

THE USE OF ASSEMBLAGE AND COLLAGE
AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

by

WILLARD DEANE BURGESS

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Approved by:


Major Professor

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There are several forms of art whose beginnings date back much further than assemblage and collage and to which, undoubtedly, more importance is given in many school art programs. In the continually expanding junior high school curriculum of today, a need is felt for new and different ways to further enrich a child's experience in the creative processes. It is not new for children to search out, collect, and play with different materials, but using them for art forms in school is comparatively new.¹

For many years schools have offered children the experience of cutting and pasting colored paper. This opportunity can be enriched and varied by the use of other materials. A child's innate creativity leads him to explore, select, and create when provided with a provocative assortment of materials with which to work.

I. Statement of the Problem

Most junior high school curriculums include many aspects of art, two of which are assemblage and collage. This study emphasizes the use of these forms as an integral

¹Lois Lord, Collage and Construction in Elementary and Junior High Schools (Worcester, Massachusetts: Davis Publications, Inc., 1958), p. 12.

part of the total art program in grades seven, eight, and nine. It was also the purpose of this study to provide a brief history of assemblage and collage, and to present suggestions regarding use of these forms beyond the junior high school classroom.

II. Importance of the Study

The achievement of creative thinking has frequently been stressed as one of the most important goals of modern school art programs. In this study, an attempt was made in the art classroom to reveal the important part assemblage and collage play in helping achieve this goal.

III. Definition of Terms Used

Collage. The word collage comes from the French word "coller", meaning to paste or stick.² The term collage, as used in this study, refers to any art form created entirely or in part by applying different materials to a flat surface.

Assemblage. An art form which contains collage characteristics, but which extends beyond the limitations of collage to include three-dimensional forms, is called assemblage. The physical characteristics that these collages, objects, and constructions have in common have been simply

²Ibid.

stated by Seitz:

1. They are predominately assembled rather than painted, drawn, modeled, or carved.
2. Entirely or in part, their constituent elements are preformed natural or manufactured materials, objects, or fragments not intended as art materials.³

IV. Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to seventh, eighth, and ninth grade art students at Roosevelt Junior High School, Topeka, Kansas. It should be emphasized that the use of assemblage and collage represented only a part of the total art program.

The major portion of the investigation was conducted during a two-year period, 1965-67. However, selected samples of art work and various methods of applying assemblage and collage techniques were taken from the author's art classes during the four preceding years, 1961 through 1965.

³William Seitz, The Art of Assemblage (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961) p. 6.

CHAPTER II

ASSEMBLAGE AND COLLAGE IN RETROSPECT

Available literature on assemblage and collage indicates a close parallel in the historical advancement of the two. However, since some deviation occurs in the concepts and limitations of the two mediums, a separate section will be devoted to each in this chapter.

I. History of Collage

Collage owes its origin to the folk or peasant arts, according to Wider.⁴ Folk art was once practiced almost everywhere that paper might be available, and its beginning dates back so many centuries that it cannot be pinpointed as to time and place.⁵

An example of folk art is the ancient "Swedish Christmas Custom"; each member of the family created a brilliantly colored design which was placed on the walls of the home for the holiday season. Some were preserved and handed down from generation to generation.

Sometime in the late Nineteenth Century, one of these peasant groups discovered that very pleasing things

⁴Stella E. Wider, "Collage," School Arts, 63:16, December, 1963.

⁵Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis, Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques, (Philadelphia: Clifton Company, 1962) p. 3.

could be made by cutting out odd papers and pasting them together on a foundation of some kind.⁶ Other peasant groups picked up this technique and before long were using postage stamps, cloth, and other materials in their designs.

The practice of cutting and pasting materials in the Nineteenth Century was not confined to any one age or sex or to any particular class, nationality, or race of people. Its practice in the United States during this period resulted in some delightful folk art: tinsel pictures, valentines, elaborate paper cutouts, cigar bands symmetrically pasted on glass bowls and dishes, boxes, and even articles of furniture, and arrangements of Indian arrowheads glued to panels that were framed and hung like pictures.⁷

It wasn't until several years after the turn of the century that influence of folk art collage began to appear in paintings by well known artists. It is generally considered that Braque and Picasso were the first painters to use collage as a serious art form.⁸

Although Picasso first experimented with collage techniques in his ink drawing "Baigneuses" in 1908, there is some doubt that he actually had the first idea. Lynch states: "Braque is generally considered the innovator of

⁶Wider, op. cit., p. 17.

⁷Blesh and Janis, loc. cit.

⁸Ibid., p. 9.

the collage elements used in Cubist painting, on which he and Picasso worked in close collaboration."⁹ Hagggar supports Lynch's theory when he describes Papier Colles as "a device introduced to painting by Braque in 1909 and immediately exploited by Picasso and other cubist painters."¹⁰ Since the two artists were working closely together during this period and obviously discussed the inclusion of collage elements in their painting before actually using them, Kahnweiler suggests that it was a joint discovery. He writes:

It is obvious that it was a joint discovery if one calls it a discovery. These two painters were then working so closely together that it is not at all certain that the one who did the first "papier colle" had really had the idea first. They might have talked about it before.¹¹

The adventurous excitement surrounding their work in those years reached a climax, as far as collage was concerned, in 1912. Picasso completed a still life on which was pasted a fragment of oil cloth that simulated chair caning and around which, in lieu of a frame, he wrapped a length of hemp rope.¹² A few months later, Braque finished his first collage, a combination charcoal sketch and pasted

⁹John Lynch, How to Make Collages, (New York: The Viking Press, 1961) p. 23.

¹⁰Reginald G. Hagggar, A Dictionary of Art Terms, (New York: Hawthorn Books Inc., 1962) p. 245.

¹¹Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, in a letter to Harriet Janis, Feb. 4, 1961, cited by Blesh and Janis, p. 15.

