**Memory Collage**

**Essential Question** How are stories expressed through art?

**Grade** 5th

**Time** 50 minutes

**Art Concepts** Assemblage, found objects, photograph, subject, collage

**Materials** Pencil, white paper, found objects, drawing materials (pens, colored pencils, crayons, etc.), glue

**Artwork in Focus** [Keep for Old Memoirs, 1976 by Betye Saar](https://collections.lacma.org/node/251811)

**Talking about Art** Throughout history, artists have used pictures and objects to tell stories. Can you name any storytellers in your personal life, community, or culture? How could you express their stories in a work of art?

Betye Saar is an artist who collects objects that she finds in flea markets, swap meets, thrift shops, and other places and assembles them in her artwork. This type of art is called **assemblage**and can bedescribed as a three-dimensional (3-D) work of art that uses **found objects**. While she is best known for her assemblages, she also creates **collages**, drawings, paintings, and photographs. Through her creative process, she reveals messages that deal with race, gender, identity, and history by infusing objects with stories, memories, and symbols.

Take a look at *Keep for Old Memoirs* by Saar. What do you see happening in this **photograph**? *Keep for Old Memoirs* is a photograph of an artwork she created that reflects her history. Saar’s great-aunt is the **subject**, or main focus, of the photograph, and she describes it as, “a copy of a photograph from my great-aunt’s collection of images.” Also her gloves. And an old frame and a text and a small note called “Keep for Old Memoirs.” “That was a note that I found among her things too.... When I was a child, I loved looking through my great-aunt Hattie’s album filled with photographs of family and friends from Kansas City, Missouri. As Hattie and my mother recalled events and people, they exchanged stories and memories of their shared past. This experience made me realize that every picture tells a story.”

Do you have a special memory of someone in your life? What objects or images come to mind when you think about them?

**Making Art** For this activity, you are going to tell a story through art, objects, and writing about either yourself or a person (or pet!) in your household.

You will need a pencil, two pieces of paper, some glue, and any other drawing materials you’d like to incorporate.

1. Look around your surroundings for three to six objects that best describe you or the subject of your art. Make sure to ask permission first to use the items for your art if the subject isn’t you. If your subject is a dog, cat, or other animal companion, no need to ask—I’m sure they’d be honored! Gather your objects together on a table and take a moment to observe them. Can you think of any memories you have attached to these items? Write them down on a sheet of paper and see if you can come up with one short sentence for each.
2. Place the objects together in an arrangement of your choice. Try to overlap the items and examine their shapes, forms, and colors. Try different arrangements, or *compositions*, until you are happy with the outcome.
3. Begin to lightly sketch what you see using a pencil and your other sheet of paper. Look carefully at the objects as you draw and try to fill up as much of your paper as possible. Once you are happy with your sketch, you can begin to add volume. Creating volume in a drawing gives the shapes the illusion of having form. Drawings are two-dimensional (2-D), but through certain techniques, they can feel 3-D by using value, which is the contrast between light and dark areas that are cast in shadow. For example, if the areas are in the light, you can apply very little pressure with your pencil when shading. If you have other drawing materials you’d like to incorporate, you can use the same techniques!
4. We will turn our drawing into a collage. A collage is created from pieces of paper (or other 2-D items) that are layered, overlapped, and glued down to form a work of art. Collages can include photos, drawings, writings, or all of the above.
5. To turn your drawings into a collage, look back at the memories you wrote down and rip them out from the paper. Don’t worry if you tear through some of the words. Then, decide which pieces of your writing you’d like to include and collage them into your drawing wherever you choose. When you are satisfied with your composition, glue them all down to finish.

**Reflection** How does your artwork tell a story about its subject? What might people who have never met your subject learn about them through your drawing and words?

Think about how you made choices while creating your artwork. Did you choose colors, shapes, and textures for their *aesthetic* appeal (aesthetic means beautiful visual harmony) or for the way they symbolized your subject? Or, sometimes, was it both?

**Curriculum Connections** California Arts Standards for Public Schools—Visual Arts

5.VA:Cr1.1: Combine ideas to generate an innovative idea for art-making. 5.VA:Cr1.2: Identify and demonstrate diverse methods of artistic investigation to choose an approach for beginning a work of art.

Common Core State Standards Math

[W.5.3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/5/3/): Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

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