



“A Little Memory:” Dorothy Hood and Collage

Recommended for Grades 3-5

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OVERVIEW

“A Little Memory:” Dorothy Hood and Collage

Dorothy Hood used the medium of collage to express her memories of places she traveled to and imagined. In this lesson, students will learn about Dorothy Hood’s collages and then create their own abstract, mixed-media collages based on a favorite memory.

Objectives:

- Students will closely observe Dorothy Hood’s *Coptic Days* and share their ideas, observations, and questions in a class discussion.
- Students will create an abstract collage inspired by a memory, using a found image or piece of ephemera as a starting point for their composition.

Essential Questions:

- How does the medium of collage help us express the emotions, colors, and textures of memories?

Texas State Standards (TEKS):

Grade 3, Art, Title 19, Part 2, Chapter 117, Subchapter A, Rule §117.111, (2)A,B,C

Grade 4, Art, Title 19, Part 2, Chapter 117, Subchapter A, Rule §117.114, (2)A,B,C

Grade 5, Art, Title 19, Part 2, Chapter 117, Subchapter A, Rule §117.117, (2)A,B,C

Creative expression. The student communicates ideas through original artworks using a variety of media with appropriate skills. The student expresses thoughts and ideas creatively while challenging the imagination, fostering reflective thinking, and developing disciplined effort and progressive problem-solving skills. The student is expected to:

- (A) integrate ideas drawn from life experiences to create original works of art;
- (B) create compositions using the elements of art and principles of design;
- (C) produce drawings; paintings; prints; sculpture, including modeled forms; and other art forms [...] using a variety of materials.



Dorothy Hood, *Coptic Days*, ca. 1980, 30 x 20 inches, Public Art of the University of Houston System, mixed media

ABOUT DOROTHY HOOD

*"[Collage] is fine, and it's just wonderful what you have afterwards.... it's a little memory."*²

Dorothy Hood (1919-2000) was a painter and mixed media artist. She was born in Bryan, Texas and raised in Houston. She was an only child and her parents often left her to play alone, using her imagination to draw and make art. She attended art school in Rhode Island and New York, then traveled to Mexico where she lived for 20 years before returning to live in Houston in 1961.

Hood was an avid traveler, and her large-scale abstract paintings are inspired by the cultures, colors, textures, and landscapes of places she lived and visited. She was even inspired by places she had never been—like space! The composition of *The Angel's Key*, a painting in the permanent collection of Public Art of the University of Houston System (Public Art UHS), was inspired by NASA photographs and scenes from Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. She said that her work expressed "the landscapes of my psyche."³ She started making collages like *Coptic Days* while she was living in Texas in the 1980s. She said that the medium of collage was a welcome departure from painting. These quicker, smaller collages were "just sheer joy," and allowed her to experiment with materials more freely.

Hood collected and kept items from her life, from valentines and letters to art materials. In 1981, she took a trip to Egypt and brought home the patterned papers that she used in *Coptic Days* and other collages. *Coptic Days* references the Copts, an ethnoreligious group in North Africa, Sudan, and Egypt. A black-and-white image of a Coptic drawing on papyrus is in the top center of the top of the canvas. Other elements in the collage include cut and torn patterned paper, a dried leaf, and two cut squares of canvas with washes of blue paint.

Dorothy Hood: The Edge of Being is on view from October 2021 to March 2023 at the M.D. Anderson Library, Special Collections, where the Dorothy Hood Papers are housed. The exhibition extends throughout the UH and University of Houston-Clear Lake campuses. Please visit publicartuhs.org to schedule a tour.



Image: Dorothy Hood in her studio, from the Dorothy Hood Papers, a collection of the University of Houston Libraries and the Art Museum of South Texas, UH Libraries Special Collections.

CLOSE LOOKING: DISCUSSION

Objective: Students will closely observe Dorothy Hood’s *Coptic Days* and share their ideas, observations, and questions in a class discussion.

Estimated length: 10-15 minutes

Display *Coptic Days* on a SmartBoard, projector, or print and distribute color copies. Ask students to look closely at the artwork. Prompt discussion by asking students to describe what they see:

- What do you see or observe?
- What shapes or colors do you notice?
- What materials do you notice? How do you think this artwork was made?
- What do you wonder or what questions do you have about this artwork?

