Century Skills: I.1, I.3, II.5, II.7, III.3, III.7)*

ART.VA.V.HS.8 Identify the role visual arts play in enhancing civic responsibility and community.

*(21st Century Skills: I.3, I.6, III.2, III.4, III.7, III.9)*

### **Integrated Standards:**

CG4 Conflict, Cooperation, and Security

*Analyze the causes and challenges of continuing and new conflicts by describing local and global attempts at peacekeeping, security, democratization, and administering international justice and human rights*

CG3 Patterns of Global Interactions

*Define the process of globalization and evaluate the merit of this concept to describe the contemporary world by analyzing distribution of wealth and resources and efforts to narrow the inequitable distribution of resources*

CG2 Resources

*Explain the changes over the past 50 years in the use, distribution, and importance of natural resources (including land, water, energy, food, renewable, non-renewable, and flow resources) on human life, settlement, and interactions by describing and evaluating*

- social, political, economic, and environmental consequences of the development, distribution, and use of natural resources
- major changes in networks for the production, distribution, and consumption of natural resources
- the impact of humans on the global environment

L.A. 11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

### **Universal Design for Learning:**

#### **Multiple Intelligences:**

**Kinesthetic** – Students will manipulate 3-Dimensional objects to convey a political/social justice statement

**Intrapersonal** – Students will be given the opportunity to consider what they would personally change in the world, if they had the chance

**Visual** – Students will be shown a variety of assemblage

**Naturalist** – Discussion and reflection on the theme of protecting the environment

**Existential:** Students will have the opportunity to help make a political/social

statement through Operation PayDirt and create an assemblage piece that presents a social injustice issue

**Musical/Linguistic:** “Scarborough Fair” by Simon and Garfunkel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnbLRCIJKbE> and Waiting On the World To Change - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REqz9D7OWZE> , reading of The Giving Tree

**Interpersonal** - Students will be given a copy of the Bill Of Rights to consider what is meant by equal rights for all

### **Mind Styles:**

**Abstract Random:** Students will be greeted at the door with the written lyrics of the song Scarborough Fair while the song is playing in the room.

**Concrete Sequential:** Power Point on assemblage and social justice. Students will be given a periodical of current events and a list of social injustices in the world. Topics can range from animal rights, human rights, environmental topics, etc.

### **Anticipatory Set:**

Scarborough Fair written lyrics and song playing as they enter the classroom with the words “What is the meaning of this song?” written on the blackboard.

### **Material & Supplies:**

- Pencils
- Colored Pencils or Markers
- Fundred Dollar template
- Periodicals on current events
- Scraps of paper
- Large variety of objects to be used for the assemblage pieces
- Variety of cigar boxes, wood drawers or containers
- Adhesives
- Bill of Rights
- Music – Scarborough Fair (both song and written lyrics)
- Spices, foods that are symbolic (pretzels)
- Children’s book - The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstei
- Visual examples of symbolic and assemblage artwork (possibly Goya, David, Dali, DaVinci, Cornell, Ai WeiWei, Mel Chin)

### **Resources:**

PP on Assemblage Art, Symbolic Art, Artists as social activists

Short vimeo created by Operation Paydirt on lead paint - Now You See It -part 1 on vimeo: <http://vimeo.com/86638008> -Now You See It- (both part 1 and 2) on the OP website: [http://fundred.org/Operation\\_Paydirt/public\\_html/Operation\\_Paydirt/?p=22](http://fundred.org/Operation_Paydirt/public_html/Operation_Paydirt/?p=22)

Short video from Operation Paydirt - <http://www.fundred.org/experience/>

Short Vimeo video, - <http://vimeo.com/43795366>

## **Concepts and Vocabulary:**

*Schema* is simple and requires very little thought from the viewer or the artist

*Symbol* is somewhat hidden, more complex, and requires higher level thinking

Assemblage Art - consists of making three-dimensional or two-dimensional artistic compositions by putting together found objects.

Social Justice – Equal and healthy opportunities available for EVERYONE

Social or Political Art- Artwork created to increase awareness on an issue in our society that needs to be changed

Political Artists – Artists that create artwork to raise awareness of unjust conditions in our society

Collective Voice – A group of people working on the same goal

Advocacy – Public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy.

Empathy – The power of understanding and imaginatively entering into another person's feelings

Environment – Relating to the natural world and the impact of human activity on its condition

Pollution - Unhealthy things (lead paint) that can get into our ground, water and air

Lead – A heavy toxic metallic element that was used in paint and banned in 1978

Lead Poisoning – When lead gets in the body and interferes with body processes. Lead is toxic to many organs and tissues including the heart, bones, kidneys and brain.