¹²Seitz, op. cit., p. 9.

strips of wood-grain wallpaper.¹³ Inspired by the results of these early attempts, Braque and Picasso made heavy use of the medium until about 1915. Midway in this period Juan Gris adopted the medium.

By the early 1920's all three artists had virtually ceased collage work, but its imprint remained permanently in their painting. Long before this, however, they had firmly established collage as a separate medium; between them had stylistically formulated what is now called "classic collage"; and had prophetically experimented with many techniques and materials.¹⁴

After collage's initiation by the cubists, other movements began to utilize it. One of the first to do so was an Italian art movement called futurism. The philosophy of the futurists was one of optimism, with emphasis in their art work on aspects of life not yet explored. Their aim was to capture in paint such qualities as speed, sound, dynamism, and states of mind. The collage medium was utilized by this group until the movement faded in 1914.¹⁵

From 1916 until 1922, the use of collage was expanded by a group of artists who referred to their work as "dada" art. The word dada, meaning "hobby-horse", was selected at

¹³Blesh and Janis, op. cit., p. 17.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 20-21.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 37.

random from a French dictionary.¹⁶ The unique method of selection and unusual name were thought to appropriately characterize the revolutionary ideas and attitudes of the artists. Impact of the dada movement on the history of collage is aptly stated by Lynch:

Probably the first collages composed entirely of cut-out and pasted materials were those of the Dadaists - a group active in Germany and Switzerland during the First World War and for a while afterward. The collages of this group of artists were surrealist. Portions of magazines, catalogues, textbooks, manuals, and so on, were used to create a compounded, contorted, real-unreal image, often from pictures of the most prosaic objects such as pots and pans or a trunk. They were a rather esoteric form of protest against war and social conditions,...but with a highly intellectualized bitterness. The shock value of these collages, which depended mainly on the displacement of the objects used out of logical context and their reappearance in bizarre or ludicrous combinations with other similarly displaced objects, was an expression of the pain of the upheavals caused by the war, the breakdown of national, economic, and class distinctions with rather schizoid results.¹⁷

Collage experienced a decline in usage following the dada period. Had it not been for Kurt Schwitters, German poet, painter, and sculptor, collage might not have developed into the widely accepted medium it is today. Schwitters joined the dada movement in 1919 and remained active in the collage medium until his death in 1948. Of Schwitter's contribution to the growth of collage, Lynch writes: "A minor poet rather than a genius, he did what so many minor poets have always done. He kept alive an art

¹⁶Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁷Lynch, loc. cit.

form abandoned by his fellow artists."¹⁸ Schwitters was in the truest sense of the word an original. With him, collage developed into an art medium important enough in its own right to stand alongside painting.¹⁹

Although the scale of his work is small by today's standards, (the usual Schwitters collage is a little smaller than a postcard)²⁰ he introduced an amazing variety of new materials, many of them not used before in modern art. Kuh offers the following statement regarding Schwitter's creative talent:

Going beyond formal cubist experiments, he stressed psychological surprises as well as visual ones... No one before or since has more conclusively punctured the theory that permanent, valuable, or respected materials are prerequisites for esthetic enjoyment.²¹

By 1945, artists were using collage to express their inner feelings about the complexities of their immediate day and age. The art of collage was becoming an integral part of life. If an artist felt that the world was made up of ugly things, then his collages depicted this feeling. Blesh and Janis suggest the name "factualism" for this movement which included sculpture and assemblage as well as

¹⁸Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁹Blesh and Janis, op. cit., p. 58.

²⁰Lynch, op. cit., p. 60.

²¹K. Kuh, "Collage by Kurt Schwitters," Saturday Review, 46:37, February 23, 1963.

collage.²² Among the leaders of this movement was Alberto Burri who began working with collage following traumatic experiences in World War II. Exemplified in his work were the pitiful sights of war; wounds, fire, death. Factualism became the main concept for most serious collage artists in the late 1940's and still prevails today.

Collage, since its humble folk art beginning, has become much more than an amusing pastime. It has evolved from the simple pasting of fragments of paper and cloth on paintings in 1912 to the complex assortment of ideas and materials being used by modern day artists.

A fitting tribute to collage's half century of struggle and its emergence as a major art medium is offered by Blesh and Janis:

Today...collage is a major art medium whose techniques have expanded, range of materials immeasurably broadened, and use become almost universal. Collage together with its many offshoots emerges today not only as a major medium, but as a germinative idea that, once planted, has pointed and even led to some of the most significant as well as astonishing developments in the astonishing art of our time.²³

II. History of Assemblage

When Picasso and Braque produced their collage-paintings in 1912 which began the development of collage, they also indirectly initiated three-dimensional assem-

²²Blesh and Janis, op. cit., p. 243.

²³Ibid., p. 3.

blage.²⁴ They, along with other cubist painters, had hinted at it before when they discarded traditional painting and began to break up real appearances into parts and reassemble them on their canvasses. Just as the introduction of oil painting in fifteenth-century Flanders and Italy paralleled a new desire to reproduce the appearance of the visible world,²⁵ collage and related forms of construction gave evidence of a new desire to cast off old values and traditions and substitute real objects for illusion.

Once the artist experienced the picture's outward movement into space through collage techniques, he invariably expanded his use of the medium to include a type of relief construction, such as Picasso's "Guitar" in 1912. Seitz feels that this combination of colored paper and string may well have been the first assemblage.²⁶ In any event the restrictions of flat, two-dimensional collage had clearly been broken and by 1914 the cubists, led by Picasso, had produced a number of three-dimensional constructions using discarded scraps of wood, cloth, cardboard, and other materials.