Explain that the artwork was created by an artist named Dorothy Hood. Although Dorothy Hood was known as a painter, she also made collages that she described as “a little memory.” This collage is titled *Coptic Days*, and includes an image of a papyrus drawing and pieces of patterned paper that Dorothy Hood may have collected during her visit to Egypt. Prompt further discussion and encourage students to interpret what they see:

- How did the artist layer the different elements/pieces of the collage? What part of the collage do you look at first? Which details stand out to you?
- What mood or emotions are in this collage? If this collage shows a memory, do you think it would be a happy or sad memory? What colors, textures, images, patterns, or elements make you say that?
- What emotions do you feel when you look at this artwork? Does it remind you of any of your own memories?

Transition to the art-making activity by saying that students will create their own collage inspired by a memory, using some of the same materials. Students will start with a single image or piece of ephemera and add colors, patterns, textures, and images like those in *Coptic Days*.

Lesson Adaptations or Extensions:

- A. Video and Audio of Dorothy Hood: As a group, view a 3.5-minute excerpt from the documentary *Dorothy Hood: The Color of Life*, in which Hood talks about collage and demonstrates her process (image right). See Additional Resources section for a link to the documentary on YouTube.



ACTIVITY: ART-MAKING

Objective: Students will create an abstract collage inspired by a memory, using an image or found object as a starting point for their composition.

Estimated length: 30-40 mins

Materials Needed:

- Found object (photo, ticket stub, brochure, postcard, candy wrapper, playing card, etc.)
- Scissors
- Glue stick
- Board or sturdy paper for background
- Colored and/or patterned paper for decoration
- Magazines, newspapers, or other image sources
- Markers, colored pencils, crayons, and/or paint

1. Ask each student to choose a memory and select an image or found object that connects to their memory. The image or object can be brought from home or selected in the classroom using a magazine or other source of images. Ideas for memories include a birthday or holiday, a field trip or a family visit to a new place, a memory of a favorite person, or even a recent memory of an everyday activity.
2. Distribute materials. Ask students to write their name on one side of their board or paper, along with the title of their memory collage and (optionally) a few notes about what details they can recall (colors, sounds, shapes, people) and how they remember feeling.
3. Instruct students to flip over their board or paper, then attach their image or found object anywhere on the surface as a starting point or their composition.
4. Then, instruct students to find, select, and cut out additional images and materials that remind them of the images, colors, textures, and other aspects of their memory, then arrange and layer materials until they are satisfied with the composition.
5. Encourage students to fill all empty space with images, paper, and marks made with markers, colored pencils, crayons, or paint. Note that the attached elements in *Coptic Days* cover the entire surface of the background paper/board.
6. At the end of the lesson, ask student volunteers to share their collages.
 - What was your memory?
 - What was your image or found object (What image or object did you start with?)
 - What materials did you select to show this memory? What choices did you make?

Lesson Adaptations or Extensions:

- A. End-of-Year Activity: Use this activity to reflect on memories from the school year. Repurpose students' saved work (homework, worksheets, sketches) and use as collage material. Ask students to reflect on how they felt at the beginning of the school year and how their feelings may have changed as the school year progressed.

- B. Additional Materials: Experiment with adding other found objects to the collage such as ribbons, lace, game pieces, tin foil, coins, seashells, sticks, small toys, yarn, beads, band-aids, confetti, glitter, stickers, pins, fabric, cardboard, wire, cellophane, stamps, and more. Stronger tape and glue or additional adhesive materials may be necessary.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Artwork Page: publicartuhs.org/artwork/coptic-days

Exhibition Page: *Dorothy Hood: The Edge of Being*
University of Houston, October 14, 2021 - March 2023
<https://publicartuhs.org/event/dorothy-hood>

Video and Audio: *Dorothy Hood: The Color of Life* (29 minutes), produced by Carolyn Farb. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35JllqTJEjg&t=9s>. Minutes 17:27-20:00 depict Hood creating a collage and talking about her approach to collage as a medium. Transcript of excerpt:

17:27 Anything, I mean I can collage anything. I think when you can get something that's very acute to your heart or your memory, there's no doubt that there's a shadow of it, I mean it appears. It comes to you. There's no doubt about that. [*Hood picks up a piece of paper and arranges it*] This is kind of a garish looking thing so it might best be somewhere near this. The last thing is something that is [...] throw on something that is completely idiotic, something that's completely impossible, hoping that it will work and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.

