

**Education: Lesson Plan****RESOURCES FOR K-12 EDUCATORS**

Cat Weathervane

Anonymous, American, Cat Weathervane, 1957.

Bronze with gold leaf, Gift of Helen Warren and Willard Howe Cummings, 1957.044

**Lesson: Folk Art**

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The Colby College Museum of Art's collection of folk art is extensive and offers insight into the lives of ordinary people who lived in the 19th century. The collection includes many works that were produced, sold, and displayed in Maine. Folk art in the 1800s was not the art of the elite or the wealthy; it was artwork that the common person would have owned.

**Summary**

Folk Art is a term used to describe works created by people with little or no formal training as artists. In other words, folk art is the work of ordinary people. In the 1800s, items like weathervanes, pottery, or blankets served utilitarian purposes. Sometimes folk art was created solely for decorative purposes. Regularly, however, these works were created to celebrate and commemorate ordinary peoples' lives.

**Pre-Museum Visit Activities****K-4:**

Discussion: Discuss how students make their rooms their own. What sorts of items do students display in their rooms? Which of these items make their rooms look nicer? Which have a specific function (lamps, carpets)? Which items serve both purposes? Discuss where these items came from. Were they purchased at the store? Which stores? Are there any decorative or functional items that were created by the student or someone in his/her family? Discuss how in the 1800s, people would hire craftsmen and craftswomen to create unique items to reflect their family's sensibilities.

Extension Activity: Instruct students to create a Venn Diagram (an illustration that shows the relationship between two categories) using the attached worksheet. The two categories are "Items in my room that I use" and "Items in my room that make it look better." Ask students to highlight or star any item on their list that either they or a family member created. Ask students to rank the items in order, from those that reflect the student's personality the most to those that reflect the student's personality the least.

Discuss how each of us buys items that celebrate our likes, needs, and personality, and that this was also the case 150 years ago.

Explain that professionally made art in the 1800s was too expensive for most common people, so they purchased artwork from artists with little or no professional training. These works are called folk art.

### **5-8:**

#### **Discussion:**

Brainstorm about what an amateur is, and what a professional is. What does it mean to be an amateur and a professional in each of these fields: art, sports, acting, dancing, and astronomy. Discuss how an amateur becomes a professional (training, dedication, education, etc.)

Discuss how pay is often different for an amateur and for a professional. Some amateurs receive little or no financial compensation for their efforts. Why do they continue to do the work they do? Pretend you live 150 years ago and want to buy a painting for your home. What are some reasons you might ask an amateur to create the painting, rather than a professional? (Less expensive, the artist is someone from your community, the artist loves to create artwork, the artist is a friend who knows a lot about you, etc.) What are some reasons for hiring a professional? (The work is polished and impressive, the artist's formal training and abilities allow him or her to create the illusion of reality, works by well-established artists are considered to be more valuable, etc.)

Explain that professionally made art in the 1800s was too expensive for most common people, so they purchased artwork from artists with little or no professional training. These artists often lived in their patron's communities.

#### **Extension Activity:**

Ask students to write a paper on the following question: Think about an activity that requires skill, and that you enjoy, and describe your experiences at that activity. Describe what you would need to do to become a professional at that activity.

### **High School:**

#### **Discussion:**

Brainstorm about what an amateur is, and what a professional is. What does it mean to be an amateur and a professional in each of these fields: art, sports, acting, dancing, and astronomy. Discuss how an amateur becomes a professional (training, dedication, education, etc.)

Discuss how pay is often different for an amateur and for a professional. Some amateurs receive little or no financial compensation for their efforts. Why do they continue to do the work they do?

Pretend you live 150 years ago and want to buy a painting for your

home. What are some reasons you might ask an amateur to create the painting, rather than a professional? (Less expensive, the artist is someone from your community, the artist loves to create artwork, the artist is a friend who knows a lot about you, etc.) What are some reasons for hiring a professional? (The work is polished and impressive, the artist's formal training and abilities allow him or her to create the illusion of reality, works by well-established artists are considered to be more valuable, etc.)

Explain that professionally made art in the 1800s was too expensive for most common people, so they purchased artwork from artists with little or no professional training. These artists often lived in their patron's communities.

### **Extension Activity:**

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### **Museum Visit Activities**

In addition to participating in a docent-led tour of the museum, teachers can lead their students in the following activities in the galleries.

Scavenger Hunt - K-3rd Grade: Download Worksheet (Adobe PDF Format)

Have students look at a variety of folk art displayed throughout the museum. As they look, have them try to find the following items:

An Elephant

A lighthouse

A Cat

An American flag

A city or town in Maine

A ball of yarn

A telescope

A smokestack

An apple

An arrow

A rooster

A horse and cart

Today and Yesterday: 4th-6th Grade

Ask students to list on their worksheets common objects depicted in the folk art on view and sort them into the two categories: "Items not commonly seen today" and "Items still around today." After completing the worksheet, students will use the data they've collected to compare and contrast the 1800s with the present using the included T chart.

### **Visual Anchors: 7th Grade- High School**

It is often the case that very little is known about the life of a nineteenth-century folk artist. This is because these artists rarely signed their work, and their reputations tended to be local (as opposed to national like most professionally trained artists). However, most works of folk art contain compelling visual anchors—the initial elements that one notices when one looks at the work. Often, nineteenth-century folk artists were highly knowledgeable about one element that they depicted (ships, for instance, or animals). As a result their work tends to be formulaic (when an artist makes similar images over and over). The visual anchors a folk artist employs can offer great insight into his or her background.

