

Ohio Standards
Connections:

**Connections to State of
Ohio Academic Standards
Fine Arts**

- Historical, Cultural and Social Studies
- Creative Expression and Communication
- Analyzing and Responding
- Valuing the Arts/Aesthetic Reflection
- Connections, Relationships, and Applications

Social Studies

History- Students use materials drawn from the diversity of human experience to analyze and interpret significant events, patterns, and themes in the history of Ohio, the United States and the world.

People in Societies-

Students use knowledge of perspectives, practices and products of cultural, ethnic, and social groups to analyze the impact of their commonality and diversity within local, national, regional, and global settings.

Social Studies Skills and Methods: Students collect, organize, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple sources to draw logical conclusions, communicate this information, and apply what they have learned.

Language Arts

- Acquisition of Vocabulary
- Concepts of Print, Comprehension Strategies and Self-Monitoring Strategies
- Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text
- Literary Text
- Writing Process and Applications
- Writing Conventions

Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson

Unwritten Love Letters



Lesson Summary:

This lesson combines research and art-making activities by introducing students to Aminah Robinson's series of work entitled *Unwritten Love Letters*. Students select an important person or event to depict on an envelope that has been steamed open for use as a drawing surface. The students' research can relate to the Civil War period or to any theme that they are studying.

Estimated Duration: 2-4 class periods

Commentary:

Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1940. When she was a little girl, her father taught her how to draw and how to make books from homemade paper and "hogmawg," a mixture of mud, clay, twigs, leaves, lime, animal grease, and glue. The artist uses hogmawg in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional work. Her mother taught her weaving, needlework, and button

work. She knew she wanted to be an artist and began going to art school on Saturdays while she was still in high school and then continued after she graduated from high school. Aminah creates sculpture, paintings on cloth, drawings, books, and a series of work called *Unwritten Love Letters*. She makes the *Unwritten Love Letters* from envelopes she has received in the mail or discovered at garage sales. After steaming them open and dying them, the envelopes become the surface for drawings in pen and ink, watercolor, and pastels about writers, civil rights leaders, inventors, literary figures, and historic events. The drawings are often embellished with buttons and beads and canceled postage stamps.

Pre-Assessment:

Discuss the work of Aminah Robinson in class. For related information, borrow from the library *Symphonic Poem: The Art of Aminah Brenda Lynn* and/or *A Street Called Home* by Aminah Robinson and other books she has illustrated. Use the *Unwritten Love Letter* from the Downloadable Images section of this Website and refer to the *Unwritten Love Letter* in the “See Aminah’s Work” section of this Website.

Ask the students:

- Why do you think Aminah Robinson calls this envelope art *Unwritten Love Letters*?
- Why does she think it is important to use envelopes and stamps that have already been mailed to someone?
- Would you rather receive a letter from someone or an email? Why?
- What kind of event or person do you think is important enough to be the subject of your *Unwritten Love Letter*? Why?
- Do you think using recycled materials (cancelled postage stamps, envelopes, buttons) is more or less meaningful than using new materials? Why?

Scoring Guidelines:

The pre-assessment discussion and exploration provide opportunities to gather information on students’ prior knowledge of Civil War topics (or topic of teacher’s choice). Participation notes could be made to monitor students individually.

Post-Assessment:

At the completion of all sessions, the artwork and final assessment are combined in the evaluation of the student learning. Use the attached rubric to have students assess their work and then complete the final assessment.

Objectives:

- Students will learn about Aminah Robinson and her process of making *Unwritten Love Letters*.
- Students will research an important historic person or event.
- Students will design a drawing based on the historic event or person they have researched.
- Students will incorporate drawing, words, and found objects into an envelope-based design.

Instructional Procedures:**Day One:** Introduction to lesson

1. Introduce lesson by discussing Aminah, her work (see pre-assessment discussion questions); show students examples of Aminah's *Unwritten Love Letters*
2. Discuss the kind of people and events Aminah depicts on her love letters; students brainstorm ideas for their own work
3. With teacher approval, students select a person or event to commemorate in their own *Unwritten Love Letter*

Days Two and Three: Students research their topics in the library and online. Students should be prepared to talk about the topic they selected in a class discussion. Topics can relate to any aspect of the Civil War period or an area of the curriculum students are currently studying.