If you make a mistake when you're painting, either you're going to paint over it or you're going to have to make a total revision, and that means lots of worrying with the material and so forth and here you can change constantly until you get it right, and of course that's more pleasurable, in a way. I mean to me, this [collage] is not a hard art, it's just sheer joy, that's all.

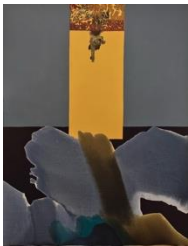
A painting is a complete commitment. I mean, your philosophy, your emotional attunement, your conquest of life, your physical conquest, everything goes unified into a painting. It's far more thrilling, I mean, this [collage] is fine, and it's just wonderful what you have afterwards and there's a certain... even at the most you put, you know, newspaper clippings that made a lot of sense to you and things that meant a lot to you, but it's a little memory. It's a little memory. And painting's the *thing*, you know, you're doing.

Bibliography and Sources

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4. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. "Kindred Spirits: Louise Nevelson and Dorothy Hood" (exhibition booklet), 2018. Exhibition Information: <https://www.mfah.org/exhibitions/kindred-spirits-louise-nevelson-dorothy-hood>; Booklet: <https://static.mfah.com/documents/kindred-spirits-exhibition-nevelson-hood.15303091210995694149.pdf>.
5. Tubbs, Sara. "Artwork of Texas Icon Dorothy Hood on Display at UH," University of Houston, February 9, 2021. <https://uh.edu/news-events/stories/2021/february-2021/02092021-dorothy-hood-donation-to-public-art-uhs.php>
6. Vine, Katy. "Fame in the Abstract," *Texas Monthly*, September 2016. <https://www.texasmonthly.com/arts-entertainment/discovering-dorothy-hood/>

Additional Artworks at Public Art UHS:



Dorothy Hood
The Angel's Key, 1987
 Oil paint on canvas, 90 x 61 ½ in.
 Gifted in 2017, John M. O'Quinn Foundation,
 in honor of the Katherine G. McGovern College of the Arts
 Location: University of Houston
 URL: publicartuhs.org/artwork/the-angels-key



Dorothy Hood
Time the Bridge of Doors, 1979
 Oil on canvas; 86 ½ x 110 x 2 ½ in.
 Acquired in 2018
 Location: University of Houston-Clear Lake
 URL: publicartuhs.org/artwork/time-the-bridge-of-doors



Dorothy Hood
Homage to Matisse, ca. 1969
 Oil on canvas
 Print Study Collection of the UH Kathrine G. McGovern
 College of the Arts
 Location: University of Houston
 URL: publicartuhs.org/artwork/homage-to-matisse

Glossary

Abstract Art Art that does not attempt to represent reality but instead expresses the shapes, forms, colors, or moods of the real world.

Collage	The technique and the resulting work of art in which pieces of paper, fabric, photographs, and other materials are arranged on a supporting surface.
Found Object	A found object is one that the artist selected rather than created. A found object is not originally intended for an artistic purpose, but the artist uses it as part of an artwork by manipulating it, embellishing it, and/or combining it with other items. A found object can be 2-dimensional like a photograph, ticket stub, newspaper cutting, or playing card or 3-dimensional like a toy, utensil, fabric or piece of wood.
Layering	An artistic technique in which elements overlap, partially or fully obscuring the material(s) behind it. Artists may use layering to make some elements in a 2-dimensional composition appear closer while others appear further away, creating a sense of depth.
Memory	Something remembered from the past, like an experience, feeling, or information that a person has learned.
Mixed Media	A term used to describe artwork in which a variety of materials are used, such as 2-dimensional collage or 3-dimensional assemblage.
Texture	One of the 7 Elements of Art, texture refers to the feeling or appearance of a 2-dimensional surface or a 3-dimensional object.