The Italian futurist movement also began to make use of this new medium. The assembled art of Balla, Marinetti,

²⁴Seitz, op. cit., p. 10.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

and Canguillo were given much attention at the international exhibitions of modern art held in April, 1914 in Rome and London.²⁷ Examples of true assemblages by other futurists have been documented by photographs which still exist.²⁸

As futurism faded into obscurity, the dada group adopted the art of assemblage. Previously involved only in collage experiences, the dadas found that assemblage afforded them new freedom to express their protest against war and social conditions by combining exaggerated assortments of three-dimensional objects out of context with each other. Artists such as Duchamp, Schwitters, and Ernst were attracted by this creative method of expression and projected it into the mainstream of modern art with their diverse works and extensive use of the medium.

A great many artists felt the impact of the dadas' contribution to assembled art in the years following the decline of the movement. Surrealist painters saw this refreshingly different medium as a means of furthering their interpretations of the subconscious mind. Real objects could now be used to replace painted images of super-reality. Salvador Dali created what he called his "surrealist objects".²⁹ Other surrealists such as Miro and Magritte relinquished painting and collage for the more unrestricted

²⁷Ibid., p. 26.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., p. 59.

art of assemblage.

Joseph Cornell's work typifies the individual creativeness with which artists were expressing themselves in the post-1940 era. His assembled objects, most of them enclosed in wooden structures referred to as "exquisite boxes", defied all law or tradition.³⁰ The complex of ideas and associations he used ranged from a child's world of illusion, to an interpretation of the universe, including the sun, moon, and planets.

In the half century of its existence, assemblage has received criticism as well as acceptance. Simon Rodia, who labored for thirty-three years on his "Watts Towers" in Los Angeles, revealed the pressure of public opinion when he said, "some of the people say what was he doing... some of the people think I was crazy...."³¹ Seitz, in support of Rodia's work called it "a unique creation of inspiring power and beauty, a masterpiece of assemblage".³² Man Ray, aware of public criticism of his own assembled art, explained that the objects of his creation were as much a mystery to himself as they might be to others, and "that", he says, "is their justification, if any is needed."³³

³⁰Ibid., p. 68.

³¹Ibid., p. 77.

³²Ibid., p. 79.

³³Ibid., p. 49.

Assemblage has provided an effective outlet for artists in a fifty-year period of abstract expressionism. Many influences have affected its progress from the apprehensive approaches of the cubists to the newest of all art movements, the three-dimensional assemblages large enough for a spectator to enter and become an element of, called "The Environment and the Happening".³⁴

Seitz, attempting to justify the great extent to which assembled art is being used today, says "...Western art is, has always been, and should continue in a state of ferment and constant redefinition".³⁵ And attesting to the integral part assemblage has played in this redefinition, he offers the following view:

...it must be recognized with approval and pleasure that, in addition to enriching and adulterating the themes and forms of painting and sculpture, makers of assembled art have wrought a truly magical transformation: ...they have created challenging, meaningful, and often beautiful objects ordered by principles inseparable from this century.³⁶

Assemblage has become perhaps the most versatile of all the art mediums. And its importance to modern art is surely beyond question.

³⁴Ibid., p. 91.

³⁵Ibid., p. 92.

³⁶Ibid.

CHAPTER III

ASSEMBLAGE AND COLLAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

An art program in the junior high school has the responsibility of capturing and guiding the imaginations of students through the use and combination of materials and processes. It is also important for the student to experience the feeling of achievement that is so vital to creative learning.

Assemblage and collage provide highly imaginative and creative opportunities for the young art student without imposing the strict technical requirements found in other art forms, such as drawing and painting. Consequently, enjoyment and satisfaction, as well as real achievement, often come much more readily.

This study was not merely an attempt to project ideas and classroom methods of the author, but rather to provide a firsthand view of creative experiences and results of junior high art students using assemblage and collage.

I. Collage in Seventh Grade

There are necessary considerations which must be studied before introducing collage to seventh grade students. For example, the number of students who have been exposed to collage elements in elementary school and the extent of their experience. Roosevelt Junior High receives students from four different elementary schools. Most of the students had

done some cutting and pasting previous to entering the seventh grade, but none were able to define the term collage. And since experiences offered in the respective elementary schools differed with each classroom, the need was recognized for an inclusive collage series which would take into account previous use of the medium as well as stimulation of new interest and giving the students new learning experiences with a greater variety of materials.

The successful arrangement of collage elements is dependent, to a large extent, on a basic understanding of design. This concept is supported by Lord.³⁷ Balance of shapes and color, space relationship, and continuity are all important ingredients in a well-organized work of art. Therefore, an attempt was made to help the students to become aware of good principles of design in collages used in this study.

It was also felt that students needed to have a reasonable understanding of collage as an art medium and to be aware of its wide use among professional artists. According to Lord, junior high school students beginning to work with collage will want to know the values of what they do. "They may want to know reasons for using collage and be given assurance that it is a recognized art medium."³⁸ In an

³⁷Lois Lord, Collage and Construction in Elementary and Junior High Schools (Worcester, Massachusetts: Davis Publications, Inc., 1958), p. 31.

³⁸Ibid.

attempt to stimulate interest in, and gain an understanding of the collage medium, the seventh grade students at Roosevelt Junior High were given the derivation of the term collage and a brief history of its progress. Collage examples from previous classes were displayed, and reproductions of art work by such well-known artists as Paul Klee and Robert Motherwell were shown and discussed with the students.

A series of seven projects was planned, beginning with very simple, pasted-paper designs and gradually progressing toward the ultimate achievement, a completely unrestricted collage. A separate explanation has been devoted to each of the seven assignments and a selected sample accompanies each explanation.

Project Number One. Each student was required to create a linear design by using seven strips of black construction paper and arranging them either vertically or horizontally on a sheet of 9 by 12-inch white drawing paper. They were allowed to cut the strips into different lengths and were encouraged to move the strips around to discover the most satisfying arrangement before pasting any of the strips on the paper. By limiting the direction of the strips to vertical and horizontal, only rectangular shapes could be formed. Due to the simplicity of the design, students were able to concentrate on balance and continuity without becoming involved in color, shape variation, and texture.

