

Throughout history, generations have defined their times through their values, culture, beliefs, and environments. Do you ever take the time to peel back the layers of history to reveal what you were built upon and what part your community had in forming who you are and where you came from?

# Community Layers

## A Look Within

Nicole D. Brisco



Left: Lauren Clevenger; Right: Brittney Miller

**T**ake a moment and consider from an artist's point of view a symbolic approach to community. When you hear the word "community," what types of images do you visualize? For most people, community represents family, local parks, neighborhoods, historic buildings, schools, and businesses. However, what we as artists must do is explore the symbolic nature of these concrete objects. What are these objects really? What do they do? How do we see them? Consider asking your students these questions as you explore community in a multifaceted approach to layers

**Through collage these high-school students explore the symbolic nature embedded in the layers of their community.**

and how we as humans and artists build upon our foundations.

### Thinking in Motion

Unless directed, most students tend to think in a concrete manner, so it is important that you set guidelines to direct their thinking in a more creative and symbolic approach. What common objects symbolize the idea of community through their function, structure, or purpose?

You can accomplish this by posing the following questions: What does community mean to you? Who lives in your community? How was your community built? How do you see your community? How does a com-

munity function? What other forms of community are there? What objects or people help your community function? What public spaces help to define your community?

### Production Possibilities

Once you have brainstormed with your students, begin to ask them how objects could symbolize the idea of community. Begin with an example such as a pomegranate. A pomegranate has a tough surface that contains its seeds. These seeds make up the inside of the fruit and help to ensure the future of the pomegranate. Propose this question: Could the life of this object relate to the life of a community? Have students create a list of twenty objects that could symbolize community. Some examples could be:

- Onion—multiple layers to form the whole.
- Nautilus—begins small and grows to produce safety for its inhabitants.
- Building Blocks— must be stacked to produce stability.
- Gears—must work together to perform a function.

Once students have created their own lists, have them work with a peer to select a final object. The object they select must be one that they could bring into the classroom to draw from life.

### Community Collage

Now begin discussing with students the concept of a collage. A collage is much like the idea of community. Each is built by adding layer upon layer. It is important to show students examples of collage artists such as Rauschenberg, Dan Eldon, or Sabrina Ward Harrison. Once they have looked at styles of collage and layering, have students create multiple thumbnail sketches that involve their object and layers of materials.

Building layers into a collage can be overwhelming to students. Review the principles of design. Emphasize the most important in a

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collage such as rhythm, movement, and focal point. Remind them that the drawing of the object should be the focal point and not the collage materials that surround it.

To begin each thumbnail, it is imperative that students build a “skeletal frame.” Ask each student to begin with three to five intersect-



Left: Carol Ann Lee; Above: DeeAnn Carson



ing lines. These simple lines will allow students to build off a foundation. Encourage them to make lists of materials that they can use in their artwork. Start with a list such as old letters, images, menus, newspaper, vellum, scraps of magazines, colored papers, old sketchbook draw-

ings, and copies of old family photos. Encourage students to create a minimum of five layers of materials. As each student progresses, review their work often and review their decisions. 🎨

*Nicole D. Brisco is an art teacher at Pleasant Grove High School, Texarkana, Texas and a contributing editor for SchoolArts. nbrisco@pgisd.net*

#### NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.*

#### WEB LINK

[www.sabrinawardharrison.com/](http://www.sabrinawardharrison.com/)  
[www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/rauschenberg\\_r.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/rauschenberg_r.html)  
[www.daneldon.org](http://www.daneldon.org)

### Self-Evaluation

Once students complete their collage, have each do a self-evaluation of their work using the Feldman Model: description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment. Ask students questions such as:

- Do you view your community differently now than you did before this project?
- What did you learn about your community from this project?
- How specifically did the object you selected symbolize community?
- What did you use in the layering of your collage? What and how did it add to the symbolic nature of your artwork?
- If you were to create a sequel to this artwork, what would you do differently and how would your ideas evolve?
- How successful do you believe you were with working your object into the collage and how did your sense of design add to the piece overall?