Communities:
The Role of the Artist

Curriculum Guide
for Memphis Brooks Museum of Art
Permanent Collection Tours

The artisans who created this mask made an object of great significance for the king's leaders of the Bamileke community.

Bamileke People
Africa, Cameroon
Elephant Society Mask (detail), late 19th century
Raffia, beads, canvas
Gift of the Director's Council 97.2.1

Some artists had the important task of recording the likeness of historical leaders before the advent of photography. Many artists today still carry out this tradition for their communities.

Ralph E.W. Earl
American, 1788-1838
Portrait of General Andrew Jackson, President of the United States, 1833
Oil on canvas
Memphis Park and Commission Purchase 46.2
Dear Teachers,

On this tour, students will explore the permanent collection at the Brooks through a variety of artistic styles, techniques, cultures, and time periods in order to better understand the form and function of artworks and the role of the artist within his/her community.

By discussing an object's formal qualities, subject matter, and historical period, students learn the role of artists in communities throughout the world. The artworks will serve as a reference for guided discussion on similarities and differences of people, places, and events and will aid in the discovery of how artists use their work to represent the needs and values of a community.

In the studio, students will work on a book-making project to symbolize the interconnectivity of varying parts of a community. Just as a community relies on each of its members' cooperation, the book depends on each part working together to make a whole. A writing prompt with an art component carries the studio activity into the classroom after your visit to the Brooks offering a time of reflection and sharing to enhance, enrich, and make connections to the museum experience.

Sincerely,

Brooks Education
Lesson Plan

Grade Level:
5th - 8th

Number of Students:
60 maximum

TN State Standards in Art:

- **Standard 1.0 Media, Techniques, and Processes:**
  Students will understand and apply media, techniques, and processes.

- **Standard 3.0 Evaluation:**
  Students will choose and evaluate a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas.

- **Standard 4.0 Historical and Cultural Relationships:**
  Students will understand the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

- **Standard 6.0 Interdisciplinary Connections:**
  Students will make connections between visual arts and other disciplines.

Common Core Standards Met during the Tour Experience:

Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration
Grade 5- 1,2,3, and 6
Grade 6- 1,2,3, and 6
Grade 7- 1, 2, and 6
Grade 8- 1, 2, and 6

*See Curriculum Connections for specific core curriculum standards

Main goal of tour

Students will discuss artists’ roles in communities by examining the form and function of artworks.
Lesson Objectives Established with Bloom’s Taxonomy

The learner will...

**Remember**  
Use new and existing knowledge to identify an artwork as it relates to form (its appearance) and function (use).

**Understand**  
Distinguish the formal and functional properties of the artwork to better understand the artist's intent and how the art work serves the larger community.

**Apply**  
Classify artworks as formal/aesthetic, functional, or both and explain the decision.

Interpret ways in which the artist's work influences the community.

Explain how the needs and values of communities change based on cultural and geographic location.

**Analyze**  
Differentiate the style and function of works from varying cultures and/or time periods.

Point out the artist's role in the community by examining the form and function of works from varying cultures and time periods.

Examine how the elements of art (line, shape, color, value, form, texture, space) are used with artworks which also have a function.

**Evaluate**  
Evaluate the works by their formal qualities and their functional qualities. Are the pieces beautiful and/or functional?

Do the artworks serve the community for which they were made?

Do you think that the artist was able to meet some of the needs of their community with this piece?

**Create**  
In the studio, students will create an original book which can be displayed like a large-scale sculpture or quilt-like work that represents the role of artists Memphis.
Classroom Preparation Prior to Visit

☐ Review Teacher Resources and consider ways of implementing them in your teaching prior to your museum visit.

☐ Introduce students to the Communities vocabulary list. Discuss the terms and help students identify examples of each.

☐ See pre-visit activities and curriculum connections.

☐ Review Museum Manners with students and Chaperone Guidelines with chaperones.

Teacher Resources

This site provides a brief overview of the role of the artist in society throughout historical periods: http://www.uwgb.edu/malloyk/lecture_6.htm.

This is a great website for graphic organizer templates which can be used when defining communities or with the post-visit science activity: http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer.

Suggested Reading:

  Grades 6-8 ISBN: 9780440407829
  It all begins when Rocky follows Mick Strum around town while he sketches its people, animals and graveyard. Mick has been commissioned by Rocky’s Kansas town to create a memorial to their war dead. But the townspeople see things in Mick’s drawings that they don’t want to know or accept about themselves. Can Mick help them accept one monument that will be meaningful to everyone?

  *This is a fiction work which could be used for initiating discussion about the artist’s role within the community.*

  Grades all ages ISBN: 0965376648
  Since the 19th century, the women of Gee’s Bend in southern Alabama have created stunning, vibrant quilts. Beautifully illustrated with 110 color illustrations, *The Quilts of Gee’s Bend* includes a historical overview of the two hundred years of extraordinary quilt-making in this African-American community, its people, and their art-making tradition.
  Grades: 5th – 8th  ISBN: 0763620475
  Five ordinary Americans are presented for their creative and unique contributions to their communities. Their passion for their work shows in the fruits of their labor.

