

## Alternate Histories

**Developed by:** Melissa Marr and Heather Wilkinson

**Suggested Grade Levels:** 7-12

**Subject Areas:** Art, Language Arts, Social Studies, Media Studies

### **Rationale:**

*“Collage is more than just an art style. Collage is all about bringing different elements together. Once you form a sensibility about connection, how different elements relate to each other, you deepen your understanding of yourself and others.” -Bryan Collier*

The technique of collage brings together elements from disparate sources and juxtaposes ideas and images. Mixed media collage is a way of working that is well suited to creating a non-linear narrative that places the artist in dialogue with larger issues.

Our understanding of history has changed. Historians, scholars, and artists alike recognize that our past is understood differently depending on one’s perspective. Artists are exploring ways of expressing and investigating contemporary culture through the lens of their personal experience and collective history.

Students will reference the mixed media work of Jane Ash Poitras from the permanent collection at the AGNS. They will create their own collages that explore aspects of personal and collective history and experience.

### **Classroom set up:**

Group discussion, research and individual work

Allow students to work big and use a more permanent backing (canvas, board, Masonite, heavy paper, etc.)

### **Suggested Resources/Images:**

*Pink Shamans* (1996, Mixed Media on Canvas) by Jane Ash Poitras (AGNS permanent collection)  
A copy of this artwork is included at the end of this lesson plan and is also available on line at:  
<https://www.artgalleryofnovascotia.ca/exhibitions/contemporary-first-nations-art-permanent-collection>

Websites about the work of Jane Ash Poitras, specifically:

<http://www.glenbow.org/artpad/en/teacher-resources/collage/jane-ash-poitras.html>

Collage methodology/ideas/contemporary/historical references:

Bryan Collier – Children’s Author and Illustrator (Some titles available at local libraries include: *Uptown, Visiting Langston, Rosa, Martin’s Big Words, Freedom River*)

Hannah Hoch – German Dada artist

Romare Bearden – 20<sup>th</sup> c. American Artist

Robert Rauschenberg – 20<sup>th</sup> c. American Artist

**Materials:**

Print media

Newspapers

Magazines

Memorabilia (such as ticket stubs, photographs, pamphlets, stamps, diaries, letters, etc.)

Glue

Scissors

Paint/Brushes

Stencils

Fabric

Support or backing (sturdy paper, Masonite, canvas, cardboard, Bristol board)

Printmaking/Stamping

**Suggested Outcomes:**

Produce an original body of artwork that integrates information from a variety of sources to convey personal meaning.

Explore the factors that influence one’s perceptions, attitudes, values and beliefs.

Examine the role and influence of visual images in student’s daily lives, including mass media and popular culture.

Analyze artwork and determine artist’s intention.

Manipulate and organize design elements and principles to achieve planned compositions.

Identify and use concepts associated with time, continuity and change.

**Introduction:**

Look at *Pink Shamans* or other mixed media work by Jane Ash Poitras and invite students to discuss both content and technique and the relationship between the two. Consider sources of imagery, materials used, composition strategies and other visual art elements.

Have students make their own collage incorporating a variety of art techniques and sources of imagery (with personal, historical and contemporary references).

**Suggestions for Teaching and Learning:**

Invite students to work on their collages over several sessions to develop content and to layer images effectively.

1. In the introductory discussion, have students consider the difference between a *description* of the work and a *critical analysis* of the work. Some of the observations by students will be factual and some will be opinions. Encourage students to look, describe what they are seeing, and think critically about the content of the work.

Introduce key vocabulary and concepts such as: appropriation, juxtaposition, non-linear, etc. Distinguish between personal imagery and cultural symbols.

Encourage individual interpretations and consider that there is no “right” way of reading this artwork. Note that the title offers clues to the viewer.

Explore connections between different elements. What is deliberate? What happens by chance?

Discuss focal point (or points) of the collage.

Can you identify the subject of the collage and does that invite dialogue?

Consider how colour, line and texture affect the tone of the collage.

2. As a class, brainstorm source materials – both text and images. Discuss overuse of clichéd images, words and symbols (hearts, peace symbols, etc.). Encourage students to look at other collage artists to expand their visual vocabulary.

3. Individually students need to choose an entry point into their work. Offer leading questions such as, who do you identify with as a group? (family background, teams, clubs, race, cultural identity) and, what do you react to? You can also suggest including personal, contemporary and historical imagery. Have students consider how taking something out of context can change or subvert the way it is perceived.

4. Share techniques and plan ahead for effective layering. Paint, printing ink, gluing, etc. need time to dry. In successive sessions, allow students to develop both the physical work and the content.

5. Have students play with arrangement and look for unexpected connections - and let those points of connection inform techniques of over-painting, layering, obscuring, use of colour, etc.

6. Discuss final collages and explore how the technique informs the work.

**Ideas for Extension:**

Using the students finished collages as a springboard for discussion, identify commonalities and divergences. Consider the following quote:

*“In paying attention to my life, I find that what may appear to be personal narratives, in fact, implicate larger social and historical considerations. Seen in this light, what I choose to recount is no longer about me as an isolated individual.”* Jin-me Yoon, artist

Try connecting found images in alternative ways: stapling, sewing, taping, etc. and consider how that impacts the perception of the viewer.

Research other artists who use collage to discuss issues of identity and political and social concerns.

**Suggestions for Assessment:**

Students can be assessed on their respectful participation in group discussions; research; the relevance and variety of gathered materials; critical analysis; and the quality of the relationship between content and form.

