

Found Object Artworks

Transforming Ordinary Objects

Overview: After completing this activity, students will be better able to understand the importance of materials and the juxtaposition of objects in the creative process. They will also develop or refine critical thinking skills.

Age Group/Grade: 8-10 years, grades 3-5

Subject Area: Visual Arts, Language Arts

Duration: approximately 40 min.

Background

A found object is a natural or man-made item that an artist or his/her associates identifies as having some aesthetic value. Artists may choose to change parts of found objects or may leave them whole before incorporating them into larger works.

Discussion

Share with students *"MINUTE MAID" Articulated Figure*, which is made of a Minute Maid orange juice can, carved wood, and turned iron. Begin your conversation with the following questions:

- The artist created part of this artwork from a juice can. How has the artist changed that can? Which changes altering the can to look like clothing are particularly effective?

Explain that this figure is similar to a "limberjack." Makers of these dancing dolls would create jointed figures and attach them to the ends of sticks. Their owners could then bounce the artwork, making it appear to dance.

- Imagine this artwork dancing. What items did the artist add to his sculpture in order to emphasize the movement?
- What objects could you find to make into a work of art?

Activity

Have students bring three different objects into class. Ask them to select one to look at closely. Have them make a detailed pencil sketch of the object on a plain piece of paper.

Explore the transformation of a found object into art by asking students to quickly jot down answers to the following questions next to their sketch:

- What could you transform that object into?
- Imagine changing just one part of the object; what could it be then?

For a full-size image of *"MINUTE MAID" Articulated Figure*, visit: https://ids.si.edu/ids/deliveryService?id=SAAM-1986.65.277_2



Unidentified artist, *"MINUTE MAID" Articulated Figure*, ca.1950s, "Minute Maid" orange juice can, carved and painted wood, and turned iron, 10 1/2 x 3 1/2 x 2 3/4 in., Gift of Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr., and museum purchase made possible by Ralph Cross Johnson, 1986.65.277.

Using the back of their sketch, have students use descriptive language to give a single object five different meanings. For example, a plastic pen cap might be described as:

- A tall top hat for a gentleman fairy off to a dance;
- A pirate's peg leg for walking the plank;
- One of many petals, fallen and curling in the sun;
- The extra long snout of a dachshund;
- A candle waiting for a match.

Encourage students to return to their cache of found objects and try out different combinations of objects.

- What might your first object be, now that you can combine it with other items from your collection?
- How does your impression of your first object change when you combine it with other objects?

Explain that they will design a found object sculpture that could move.

- Which combination of objects is best suited to this task?
- How might you alter your individual objects to make their meaning clear?
- What might you need to add in order to emphasize movement?

Finally, have students sketch a sculpture that incorporates three found objects and make a list of any additional objects they might need to complete the artwork.