

Imagined Communities

Grades Pre-K thru 5th

Inspired by DeVon Smith, Ruby C. Williams and Gayleen Aiken

Lesson Overview

For this activity, students create “Visionary Communities” based on real or imaginary individuals, families, or creatures with fabrics, yarn, and colors.

Objectives

- Students interpret, analyze, and discuss artworks that express themes about community.
- Students reflect on their culture and traditions.
- Students express their real or imagined communities through collaborative drawing.



World's 1st Family of Robots by DeVon Smith

Critical Questions

How does our community impact how we view ourselves?

How do we connect with our community without words?

Vocabulary

Pre-K thru 2nd	3rd thru 5th
Community Tradition Imagination Visionary	Community Tradition Imagination Visionary Fictional and Nonfictional

Materials

- Glue
- Colored Pencils
- Construction paper
- Crayons
- Fabric or felt
- Yarn

Maryland State Standards

Art Standards	
Anchor Standard 11 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E:P-2:1: Create art that tells a story about life experiences • E:3-5:1: Observe and interpret cultural traditions and surroundings in new ways by creating art.

Classroom Activity

Step 1: Warm-up - Ask and display questions on the board “what is a community?” and “Who is in your community?” Ask students to turn and talk for 1 to 2 minutes. Allow students to share out and write their answers on the board.

Next, choose Ruby C. Williams, Gayleen Aiken, or DeVon Smith to discuss with your class.

Display their artwork on the board and ask one or more of the following questions.

1. “ Where do you think this individual or community lives?”
2. “ How do they help their community?”
3. “ What traditions do you think they do with their community?”

Write their responses on the board. Read the selected artist's biography to students and display/ask questions:

1. “ How did the artist's life inspire their artwork? ”
2. “ How did the artist show the idea of community in their artwork?”

Step 2: Separate students into groups of 4. Inform the class they will collaborate and make a “Visionary Community” in their groups. Pass out the [Visionary Community Worksheet](#), and instruct students to answer the first question individually.

1. “Who is a person, animal, or an object that reminds you of your community? “

Next, instruct students to discuss who the figure/what the object is and to complete the worksheet as a group. Allow 10 to 15 minutes to complete the activity.

2. “ Where does your “Visionary Community” live? Write your answer and draw a picture.”
3. “ How does your group help each other? What traditions does your community like to do together? ”
4. “Redraw your and your peers’ pictures into a “Visionary Community!”

Step 3: Pass out an [Exquisite Corpse activity sheet](#) and instruct students to create a community member together through a game called Exquisite Corpse. [Exquisite Corpse](#) is a game where each person draws on paper, folds and hides the drawing, and then passes it to the next player to add their picture ([Tate.org.uk](#)). Play [Exquisite Corpse Collaborative Drawing Tutorial - Art With Trista](#) and state/display instructions:

1. First, draw your head. When complete, fold your paper to hide your drawing and pass it to your peer. Keep going until your "Visionary Community" member is complete! Your “Visionary Community” member can look like any person, animal, or object! They can be real, or imaginary!
2. When you get your "Visionary Community" member back, decorate them with colors, fabrics, and yarn. Have fun and create!
 - **Pre-K-2nd** Students draw their community members, color, and paste fabrics to their figures.
 - **3rd to 5th** After the video, demonstrate how students will complete the exquisite corpse activity. Time each section for 3-5 minutes (adjust for your class accordingly).

After the Exquisite Corpse game, pass out glue, colored pencils, fabrics, scissors and yarn. Instruct students to dress up their community members with the materials. Allow students to work independently for 15 to 30 minutes. Check in with groups and adjust time accordingly for your class.

After the project is complete, cut out the figure, punch a hole at the top of the paper, and loop a string to hang the artwork around the classroom. Or, give your class the option to arrange their community

members in the classroom.

Step 4: Display and ask students the reflection/exit ticket questions. Write their responses on the board.

1. "What does a 'Visionary Community' mean to you?"
2. "What makes a community unique?"
3. "How did your community, real or imaginary, inspire your artwork?"

