



## **REPRESENTING AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERS**

**Grade:** 6th

**Teacher:**

Rebecca L. Adams

**Artist:**

Erica M. James

**Academic Content and Learning Skills:**

Social Studies, Language Arts & Cooperative Work Skills, Biographical Research, & African American History

**Arts Content:**

Visual Arts, Photography, Graphic Design Media, Literature & Book Arts

### **Overview**

Rebecca Adams' was in the midst of researching various African Americans in the media for the Murray Language Academy African American history fair, when Ms. Adams first talked with mixed media artist, Erica Moiah James. The African American history fair is presented every year as an opportunity for parents to come into the school to meet teachers and see their children's work. The teacher and artist decided to work together on a project utilizing the art of book making.

### **Research and Inquiry**

How do we represent our leaders?

### **A Variety of Hands-on Approaches to Generating and Representing New Knowledge**

During the four session, 8-hour residency, the students made books to celebrate the life stories and contributions of African American leaders. Ms. Adams led her students in writing biographies and formatting them on the classroom computers. She also encouraged her students to locate photographs of these individuals throughout the library and through on-line internet research. These photographs were later used to create a collage for illustrating the books. Five books, each 14"x16", and containing 4-6 biographies, were produced.

### **Assessing, Presenting, Teaching Others, and Engaging Parents and Community**

The books were displayed for parents, teachers, and other students at the African American History Fair open house in late February.

### **Classroom Goals Addressed by Project**

- Encouraging students to understand the research process and the power of books, as

well as introducing them to African Americans in the media.

- Combining academic content with a challenging arts project led students to consider how they would use their own creativity to express the creativity of the individuals they wrote and drew about.

### **State Goals Addressed by Project**

Illinois State Social Science Goal #2:

Students will be able to understand and analyze events, trends, personalities, and movements shaping the history of the world, the United States, and Illinois.

Illinois State Social Science Goal #4:

Apply the skills and knowledge gained in the social sciences to decision-making in life situations.

Illinois State Benchmark Outcomes:

- Understand that people in the United States, differing by race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and culture, have contributed to and influence their own and global society.
- Recognize the various factors that influence human development and behavior.
- Analyze and explain the influence of mass communication and technology on society's values, beliefs, and behaviors.
- Analyze how contemporary issues influence society's values and the civic responsibility of an individual to be aware of them.
- Recognize the preparation needed for the world of work.

Illinois State Fine Arts Goal #2:

Students will be able to identify processes and tools required producing visual art, music, drama, and dance.

Illinois State Fine Arts Goal #3:

Students will be able to demonstrate the basic skills necessary to participate in the creation and/or performance of one of the arts.

Illinois State Benchmark Outcomes:

- Recognize, identify, and use basic tools, beginning skills, appropriate vocabulary, and techniques for creation in the arts to express ideas, attitudes, feelings, and experiences.
- Observe and create visual forms and refine technical skills to depict values, scale and proportion.
- Identify, analyze, and incorporate art elements and principles in the evaluation and creation of various art forms.
- Identify and discuss careers in arts education, the performing arts, the creative arts, and art related fields.
- Students also learned to compromise and collaborate while working on a group project.

### **What Resources were used?**

Biographies of famous people, Internet resources, and computers to format student writing. Artists used cardboard, PVA glue, scissors, construction paper, buff paper for text drawings, special papers for covers, craypas, pencils, charcoal, paint brushes, fabric paint, colored pencils, newspaper/magazine clippings/photocopies, writing pens, binding clips.

### **Key Words/Vocabulary that are most important to this unit**

- Content
- Illustration
- Copyright

## **Brief Step-by-Step daily/weekly lesson plan for this unit**

This is a 4-week, 8-hour unit.

### *Lesson One*

Title: Building Blocks of Books

Goal: To teach students how a book comes together

Introduction: The artist will give a step by step demonstration of book making from start to finish. The artist will demonstrate a simple rectangular book and also one with an unusual shape to encourage the students to explore other possibilities.

Activity: Students will make decisions on the size of their books, it's shape and colors. They will decide how many pages the book will be, what colors the pages will be and begin plotting margins etc. They will also glue the paper on the front and back panels of their books.

Review: The artist will ask the students based on her demonstration what the next step will be? The students will be encouraged to bring in photocopies, newspaper and/or magazine clippings for use in their books.

### *Lesson Two*

Title: Content

Goals: To have students begin developing the pages of their books.

