

LESSON PLAN: HOMECOMING

Compliments of Albright-Knox Art Gallery's Looking and Learning program, a component of ARTStart.

based on:

ROMARE BEARDEN, RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON, 1967

Mixed media and collage on canvas, 50 1/4 x 60". Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Armand J. Castellani, 1981



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** This lesson plan was designed to complement the third-grade social studies curriculum, but it can also be used in various other areas such as language arts and arts and crafts curricula.

It is based on the collage by Romare Bearden called **Return of the Prodigal Son**. The work can be discussed on two different levels: one relating to the ancient parable about the prodigal son, and the other based on Bearden's life and contemporary society. Please read this lesson plan all the way through before you begin.

You will be presenting to your class two versions of the same story, set in different times and places, and involving a different set of characters. For each version, you will ask the students the same set of questions.

- PART I: discussion to do prior to showing the class the collage:

This part of the lesson relates to the parable of the Prodigal Son as related by Jesus in the Christian Bible. Answers to the questions will be based on what the children hear as you read them the story, and other knowledge they have of that particular time and place.

- PART II: discussion to do while looking at the collage:

This part is based on Bearden's updated version of the parable. Answers to the questions will relate to what they SEE in Bearden's collage. When appropriate, compare these answers to those in the first part.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Ask the students to look at the work of art closely and make a list of everything they see. Have them share their observations with the class. Suggestion: a spelling list could be made up using objects or characters in the collage.

- PART I: DISCUSSION TO DO PRIOR TO SHOWING THE STUDENTS THE COLLAGE

READ THE STORY OF THE PRODIGAL SON TO THE CLASS

Once, many years ago, somewhere in the Middle East, lived a wealthy man with two sons. Each of them was given a share of their father's money and possessions. The oldest son stayed home and worked hard, helping his father with their animals and crops. The younger son left home and traveled all over, spending his money unwisely. After a number of years, he found himself penniless and homeless. He returned home to his father, apologizing for his careless behavior. Rather than punishing the irresponsible youth, his father hugged him, gave him new clothing, and had a great feast prepared to welcome his son home. The older son thought that this was unfair, and was angry. Although his father understood his anger, he explained, "Your brother was dead and has come back to life, was lost and is found."

ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who are the characters in the story?
father, older son, younger son
2. What is their lifestyle?
they are wealthy (with livestock and crops) and most likely live in or near the desert (show the students the Middle East on a map); what types of things would they wear in this climate? What might their house be like? Do they do all of their own work?
3. What are the rules governing their lives?
take care of family; forgive mistakes
4. Where are they located?
desert, Middle East

5. What important events happened in their past?
this is a question for your students' imaginations (e.g., probably their mother died; they've learned about farming and livestock; were the two boys close, or did they fight all the time? etc.)

- **PART II: DISCUSSION TO DO WHILE LOOKING AT THE COLLAGE [why is this bold and all caps when Part I Discussion was not?]**

READ BEARDEN'S UPDATED VERSION OF THE STORY WHILE THE CLASS LOOKS AT THE COLLAGE [make this bold as in READ PRODIGAL SON TO CLASS?]

"The Prodigal Son has left North Carolina, gotten into bad company and has come back to the 'old folks,' his home, where, as Robert Frost says, when no one else wants you, they got to take you in."

ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION [I made this like the other heading]

The class should base their answers on the work of art. Remember to validate all answers, because everyone sees art differently, based on their own experiences and ideas.

PLEASE NOTE - the collage contains references to both the traditional and modern versions of the story. For example, although Bearden was referring to North Carolina, there is a small fragment of desert in the upper left corner. The candle, too, might refer to the past, along with the bottle of wine wrapped in rope. Keep this in mind when the children are making observations.

1. Who are the characters in the story?
young man and two adults (since the two adults seem to both be women, you could discuss the way families have changed over the centuries, especially in contemporary society)
2. What is their lifestyle?
have the students look at their clothing, jewelry, and the surrounding objects
3. What are the rules governing their lives?
since this takes place in contemporary society, perhaps students could base their answers on their own families and their rules; do they think that the two adults will have some new rules for the youth that has just returned?
4. Where are they located?
North Carolina (where Bearden lived until he was about ten years old)
5. What important events happened in their past?
this is still a question for the students' imaginations (how are the three characters related? what do they do for a living? what did the young man do that got him into trouble? why did he leave and where did he go?)