

Of Dogs and Other People: The Art of Roy De Forest

Curriculum Activities

Grades: Transitional Kindergarten

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Lesson #1: Carefully Arranging a Collage Using Pre-cut 2-D Materials

Understanding Goals

1. Students will practice their observational and oral language skills by talking about the shapes, colors, lines, and figures they see in a selection of Roy De Forest's paintings and in their own work.
2. Students will make decisions about composition by arranging pre-cut papers into a collage.

Materials

- Large projections or posters of three Roy De Forest works (see accompanying PowerPoint file)
- A bunch of cut out pieces of paper, cloth, and string of different colors, textures, shapes, and sizes—one tray for each table or small group
- Black felt rectangles to serve as a composition mat (one for each child)

Vocabulary

careful, arrange, rearrange, collage

Depending on the language level of the individual, students will hear and use words describing color, shape, lines, and animals.

Anticipatory Set

Teacher will gather students at the rug and show them a bunch of cut out pieces of paper, cloth and string of different colors, textures, shapes, and sizes. Teacher explains that students will carefully arrange them to make an interesting piece of art and that the teacher will take a picture of their arrangement.

Lesson

1. At the rug, students will look at a print, painting, or projection of one of Roy De Forest's artworks. Teacher will lead a discussion of what students see using questions about visual elements (What colors do you see? What shapes do you see? What kind of lines do you see? What figures do you see?). Teacher points out how the artist, Roy De Forest, decided how he would put all of these colors and shapes together to make his art. Teacher repeats with one or two more works.
2. Students move into a circle so they can see the teacher work in the middle of the circle. Teacher brings a tray of papers, cloth, and string and one black felt rectangle. Teacher describes their process aloud as they look through the paper and cloth pieces and decide which one they will place on the mat first. They will try out a few places for the shape on the felt mat, and then decide on one. They choose and add more pieces and rearrange as they go to create a collage of images. When the students are finished, teacher takes a picture of the collage.
3. Students are invited to create their own collages at a table. Teacher encourages students to take their time to carefully arrange and rearrange the pieces. Teacher takes a picture of the work when the students are finished. Students return the cloth and paper pieces to the tray and, if there is time, can compose another.
4. Students push in their chairs and do a gallery walk, where students walk around the room looking at classmate's work. (Teacher briefly reviews expectations of a gallery walk first.) Students are encouraged to tell their teachers and each other about the shapes, colors, lines, and figures they see in their classmates' work.

Extension

- This entire lesson could be repeated in the gallery of the Roy De Forest exhibit at the Oakland Museum of California.
- Teacher could present Roy De Forest's sculptures and have students respond by creating collage or sculpture using 3-D materials.

Lesson #2: Creating Stories through Loose Parts Collage

Understanding Goals

Students will practice oral language by telling their own stories using 3-D objects including animals.

Materials

- Images of Roy De Forest's artwork (see accompanying PowerPoint file)
- Story connected to one of Roy De Forest's artworks
- Figurines of dogs, horses and other animals.
- Black felt rectangles or trays, one for each child
- 6–8 different types of 3D materials like puff balls, glass gems, rocks, wood slices, cloth pieces, small blocks. Bowls of materials at every table.

Vocabulary

Names of whatever materials the class will be using

Story elements: beginning, character, setting, action, ending

Anticipatory Set

Teacher gathers students and shares that we can find stories in books but we can also find them in art.

Lesson

1. Before starting, the teacher invents a story based on the artwork, or selects one of the stories starting from page 7.
2. Teacher shows an image of a painting by Roy De Forest and says that this painting can tell a story; students look at the image for a quiet moment.
3. Students listen to the teacher tell their story based on an artwork (or one of the stories starting from page 7).
4. Students move into a circle and teacher brings out 3-D materials like puff balls, glass gems, rocks, wood slices, cloth pieces, small blocks, and figurines. Teacher brings out black felt or a tray and models how they can tell a story by

arranging and manipulating the materials. Teacher should tell their story out loud.

5. Students are invited to the tables to manipulate materials and tell their own stories.
6. Teachers/volunteers should move around the room and collect the kids' stories. They can audiorecord them or write them down. They can also take a photo of the materials at one moment of the story for documentation.

Extension

- Lesson steps 1–5 could be repeated in the Roy De Forest exhibit at the Oakland Museum of California.
- Students can try creating stories in pairs rather than alone.
- Students can express their stories in art by painting or using another medium.

Ongoing Assessment

This lesson is a great way for teachers to assess students' language use and understanding of story structure. Story length, detail and focus as well as grammar and vocabulary will be observed for future lessons. Students should be working toward including story elements like a strong beginning, a clear setting, at least one character, some type of action or problem, and an ending or resolution. At the TK age, even after much practice of storytelling, we don't expect all stories to have all of these elements.

Additional Resources

Check out apps like Talking Photo and Speaking Photo to record short (30 second) stories with photos.

Talking Photo: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/talking-photos-record-voice-over-images/id900748720?mt=8>

Speaking Photo:

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/speakingphoto/id485844944?mt=8>

Background on Roy De Forest

Excerpts from the exhibition *Of Dogs and Other People: The Art of Roy De Forest*

Roy De Forest’s fantasies invite us on journeys into rich alternative worlds. Playful and humorous elements—including bright colors and animals—define his art. At the same time, De Forest grappled with important cultural and philosophical themes. His imaginative journeys began during the time when Cold War conformism was the dominant cultural force in California.

De Forest (1930–2007) spent most of his childhood on a small farm in Yakima, Washington. His family couldn’t afford to buy him toys, so he learned to entertain himself by reading adventure books. These books, along with the boats and planes he built by hand, remained important sources of inspiration for his work.