Review Compositional Considerations – focal point, repetition, movement

## **Day One Procedures:**

Students will enter the room with Scarborough Fair playing and the written lyrics handed to them at the door. The question “What is the meaning of this song?” is written on the blackboard.

The song is a symbolic protest against the Vietnam War. Simon and Garfunkel brilliantly sing a duet asking the listener to consider how the American people forgot about the soldiers fighting for our freedom. The students may not be familiar with the spices mentioned in the song (parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme); these spices can be passed

KCAD for Operation PayDirt

around the room allowing the students to smell or taste them. List possible song titles the students listen to and the messages and symbolism these songs achieve.

The students are then presented with a PP that introduces them to symbolic art and social/political justice artists. This may include Goya, David, Salvador Dali, Leonardo DaVinci, Joseph Cornell, Ai WeiWei, Mel Chin. Initiate the definition of social justice.

The students are asked to consider what social justice issues that they feel passionate about and would like to create an assemblage piece that symbolically addresses that issue.

Consider the following questions as a springboard:

- A. What colors or objects symbolically represent you?
- B. What are your favorite places and memories in your history?
- C. Your greatest fears?
- D. If you were to die tomorrow what last message would you want to say to the world?
- E. What current event or controversy weighs heavy in your heart?
- F. What historical moment would you change or alter if given the chance?
- H. Write down ideas and symbols of what you want to say.
- I. What supplies might you need?

**Day Two Procedures:** Review the discussion from day one. Discuss how and why artists use their artistic voices to fight for social justice. The students are introduced to Mel Chin and Operation Paydirt after viewing some of the videos and resources. There will be a review of key concepts and artwork that is symbolic, social or political in nature.

Introduce the symbolism and meaning in the American dollar bill.

The students will have the opportunity to complete a Fundred Dollar. This Fundred Dollar project is voluntary. If a student does not choose to participate, they are given a blank sheet of paper to begin sketching their assemblage piece.

Homework – Students are asked to come to the next class with the above questions answered and a bag of at least 15 objects found in junk drawers or recycle containers that they could use or trade in class for an assemblage. The students should be aware that a repetition of an object will add interest to the final piece. The students should also have 3 – 5 sketches of an assemblage box that symbolizes a social issue that they would like to raise awareness about.

### **Day Three - Six Procedures:**

Listed below are some suggested methods for delivering the Art Symbolism unit. These lessons can be modified to fit your particular classroom environment and/or time allotment.

KCAD for Operation PayDirt

As stated in the Student Learning section of this lesson, instruction in this unit should result in students achieving the following objectives:

- 1) Students will properly define the term art symbolism.
- 2) Students will understand the connections art symbolism has to music, literature and the history curriculum.
- 3) Students will apply the elements and principles of design when constructing a three-dimensional box.
- 4) Students will develop a project focusing on emphasis, rhythm, and movement.
- 5) Students will properly write a short descriptive written artist statement of the on symbolism of their assemblage piece.
- 6) Students will identify how symbols and schemas are used throughout history.
- 7) Students will identify artists that create artwork as a social justice statement.

Discuss the use of symbolism in art, music, and literature throughout history. One of the goals of this unit is to help art students begin to understand the connections between the art curriculum and other disciplines and bridge the gap between subjects. Define *symbolism* and how it has been used in art.

*symbolism*: the systematic use of symbols or pictorial conventions to express an allegorical meaning

Symbolism isn't so much a style of art but more an international ideological trend. Art symbolists believe that art should display more about absolute truths that can only be accessed indirectly by the viewer. That is why art symbolists paint scenes from nature, human activities, and other real-world phenomena in a highly metaphorical and suggestive manner.

2. Have the students compare and contrast the use of symbolism in art with symbolism in the literature read in their English classes. Have the students decipher the symbolic meaning found in children's literature. One possible choice might be *The Giving Tree*. Ask your school's English teacher about literature used in the classroom and possible topics.
3. Discuss with the students the ways symbolism can be achieved and why an artist would use symbolism to make their social/political statement.
4. Discuss the Bill of Rights and the responsibility that we all have to maintain the integrity of it.
5. Provide students with a variety of artistic paintings from throughout history that students can analyze for the symbolism.
6. Provide students the opportunity to view some of Joseph Cornell's pieces. He is a professional artist who made incredible symbolic statements using boxes as his

catalyst. The student's box should create a visual movement and rhythm that moves the viewer's eye throughout the entire space, giving clues to the message or theme statement. Joseph Cornell's artwork will provide a good example and starting point for students to begin their own three-dimensional boxes.