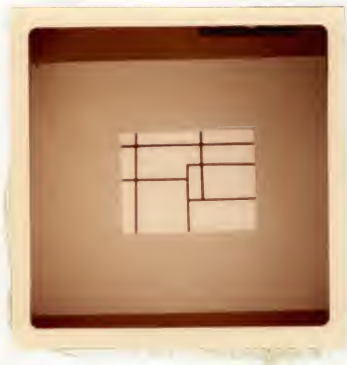


FIGURE 1

PROJECT NUMBER ONE CREATED FROM SEVEN STRIPS
OF BLACK CONSTRUCTION PAPER ARRANGED
VERTICALLY AND HORIZONTALLY

Project Number Two. This assignment included the same materials as those used in project number one but with a difference in the arrangement of the strips on the paper. Each student was permitted to arrange the construction paper strips in any directions except vertical and horizontal. This provided an opportunity for wider variation of shapes and also eliminated the possibility of repeating the same arrangement used in the first assignment. It was explained that in order to obtain variety as well as continuity in their designs, it was necessary to form shapes of different sizes. This was accomplished by controlling the arrangement of strips.



FIGURE 2

PROJECT NUMBER TWO CREATED FROM SEVEN STRIPS
OF BLACK CONSTRUCTION PAPER ARRANGED IN ANY
DIRECTION EXCEPT VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL

Project Number Three. The third assignment contained the same materials as those used in the first two with the addition of color. Requirements for the placement of strips were similar to those in project number one. Once the design was organized into rectangular shapes, each student could then include two pieces of colored construction paper. It was noted that the best way to balance the colored shapes was to place them predominately on opposite sides of the center of the design. The pieces were cut so they fit neatly into two selected spaces between the black strips. Only one color was used for both shapes. It was decided that an extra black strip of construction paper could be added to this assignment if so desired.

Project Number Four. The basic organization of this fourth design related closely to that of the second assignment. However, eight black strips were used instead of seven, and three colored shapes were added. The extra strip allowed students to increase slightly the complexity of their design, and the three pieces of colored paper forced them to do a little more planning than in the previous designs. Only one color was used in each design. Students were urged to be selective in the arrangement of the colored shapes in order to acquire proper balance. They were urged also to select spaces of varying sizes in which to place the colored shapes.

Project Number Five. The author decided that the students were then ready to try assembling a more complex



FIGURE 3

PROJECT NUMBER THREE CREATED FROM SEVEN OR
EIGHT STRIPS OF BLACK CONSTRUCTION PAPER
ARRANGED VERTICALLY AND HORIZONTALLY.

TWO SHAPES, BOTH OF THE SAME COLOR,
WERE INCLUDED



FIGURE 4

PROJECT NUMBER FOUR CREATED FROM EIGHT STRIPS
OF BLACK CONSTRUCTION PAPER ARRANGED IN ANY
DIRECTION EXCEPT VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL.
THREE SHAPES, ALL OF THE SAME COLOR,
WERE INCLUDED

design using colored shapes and an unlimited number of black construction paper strips. They were permitted to use as many colored shapes as they wished. However, the shapes were to be selected from only three colors. For example, the student project shown in Figure 5, page 24, includes a total of eighteen shapes, all of which are formed from three colors; blue-green, red and orange.

Since there were no limitations as to the direction of the strips or the number used, students were encouraged to concentrate on obtaining a wide variety of shapes in their designs. It was suggested that designs might be more interesting if strips of different widths were used.

The basic organization of each design was completed by selective placement of the black strips. Color was then added by cutting pieces to fit within the various shapes created by the overlapping strips. It was pointed out that continuity and balance could best be achieved by interspersing the colored shapes throughout the design. Each individual decided on the number of shapes he wished to use within the three-color limitation.

Project Number Six. After completion of the five preceding designs, it was felt the students then possessed a reasonable understanding of composition and were ready to begin working with different materials. However, rather than advance directly into an unrestricted, textural collage, an interim project was assigned - a paper collage. It was decided that this type of project permitted students to be



FIGURE 5

PROJECT NUMBER FIVE CREATED FROM AN UNLIMITED
NUMBER OF BLACK CONSTRUCTION PAPER STRIPS
AND SHAPES OF AN UNLIMITED NUMBER
FROM THREE COLORS

selective, as well as creative, and yet this related well to the previous designs.

The students were allowed to use as many different kinds of paper as they wished and were encouraged to develop in their collages a nonobjective theme. However, it was important that they exercise control in the organization of their materials. Each collage was assembled on a 12- by 18-inch surface, and the various parts of the composition were fastened into place with rubber cement. It was significant to note that a strong design influence from the previous projects appeared in many of the paper collages.



FIGURE 6

PROJECT NUMBER SIX--A PAPER COLLAGE. STUDENTS
WERE PERMITTED TO INCLUDE ANY KIND OF PAPER.
A NONOBJECTIVE THEME WAS SUGGESTED

Project Number Seven. Often when students begin to work with a new art medium, their lack of experience causes them to concentrate on developing a single familiar object or form without regard to total composition. Consequently, their projects lack an overall continuity and often appear incomplete. It was felt that the completion of the first six assignments in this study, using predominantly nonobjective patterns and shapes, helped students to develop an awareness for complete design organization.

It was then decided that the final collage experience in the series should provide an opportunity for students to exercise complete freedom in choice of materials and subject matter. They were shown some collages from previous classes. It was then explained that each student was to select a subject that appealed to him personally. The two subject areas most frequently chosen in this study were landscapes and nonobjective interpretations. Other choices included The Circus, A Football Game, and an historical interpretation of Abraham Lincoln's Boyhood Home. A few materials were provided by the author, but the majority were gathered by the students from their home surroundings. A sampling of materials collected included dried grass, twigs, tree bark, leaves, sand, string, hairpins, burlap, cotton, buttons, and many types of cloth. Most of the students displayed an unusual amount of enthusiasm and resourcefulness in their collage interpretations.



