ArtReach Pre-Visit Packet: James Castle: Idaho Artist (1900-1977)

Art-Reach Pre-Visit Activity: Art Talk

Please view the two reproductions with your class and lead a discussion using the following questions as guidelines. There are no “right” answers. The questions are meant to guide the group discussion. Students will re-visit and discuss these works as well as others during the ArtReach visit. The vocabulary in this packet will aid discussion.

Research and experience have shown that students feel more comfortable when they can connect with something familiar when the Museum educator conducts the program. The students enjoy sharing their insights from the pre-visit discussion with the educator.

James Castle: Idaho Artist (1900-1977)

This visit focuses on artwork in BAM’s Permanent Collection by one artist named James Castle. James Castle was born in Garden Valley, Idaho. He developed his own system of expression and communication through the artwork he created on a daily basis. He used found materials and fashioned his own art tools and media. Castle rejected commercial art supplies offered to him, instead using sharpened sticks for pencils and soot mixed with saliva for graphite.

James Castle used cast-off and found materials collected from his family home, post office and store.

- Does this artwork look old or new? Why?
- If you could touch this piece of art what do you think the texture would feel like?
- Does it remind you of anything you have in your home?
- What, if anything, do you think this was used for?
- Can you tell what material was used to create this work of art?
- Where do you think James Castle acquired this material?

James Castle (1900-1977)

**Untitled**, 20th century
- paper, soot, color-printed cardboard
- Permanent Collection
- Purchase (1998)
James Castle had six siblings. He would often go into the upstairs attic loft to draw and make art privately. He could not hear, speak, read or write and only attended school for a short time. He created art based on his life, where he grew up, his family, experiences, and memories, so his art is largely autobiographical.

- How are the two works different from one another?
- What do the two works have in common?
- Where do you think he got the idea for this artwork?
- Why do you think he created art about his experiences, family, memories etc.?
- Where do you think he found the materials to create this artwork?
- If you were to create art of an autobiographical nature what would you want to communicate to others? What materials would you use, why?

James Castle (1900-1977)
Canada goose, 20th century
found paper, charcoal, string and soot
Permanent Collection
Purchase (1977)

Vocabulary
James Castle: Idaho Artist (1900-1977)

**Medium**
A specific kind of artistic technique or means of expression as determined by the materials used or the creative methods involved: the medium of lithography. The materials used in a specific artistic technique: oils as a medium.

**Media**
The plural of medium.

**Outsider Artist**
An artist that is self-taught with no formal training in art.

**Cast-off materials**
Any kind of material that has been used in some way and is ready to be discarded. Essentially, recyclable material or garbage.

**Autobiography**
The biography (written history) of a person narrated by himself.

**Autobiographical Art**
Art that expresses or communicates a person's life and history including experiences, memories, family, geography etc.

ArtReach Curricular Connections
James Castle

Teachers can adapt the following curricular connections to meet the needs of any grade level.

Social Studies and Technology
- Have your class research and study the earliest documented evidence of writing, beginning with the pictographs written by the Sumerians of Mesopotamia. In small groups, students can research a specific type of early writing and create a multimedia presentation. This information can then be used to compare the different types of early writing and the people who used them to express themselves. Then have students create a class timeline of early pictorial writing (and more traditional writing), documenting the major changes in the ways people have recorded and communicated events and ideas throughout time.
- Have students create an autobiographical power point presentation over a one-week period. Begin by having a class discussion on different forms of communication and how people express themselves traditionally and non-traditionally (one way would be through sign language). Discuss sounds, gestures, mime, pictures, music etc. Then tell students that they are going to create an autobiographical multimedia slide show called “All About Me.”
- Create an interview for James Castle. Have students make a list of questions they would like to ask if he were alive and he were able to speak with them. Include questions about his background, training, daily life and what inspired his work. Write a script for the interview and then present it to the class.
- Have students research how books have been made throughout history and in a variety of cultures. What materials and techniques were used to create the books? How are they similar to or different from the books we use today?

Visual Arts and Language Arts
- Have students look around their homes to find cast-off materials to create their own autobiographical art. Have them save mail, magazines, newspapers, letters, catalogs, wrapping paper, and food packaging for a week. Then ask students to think of a memory or an experience to express pictorially. When they have finished, have them present their work to their peers.
Make a Paper Bag Book

Instructions

1. Take the bag apart and lay it out on the table.

2. Trim off the bottom so that you have a long rectangular sheet left.

Discussion

Discuss how books are special places for telling stories, expressing ideas and sharing feelings. Shapes can be cut from colored paper and/or pictures from old magazines and then glued into the books. Stickers can be pasted into the books or they can also be stamped with rubber stamps. First have students think of an idea for a story they would like to share with others. Some ideas to discuss are:

- Tell others about a personal adventure.
- Make an "I Am" book describing the author/maker of the book.
- Describe, in pictures and words, a recent trip with family.
- Illustrate a story about a favorite hero.
- Make up a story about something that might have happened many years ago.

