

Before you Begin

MATERIALS

Text Selection — Bowdoin referenced Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* to create her artworks. For this exercise, we will be using an excerpt from Roald Dahl’s *James and the Giant Peach* (see page 4).

NOTE

This lesson can easily be applied to texts included in an existing curriculum, or texts selected by the instructor/learner.

Art Supplies — You’ll need something to write on (colored paper, cardboard, fabric, old magazines) and something to write/draw with (markers, pens, crayons, paint), as well as scissors and adhesive (glue, tape). Feel free to get creative with items found around the house or classroom!

OVERVIEW

1. Engage with the exercise text 15 minutes
2. Explore the exhibition and discuss 20 minutes
3. Create artworks 1 hour
4. Close with group discussion 15 minutes

OPTIONS FOR MODIFICATION

- Variations in text and materials can be made to accommodate a wide range of age groups and accessibility levels. Paper can be torn rather than cut to remove the need for scissors; or, for more advanced learners, materials such as Mod Podge or X-Acto knives (which Bowdoin uses in her work) can be incorporated to allow for greater precision in cutting and layering. Text selections can be shortened, expanded, or otherwise adjusted to suit learners’ reading levels; instructors can also invite learners to select their own texts to use in the exercise.
- Create a collaborative wall mural. As students choose quotes from a particular text or chapter as relevant to the course, have them create a shape or form to be connected to other classmates. This serves as a visual manifestation for how the group as a whole “feels” about a text, and invites them to creatively work their forms together to make something cohesive. It also promotes empathy/relating to other classmates.

TEKS STANDARDS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills)

§117.202.c2C — produce artworks, including drawings, paintings, prints, sculptures/modeled forms, ceramics, fiber art, photographic imagery, and digital art and media, using a variety of materials

§117.202.c1D — discuss the expressive properties of artworks such as appropriation, meaning, narrative, message, and symbol using art vocabulary accurately

§117.203.b4A — create written or oral responses about personal or collaborative artworks addressing purpose, technique, organization, judgment, and personal expression

§117.204.b2E — create experimental artworks using installation, performance, or collaboration

Engage with the Text

Using the excerpt on the next page, have students read the text 2–3 times, jotting down any emotions or feelings that may come up while reading the text.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

PERSONAL

Does this quote make you happy? Excited? Anxious? Curious?
Does it bring to mind a particular image? Or color?

TEXTUAL

What emotions do you think James is feeling?
What emotions do you think the author is trying to present through his use of descriptive words?

Allow for 10 minutes of small group discussions between students. Students should share their analysis of the selection and the emotions they identified within the text. Ask them to provide evidence from the text to support their ideas and observations.

This excerpt from the novel describes the moment before James explores the giant peach that has appeared in his Aunts' garden for the first time.

The garden lay soft and silver in the moonlight. The grass was wet with dew and a million dewdrops were sparkling and twinkling like diamonds around his feet. And now suddenly, the whole place, the whole garden, seemed to be *alive* with magic. Almost without knowing what he was doing, as though drawn by some powerful magnet, James Henry Trotter started walking slowly toward the giant peach.

Dahl, 1961, p.28

Dahl, R. (1961). *James and the Giant Peach: A Children's Story*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Explore the Exhibition and Discuss

Explore Natasha Bowdoin's *The Daisy Argument* through images, video, and text.

utvac.org/event/natasha-bowdoin-daisy-argument

DISCUSSION

Bowdoin's *The Daisy Argument* takes words and phrases from Lewis Carroll's books that, if only read aloud, would not have a physical shape. You could hear them, and imagine what they may be describing, but you could not physically touch them or see them. By placing the words and phrases on her choice of paper, Bowdoin is able to assign them colors, scramble them up, rearrange them, and even change their meaning. This demonstrates the artist's ability to use language itself as art making material!

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does an artist like Bowdoin use form, color, material, shape and language to communicate ideas and emotions?

FURTHER ARTIST EXPLORATION

Other work by Bowdoin

moody.rice.edu/exhibitions/natasha-bowdoin-sideways-sun

Jacqueline Rushlee is another artist using texts as an art making material. View her work *Summer Reading* (2010).

jacquelinrushlee.com/summer-reading

Artist Tania Mouraud uses text by abstracting words and phrases to create her *Wallpaintings* (1979-) series.

taniamouraud.com/work-single?id=85



Natasha Bowdoin: *The Daisy Argument*, installation view, Visual Arts Center, The University of Texas at Austin, January 28–March 12, 2011. Photo: Sandy Carson.



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Natasha Bowdoin: *The Daisy Argument*, installation view (detail), Visual Arts Center, The University of Texas at Austin, January 28–March 12, 2011. Photo: Sandy Carson.



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Create an Artwork

Invite students to choose materials from the available selection. They must have at least one writing utensil, something to write on, scissors, and adhesive of some kind.

Using their chosen materials, ask them to transcribe (or re-write) the text ...

- Students may choose to transcribe the entire section of text, phrases, or even a selection of individual words.
- The way the text is written is up to each artist. It could be written many times to cover their material, written once very large, written in different fonts, and so on.
- Here, it is worth emphasizing that time and care spent to transcribe their text is a form of personalization (making the text their own!).

... and cut, shape, rearrange and reassemble materials to create a new image or 3D form.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

How will you use your materials to convey a feeling? Will you use bright colors? Or only black and white? Did you choose stiff, moldable materials? Or more free-flowing, like a fabric or soft paper?

Are you going to create a specific image? Are you going to create a design or pattern, like Bowdoin might?

Group Discussion & Wrap-up

Close with a Group Discussion around the following.

SHOW & SHARE

Have each student briefly share their artwork and describe the decisions they made about the use of text and materials.

AESTHETIC AWARENESS

What materials worked for you? Why did you choose them? What part of the process was your favorite? What's one thing you'd do differently next time?

BIG PICTURE

How did it feel to take text from the book and make it your own? Did it make the text more engaging? Did you feel empowered? Did this exercise help you to consider emotions in a new way? Has seeing multiple iterations of the text helped you to better understand it as a whole?