FIGURE 7

PROJECT NUMBER SEVEN - A COLLAGE CREATED
FROM AN UNLIMITED AMOUNT OF MATERIALS.
THE STUDENT WAS PERMITTED TO CHOOSE
HIS OWN SUBJECT MATTER

In summation of this study in collage experiences for seventh grade students, several significant observations were made by the author. During the seven-week period required to complete the series of projects, student interest and anticipation increased with each new assignment. Some students completed additional collage projects in their spare time at home.

The limitations and specific requirements established for each project obviously aided the more inexperienced

students in achieving success with a new medium. It was noticed that neatness and control in the application of materials improved considerably in most cases throughout the series.

An increased understanding of design along with the satisfaction and enjoyment of working with a variety of materials were significant developments in this study. And finally, it was felt that the students had developed a new awareness of collage as an acceptable art medium and a new insight into the use of simple materials as art expression.

II. Collage in Eighth and Ninth Grades

Due to the flexibility of the collage medium, the activities mentioned in this section have been employed by both eighth and ninth grade students in the Roosevelt Junior High art classes. Out of the large number of collage assignments found suitable for these students, five projects have been selected for use in this study.

Still-Life Collage. It was found that most students performed better in early collage attempts when they were given specific subject matter to interpret. By assigning a still-life collage, the students were provided with a familiar visual reference and able to concentrate on selecting materials that would best represent the various parts of the still-life. A keen awareness of organization developed as a result of detailed pencil drawings of the still-life prior to the collage assignment.

It was determined that the students' experiences were enriched by encouraging them to include their own interpretations of the subject and to arrange their material in any manner they chose. An example of the still-life collage assignment is shown below. This carefully planned and imaginative interpretation was made by a ninth grade student with some previous experience in collage.



FIGURE 8

STILL-LIFE COLLAGE BY NINTH GRADE STUDENT WITH
PREVIOUS COLLAGE EXPERIENCE. MATERIALS
INCLUDE CLOTH, YARN, PAPER, BALSA WOOD
STRIPS, CARDBOARD, TIN-FOIL,
AND A PENCIL

Landscape Collage. A familiar subject and one which provided unlimited possibilities for creative interpretation was the landscape. In this study, the term landscape included all types of outdoor scenes. The students were permitted to select ideas from their imagination or memory. The use of a variety of materials was emphasized, along with the importance of complete design organization.

Many representational features applied by students bore a close resemblance to the original subject matter. For example, bits of tree bark were used in one collage to make a tree trunk. Blades of dried grass simulated weeds and tall grass along the river bank in another collage. Still another student assembled a split-rail fence in her collage through the use of small twigs from a tree. Other ideas that proved effective were as follows: wooden tongue blades representing barn siding; bits of cork used as stone in the construction of a wishing well; and wrinkled blue tissue paper covered with Elmer's glue used to create running water of a stream.

The project pictured on page 31 is a good example of the individual creativeness promoted by the use of landscape as a collage idea.

Abstract Collage. The positive value of abstraction is often a difficult concept for many students to grasp. However, due to certain innate abilities, most students can experience satisfying results with abstract expression if it is presented in an appropriate way. Abstraction through the



FIGURE 9

LANDSCAPE COLLAGE - THIS NINTH GRADE STUDENT
CREATED THE "SUNSET" ABOVE BY COMBINING
COLORED TISSUE PAPER, STRING,
TIN-FOIL, AND PAPER CLIPS

use of collage techniques offers the student complete freedom to experiment with texture and material relationships.

The main objective of the abstract collage assignment used in this study was to enable students to develop sensitivity and understanding for exploring and arranging textures and patterns. Prior to the collage assignment, a simple non-objective design composed of geometric shapes was presented in an effort to develop an awareness for visual balance and continuity. To establish further positive direction in the organization of materials on the collages, three main points were emphasized: variety in size of shapes used; balance of contrasting colors; and discrimination in arrangement of heavily-textured materials with smooth-surfaced shapes.

As a means of stimulating interest in using a wide selection of materials, several general types such as wood, paper, cloth, and objects from nature, were suggested. To provide a sturdy base on which to glue the materials, a number of cardboard advertisement posters were secured.

Most of the eighth and ninth grade students obtained highly satisfying experiences from manipulating the complex assortment of materials they had gathered. The fact that they were able to move the materials around until they arrived at a pleasing arrangement developed a real sense of personal achievement.



FIGURE 10

ABSTRACT COLLAGE - PREVIOUS DESIGN EXPERIENCE
HELPED THIS EIGHTH GRADE STUDENT ACHIEVE A
PLEASING ARRANGEMENT OF TORN PAPER SHAPES
AGAINST A CAREFULLY PLANNED BACKGROUND
OF LARGE COLOR AREAS

Collage Painting. Collage painting, as defined in this study, refers to the combined use of collage elements and paint as an art expression. As a result of collage's flexibility and the technical control exercised in painting, a combination of the two produced highly creative, yet carefully planned experiences. It was found by the author to be most effective when used as an outgrowth of another painting project.

The assignment reviewed in this section was inspired by a semi-abstract watercolor painting of a still-life. As a result of this expressive painting, it was then decided that the students were capable of executing a paint-collage interpretation of the same subject. Emphasis was placed on different ways to represent various parts of the still-life, yet still retain a painting quality. Some of the materials most frequently included in the paintings were: pieces of newspaper, tissue paper, string, cloth, ink, and colored chalk.

It was felt that the experience the students gained through this method of expression was extremely valuable in relation to future projects, both in the medium of painting and that of collage.

