

# FINDING FREEDOM THROUGH ARTMAKING

**Grades 9-12**

Inspired by the works of Mary Proctor such as Freedom of Expression

Time Needed: 3 class periods (45–60 minutes each)

Artist Focus: Mary Proctor

## Overview

Mary Proctor is a visionary artist who often uses found objects, vibrant colors, text, and reclaimed surfaces to explore themes of healing, resilience, and freedom. Her 1998 work *Freedom of Expression* combines paint costume jewelry, buttons, and shells to present a narrative of joy, release, and spiritual movement.

In this lesson students will investigate how Proctor's visual art conveys the ideas of movement and freedom. They will explore how different modes of expression (dance, gesture, movement, music, and visual art) can be combined to communicate powerful ideas. After analyzing *Freedom of Expression*, students will select a song lyric, pose, gesture, or movement that represents freedom to them, and create a mixed-media artwork inspired by Proctor that integrates text, movement, and found materials.

## Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Analyze how Mary Proctor conveys movement, freedom, and spiritual expression in her artwork.
2. Hypothesize how visual imagery influences audience perception and emotional response.
3. Select a song, lyric, pose, or gesture that represents freedom and translate that into a visual composition .
4. Use found materials, text, and images to create a mixed media artwork inspired by Proctor's practice.
5. Present and articulate how their choices (music, movement, materials, imagery) communicate freedom.

## Standards Alignment

Maryland State Visual Art Standard – Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work. Anchor Standard 4: Analyze, interpret, and select artistic work for presentation.

## Essential Questions

How does movement express freedom?

How can artists use multiple forms of expression (art, dance, gesture, music) to communicate?

How does the way artwork is presented shape how it is perceived?



## Expectations (Grades 9-12)

- E:9-12:1: Hypothesize ways visual imagery influences human perception and affects human experience.
- E:9-12:5: Articulate clearly and effectively in performance with attention to details and nuances that communicate artistic expression.

## Vocabulary

- Self-Portrait - An artwork an artist creates of themselves.
- Reflection - Thinking about one's own experiences, values, or growth.
- Express - To share feelings, ideas, or identity through words or art.
- Community- A group of people connected by shared experiences or support.
- Transformation - A process of growth or change
- Healing - Recovery, resilience, or renewal after changes.
- Freedom -The ability to act, think, or feel without restraint; in art, freedom often connects to creativity, identity, and self-representation.
- Gesture - A body movement that communicates and idea or emotion,
- Spiritualism- A belief of practice that focuses on the human spirit, soul, or connection to something beyond oneself.
- Symbolism - The use of words, images or objects to represent deeper meanings.
- Assemblage - An artwork made by combining found or three-dimensional objects.

## Activities

Day 1: Investigate the Artist

1: Have student explore resources about Mary Proctor:

<https://spacesarchives.org/explore/search-the-online-collection/marys-art-yard/>

<https://www.soulsgrowndeep.org/artist/mary-proctor>

- Alternatively, assign half of the class to each resource and then pair students up to share information and compare resources.

Ask the following questions:

- What stands out to you in Mary Proctor's biography?
- What is a continuous theme you notice in the article? Show evidence through a word, symbol, or shape.

2. Play the video: [Tallahassee Inspired - Mary Proctor](#)

Ask students the following questions:

1. What stood out to you in the video?
2. What connections can you make between how Mary Proctor describes her story in the video and "My Grandma's Old Blue Willow"?
3. What does inspiration mean to you? How does Mary Proctor describe and express inspiration through her artwork?

3. Display [Freedom of Expression](#) and instruct students to turn and talk and complete the close looking activity for 10 minutes using the [Close Looking activity](#). When complete, have students share their findings.

4. Display the following quote and read out loud (you can also print the quote for students to share in their groups.) "It's a door. I found it, and made it to show people that I'm able to express myself not just physically; I'm talking about a spiritual freedom. A person got to be set free, to be themselves, free from pain, hurt, anger, malice; free from hate, that bound us. We can loosen up, let God in, let ourself be free. Free to get behind that door and just be *me*—to dance, to move. I do that. I got a little weight on me, but I love to dance. I can *move*. When hell coming at you, you can still do it all, with inner peace in you. You can be free."

5. Ask students to reflect independently or as a group to the quote. What images, colors, or symbols

come up for you as you read it? What connections can you make with the artist?

## Day 2: Freedom Is a Blank Canvas

1. Use the  [Mary Proctor Freedom of Expression Work Sheet.pdf](#) to have students reflect on their impressions of Mary Proctor and her work.
  - a. Discussion: What things might an artist need to consider when planning to tell a story through their artwork?
2. Ask students to reflect on the following questions:
  1. What are 3 words that stand out to your group the most in this quote by Mary Proctor? Discuss why amongst your group.
  2. Choose those 3 words, write them down. Next, as a group choose one song that expresses those 3 words.
  3. Choose 2-3 poses that embody one or more of the words. You can select a pose from Mary Proctor's "Freedom of Expression."
  4. Bonus! \*optional\* Create a dance based on the 3 words and song your group chose.
3. Using their worksheet, instruct students to remake their poses and movements into new original artworks in an assemblage style. Share examples of Proctor's and other artists' works that are relevant to the materials and visual expression you want your students to be inspired by.
4. Have students begin to gather materials, resources, and begin the process of planning and stitching their work. Student work should include:
  - i. Lyrics, a phrase, or word related to the idea of freedom
  - ii. A figure/ gesture or symbol showing movement.
  - iii. Found materials that develop texture, depth, and add to the meaning of the work.
5. Allow students to share their plan/ works in progress with their peers in order to gain meaningful feedback on the meaning that an audience may take away from their composition.

