

Imagined Futures

Grades 9th thru 12th

Inspired by Zebedee Armstrong

Lesson Overview

Students create artworks based on their interpretation of time, spirituality, and the future into a “contraption.”

Objectives

- Students interpret, analyze, and discuss artworks that express themes about the time and future.
- Students create “Visionary Future” artworks that explore their interpretations of the past, present and future.



Calendar by Zebedee Armstrong

Critical Questions

How do individuals or societies address their predictions of future events through art?

Why do artists represent themselves through materials?

Vocabulary

9th thru 12th
Imagination Transformation Documentation Afrofuturism Reclaim Visionary Design Spirituality

Maryland State Standards

Anchor Standard 7

Perceive and analyze artistic work.

E:9-12:1: Construct and justify meaningful interpretation of an artwork or collection of works supported by evidence through describing and analyzing feelings, subject matter, formal characteristics, art-making approaches, contextual information, and key concepts.

Anchor Standard 10 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

E:9-12:1: Synthesize knowledge of social, cultural, historical, and personal life to create meaningful works of art or design.

Materials

- Glue
- Markers
- Hot glue gun
- Magazines
- Colored Pencils
- Construction paper
- Cardboard box or stock paper
- Discarded or found items

Classroom Activity

Note: In this activity, students have the option to use a hot glue gun and discarded or found materials. Please go over safety protocols in your class with these items.

Step 1: Ask and display the warm up question on the board
“What does the phrase, ‘taping with time’ mean to you? Write your answer and draw an image associated with this phrase.”

Instruct students to write their interpretation on one side of the paper and their drawing on the other side. Allow students to work for 5 minutes.

When the time is complete, set students in groups of 4-5 and have them exchange index cards with the drawings visible. Instruct the students to create a phrase for the drawing they see.

Step 2: Next, display Zebedee Armstrong’s artwork on the board. Ask students, “ Describe what you see. Why do you think the artist used certain colors, forms, texts, and textures?”

For Zebedee Armstrong play: [Zebedee Armstrong FINAL JUDGEMENT VISIONARY OUTSIDER ARTIST ZB](#) and [ZB Armstrong](#) (interview with Zebedee Armstrong in his home)

Questions:

1. “What themes do you notice in Zebedee Armstrong’s work?”
2. Read excerpt to students “The calendars consist of complex pathways and grids drawn in black, red and blue permanent marker encircling his constructions. Armstrong called this effect ‘taping with time.’
“Why do you think Armstrong called his process ‘taping with time’? How did he express this phrase in his work?”

Step 3: Read the Afro futurism statement-“What is Afrofuturism?” by the [National Museum of African American History & Culture](#) “Afrofuturism expresses notions of Black identity, agency and freedom through art, creative works and activism that envision liberated futures for Black life.” For additional information, play: [Afrofuturism mixes sci-fi and social justice. Here’s how it works.](#)

Read/display the excerpt: “ The process is meditative and illuminating, and in the process he apparently left his everyday state of mind, transforming his structures into spiritually charged icons.”

1. “ Do you believe that Zebedee Armstrong artwork is connected to afrofuturism? Why? Or Why not?”

2. “How does Zebedee Armstrong express time, future, and spirituality in his artwork?”

Extension Lesson:

Step 3: Separate students in groups of 4 to 5. Print out [Profile: Zebedee Armstrong \(1911-1993\) – Black Art Story](#) for each student to read.

State and display the instructions “ In your group, discuss and summarize why or why not Zebedee Armstrong’s artwork is connected to Afrofuturism in three points and a drawing.”

Pass out [Visual chart Worksheet](#). Allow students to work 10 to 15 minutes, adjust time accordingly for your class.

After worksheets are complete, allow groups to present their visual charts to the class.

Step 4: Give out “[Visionary Futures](#)” [worksheet](#) Instruct students to answer the following questions:

1. What is a word and number you associate with time?
2. What is a shape, symbol, or object you associate with the future?
3. What color(s) do you associate with spirituality?

Instruct students to combine all of their answers and make a contraption that represents time, future, and spirit in the form of a collage or a sculpture. Pass out markers, magazines, construction paper, glue, cardboard, discarded or found items, for the collage or sculpture. Consider using a hot glue gun to add discarded or found materials to build the contraption (collage or sculpture).

Students work independently for 25 to 30 minutes (adjust time accordingly for your class). Check in to see if the class needs more time and or help. After the project is complete, allow students to present their artworks.

Step 5: Display and ask students the reflection questions and write their responses on the board.

1. What examples of Afrofuturism do you recall in art, social media, or daily life?
2. How do reclaimed materials transform and impact the history of a space?
3. What does a “Visionary Future” mean to you?

Additional Resources

[zebedee armstrong](#)

[Profile: Zebedee Armstrong \(1911-1993\) – Black Art Story](#)

[ZB Armstrong: Introduction](#)

Videos

[Zebedee Armstrong FINAL JUDGEMENT VISIONARY OUTSIDER ARTIST Z B](#)

[ZB Armstrong-Laroche Collections](#)

Books

[Passionate Visions of the American South: Self-Taught Artists from 1940 the Present, and exhibit curated and a catalog edited by Alice Rae Yelen](#)

Artist Biographies

Zebedee (ZB) Armstrong

Born on October 11, 1911, in Thomson, Georgia, Zebedee “Z. B.” Armstrong attended school until the eighth grade, and like his father before him, he spent most of his life picking cotton on the Mack McCormick farm. In 1929, at just seventeen-years-old, Armstrong married Ulamay Demmons. Together they had two daughters. When Ulamay died in 1969, Armstrong started a new phase of work at the Thomson Box factory, laboring there until his retirement a decade later. Troubled by the loss of his wife and the indoor monotony of factory work, Z. B. experienced much sadness until 1972, when Armstrong said an angel came to him proclaiming, “You have to stop wasting your time because the end of the world is coming.” Taking the angel at his word, Armstrong began working night and day to devise a calculating calendar that would predict the precise occurrence of this impending catastrophic event.