  For the teacher
  Davis Catalogue Number: 882-5
  *Explorations in Art*, Middle School/Junior High provides the type of relevant, engaging learning that is so critical to motivating the middle school/junior high student. We know that hands-on learning is the foundation of the middle school art curriculum. A wide range of dynamic studio activities focuses on issues and ideas of particular interest in the middle school/junior high age group.

### Vocabulary

Please use your discretion when determining the appropriate content for your class.

**Aesthetics:** principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty

**Community:** 1) A group of people living in the same locality and under the same government. 2) A group of people who share common interests

**Context:** The interrelated conditions (cultural, political, social, economic) in which something exists or occurs.

**Culture:** The sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs that distinguishes one group of people from another. Culture is transmitted from one generation to the next through language, material objects, ritual, institutions, and art.

**Decorative:** Ornamental; beauty over function

**Form:** The physical properties of an artwork

**Function/ Functional:** Purpose of an art work; utilitarian or decorative

**Icon:** Symbol or image of cultural significance

**Utilitarian:** designed to be useful or practical with less emphasis on the attractiveness
Pre-Visit Activities

Lead a class discussion on the definition of community. Graphic organizers and notes can be used during discussion. Next, continue the discussion with how artists contribute to their communities through their artwork. The artist’s work is also influenced by the community around him/her either by geography, economy, culture, or shared beliefs. Two examples follow:

Loretta Pettway
American, b. 1942
*Lazy Gal Variation, 2003*
Cotton and denim
Partial gift of the Tinwood Alliance and Loretta Pettway; Memphis Brooks Museum of Art Purchase with funds provided by Decorative Arts Trust, Memphis Cotton Patchers, and John and Tina McWhorter 2004.11

This quilt was made by the community of Gee’s Bend, which is located around a bend in the Alabama River. The population is majority African American and was founded by free slaves who chose to work there as sharecroppers after the abolition. The area is not very wealthy and is fairly isolated.

The quilts are made by a group of women who gather together to create and socialize in what is known as a quilting bee. When the people gathered to create quilts, they developed stronger bonds not only with one another, but also with their larger community.

At first, their quilts were made for the function of keeping people warm while recycling and repurposing scraps of material. Later, the Freedom Quilting Bee formed around Gee’s Bend, Alabama and used their quilts as a tool for the promotion of the civil rights movement. Because the patch-work quilt was a style that was fashionable in the 1960s, the poor quilters were able to sell their works and become respected artisans while also bringing wealth to their community.

The quilts were not only functional, but were also praised for their form and beauty. Some of them have been compared to modern paintings due to their abstract designs. This quilt is a good example of that.
For extra enrichment watch the Alabama Arts Awards, 2007 video about the Gee's Bend Quilters exhibit: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16IoDMYmLSi0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16IoDMYmLSi0) (length – 4:34 min.)

**Discussion Points about the Gee's Bend Quilters:**

1. Describe what you see. Is the quilt pleasing to look at? Why?
2. Can you tell what this quilt is made of? How does that also reflect the idea of community?
3. What are the functions or the Gee's Bend quilts?
4. How were the artists influenced by their geographical environment?
5. How did the artists use the quilts to meet the needs of their community?

Medieval artists worked under a master craftsman in their own communities called guilds. It was not very important to sign their name to the work, so usually these pieces are attributed to a place or guild. The guild ensured the artists had proper training and quality artwork.

Many people, like peasants and serfs, in early Medieval communities were illiterate. They relied on priests, people of higher status, and artists (guilds of sculptors and painters) to illustrate and reinforce scriptural teaching and church doctrine.

This particular sculpture is of Saint Michael the Archangel with his sword raised to fight a great dragon. It tells a story without using words. Symbols are used in the artwork to help viewers identify the figure. First, Michael is represented as very young and with a calm expression. Second, Saint Michael is almost always shown holding a sword and weighing scales. In this sculpture we can only see a part of the scales in his left hand.

A community of followers formed around St. Michael's role as a heavenly hero against evil. In the context of the Middle Ages, the sculpture provides an icon for members of the community.
This sculpture points out several roles of the artist within the community. First, the artist was the member of a guild which relied on a system of apprenticeship to learn a skill and produce artworks. The artworks would be sold to earn a living making the artist's role an economical one. Second, the artwork produced by Medieval guilds was used by the wider community as a tool for educating about shared beliefs and ideas to people who could not read. Finally, the artist who made this work provided an image of St. Michael for his religious followers.

**Discussion Points about the Saint Michael sculpture:**
1. What does this artwork look like it is used for? Which do you think is more important, form or function? Why?
2. What do you know about the style of the artwork? Are there any characteristics of the sculpture that you particularly like?
3. How did the artist guilds meet the needs of their community?
4. How were Medieval artists influenced by their community?