Additional Resources

[Something From Nothing: Remembering Artist DeVon Smith with Filmmaker David Craig – Pittsburgh Orbit](#)

[:"Robot Man" and World-Record Hitchhiker](#)

[The Curious Cousins of Vermont Outsider Artist Gayleen Aiken](#)

[Moonlight and Music: The Enchanted World of Gayleen Aiken](#)

[The Outsider Art Of Ruby C. Williams](#)

[Ruby C. Williams](#)

Videos

[Something From Nothing: Remembering Artist DeVon Smith with Filmmaker David Craig](#)

[Rare Visions and Roadside Revelations](#) (start video 9:00 min-13:05min)

[0:53 / 4:12 Meet the Raimbilli Cousins, created by VT folk artist Gayleen Aiken.](#)

[Miss Ruby C. Williams](#)

[Florida FOLK ARTIST Ruby Williams - WildTravelsTV.com](#)

Artist Biographies

DeVon Smith

DeVon Smith was born in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania, in 1926 to Betty and Mulford Smith. His family moved seven times during his childhood, and his parents divorced during the Great Depression. As a youngster, he frequently skipped school to hitchhike to the next town over and watch movies all day. Sci-fi and horror movies were his favorites. Smith quit high school and briefly worked casting tank turrets at Union Steel Casting in Pittsburgh. Drafted in 1944, Smith landed in England with the 84th Infantry, eventually earning three battle stars. After the war, he worked for a while at a hotel owned by relatives, but wanderlust got the best of him, and he soon hit the road, traveling across the 48 contiguous states in only 33 days in 1957. Smith was later officially listed in The Guinness Book of World Records for hitching the Largest Total Distance of 290,980 miles from 1973-85, eventually totalling more than 500,000 documented miles for all of his travels - a record he held until 1983. The Washington Post, the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times noted his adventures. He also appeared on the T.V. shows of both Groucho Marx and Art Linkletter.



When his wandering days were over, Smith settled in Wampum, Pennsylvania, just minutes away from where he grew up. DeVon, a big coffee drinker, downed between 8 and 10 cups daily. He made a living trading and selling junk until he died in 2003. Smith shared his trailer with his inventory of scavenged items and his 100 percent recycled "World's First Family of Robots," including Father Jupiter, wife Venus, Sis-tar, her brother Sun, and Robo-dog Pluto. A younger robot couple, Saturn and Mars, were married at AVAM in June 2000, with about 200 museum members as wedding guests in attendance. Devon shared this advice to anyone who would listen: "Don't sit in a chair. Get out and do it."

Ruby C. Williams

Ruby C. Williams grew up in Bealsville, Florida, a town founded by formerly enslaved people just after the 1865 Emancipation and located near Plant City, "The Winter Strawberry Capital of The World." Williams, who recalled picking strawberries for three cents a quart as a youngster, always wanted to be an artist: "My family knew I had some talent about me, but we just didn't have the money." Williams became a minister and married one. Together, they preached, raised a family, and lived in New Jersey for 25 years. After a devastating betrayal by her husband and best friend, Williams returned to Florida and opened her own produce stand along State Road 60.



To catch the eyes of passing motorists, Williams hand-painted bright signs trumpeting her fresh fruits and vegetables. Some of her signs began to morph into expressions of her personal hurt, with messages like, "What! You are in a hotel room with my best friend?" and, "How can you preach the word of God and live?" Soon her customers were asking to buy art even more than her produce. Williams, true to her farming roots, was fond of telling customers and admirers she set up the stand to help local farmers and to earn a living, not to launch a career in art, but that God works in miraculous ways.

Despite the artistic notoriety, Williams kept her priorities straight. "I love the farming more," Williams told the Tampa Bay Times in 2012. "I get my hands in the dirt and get to grow my own food. What is better

than having a good pot of black-eyed peas, greens, and corn bread? The art might or might not sell, but I always have something to eat.”

Gayleen Aiken

Gayleen Aiken was born in Barre, Vermont, in 1934. Her father operated a sporting goods and fix-it shop on the first floor of the family’s large farmhouse. An only child, Gayleen began drawing a group of imaginary playmates, whom she named “the Raimbilli cousins,” just before entering grade

school. By the time she was 8 or 9, she had made life-sized cut-outs of all 24 cousins—including “Cousin Gawleen,” using cardboard boxes from the outboard motors her father sold. Gayleen was always a little different and was picked on by classmates, so her parents began home-schooling her in junior high. Gayleen became a faithful diarist and record keeper of the people, objects, and events in her life.



