



Grade/s: 9 – 12

Enduring Idea: Meaning and Objects

Integrated Discipline: ELA – Writing

Unit Title: Inside the Box

Unit Designer: Lane Laney

Unit Description: Objects are often “clues” within an artwork that, when investigated, provide deeper insight into the artist’s intentions. Within this unit, learners will analyze how objects are used symbolically and create their own small box installation. In an effort to explain their aesthetic and symbolic choices, the learners will wrap up this project by drafting a short narrative, telling the story behind their box.

Images: “Still Life,” Pieter Claesz (1962.18)
“Armoire,” Louis Majorelle (1997.20)
“Snuff Bottle with lid” (collection)

Key Concept: Objects are used to represent ideas, concepts, beliefs, attitudes, or feelings

Essential Question: In what ways do objects hold meaning in our lives?

- CCSS Art:**
- VAH2-1.3 Communicate ideas through the effective use of a variety of materials, techniques, and processes in works of visual art.
 - VAH2-3.2 Analyze and describe the relationships among subject matter, symbols, and themes in communicating intended meaning in his or her artworks and the works of others.
 - VAH2-3.3 Select and effectively use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate

meaning through his or her artworks.

VAH2-5.2 Make complex, descriptive, interpretative, and evaluative judgments about his or her own artworks and those of others.

Integrated CCSS: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Learning Outcomes: The learners will...

- Investigate and explain how artists include and manipulate objects in their work to tell a story or send a message
- Create a three-dimensional “visual riddle” by strategically manipulating and installing items into a box
- Present and discuss their work and the work of their peers
- Write a short narrative, telling the story of their box

Motivator: The teacher will display “Still Life” by Pieter Claesz and ask the learners to carefully study its contents. The learners will then work in groups to write a fictional short story leading up to the still life. Prompt questions can be, “What items do you see? What event was going on? Why are the contents of the table arranged that way? Who would have been eating?” The learners will share their short stories and, afterward, the group will discuss how each item might have been a “clue” in their stories, and how artists often include “clues” in their artwork through the inclusion and manipulation of meaningful objects. Afterward, the teacher will introduce other work from the Columbia Museum of Art and the learners will investigate the objects from each artwork.

Day Breakdown: Day 1 - Motivator (see above)

Day 2-7 - The learners will plan their three-dimensional “visual riddle,” shrine, or altar; collect objects, and

alter and install items into their boxes. The teacher will work with learners to ensure they are using all of the space within the boxes effectively. Boxes and the items within them can be painted a uniform color for unity but it is optional.

Day 8 - The learners will present and discuss their finished work with the group. Final discussion and critique questions might include, "What feelings or mood does this box create? What places or ideas does it evoke? What is the symbolism or meaning behind the formatting of the box and the objects within it? Was the space inside of the box occupied effectively? What changes would make this box more successful?"

Day 9 - The learners will draft and finalize a short narrative that is either a fictional or nonfictional account of the stories behind their boxes.

Day 10 - Learners will display their finished narrative with their boxes for viewing.

Materials: boxes, found objects, hot glue guns, super glue.
Optional items: wood, shop tools, foam core/matboard, plexiglas, x-acto blades, fabrics, wallpaper books, old furniture that can be demoed, old containers like baby food jars

Resources: Christian Thee's informales
 ◦ <http://christianthee.com/collections/informale>
Joseph Cornell boxes
 ◦ His work:
 <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/cornell/>
 ◦ <http://www.josephcornellbox.com/>

Assessment: The learners will be assessed using a rubric that analyzes participation in the motivator, box installation and manipulation (formal properties), box installation and manipulation (conceptual), participation and presentation for critique, and narrative production.