Optionally, Students may engage in a self-critique activity asking them to look critically at their own work and consider how their composition, materials, and rendering express the feeling or idea of freedom.

Guiding questions here:

1. If you were to create a stage for the background, how would it look?
2. What colors express your 3 words and song that your group chose?
3. What images or symbols? Texts?
4. What textures and materials?
5. What about your pose, what ways can you express your pose(s) in your artwork?

## Days 3 & 4: Creating the Final Artwork

1. Student independent work time: Students will work to complete their assemblage artworks using preferred materials and attachment methods.
  - a. Demonstrate to students how to correctly and safely adhere and use materials in their work.
  - b. Ask students to consider how they wish to render their figure in their artwork, and how that rendering might change the meaning of their art.
  - c. Teachers should circulate to support material experimentation and composition.
2. Have students display their final work alongside the lyrics, song, dance, or movement that inspired them.
  - Ask students to develop artist statements to be displayed with their work, reflecting on the process, meaning, and final artwork. Students should be able to articulate how their presentation and materials choices communicated their ideas.

## Materials

- 8 X 11 in construction paper
- Stock paper
- Tape
- Cardboard
- Found Materials
- Paint
- Magazines
- Markers
- Colored pencils
- Scissors
- Glue or Modge Podge

## Extensions

1. Performance Connection: Have students partner with peers in the school's or a local community dance group- They could watch the dancers and create figure drawings based on the poses, or could collaborate with students in the Dance Program to create a short routine using emotive poses.
2. Digital Layering: Have students create a short animation or artwork, combining the pose with chosen song lyrics, music, and other elements. Videos students work on can be edited into one final video or playlist.

## Assessment

Formative Assessments:

- Student participation in group discussion and artwork analysis.
- Completed sketches and brainstorming worksheets.
- Peer feedback during planning.

Summative Assessments:

Artwork Rubric (criteria may include):

- Creativity: Creative integration of text, images, materials, and assorted content to express personal ideas about the concept of freedom.
- Connection to Self: Students have made choices in their work that reflect who they are and the message of their artwork.
- Craftsmanship: Careful use of materials (neatness, color, and effort). Thoughtful presentation of artwork that contributes to the overall message of the work.
- Written Reflection: Students clearly articulates how choices and techniques in the artwork contribute to the overall message of the artwork.

## Resources

- Video: [Tallahassee Inspired - Mary Proctor](#)
- Biographical Resources:  
<https://spacesarchives.org/explore/search-the-online-collection/marys-art-yard/>  
<https://www.soulsgrowndeep.org/artist/mary-proctor>
- Worksheet: [Close Looking activity](#)
- Image: <https://www.soulsgrowndeep.org/artist/mary-proctor/work/freedom-expression>

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity:** For this activity, you will create a pose and select a song that expresses that is inspired by Mary Proctor's artwork "Freedom of Expression."

1. What are 3 words that stand out to your group the most in this quote by Mary Proctor?

Discuss why amongst your group:

- "It's a door. I found it, and made it to show people that I'm able to express myself not just physically; I'm talking about a spiritual freedom. A person got to be set free, to be themselves, free from pain, hurt, anger, malice; free from hate, that bound us. We can loosen up, let God in, let ourself be free. Free to get behind that door and just be me—to dance, to move. I do that. I got a little weight on me, but I love to dance. I can move. When hell coming at you, you can still do it all, with inner peace in you. You can be free."

2. What are 3 words that stand out to your group the most in this quote by Mary Proctor? Discuss why amongst your group. Next, choose those 5 words, write them down.

3. Next, as a group choose 1 song that expresses those 3 words.

• \_\_\_\_\_

Musician: \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

Song name: \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

Lyric(s): \_\_\_\_\_

4. Choose 2-3 poses that embody one or more of the words. You can select a pose from Mary Proctor's "Freedom of Expression." **Bonus!** Create a dance based on the 3 words and song your group chose.



Example

6. Use the art materials to create an artwork that expresses the 3 words, poses, and song you came up with your group. Consider the following questions while making your artwork:

- If you were to create a stage for the background, how would it look?
- What colors express the 3 words and song that your group chose?
- What images or symbols? Texts?
- What textures and materials?
- What about your pose, what ways can you express your pose(s) in your artwork?

7. Answer the following reflection questions below:

- Mary Proctor titled her work “Freedom of Expression.” Thinking about the meaning of her title and how it relates to her work, what would title your artwork and why?

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- Connect different modes of expressions that you’ve seen from artists (musicians, poets, etc.). What is it about the way they express their art forms that makes it stand out to you? How did they inspire the way you express yourself? Your art?

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1. What colors, shapes, objects, and textures do you notice in the artwork? Why?

2. What comes to your mind when you look at the artwork? Why?

3. What is one question that you have about the artwork?

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