

LIBBY ROTHFELD

Lesson Plan: Assemblage Sculptures

Grades: Kindergarten - 4th

Subject Areas: Visual Arts

National Visual Arts Standards

- NA-VA:Re7: Perceive and analyze artistic work
- NA-VA:Cr1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Analyze **assemblage** sculptures through discussion.
- Create a collage or build a clay sculpture that contains **ready-made/found objects**.
- Describe their artwork and the meaning(s) conveyed by their arrangement of **found objects**.

Selections from the Press Release

Libby Rothfeld exhibits her sculptures, photographs, and installations in galleries and artist spaces across the United States and Europe. [Selects](#), her institutional debut, presented works from 2016-2024 in a variety of mediums, including ceramics, photography, drawing, painting, **assemblage**, and various combinations of these.¹

Vocabulary

- **Assemblage:** art that combines existing objects to create new meanings.²
- **Composition:** the arrangement of elements in an artwork.
- **Context:** the situation in which something occurs.
- **Readymade/found object:** an existing object presented as a work of art (often in a way that is different from its intended function).³

Activity One:

Libby Rothfeld often arranges **readymade/found objects** within unusual **contexts**. By doing so, her work prompts the viewer to question their understanding of these objects. For example, in [Felix's Community \(#5\)](#), hand sanitizer bottles and salt-and-pepper shakers are set into a plastic container with resin. Introduce students to [Felix's Community \(#5\)](#), and ask them to identify what objects they see in the **assemblage** sculpture. Use the following questions to guide students' observations. Provide students with a sticky note or a sheet of paper to record their thoughts. As a class, discuss students' findings.

- Describe what you see in the **assemblage** sculpture, such as colors, shapes, and **readymade/found objects**.
- In what ways are the **readymade/found objects** placed that are similar to or different from the **context(s)** in which you have seen them in before?
- Count the **readymade/found objects** that are placed inside of something else. Is there anything unusual about their placement?
- What places or spaces does the sculpture remind you of?

After analyzing the artwork, have students work in table groups to explore assembling **found objects**. Provide each group with various items from the classroom, such as desk supplies. Encourage students to place the items into different containers such as bins, cups, and baskets to investigate a variety of unusual **contexts**. If possible, incorporate a sensory bin into this activity. Encourage students to document their explorations through drawing, writing, or photography.



Libby Rothfeld, *Felix's Community (#5)*, 2020. Laminate, tile, grout, wood, plastic bags, Post-it notes, pencil, plastic tub, resin, salt shakers, pepper shakers, hand sanitizer, face toner, inkjet print, and Plexiglas. Courtesy of the artist. Photo credit: Jade (Minh Hà) Nguyễn.

Activity Two:

Select one of the following options for engaging students in creating their own **assemblage** artwork.

Option One: Create an **assemblage** collage.

Step 1: Provide students with magazines, grocery advertisements, and catalogs. Prompt them to select and cut out images that are related to a theme. Examples could include objects found in a home or objects that differ from each other.

Step 2: Prompt students to explore different arrangements with their images before gluing them down.

Step 3: After they are finished, instruct students to trade their artwork with a peer. Prompt students to describe what they see in the collage. What does it make them think or wonder about? Ask students to name one thing they like and one thing they would change in their peer's artwork and to provide a reason for each.

Option Two: Create an **assemblage** sculpture using traditional or air-dry clay.

Step 1: Introduce students to working with clay. Demonstrate clay techniques such as pinching, coil building, and/or slab building.

Step 2: Instruct students to select two or three small **readymade/found objects** to include in a clay sculpture.

Step 3: Prompt students to create a list of containers that their chosen objects could be placed into that would look absurd or silly. Encourage students to sketch their ideas for how a clay vessel might hold their chosen **readymade/found objects**. Refer back to recorded observations and documented explorations from the first activity for inspiration.

Step 4: Guide students in creating a clay vessel based on one or more of their sketches. Since clay shrinks as it dries, instruct students to create the openings in their vessels slightly larger than the objects they will be placing into them.

Step 5: Prompt students to consider how adding details can contribute meaning to their **readymade/found objects**.

- Traditional clay: After bisque firing their vessels, provide students with materials to add details to the surface of their vessel such as glaze, paint, and patterned stencils.
- Air-dry clay: Allow 24 hours for vessels to dry. Then, coat the vessels with PVA glue. After the glue has dried, guide students in painting or adhering materials to the surface of their vessels.

Step 6: Instruct students to place their chosen **readymade/found objects** into their sculptures.

Step 7: After creating their **assemblage** sculptures, pair students with a partner to interpret one another's work. Encourage students to describe their creative choices to each other.



Libby Rothfeld, *Felix's Community (#5)*, 2020. Laminate, tile, grout, wood, plastic bags, Post-it notes, pencil, plastic tub, resin, salt shakers, pepper shakers, hand sanitizer, face toner, inkjet print, and Plexiglas. Courtesy of the artist. Photo credit: Jade (Minh Hà) Nguyễn.

¹University Galleries of Illinois State University. (2024, July 17). Media Release: Selects: Libby Rothfeld, 2016-2024. University Galleries of Illinois State University. <https://galleries.illinoisstate.edu/exhibitions/2024/libby-rothfeld/>

²The Art Story (n.d.). Readymade and the Found Object. <https://www.theartstory.org/definition/readymade-and-found-object/>

³The Art Story (n.d.). Assemblage. <https://www.theartstory.org/definition/assemblage/>