

Ideas for teachers, families, and art lovers of all ages!

A Room with a View

A Public Art Expedition to view the work of **Romare Bearden**

This activity explores the Public art of Romare Bearden located in New York City at Westchester Square Elevated Subway Station, IRT #6 at Westchester Avenue and East Tremont at Williamsbridge Road, Bronx, New York.

Families can venture on their own via the NYC subway to this activity. Teachers – this activity is great for young people grades 3-5 and above.

Art Work: *Untitled*, 1993, 2 epoxy and faceted glass side windows: 9' 6" x 4' 10" x 3/4" center window: 9' 6" x 10'

About the Art: Shortly before his death in 1988, Romare Bearden completed the project design for a stained-glass window in the Westchester Square IRT station. The work is based on a collage depicting an elevated train weaving in and out of a cityscape in Bearden's familiar Cubist description of New York City street life. The experience of riding the elevated trains is central to his imagery. "To see the changing aspects of the city—the great buildings of midtown... and the tenements abutting the elevated lines. Like Edward Hopper, I drew inspiration from these sights." Bearden's stained-glass window, made from a thick durable epoxy, is located in the entrance. The windows were executed by Belgian born and trained architectural glass artist Benoit Gilsoul who collaborated closely with Bearden. Bearden realized immediately that the light medium of stained glass was ideal for his image of the project. This is Bearden's only work in glass. Mr. Gilsoul has used brightly colored glass translating the textures and brush strokes which he discussed with Bearden as the 'cartoon' (drawing) for the windows that were executed.

Questions for Discussion: What do you notice about the windows? With a finger, trace one of the building shapes in the air. Does the shape describe a whole building, or part of one? Why do you think the artist used each color for part of a building? Come as close as you can and look. Then move back or to the side at least 3-4 feet from where you first looked at the window. What is the difference when you are close and when you are at a distance?

Sample Art Activity: Students create a painting of a city scene. First, they make sketches from two viewpoints. Then they combine the ideas from the sketches into a final drawing that they then paint.

Purpose: To demonstrate understanding that what we see changes depending on where we stand.

Materials: small paper "frames" of tag board or construction paper, scissors, pencils. Sketch paper about 6" x 9", large white paper at least 12" x 18" but preferably 18" x 24"; tempera paints, brushes, water containers, paper towels.

Teaching Strategies:

- Each child makes a 'window' or viewfinder about 2" x 2" cut out of paper, or uses old slide mounts with the plastic removed.
- At each of 2 viewpoints, students hold up the viewfinder and sketch what they see. They can draw a scene from the classroom window or from inside the classroom, or from a photo of a city scene. Sketches can be about 6" x 9".
- On the large white paper, they combine these scenes and sketch the outlines of the shapes.
- Encourage children to mix colors instead of using them right out of the bottle.
- Students paint the final large version, being aware that their ideas can change to keep the art lively and interesting.
- Show samples of postcards that announce artists' exhibits, prior to children designing their own (see Closure below).

Closure: Hold an art reception as a school event, with postcards designed by children to notify people what, when and where. Invite family and friends and serve refreshments if you can.

Extensions: [should bullets be round like those above?]

- For linguistic learning: Write poems about city life after reading poets who worked in a fragmented way, such as Gertrude Stein Research more work by Romare Bearden and present what you find to the class.
- For math/logical learning: Using one of your sketches, scale it up so that 1 inch of sketch is equal to 1 foot of painting; draw the outlines of the image on a large piece of white paper and then paint.
- For visual/spatial learning: Reinterpret your painting in another medium, such as collage or even plasticine. (Note that Romare Bearden worked with an artist who interpreted his painting into stained glass.)

- For musical/auditory learning: With a group of friends, create and perform a music video about your trip to see the Romare Bearden stained-glass art work at the subway station.

National Art Education Learning Standards:

1. Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes
2. Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas
3. Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others
4. Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

Further credits:

The *Public Art in the Bronx* web site <http://bronxart.lehman.cuny.edu/pa/bearden.htm> and companion hard-copy guide have been developed as an extension of the 1993 exhibition by the same title. Site descriptions have been adapted from the catalogue essays, "Public Art in the Bronx: A Descriptive History" by Sally Webster, and "Contemporary Public Art in the Bronx" by Susan Hoeltzel. This project has been developed by the Lehman College Art Gallery. Susan Hoeltzel has served as project director.

Ideas for Teachers have been developed by Annie Coan in conjunction with Edith DeChiara. Additional contributions to the education section have been made by Kristin Baxter and Phillip Kautz.