Unlimited Collage. This comprehensive assignment was presented to eighth and ninth grade students with previous experience in some of the more controlled areas of collage. In the unlimited collage, there were no restrictions



FIGURE 11

COLLAGE PAINTING - STILL-LIFE INTERPRETATION
BY NINTH GRADE STUDENT USING MIXED MEDIA.
MATERIALS INCLUDE TEMPERA PAINT, WATER-
COLOR, INK, COLORED CHALK, NEWSPAPER,
COLORED TISSUE, STRING

on either subject matter or materials. Hence the opportunity existed for students to use imaginative subjects not permissible in the preceding assignments, such as animals, human figures, flowers, and building interiors. It should be noted, however, that some of the ideas developed by students were similar to those found in the other projects, particularly in the use of landscape.

Unlimited collage proved most effective when preliminary suggestions were made concerning the use of familiar subject matter. For example, it was suggested that each student select a subject that was the most interesting to him personally. Various ideas were discussed and students were asked to volunteer some individual choices as a means of inspiring other class members. A kitten playing with a ball of yarn (Figure 12, page 37), the circus, a clown, the race track, and a forest scene with animals were popular interpretations.

There are several forms of collage and combined techniques other than those mentioned here which have proven effective with junior high school art students at Roosevelt. Projects discussed in this study adequately exemplify the highly versatile and creative nature of collage and its value to the total junior high art program. One of the most significant of these values was the freedom with which students worked in other art mediums following experiences in collage. These experiences heightened creativity in painting and mixed



FIGURE 12

UNLIMITED COLLAGE - THIS EIGHTH GRADE STUDENT
DISPLAYED EXTREMELY GOOD CONTROL IN ORGANIZ-
ING HER MATERIALS TO REPRESENT FAMILY PET.
SHE CHOSE HER OWN SUBJECT AND MATERIALS

media as well as assemblage and various types of construction.

The experience gained from collage proved valuable to students in developing good principles of design in other mediums and helped to increase awareness of design outside the art classroom as well as within.

Many aspects of the student's future life may be affected either consciously or otherwise by what he learns in junior high school. Therefore, profitable experiences in color usage and relationships of materials and textures in assembling works of art could enable students to make wise decisions in selection of clothing, home furnishings, and decorations for the home. These art experiences also make it possible for students to develop a greater appreciation for the beauty of their everyday environment.

III. Assemblage in Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Grades

A difficulty arises in attempting to make a clear distinction between assemblage and the various construction projects used in junior high school art classes. In defining the terms assemblage and construction as related to art, it has to be conceded that many similarities occur in the materials and methods used in the two forms and that some art projects could be called either assemblages or constructions. The basic distinction, if one is needed, seems to lie in the fact that assemblages are predominantly formed by using

objects not intended as art materials,³⁹ while constructions may be assembled entirely from materials designed for the art classroom.

As a result of this distinction between the mediums of assemblage and construction, the projects described in this section were assembled from essentially non-art materials. It should be noted, however, that a number of construction projects were also included in the course of study which stimulated the students' understanding of three-dimensional design.

Three general types of assemblage have been employed by the author as class projects. It was felt that no particular aptitude or experience was necessary to achieve individual success with specific types of assemblage. Therefore the assignments were not restricted to any definite grade level. The three types of assemblage used have been classified as (1) Found Objects, (2) Wood Scraps, and (3) Nature Materials.

Found Objects Assemblage. This title referred to any project assembled predominantly from materials found by students outside the classroom. Some preliminary discussion of assemblage was necessary as a means of motivating the students and an example from a previous class was displayed. In some instances, particularly in the seventh grade, the

³⁹William Seitz, The Art of Assemblage (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1961) p. 6.

assemblage project was preceded by a collage assignment in an effort to develop an awareness for the type of materials to be used.

In the found objects assemblage, students were encouraged to develop the type of project suggested to them by the materials they found. Therefore, no specific subject matter was suggested by the author. Figure 13 on the following page reveals the simple yet effective results obtained by a group of seventh grade students using objects and materials which represented familiar living forms. Eighth and ninth grade students displayed a wider range of choices in their subject matter, including a number of nonobjective interpretations. Some of the materials used by students in this assignment were as follows: bottles, cans, styrofoam balls, cloth, driftwood, pipe cleaners, clothes pins, wire, drinking straws, matches, light bulbs, buttons, and marbles. Some students used a great many materials on a single project while others used only a few.

It was found that a number of students who showed very limited creative or technical ability on other art projects were able to achieve a degree of personal success with the found objects assemblage.

Wood Scraps Assemblage. This assemblage project was made possible through the cooperation of the industrial arts teacher since it was necessary to collect several boxes of discarded wood scraps from the school woodworking shop.



FIGURE 13

FOUND OBJECTS ASSEMBLAGE - THE SEVENTH GRADE
PROJECTS SHOWN HERE WERE CREATED FROM PRE-
DOMINANTLY NON-ART MATERIALS GATHERED
FROM OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Scraps included a large variety of shapes and sizes and proved to be ideal material for a creative assemblage assignment.

The wood scraps were sorted and placed into boxes according to size. Suggestions were made concerning different methods of assembling them into interesting three-dimensional designs. Students were allowed to select any shapes they wished to use and were encouraged to experiment freely with different arrangements before gluing. Most of the students decided they could best express their ideas through abstract relationships.

Hand saws were available if students wished to cut some of the scraps into different shapes. An emulsion glue was used to fasten pieces together. Sandpaper was used in many cases to smooth the wood surface while some students preferred a rough texture. Thread, wire, tempera paint, and shellac were used on some projects in addition to the various wood scraps.

These wood scraps assemblages, which were composed of predominantly solid shapes, forced the students to develop sensitivity for space-form relationships as well as that of relating one form to another.