7. Have students apply symbolism to an original three-dimensional box design that emphasizes who they are, what they stand for, or what they believe. Have the students answer the questions below to gain better insight into themselves. Communicate to the students that the box should be so enchanting or interesting to the viewer that the viewer will step closer to take a second look. The box should be created as a mystery to the viewer. The three-dimensional box needs to be aesthetically pleasing to the eye; demonstrate a good understanding of the elements and principles of design; and focus on emphasis, rhythm, and movement. The box needs to incorporate a sensitive selection of symbols that can be understood by the viewer after close examination of the box's contents, title, and the short written artist statement.
8. Discuss with the students how symbols and schemas are used throughout history. Identify the different terms below and how they differ.
  - *Schema* is simple and requires very little thought from the viewer or the artist.
  - *Symbol* is somewhat hidden, more complex, and requires higher level thinking.
9. To conclude this unit, have students write a short description of the symbolism used to convey the message in their box. The written material should include a title, the contents, and the meaning they hoped the piece would communicate to the viewer through its symbolism. Students will need to design their pieces keeping in mind the possibility of it being chosen as an exhibit in an art show.

**Closure for each day will include the following questions:**

*Schema* is simple and requires very little thought from the viewer or the artist.

*Symbol* is somewhat hidden, more complex, and requires higher level thinking.

Assemblage Art - consists of making three-dimensional or two-dimensional artistic compositions by putting together found objects.

What is Pollution? - Poison (lead paint) that gets into the air, water, and ground

What is lead poisoning? - How can we protect our environment from lead poisoning?  
Lead is a dangerous element that can be in our homes through old paint.

What is Social Action or Political Art? Artwork that brings attention to a social problem

What is a collective voice? When a group of people join together working to accomplish the same goal.

Advocacy – Public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy.

Empathy – The power of understanding and imaginatively entering into another person's feelings

What is the Bill of Rights? The first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1791 and guaranteeing such rights as the freedoms of speech, assembly, and worship

**Accommodations:**

Students with physical disabilities will receive markers that have been adapted with a tennis modified tennis ball. The tennis ball will have a slit cut into it and the marker inserted. This eases hand stress.

Students can be broken into diversified groups allowing students to help and learn from each other, fostering empathy and mentoring relationships. Groups of students may work together to create a large installation.



**Assessment:**

**Scoring Guide  
Art Symbolism Grading Rubric**

20-18 Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The three dimensional box is aesthetically pleasing to the eye and demonstrates a good understanding of the elements and principles of design, focusing on emphasis, rhythm, and movement.</li><li>• The box has incorporated a sensitive selection of symbols that can be understood by the viewer after close examination of its contents, title, and small written paragraph.</li><li>• Student prepares this artwork to be displayed in a professional manner.</li><li>• Student exhibits an understanding of the concepts and vocabulary and how symbols and schemas are used throughout history through discussions.</li><li>• Student understands how artists use their voices to bring about social change.</li><li>• Student understands the dangers of lead exposure and what we can do to protect our future.</li></ul>
17-15 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The three dimensional box provides adequate use of the visual elements and principles revealing an interesting design but falls short in the understanding of symbolism.</li><li>• The student relied on simple schemas to create her or his individual message.</li><li>• The written paragraph was included but not reflective to the piece of artwork.</li><li>• The student has limited understanding of the concepts and vocabulary and how symbols and schemas are used throughout history through discussions.</li><li>• Student has some understanding of how artists use their voices to bring about social change.</li><li>• Student has a moderate understanding of the dangers of lead exposure and what we can do to protect our future.</li></ul>
14-12 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The presentation of the three-dimensional box reveals only a simplistic understanding of the elements and principles of design, and the use of symbolism is more schematic and less symbolic.</li><li>• The presentation of the finished piece was unprofessional.</li><li>• There was no written paragraph.</li><li>• The student does not exhibit an understanding of the concepts and the difference between schemas and symbols and how they were used throughout history through discussions.</li><li>• Student has little understanding of how artists use their voices to bring about social change.</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student has a little understanding of the dangers of lead exposure and what we can do to protect our future.</li> </ul>
11-0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The artistic presentation of the three-dimensional box fails to demonstrate even a basic understanding of the visual elements and principles of design.</li> <li>• The use of symbolism was scarcely existent, insensitive, inappropriate, and not informational to the viewer.</li> <li>• The presentation of the finished artwork was unprofessional. There was no written paragraph.</li> <li>• Student does not understand the concepts and the use of symbols or schemas through discussions.</li> <li>• Student has no understanding of how artists use their voices to bring about social change.</li> <li>• Student has no understanding of the dangers of lead exposure and what we can do to protect our future.</li> </ul>