Materials

- A grocery bag, scissors, glue stick, stickers, ink stamps, old postage stamps, felt-tip markers, colored papers, and magazines with lots of pictures.

Post-Visit Activity: MAKE IT!

To extend the ArtReach experience and connect the visit to your curriculum, please consider using or adapting this suggested lesson.

James Castle
Make a Paper Bag Book

Science and Math

- James Castle rejected traditional art materials that were readily available for purchase in stores. Instead he created his own art materials, using sticks for pencils and soot mixed with saliva for graphite. Have students research how art materials are made and what their physical properties are. What are the sources of pigments, clays and pencils? Then have students experiment with a variety of objects to come up with their own materials for creating artwork. What materials will create pigment on paper, etc.?
- Give students a set amount of "money" with which to purchase art materials in your classroom "art supply store." Have paint, brushes, paper, etc. available for purchase. Also provide items that are recycled or "junk" and cost them nothing. Let students plan, budget their money, add up the purchases + Idaho sales tax and then create their art!
- Have students cut cover paper and inside papers to your measurement specifications. Have them cut the cover paper so that it is slightly larger than the p.a.c.. Have students place the create on altered books and fold the materials together to locate the center. Have students measure and punch three evenly spaced holes down the fold. Have students thread a needle and stitch the book. Have students put the needle through the center hole from the outside first. Next, have students put the needle through one of the other holes followed by the last hole and then back through the first one from the inside. Have students tie the thread together and add beads or tie it into a decorative knot.
- Mixed-media artworks and works of art made with hand-made materials are sometimes difficult to preserve and protect because they require different types of care than artwork made with traditional art materials. Have each student research two types of materials commonly used in mixed-media work and how they affect each other from an archival/preservation standpoint.

James Castle rejected traditional art materials that were readily available for purchase in stores. Instead he created his own art materials, using sticks for pencils and soot mixed with saliva for graphite. Have students research how art materials are made and what their physical properties are. What are the sources of pigments, clays and pencils? Then have students experiment with a variety of objects to come up with their own materials for creating artwork. What materials will create pigment on paper, etc.?
**figure 3 step three**
Fold the paper over lengthwise so that the corners meet. Crease well and then unfold. Fold the paper over in the other direction. Place the corners together and crease well. Do not unfold.

**figure 4 step four**
Fold back one side as shown in figure 4. Place the corners together and crease well. Repeat with the other side.

**figure 5 step five**
Unfold the last two folds. Holding the folded side in your hand, cut along the center line until you reach the first vertical fold.

**figure 6 step six**
Open the paper so that eight sections are showing. Fold the page over lengthwise. (If there are pictures or words on the paper they should be on the inside.)

**figure 7 step seven**
Holding on to each side, gently push the ends together to form the pages of the book.

**figure 8 step eight**
Fold the front and back covers around so the corners meet. Crease well. You should have six pages inside for writing and artwork.


**Follow Up Activity**

Have students share their books with the class when they are finished. Have the class guess what the book is expressing before the artists reveal what they had intended to convey. Take a trip to the library to look at some books without reading the words. Then try to figure out what the authors/artists were trying to say or express in their books.

**Bibliography**

*James Castle: Idaho Artist (1900-1977)*


Barker, Albert. *Black on white and read all over: the story of printing* illus. by Anthony D’Adamo. NY: Julian Messner, 1971. 96 p. This is a history of the technology of printing from the Chinese invention of paper to an explanation of how this book was made. There are simple pen and ink illustrations and some photographs. The text is accessible to more accomplished readers.


James Castle was a self-taught artist who was born deaf and never learned to sign or read or write language in a conventional manner. His drawings, always executed in intimate scale, are expressions of his introspection and life experiences. To create his work, Castle used found materials like scraps from his parents' home. James Castle in his trailer home on Eugene Street in Boise, Idaho, c. 1970. Courtesy James Castle Collection and Archive LP. Castle memorabilia has been surfacing from within the walls, floorboards, gardens, and lawns, as the Boise compound has undergone recent renovations. “We think we’ve found it all and then something else comes up,” says Rachel Reichert, the cultural sites manager for the Boise government’s department of arts and history. BAM’s Education Department creates Pre-Visit Packets to extend student learning to before and after their ArtReach experience. Art Packs include information on the feature topic, color images, pre-tour activities, suggested curriculum connections, definitions, a bibliography and a classroom art activity sheet. The packets are produced to enhance our ArtReach program, however, they are a great resource on their own. 2010/2011 Pre-Visit Packet Menu. Collecting Birds My Place, Your Place 3-D Sculpture African and Mexican Masks Trees What Art Says Artists of the Northwest James Castle: Idaho Artist