During the next 21 years, Z. B. Armstrong made about six hundred flat and box-like calendars, using paper, wood, cardboard, old furniture, and other reclaimed materials readily available from the dump or discarded at his job site. They ranged from a diminutive six-by-eleven-inch flat calendar to a large 3-D painted wardrobe. In most of Armstrong’s time-centric works, he would begin by painting his surface white and then using mostly singular bold colors—black, blue, red and/or white—paint or using markers to form defined grids, timelines, lettering and numbers. His creative compulsion to make artworks specifically focused on the end of time continued right up to his death in 1993.

Name _____

Date _____

Activity: Make a “contraption” that represents time, future, and spirit. The contraption can be in the form of a collage or sculpture. Use markers, magazines, construction paper, glue, discarded or found items, and cardboard for the collage or sculpture. Consider using a hot glue gun to add discarded or found materials to build your contraption.

1. What is a word and number you associate with time?

Write your answer.

2. What is a shape, symbol or object you associate with the future? Write your answer and draw the shape, symbol, or object in the box.



3. What is a color you associate with spirituality?

Write your answer and draw the color(s) in the box.

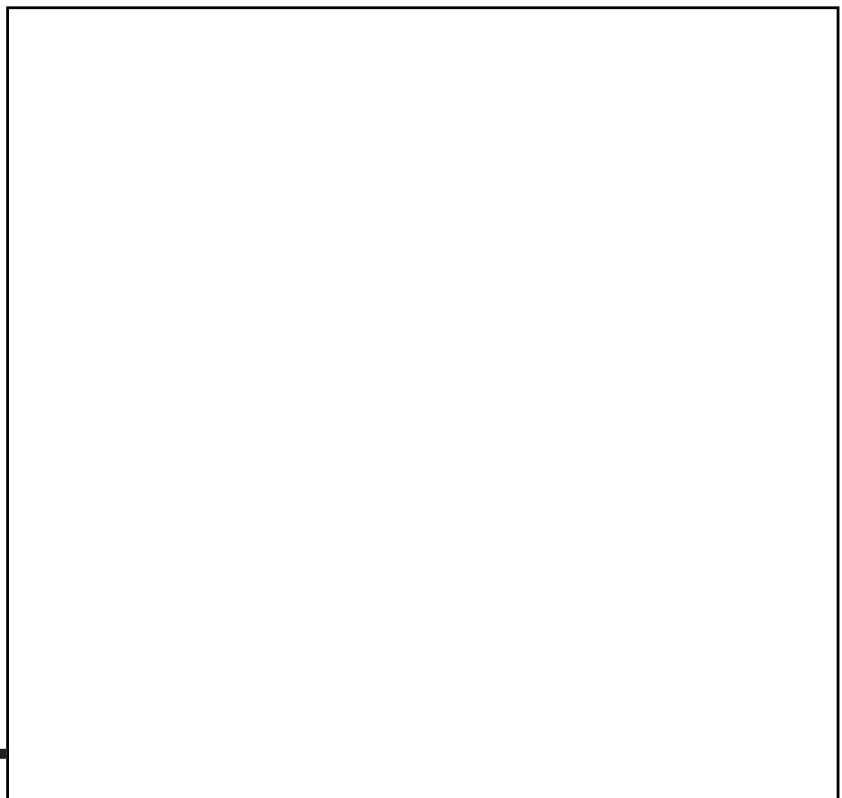


4. Create your contraption by combining the following in to a collage or sculpture:

- Your word and number.
- Your symbol, shape and/or object.
- Your color(s).

Use markers, magazines, construction paper, glue, cardboard, and discarded or found items to create your contraption.

- You can use the box to create your collage and cut it out when complete. Or, use a larger sheet of paper.
- For the sculpture, consider using a hot glue gun to add discarded or found materials to build your contraption.

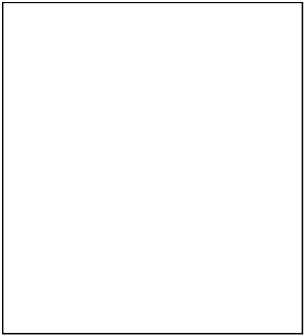
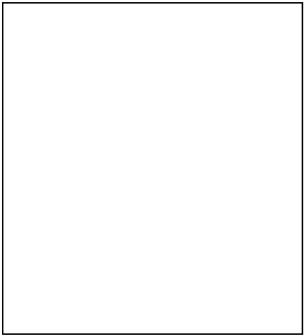
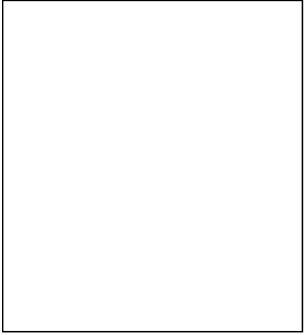


Name _____

Date _____

The National Museum of African American History & Culture defines Afrofuturism as expressing notions of Black identity, agency, and freedom through art, creative works, and activism that envision liberated futures for Black life.

1. In your group, discuss and summarize why or why not Zebedee Armstrong's artwork is connected to Afrofuturism in three points and a drawing.

		
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