Nature Materials Assemblage. Many objects exist in their natural state which contain beauty and form. The thought prevailed that if an art project could be introduced which would utilize these forms, students would develop new

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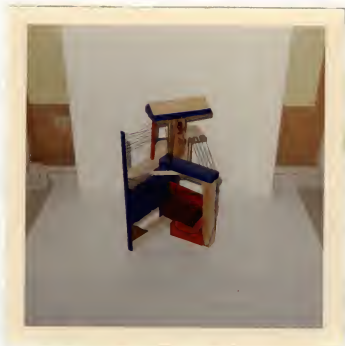


FIGURE 14

WOOD SCRAPS ASSEMBLAGE - THIS NONOBJECTIVE
INTERPRETATION WAS CREATED BY EIGHTH
GRADE STUDENT USING DISCARDED
SCRAPS OF WOOD. VARIOUS
FORMS ARE HELD IN PLACE
BY GLUE

insight in observing their natural surroundings and could gain a broader acceptance of the use of non-art materials as art expression. As a result of these observations, the nature materials assemblage was initiated. Student interest was stimulated by discussing various materials and methods of assembling them. The only limitation placed on the selection of materials was that they be primarily natural rather than man-made. It was conceded, however, that a few simple materials, such as string, colored paper, and paint, could be added once the project was assembled.

A great deal of enthusiasm developed as students began to collect their nature objects. Some decided to assemble their materials to represent familiar forms such as animals, fish, turtles, and birds. Others were influenced by the close resemblance of their found objects to a particular subject or form. A number of the more experienced students displayed their creative ideas through abstract three-dimensional designs.

The use and combination of nature materials ranged from highly complex by some students to extremely simple by others. The student whose assemblage is pictured on page 45 found an interesting piece of driftwood which he felt needed little modification to carry out his idea. Other objects which were effectively utilized by students included stones, seedpods, feathers, sea shells, dried weeds and leaves, twigs, nut shells, bones, and an empty turtle shell.

The realization that simple, inconspicuous natural objects could be combined to form highly creative and enjoyable art experiences gave students a new appreciation for assembled art.



FIGURE 15

NATURE MATERIALS ASSEMBLAGE - STUDENT SAW
NATURAL BEAUTY IN THIS PIECE OF DRIFT-
WOOD AND ONLY SLIGHTLY ALTERED ITS
ORIGINAL APPEARANCE

A review of the three assemblage experiences discussed in this section led the author to several positive conclusions. First, it was learned that, due to the extremely creative nature of assembled art, the student who did not perform well in drawing and painting was encouraged by his

efforts in this medium. He found that his work compared favorably with that of his classmates. Second, assemblage is perhaps the most adaptable of all the art mediums presently employed in the art classes at Roosevelt, with the possible exception of collage. It was found that satisfactory results could be obtained at the seventh, eighth, and ninth grade levels with each of the three assignments mentioned in this study. Third, by creating an acceptable work of art from essentially non-art materials, the students developed a new sensitivity for the beauty of simple, everyday objects that they were not aware of before. It was also felt that assemblage as well as collage helped to develop in students a more enlightened attitude toward the modern trend in today's art, much of which was heretofore confusing to them. And fourth, the experience of assembling art forms from individually selected materials instilled in the students a sense of accomplishment and developed confidence in their ability to work successfully with other three-dimensional designs.

CHAPTER IV

ASSEMBLAGE AND COLLAGE BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

In this study, the primary emphasis was placed on individual learning experiences within the art classroom. However, application of these experiences outside the classroom and awareness of future possibilities are essential if student interest and learning are to be continued. Therefore this chapter has been devoted to some general considerations concerning the use and acceptance of assemblage and collage beyond the confinement of the art classroom.

Perhaps the most immediate challenge presented to young people outside the classroom is the use of assemblage and collage in various school activities. Bulletin board displays are frequently designed by individuals or groups of students employing collage techniques. For example, different seasonal interpretations can be represented by combining colored construction paper, dried leaves, cotton, tissue paper, and cloth. Special events in schools are sometimes announced with posters or three-dimensional constructions. A school book fair, basketball games, and school dramatic productions have been advertised with a variety of combined materials. During the Christmas season, students use collage and assembled art to decorate the school building. Each year, Roosevelt Junior High school students

create window decorations and wall designs by combining such materials as colored tissue paper, cloth, colored string, construction paper, cellophane, and tinfoil. Christmas ideas are also expressed in many ways with three-dimensional interpretations. A variety of materials are used to create religious figures, Christmas trees, wreaths, Santa Claus, and colorful mobile designs. Assemblage and collage techniques are also employed in stage scenery for school operettas and plays and decorations for school parties.

Besides the many school functions and events which involve the use of assemblage and collage, classroom experience has led students to find enjoyment and satisfaction in leisure time art activities. Individual interpretations of airplanes, space ships, boats, insects, birds, and human forms by students using materials gathered from the community have been observed by the author.

There has been a wide use of assemblage and collage by adults as well as school age boys and girls. Besides nationally known exhibitions by professional artists, many examples can be found in local exhibits. And although painting and sculpture still command much public attention in exhibitions, collage and assembled art are being recognized as two of the most creative of all methods of expressions and have become an integral part in the lives of many serious modern artists.

In addition to their aesthetic achievement, assemblage and collage have become practical in the field of commercial

art. Various forms of assembled art have appeared in magazine advertisements and have been used in creating stage scenery and props. Collage enjoys extensive use in a variety of advertising mediums. And while the functional implementation of these art forms is widespread today, it is not a new innovation. Collage was being utilized commercially in a number of ways as early as 1946, according to Runes and Schrickel, who made the following statement at that time:

Collage techniques have had great influence in various fields of artistic work: advertising art, illustration, packaging, store-window display, photography, typography, stage decoration, and many others have been profoundly affected.⁴⁰

As proof of collage's wide use in several fields in more recent years, Meilach and Ten Hoor have collected a number of examples: magazine illustrations, record albums, travel posters, advertising posters, and book jackets, all employing collage techniques.⁴¹

An examination of assemblage and collage beyond the art classroom reveals that, in addition to enriching the themes and forms of other art mediums, they have emerged as major art mediums in their own right. The possibilities they provide for art students, both during their school

⁴⁰Dagobert Runes and Harry Schrickel, Encyclopedia of the Arts, (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1945) p. 234.