**Pre-Visit Activities/Curriculum Connections**

This section introduces discussion points on the concept of the artist's role in a community with interdisciplinary connections to a variety of standards. The post-visit section below provides activities in conjunction with these discussion points.

**LANGUAGE ARTS:**

*Concept:* In early cultures before the Classical era of Greece, people learned through storytelling. Many people were illiterate, sometimes because there was no developed written language or they did not need the skills of reading and writing unless they were in a position of power. Imagine that you needed to record a story for someone who could not read. What would you do? Think about how an artist tells stories? How does their artwork help to preserve memories, send messages to, or educate people in their community?

**MATH:**

*Concept:* An algebraic formula requires the equation on both sides of the equal sign agree. If even one part is missing from either side, then the formula will not work. A community must work together as individual pieces of a related whole in order to maintain balance.
SCIENCE:

*Concept:* All life is interdependent and interacts with the environment (Standard 2 across grades 5-8). By reviewing the complexities of the food chain, energy flow, and levels of organizations within the living system, comparisons and considerations can be made about the role of people and artists within the community. Each person has a vital role.

SOCIAL STUDIES:

*Concept:* The artist plays an important role within their community. How can individual artists and groups of artists connect their artworks with the beliefs, values, and traditions of their communities? How can artwork create understanding across cultures and communities to develop respect for one another?

**Post-Visit Activities /Curriculum Connections**

This section provides activities in conjunction with the discussion points found in the pre-visit curriculum connections.

LANGUAGE ARTS:

*Activity:* “Write” a poem about a community event for someone who cannot read – think creatively with the arts like theatre/speech, music, dance, and visual art. Share your poems with the class. The class will then interpret your poem in their own words so you can see how effectively you’ve communicated to your community.

(Common Core>>English Language Arts Standards>>Science &Technical Subjects>>Grades 5-8>>“Knowledge of Language”).

MATH:

*Activity:* Using the concept of quilt-making, students can study equivalent fractions through geometry, symmetry, and design. The Gee’s Bend quilts are typically more abstract, but traditional quilts rely heavily on equivalent fractions, ratios, and surface area. Students can be given spatial dimensions for the final piece (ex. 12X12”) and 2x2” pieces of paper to be cut into fractions or geometric forms and placed symmetrically for their own quilt design.

(Common Core>>Mathematics>>Grades 5-8>> “Geometry” and Grades 6-7>> “Ratios & Proportional Relationships”).
SCIENCE:

**Activity:** Design a graphic organizer (ex. a flow chart, word web, tree chart) showing how artworks made by artists like the Gee's Bend quilters or the Medieval sculptors influence other members of the community.

(Common Core>>English Language Arts Standards>>Science & Technical Subjects>>Grade 6-8>>“Integration of Knowledge and Ideas”).

SOCIAL STUDIES:

**Activity:** Choose a community that you admire based on geography, economy, culture, or shared beliefs. Research their art making traditions by finding out: what materials the artists usually use, what symbols are included in many of the works, and what the artist does for that particular community with his/her art.

(5th–8th Content Standard: 1.0: Culture encompasses similarities and differences among people including their beliefs, knowledge, changes, values, and traditions. Students will explore these elements of society to develop an appreciation and respect for the variety of human cultures.)

ART:

**Activity:** Complete the drawing and writing prompts in the book created on the studio portion of this tour. Continue adding to your book as you get new ideas.
Art plays a great role in our life as long as it makes us think about significant problems and things, happening around us, till art excites human mind and does not leave us indifferent. Great classical writers such as Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Bulgakov and others touched very important problems of mankind in their works: love and hate, war and peace, guilt and repentance, talent and mediocrity, friendship and betrayal. It can inspire or make us pluck up our courage when we are spiritually and morally broken. Art sometimes can be the only means, which can inspire a heroic deed or support us in a difficult situation. It was so during the years of war. People were morally exhausted and suffered under the burden of losses. Continuing my education with Akademie x Lessons in Art + Life, I wanted to share some thoughts I have gleaned from Piero Golia, one of the artists and tutors in the book. Here are some of his ideas that stirred my thoughts and creativity, and how I think we can apply these concepts as artists.

1. To become a successful artist isn’t a skill, it is a calling. I think one of the biggest things we need to consider when it comes to art and photography is that our work should be a calling, rather than a chore or obligation. Meaning, you shouldn’t feel obliged to go out and shoot everyday. Rather, you should feel called to go out and shoot everyday. Seriously, just to make art. If an artist also wants to use their art as a way of informing, sending a message to society, etc., that is their right, too. There are no rules. Everyone judges whether it’s art or not in their own way. I don’t, because the question doesn’t interest me and has no relevance in my art.

2. What are artists for? Can anyone become an artist? The role of artist depends on what the art is. Actors roles are to depict a character as per script and perhaps some creative input to modify it. There are as many roles of artists as their are types of art, some are just for joy like craft artists who are skilled in cr.