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## Art Masterpiece: Romare Bearden, *She-Ba* \*

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**Keywords:** Collage, culture, balance, shape, form

**Grade:** 2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup>

**Activity:** Construction paper and magazine portrait collage

\*Alternate artwork: *Summertime*



### Meet the Artist:

- Romare Bearden ((Roh-mare Beer-den) was a painter, poet, songwriter, and even a baseball player. (He pitched for the Boston Tigers, an all-black team). But Bearden became famous for his work in collage—pasting bits of fabric and paper on canvas.
- He was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1911, but lived most of his life in New York City's Harlem and in Pittsburgh.
- Bearden attended Boston University and New York University and planned to go to medical school. But when he started drawing and designing cartoons for a local black newspaper, he discovered his future lay in art, not medicine.
- In his collages, Romare Bearden pieced together memories of his American heritage. He was a master at creating the sounds, feelings, and colors of his Harlem youth and his Southern childhood.
- Many people thought of Bearden as the artist who painted the black experience, especially in the South. Black culture certainly played a large part in his art but Bearden believed that his paintings described all of America, not just black America.

- Bearden's collage/paintings are about traditions, religion, friends, Harlem, and social issues.
- His works were created with an open and free style, which reflected his personality, and the images were filled with rich, bright colors. Music, jazz and blues, and their rhythm, were also evident in his use of space, form and color, and were prominent sources of subject matter.
- Bearden often used photographs from magazines and painted papers to create his pieces. He developed a passion for bringing to his art African-American themes and rhythms.
- Bearden became successful when he was young and stayed successful for the rest of his life but he always had time to help young artists.
- In 1987, President Reagan awarded Bearden the National Medal of Art. Bearden died a year later, in 1988.

### **Definitions:**

- Collage -- A collage is an artwork made from objects that are glued down onto a surface, such as a piece of paper, canvas, or board. Collage is also the technique of making such an artwork. The objects can be whatever you wish, for example: tissue paper, wrapping paper, newspaper pages, magazine pages, cardboard, foil, metal, plastic, fabric, wire, photographs, found objects such as shells, feathers, or stones, and 'rubbish' such as broken toys or appliances. You can even cut up paintings that haven't worked or paintings you deliberately created to be collage elements. Prominent artists who made collages include Picasso and Matisse.
- Culture -- A culture is a way of life of a group of people -- the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.
- Balance -- As a basic principle of art (specifically of design), **balance** refers to the ways in which the elements (lines, shapes, colors, textures, etc.) of a piece are arranged.
- Shape -- A **shape** is an element of art. Specifically, it is an *enclosed space*, the boundaries of which are defined by other elements of art (i.e.: lines, colors, values, textures, etc.). Shapes are limited to two dimensions: length and width. **Geometric** shapes - circles, rectangles, squares, triangles and so on - have the clear edges one achieves when using tools to create such shapes. **Organic** shapes have natural, less well-defined edges (like a cloud).

- Form -- **Form** is an element of art. At its most basic, a **form** is a three-dimensional geometrical figure (i.e.: sphere, cube, cylinder, cone, etc.), as opposed to a *shape*, which is two-dimensional, or *flat*. In a broader sense, **form**, in art, means the whole of a piece's visible elements *and* the way those elements are united.

**Possible Questions:** Look and discuss *She-Ba*. For example:

1. Explain “collage” and point out the different images that Bearden uses to make his collage, such as:
  - Striped trim at bottom of maidservants skirt and dotted scarf around She-Ba’s neck.
  - Umbrella looks like it was cut from newspaper photograph that had been enlarged.
  - Maidservant’s skirt was cut from a photograph of sprayed graffiti on a wall.
  - The throne She-Ba is sitting on is from a magazine advertisement for wood paneling.
  - Textures, colors, shapes, crown, arms, faces, gold paper dangles from scarf.
2. What shapes do you see? (Squares, half-circles, zig-zags, etc.)
3. Explain the difference between shape and form. Do you see anything that looks three-dimensional? (Three-dimensional shapes are “forms.”) Why? (Because a collage, by its nature, is very flat and two-dimensional.)
4. Why do you think this artwork is titled *She Ba*?
5. Is this picture realistic?
6. What colors does Bearden use for emphasis?
7. What is going on in this picture?
8. Do you think this picture looks like it is in the American South, or in Harlem, New York?

**Activity:** Cut-paper collage portrait (full-body, not just a face)

**Materials needed:**

- 9” x 13” black construction paper, one per student
- 4” x 5” rectangles in red, blue, yellow, purple and green construction paper, one set for each student
- Glue
- Scissors
- Magazines

- Three or four permanent markers

**Preparation:**

Cut out the 4" X 5" rectangles. Preview your magazines for any photos or articles that may be inappropriate for elementary school-aged students. You may want to cut out magazine pages or parts before the project because it can take students a very long time to look through magazines for their own images. (They tend to get distracted.) It's helpful to monitor the time for the students, giving them a 20 minute, 10 minute, and 5 minute warning before the end of the hour.

**Process:**

1. Give students one sheet of black construction paper and 4 colored rectangles. Give them red, yellow, blue and their fourth rectangle they can choose green or purple.
2. Have the students position their paper so that it is in "portrait" position for their collage.
3. Next, have the students glue the 4" x 5" rectangles onto the black construction paper. Make sure that each rectangle glued onto the page is a different color.
4. Explain to the students that the objective is to create a collage of a *person* (it can be themselves, if they want, but not an animal or robot or something non-human.) Tell them to fill their collage with images that say something about that person.
5. Give the students magazine pages to cut out and make a full body with each part being slightly different. For example, a normal child's legs, bird wings for arms, and a dog's head.
6. They may also cut out different symbols of things they enjoy or can relate to. For example, an ASU emblem or their favorite ice cream cone, etc.
7. Encourage students to mix and match to make their artwork interesting.
8. Have students title their artwork and write their name on the front with a black Sharpie.
9. Hang up the collages to display

**Examples:**



**Parent Note:**

Romare Bearden (1911 – 1988) was an American artist and writer whose collage/paintings were about traditions, religion, friends, Harlem, and social issues. In 1987, Bearden was awarded the National Medal of Arts by President Reagan. His work in collage led the New York Times to describe Bearden as “the nation's foremost collagist.”

Today in Art Masterpiece, students created a portrait collage, using bright colored construction paper and magazine images.

*She-Ba, (1970) by Romare Bearden*



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