⁴¹Dona Meilach and Elvie Ten Hoor, Collage and Found Art, (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1964) pp. 21, 22, 33, 35, 50.

years and beyond, are endless. Knowledge and experience gained by students with regard to color, texture, shape, and design will prove invaluable in helping them later in life to furnish their homes, select clothing, dishes, and perhaps even pieces of art work.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

I. Summary

Although available literature indicates that collage originated several centuries ago with the folk or peasant arts, it wasn't until 1912 that the medium gained acceptance with prominent artists. Picasso and Braque first experimented with collage materials in their paintings and soon after began to branch out into three-dimensional forms, thus initiating assemblage. The use of assemblage and collage was expanded by groups of artists, such as the futurists, dadas, and beginning in 1945, the factualists.

Assemblage and collage have provided effective outlets for artists in a fifty-year period of abstract expressionism. They have emerged today as major art mediums which have led to some of the most significant developments of our time in the field of art.

In recent years there has been a growing desire to expand student learning experiences in the art classroom through a variety of new and different creative processes. This study emphasizes the use of assemblage and collage in grades seven, eight, and nine. The seventh grade students at Roosevelt Junior High School, Topeka, Kansas, were provided

with a series of seven collage projects. The series began with simple, pasted paper designs and culminated with a completely unrestricted collage. History of collage was discussed and a variety of materials was encouraged along with control in their placement.

More diversified collage experiences were offered at the eighth and ninth grade levels. Out of the large number of collage projects found suitable for this age group, five were selected for use in this study. They consisted of (1) still-life collage, (2) landscape collage, (3) abstract collage, (4) collage painting, and (5) unlimited collage. The collage assignments mentioned here provided many opportunities for students to experiment with a wide range of materials.

Assembling of predominantly non-art materials to form three-dimensional designs provided effective learning experiences in the art classroom. Seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students involved in this study made extensive use of assemblage techniques in the following assignments: (1) found objects assemblage, (2) wood scraps assemblage, and (3) nature materials assemblage. Each project presented a new challenge in space-form relationships as well as selecting desirable textures and shapes.

Student experiences with assemblage and collage in the classroom have been enriched in many instances by enabling the students to see the extent to which the mediums are used outside the classroom. Several examples were noted in this

study and the importance of carrying a strong design influence beyond the art classroom was also discussed.

II. Conclusions

The following conclusions, which emphasize the importance of using assemblage and collage in junior high school art classes, were drawn from this study:

1. Student experiences in collage encouraged more freedom in other two-dimensional mediums such as drawing and painting. Also the experience of working with textures and varied shapes prepared students for projects in assembled art.

2. Student experiences in assemblage encouraged more freedom in other three-dimensional forms such as sculpture and construction.

3. Assemblage and collage provided significant learning experiences for students with limited ability in other art mediums such as drawing and painting.

4. Versatility in moving materials around before fixing them permanently enabled students to develop successful design organization with assemblage and collage.

5. The use of assemblage and collage in junior high school prepared students for subsequent art courses and use of the mediums outside the classroom.

6. A new awareness of assemblage and collage as recognized art mediums was achieved by students through classroom experience, observation, and discussion. They found that

aesthetic enjoyment could be achieved by combining a diverse assortment of materials.

III. Recommendations

Some ideas regarding further study of assemblage and collage have occurred to the author which would require research beyond the limits of the undertaking reported here. They are listed as follows:

1. A more comprehensive study could be conducted which would include the results of assemblage and collage used as learning experiences in more than one junior high school.

2. A survey-type study could be implemented which would sample the influence of assemblage and collage in schools throughout the state.

3. A comparative study could be made between students with assemblage and collage experience and students without experience in these mediums in relation to their achievements with other art forms.

4. A study of assemblage and collage at the high school level could be made to determine the effectiveness of these mediums with more advanced students.

5. The implementation of a design test given to students both before and after experiences in assemblage and collage could possibly provide more validity concerning student improvement through the use of these mediums.

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ABSTRACT

THE USE OF ASSEMBLAGE AND COLLAGE
AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

by

WILLARD DEANE BURGESS

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It was the purpose of this study to emphasize the importance of assemblage and collage as creative learning experiences for seventh, eighth, and ninth grade art students. The study was conducted in the art classes at Roosevelt Junior High School, Topeka, Kansas. Presentation of the classroom investigation was preceded by a brief historical analysis of assemblage and collage and was followed by a discussion of their utilization beyond the art classroom.

Collage was presented to the seventh grade students by introducing a progressive series of seven projects beginning with simple, pasted paper designs and culminating with a completely unrestricted collage. The prime objective of each project was to increase the students' understanding of design.

More diversified collage experiences were offered at the eighth and ninth grade levels and were interspersed throughout the total art program. An understanding of design, color and material relationships, and originality were of major importance in each collage. The five types selected for use in this study were as follows: (1) still-life collage, (2) landscape collage, (3) abstract collage, (4) collage painting, and (5) unlimited collage.

The art of assemblage was found to provide extremely effective learning experiences in three-dimensional design. Seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students involved in this study made extensive use of assemblage techniques in the

following assignments: (1) found objects assemblage, (2) wood scraps assemblage, and (3) nature materials assemblage.

The experience gained from assemblage and collage proved valuable to students in developing good principles of design in other mediums and helped to increase their awareness of design outside the art classroom as well as within.