Introduction: Martin Luther King once said that he hoped one day that we would not be judged by the color of our skin, but by the content of our character. The issue of content is very important because it essentially means what something is really about inside. Artist will demonstrate for the class various ways to design pages and illustrate a book, which are two ways to express the content of a book. The students will be encouraged to utilize clippings and photocopies and also incorporate their own drawings into the work. Artist will also explain briefly the issues of copyright, which can be defined as the exclusive right of an author, filmmaker, etc., to control any copies, partial or whole, of works produced by them. The artist will ask students to give the student two examples of how a page can be arranged on a board.

Activity: Students will begin designing and putting together the pages of their book.

Review: The artist will ask the students the meaning of the vocabulary words: content, illustration, copyright, etc.

### *Lesson Three*

Title: Sometimes you can tell a book by its cover

Goal: To produce a cover that gives an indication of what the book is about

Introduction: Artist will present three books to the class and ask them what they think the books are about. What book would they want to read/investigate first? Why? This exercise is an effort to encourage students to produce a book cover that is visually striking and dictates something about what the book is about.

Activity: Students will be asked to design and produce a cover for their books and answer questions or accept compliments from the class

Review: Students will be asked to share with the class the cover designs for their books and answer questions or accept compliments from the class.

#### *Lesson Four*

Title: Putting it all together

Goal: To put the finishing touches on the books and to bind them.

Introduction: Artists will review the binding process for students and will assist them with putting the finishing touches on their books and binding the completed works.

Activity: Students will be asked to complete all pages and begin putting their books together.

Review: One or two students may be asked to share their books with the class.

#### **Assessments Used for this project**

For Subject Area(s):

- Students were able to recognize images of various African Americans in the media and literary arts.
- Students were able to relate the biographies of various African Americans in the media and literary arts both orally and in written reports.
- Students used resource material from libraries, magazines, and Internet sites and were able to develop bibliographies.

For Art Forms:

- Research for photos/images, preliminary sketches, final sketches, color choices, ability to work with others, final product.
- Students could identify the parts of the book and how a book is made
- Students learned new vocabulary related to art and bookmaking.
- Students made choices about presentation, layout, and cover of their books.
- Students worked together with others to form consensus.
- Students expressed pride in their work.
- Students participated in review/critique of their work and the work of others.

## **Comments/Reflections from Teachers, Artists, Students, Parents**

Comments from Teachers Involved:

"It's always a pleasure to work with Erica James! Erica and I spoke on the phone on several occasions. That was all I had to do. She came into my class equipped with all the materials we needed to get the job done. We made books of African Americans in the media to tie in with our school wide theme for February. All of my students, prior to Erica's visit, researched and wrote a biography as well as found a picture of their person. The idea was to create a representation of that person and include icons or symbols that related to the person. Students even had an opportunity to sew the books. I really wished we had more time and of course, space. I learned how to make really delightful books out of fabric."

"Next time I would schedule much more time. I would also make sure I laminated all of the biographies first. Some of the student's papers were stained by the time we completed the project. This is a project I would definitely do again."

Comments from Artists Involved:

"I think I was beginning to get a little cynical regarding the eagerness of this age group to learn or attempt things that required some risk and effort on their part, but this group certainly proved me wrong. They dove into the project. I later learned that they hadn't done any projects this school year. When I began the residency, I did not know who the slower kids were in class. I had the same expectations for everyone and most children did rather well. At the end of the project, when the teacher pointed out the students having difficulty keeping up with the rest of the class, I was really surprised. They had done so well. Children, like a lot of us, learn in different ways. I have come to believe that the arts can and should be utilized to creatively teach and enhance traditional courses. From the work I did with students, I can visualize other steps for these students in arts integration:

1.) Literature: At least four of the individuals profiled were writers, representing three genres of writing; Toni Morrison and James Baldwin, novelists; Baldwin and Lorraine Hansberry, Playwrights, and Rita Dove, poet. The class can explore some of their works and the various styles of writing -- writing a poem, essay or a play. 2.)

History/Geography/Social Studies/Art History: Since this was a book making project, the class could research and study where the art and tradition of bookmaking comes from and how books are produced in different cultures. 3.) Media Literacy/Social Studies:

Several of the individuals profiled by the student were from evening news programs."

## **Advice to teachers and artists who want to try this arts integration project**

- Practice everything with undo-able things like pencils or on black paper before trying the real thing.
- Some advice I would give is to be sure that the children don't have to rush through it or put extra pressure on them to finish it. Basically, just let them do it themselves with a little help from the teachers and artists. So it is something they can say they did.
- My advice to teachers and artists is just do it, this is a fun and learning project and I think all children will like this wonderful project.