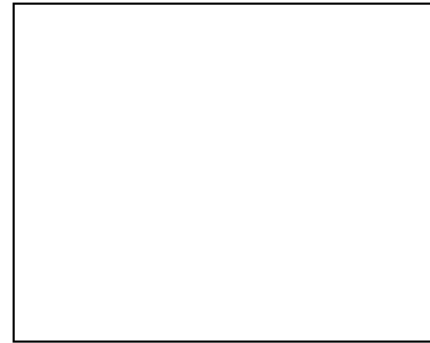
When her father died in the early 1950s, the family “got poor,” Gayleen recalled. The beloved old farmhouse was sold and she and her mother moved to a rented apartment. Her mother passed away in the late 1980s. Gayleen continued to draw pen and crayon pictures of the Raimbilli cousins, living out all the adventures she dreamed of having when she was a child—playing and collecting a variety of musical instruments, dancing in the moonlight, playing pranks on parents and witnessing inanimate objects sprout arms and legs and come to life—creating an idealized image of life in the sturdy farmhouse and the Vermont landscape and granite industry of her youth. In the 1980s, Gayleen began painting at the Grass Roots Art and Community Effort (GRACE), which gives non-directive art workshops to the young, old, and institutionalized in Vermont.

Name _____

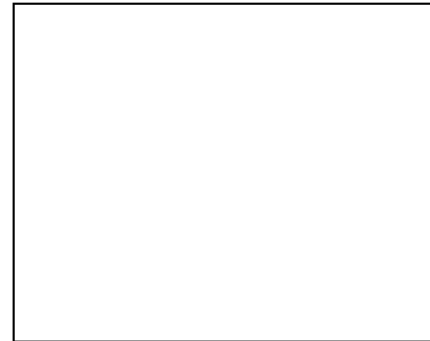
Date _____

Activity: Today, you will create a "Visionary Community "member. A **community** is a group with similar interests, cultures, and values.

1. Who is a person, animal, or an object that reminds you of your community? Write your answer and draw a picture.



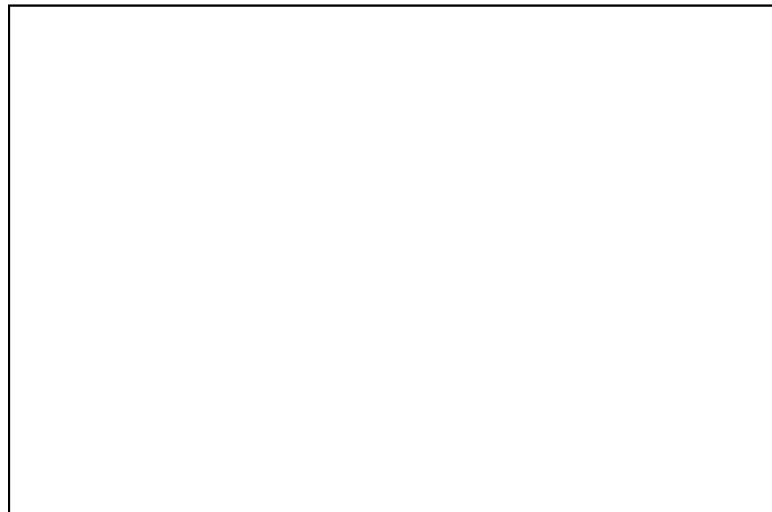
2. Where does your "Visionary Community" live? Write your answer and draw a picture.



3. How does your group help each other? What traditions does your community like to do together? Write your answer and draw a picture.



4. Redraw your and your peers' pictures into a "Visionary Community!"



Name _____

Date _____

Today, you will make your "Visionary Community" member by playing the Exquisite Corpse game. **What is Exquisite Corpse?** Exquisite Corpse is a game where each person draws on paper, folds and hides the drawing, and then passes it to the next player to add their picture.

1. First, draw your head. Then, draw a line into the next section for your peer to connect their drawing. When complete, fold your paper to hide your picture and pass it to your peer. Keep going until your "Visionary Community" member is complete! Your "Visionary Community" member can look like any person, animal, or object! They can be real, or imaginary!
2. When you get your "Visionary Community" member back, decorate them with colors, fabrics, and yarn. Have fun and create!