Use the following worksheet to collect information about the painting and the artist.

### **Post-Museum Visit Activities/Assessment**

Create a Weathervane

Weathervanes are excellent examples of sculpted folk art. These art works reflected the taste of their owners while serving a functional purpose. By depicting the silhouettes (or profiles) of objects or animals in thin sheets of metal, folk artists created instruments that caught the wind, and the eyes of viewers. The Colby College Museum of Art has many nineteenth-century weathervanes in its collection.

Materials (per student): Scissors, white paper, foam board, craft knife (if appropriate/ scissors can work too) a coat hanger, duct tape, black paint, Styrofoam block.

Directions:

1. Using the white paper, create and cut out a design for your weathervane. Examples of weathervanes from the 1800s include animals, ships, and arrows.
2. Trace the outline of your design twice onto the foam board and cut out the two pieces.
3. Carefully untwist the coat hanger into a long length of wire; then bend it into the shape of a giant upside-down U. Attach the two foam board pieces to either side of the U using the duct tape, like a sandwich. The two ends of the wire U should protrude from the bottom of the weathervane. Carefully tape the two foam board pieces together around the wire.
4. Paint the two sides black or gold and let the project dry.
5. Poke the ends of the coat hanger into a Styrofoam block.
6. Students may present their weathervane to the class.

Make a Theorem Painting

Theorem Paintings are a type of still life. A still life is a painting of inanimate objects. Subjects can include fruits, flowers, dishes, vegetables, and meats. Theorem painting was taught in New

England boarding schools in the 1800s. The method calls for stencils, which are used to transfer shapes of various objects onto fabric.

Materials (per student): Canvas fabric, stencil paper, craft knife (if appropriate/ scissors can work too), multicolored acrylic paints, small to medium paint brushes, masking tape.

1. Draw the outlines of objects that one would find in a still life onto the stencil paper; make sure to leave plenty of room for multiple objects. Using your cutting tool, cut out the stencil designs. Discard the cut-out portions and save the paper with the hollow outlines.
2. Spread out the fabric and, using the masking tape, tape it to a desk or table.
3. Apply a little bit of acrylic paint to your brush. Place the stencil over the fabric and, while holding it firmly in place with one hand, carefully paint a stenciled shape onto the fabric making sure to fill in the entire image.
4. Repeat for each of your stencils, using different colors. Stencils may be used more than once. Be careful that the stencils do not smear or mix the colors.
5. Let the fabric dry completely before removing it from the desk or table.
6. Students may present their theorem painting to the class.

### **Notable Works in the Colby Collection**

oWilliam Matthew Prior, Portrait of a Gentleman, 1848

H.P. Hunt, Lady Holding a Book, 1848

Anonymous, Portrait of a Young Lady, 1860

G.J. Griffin, A View of Freeport, Maine, 1886

James Bard, Paddle Steamship Addison E. Andrews, 1865

R.G. Hall, Upper Part of East Machias from the Academy Hill, 1858

Sturdevant Hamblen, Adelaide Endora Smith, later Mrs. Frederick E. Boothby, 1852

Anonymous, Rooster Weathervane, unknown

Anonymous, Fruit in Bowl, circa 1850

### **Lesson Vocabulary Words**

Folk art, weathervane, theorem painting, still life, utilitarian, community, landscapes, seascapes, silhouettes, self taught, visual anchor, handmade.

### **Learning Results/Objectives**

**English Language Arts. E. Listening and Speaking:** Students listen to comprehend and speak to communicate effectively.

**E1: Listening.**

**Pre-K-2:** Students use early active listening skills.

**6-8:** Students adjust listening strategies to understand formal and informal discussion, debates or presentations and then apply the information.

**9-Diploma:** Students adjust listening strategies for formal and informal discussion, debates or presentations, and then evaluate the information.

**E2: Speaking**

**Pre-K-2:** Students use speaking skills to communicate.

**3-5:** Students use active speaking skills to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts.

**6-8:** Students adjust speaking strategies for formal and informal discussions, debates, or presentations appropriate to the audience and purpose.

**Visual and Performing Arts. B. Creation, Performance, and Expression:** Students create, express, and communicate through the art discipline.

**B1: Media Skills.**

**Pre-K-2:** Students use basic media, tools and techniques to create original art works. **3-5:** Students use a variety of media, tools, techniques, and processes to create original art works. **6-8:** Students choose suitable media, tools, techniques, and processes to create original art works.

**9-Diploma:** Students choose multiple suitable media, tools, techniques, and processes to create a variety of original art works.

**B2: Composition Skills:**

**Pre-K-2:** Students use Elements Of Art And Principles Of Design to create original art works.

**3-5:** Students use Elements of Art and Principles of Design to create original art works including paintings, three-dimensional objects, drawings from imagination and real life, and a variety of other media and visual art forms.

**6-8:** Students use Elements of Art and Principles of Design to create original art works that demonstrate different styles in painal style in a variety of media and visual art forms.

**B3 Making Meaning: Pre-K-2:** Students create art works that communicate ideas and feelings and demonstrate skill in the use of media, tools, and techniques.

**3-5:** Students create art works that communicate ideas, feelings, and meanings and demonstrate skill in the use of media, tools, techniques, and processes.

**6-8:** Students create art works that communicate an individual point of view.

**Diploma:** Students create a body of original art work. tings, three- dimensional objects, drawings from imagination and real life, and a variety of other media and visual art forms.

**9-Diploma:** Students use Elements of Art and Principles of Design to create original art works that demonstrate development of person