Day Four and Five: Students Create Letters

- Obtain old or new envelopes
- Steam them open (under supervision)
- Color them using natural dyes like onion skin or beets. See this Website for information about natural dyes: www.umaine.edu/NSFGK-12/images/PDFs/natdye.pdf
- Illustrate person or event with pen and ink, pastels, watercolors
- Add biographical information, or a poem or story about the person/event
- Embellish with cancelled stamps, beads, and buttons

Differentiated Instructional Support

Elementary students should take notes on the person or event they have selected for their topic. Middle and high school students can write a paper about their topic before they determine the specific aspect of their subject they will depict in their “love letter.” Younger students can use watercolor to cover their envelopes and older students can research the use of natural dyes and use them.

Extension When letters are complete, use them to create a classroom gallery.

Homework Options and Home Connections

Students can find books about their topic in the library and read them at home. They can work online if available at home. Students collect cancelled stamps from their families’ mail. They can also bring in cloth, buttons, and found objects.

Interdisciplinary Connections

This lesson is directly related to social studies and language arts.

Materials and Resources:

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|---------------------|---|
| <i>For teachers</i> | Images of <i>Unwritten Love Letters</i> downloaded from this lesson plan and from the “See Aminah’s Work” section of the Web site; a list of names and events for student research. |
| <i>For students</i> | Envelops, natural dyes or watercolor, canceled stamps, fabric, lace, buttons, beads, pen and ink, pastels, thread, glue |

Key Vocabulary

Hogmawg
Two-dimensional
Three-dimensional
Embellish

Technology Connections

Students can use internet to research the person or event they selected as the topic for their *Unwritten Love Letter*. Discuss the way to recognize a reliable Website and review how to reference a Website as a source for their work.



General Tips

Allow time for the envelopes to dry completely after they are dyed or painted with watercolor. Limit the amount of found objects. The student drawings and important written information should be the focal point of the envelope. Found objects should be used sparingly to enhance the design of the envelope and the drawing. For younger children, distribute a small amount of cancelled stamps and/or buttons to each student.

Attachments: Student and Final Assessments; examples of student and teacher art

UNWRITTEN LOVE LETTERS - STUDENT ASSESSMENT

NAME _____

DATE: _____

STUDENT:	Excellent/ Exemplary (4)	Good/ Proficient (3)	Average/ Marginal (2)	Needs Improvement (1)	Final SCORE
<u>Research</u> : Reflects a significant historic person or event that has been well-researched					
<u>Design</u> : incorporates drawing and found objects in composition and utilizes shape of envelope					
<u>Creativity</u> : work demonstrates original thought and execution					
<u>Craftsmanship</u> : Project is completed on time, is neat, and well-executed					
<u>TOTAL</u>					

OVERALL RATING OF PROJECT _____

IF YOU COULD DO THIS PROJECT AGAIN, WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?

WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM COMPLETING THIS PROJECT?

UNWRITTEN LOVE LETTERS – FINAL ASSESSMENT

NAME _____

DATE: _____

STUDENT:	Excellent/ Exemplary (4)	Good/ Proficient (3)	Average/ Marginal (2)	Needs Improvement (1)	Final SCORE
<u>Research</u> : Reflects a significant historic person or event that has been well-researched					
<u>Design</u> : incorporates drawing and found objects in composition and utilizes shape of envelope					
<u>Creativity</u> : work demonstrates original thought and execution					
<u>Craftsmanship</u> : Project is completed on time, is neat, and well-executed					
<u>TOTAL</u>					

OVERALL RATING OF PROJECT _____

COMMENTS:



Student and teacher examples of *Unwritten Love Letters*.
For more examples, see Teach/Ideas from Teachers on this Website.