Dogs reign supreme in De Forest’s imaginary kingdom. As a child, he had a succession of dogs, all of which he named Hector. He also loved horses and their sleek bodies. He was particularly drawn to the spotted coats of the Indian Paint horses that grazed on the nearby Yakima tribal lands and sprawling ranches.

In 1950, De Forest moved to San Francisco to attend art school. He became associated with the Funk Art movement in the 1960s, which rejected the trends of Pop Art and Minimalism that dominated the art scene nationally. De Forest preferred freedom of imagination, spontaneity, and a maximalist approach.

De Forest made art spontaneously rather than carefully thinking it through in advance. An art critic, reviewing an early De Forest exhibition, described the artist’s imaginative approach to making sculpture:

“He takes boards, sticks, and irregular scraps of wood, other miscellaneous materials, just about every hue of paint known to man, and in a frenzied delight of creativity whips out some of the wiggliest, most utterly delightful works of art that have graced gallery walls in my recent memory.”

—Dean Wallace, *San Francisco Chronicle*

Drawing was crucial to De Forest's creative process, helping him to develop his ideas along with his paintings and wall sculptures. Never preparatory sketches, his works on paper are stand-alone artworks.

Roy De Forest loved to read and had a lifelong fascination with travel books and adventure stories. But he was mostly an avid armchair traveler, journeying more often through his reading than he did in person. Journeys—by foot, boat, or horse—are often featured in his artwork. The voyage De Forest painted most frequently was the inward one, into the realm of his imagination.

Sample Stories

The stories on the next six pages are from recordings shared inside the exhibit *Of Dogs and Other People: The Art of Roy De Forest*. You can also use them as stories for *Lesson #2: Creating Stories Through Loose Parts Collage*.

Listen and look closer:
Hans Bricker in the Tropics

Amber Cady, Therapist

My name is Amber Cady, and I am a therapist.

The journey I imagine taking into this painting makes me feel both tense and really hopeful.

When I look at this painting, the first thing that catches my eye is the volcano, but then I quickly jump over to the brick man and back and forth. I feel like my eyes are darting back and forth between them.



Amber Cady, *continued*

I imagine going in, and I imagine starting at that tree with the stripes, the palm tree. I imagine it's a palm tree... and sort of hiding out watching somewhere among these plant/bush/tree things, plants, and watching this whole thing unfold with the dog and the horse and the brick man. Yeah.

It's so fascinating to me. I feel like I have this deep urge to sit there. I really do feel like there's something so soothing about that little spot.

I feel like I can connect to something, which is grounding. And then if I bring myself into the forefront, where I'm hanging out with the brick man and the dog, and then I look over my shoulder and I see this woman brick figure coming... being ripped into this reality, then I start to feel a little bit nervous, or yeah, a little tense.

One of the things that I think in my own work, and working with people around mental health stuff, is that, part of what we all are trying to do is navigate and tolerate the complexity of multiple realities, and how to...not necessarily always make one reality one reality, but integrate, and have a place where people can share realities.

**What is the first thing you feel
when you look at this painting?**

Listen and look closer:
Hans Bricker in the Tropics

**Ilán Casián-Issenberg,
Actor and Fifth Grader**

My name is Ilán Tlayotzin Casián-Issenberg, and I'm an actor.

Looking at this painting... okay, so I imagined it like this world inside a hollow mandarin, and then everyone from outside is peeling off the rind and is looking into this small world inside of a hollow mandarin.

What first catches my eyes is these triangles falling down from the top of the painting. I feel like it's like someone from the outer world ripping into this tiny world and looking into it. And then she or he, whoever that person is, on the outside is maybe calling to this brick man and like, "Come back, come back," and he's like, "I can't."

I'd probably go to the edge of the closest I can go to see these triangles to see what it really is. Then I'd probably go to this brick

Ilán Casián-Issenberg, *continued*

man and see what he or her, or whatever it is, is really, yeah... I'd like to talk to the brick man in English then try in Spanish, Pig Latin. I don't know, maybe every language. He can adapt to whatever the speaker can talk. I'd go up to him and talk to him like a normal person or her and just see what happens. And I just look around to see what I find.



**If you were to talk to the brick man,
which language would you use?**

Listen and look closer:
Country Dog Gentlemen

**Tora Rocha, Landscaper
and Former Zookeeper**

I'm Tora Rocha. I am a landscape maintenance supervisor. I used to be a zookeeper, and this painting brings back many, many memories in many different parts of my life.



When I first look at this painting, I notice the big brown dog with a big red tongue in the middle. He really calls out to me like, "I'm in charge here."

I kind of like the little brown dog at the bottom with the big blue eyes, that's kind of peeking out,

Tora Rocha, *continued*

like doesn't really want to be seen but is trying to be seen, and see what's going on, find out what all the other commotion behind him is going on. I think I kind of relate to that one. I like to stand to the side and see what all the commotion's about before I jump into it.

I used to work at the zoo, and this painting reminds me of when I worked at the zoo. I always felt like when we're not around, the animals had their own little party.

This painting reminds me of my work as a park supervisor and being in charge of gardens. It's a lot of tropical plants in there. Some very unusual flowers. I see mushrooms. I see some lichen, and all kinds of interesting horticulture species. But then there's amoebas flying around at the top of the canopy, so it's kind of cool. It's like a mixed world of all kinds of things going on. But it definitely reminds me of a garden, or a forest, and the dogs are having a party in the forest, near the lake.

If I gave this painting a title, I would call it *Canines in the Jungle*.

What would you name this painting?