

# ART CENTER LESSON PLAN

IDEAS + ACTIVITIES

## ASSEMBLAGE + CAVE

### VIEW



**Let us begin with careful looking.** Using our eyes, let's spend one whole minute silently seeing what we notice. Scan the image. What stands out? What are you drawn to? Look for light, shadow, shapes, and lines. What can you identify? What appears mysterious? Is there anything you notice after looking for one minute that you did not see at first glance?

**Nick Cave** (American, born 1959)

*Rescue*, 2013

Mixed media including ceramic birds, metal flowers, ceramic Doberman, vintage settee, and light fixture  
88 x 72 x 44 in.

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;  
Purchased with funds from the Edmundson Art  
Foundation, Inc., 2015.29.a-b

Photo Credit: Rich Lozier

# ART CENTER LESSON PLAN

ASSEMBLAGE + CAVE

## DIG

Let's go back to the artwork on page one and try another slow looking practice. You will spend one whole minute looking. After your slow looking, you will write three lists of the all things that you notice. Sort these words into groups of nouns, adjectives, and verbs that you see, feel, or sense from the artwork. Try to find as many words as you can to fill up your lists!

**Nouns** | people places or things

- |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|
| 1. | 4. | 7. |
| 2. | 5. | 8. |
| 3. | 6. | 9. |

**Adjectives** | describing words, size, color, feelings, shapes etc.

- |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|
| 1. | 4. | 7. |
| 2. | 5. | 8. |
| 3. | 6. | 9. |

**Verbs** | action and doing words

- |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|
| 1. | 4. | 7. |
| 2. | 5. | 8. |
| 3. | 6. | 9. |

What kind of words were easiest to find in the artwork? Why do you think that is?

Do you think if you spent more time looking you would be able to list more words?  
Why or why not?

Now that you have these lists of words inspired by artwork, what could you use them for?

# ART CENTER LESSON PLAN

## ASSEMBLAGE + CAVE

### DISCUSS

Nick Cave's artwork is a sculpture, but it is also an assemblage. In art, an assemblage is something that is created using items combined together. Why do you think an artist might make an assemblage instead of creating an artwork from materials like paint or clay?

Looking at Nick Cave's artwork *Rescue*, what materials did he assemble to create it? Why do you think he chose these objects? Where do you think he acquired these objects?

When you look at the work, what draws your eye first? Why do you think it attracted you? Why do you think Nick Cave chose to pick the pieces that he did? An assemblage is not like a jigsaw puzzle, the artist has freedom to put any piece in any place. How do you think the way Nick Cave put this work together affects how you see it? How could he have put these pieces together differently? If he assembled it differently, would the work mean something else?

Many pieces of artwork are not named because the artist wants the viewer to honor their own perceptions. Why do you think Nick Cave titled this piece *Rescue*? What do you think Nick Cave might want to rescue? If you created a piece titled *Rescue*, what types of objects would you include?

# ART CENTER LESSON PLAN

ASSEMBLAGE + CAVE

## MATERIALS

3-5 Objects

Optional

Cardboard and Glue

or

Camera

## CREATE

### ASSIGNMENT #1

Assembled by Me | Visual Arts

You may have made collages or assemblages in the past, but in this project you will be asked to think deeply about the objects you are combining.

## INSTRUCTIONS

An assemblage in visual art is created by combining items that already exist. Before you begin creating your own assemblage, decide what you want your artwork to do. Do you want to make something that is beautiful? Do you want to make something funny? Will your assemblage teach others about yourself or about an idea that you care about? Your art is 100% your own. By deciding what your assemblage is communicating, you can be an artist while using objects that you did not make. What will be your message or goal?

Thinking about your artwork's message, collect 3-5 objects from around your classroom, house or yard that you feel will help you communicate this message. Find objects that you think are beautiful, items that are funny when put together, symbols of yourself or your ideals (things that you care about). Gather these items and lay them out in front of you.

Before you get to assembling these items, you will spend some time thinking and arranging them. First, consider which of your items is the most important to your message. What item do you really want people to see when they look at your artwork? Why do you think this item is so important? What do you think this item will say to people who view your assemblage? Now set that one item aside—you will save it like a cherry on top of your artwork!

Next, take two more of the objects that you found. Think about what these two things have in common. Are they two things that you have seen displayed together before? Or is seeing them together something new? Are these items opposites in any way? How are they different? How are they the same? What are they made of? Are they similar or different in size?

If you have gathered more items, consider them in a similar way. How do all these objects relate to one another? Are you saying something new by combining them?

Lastly, document these items. If they are all things that can be thrown away (recyclables, art supplies, stickers, unimportant paper), you can glue them together on a piece of cardboard. If they are objects you would like to keep, simply stack them and layer them in a way that you like. Then take a photo of your assemblage and return your items to where you found them. Have you achieved your original message or goal?

## MATERIALS

Paper and Pencil

### ASSIGNMENT #2

Rescued from Where? | Language Arts

In the Nick Cave sculpture *Rescue*, there is a central figure, a large black dog sitting in the middle. Use your imagination to write a short story inspired by the dog and its relation to meaning of rescue.

### INSTRUCTIONS

The dog in the Nick Cave sculpture *Rescue* is very real. No, it is not alive, but it does exist! Even more interesting than this black ceramic doberman sitting on a gold sofa within an assemblage, within an art museum, is the fact that this dog existed before if ever became a piece of artwork.

Write a short story about what you imagine this dog's life to have been before Nick Cave placed it on the sofa. You can pretend that it was born and grew up like a puppy or write about how it was made and where it traveled prior to Cave *rescuing* it.

In your story, you might want to include the dog's name, what country, or state, or city it is from. Was it born a puppy? Made by an artist with their hands? Made in a factory by machines? Where did it live before Nick Cave found it? Did it live in a home? In the wild? In a different art museum? What was the dog's life like? Did it have a family? Was its family humans or other animals?

Where did Nick Cave discover the dog? What did he think when he saw it? Why did Nick Cave choose this dog to *rescue*?

What does the dog think about its new life? What has changed the most for it? Does it like the gold sofa, canopy of birds and beads, being a piece of artwork? How does the dog feel about being *rescued*?

# ART CENTER LESSON PLAN

## ASSEMBLAGE + CAVE

### RELATE

Another way to think about assemblages are to think about the work having layers of different things. Watch this [short PBS video](#). Nick Cave created the costumes that the dancers are wearing in the video. He calls these artworks “Soundsuits.” Why do you think he calls them that? What kinds of things did Nick Cave have to layer to create these artworks? Now think about the person who made this video. What things did they layer together to create the video? How is video editing like assemblage? How is it different?

It can be hard to see all of the details of the sculpture in one photo. This is because a sculpture is a three-dimensional object and you must look at it from different angles in order to see the entire artwork. [Watch this video](#) created by the Denver Art Museum for a Nick Cave exhibition featuring *Rescue* and other artworks like it. What more can you see now that you could not see in the photograph?

Many artists use assemblage as their artistic technique. One example is contemporary artist Ebony G. Patterson. Visit her piece virtually at the Des Moines Art Center [here](#). How is her work like Nick Cave’s? What do they have in common? Both of these artists are making art today. Do you think they could be inspired by one another? What are the differences between their artwork?

A great way to become inspired by an artist is to listen to what they have to say about their artwork. Read [this article by TIME for kids](#) to learn more about Nick Cave. Was there anything that you read that surprised you? Did Nick Cave say anything that inspired you? How would you feel if you were at the train station when the “creatures” showed up? How do you think Nick Cave is impacting the world by being an artist?

# ART CENTER LESSON PLAN

ASSEMBLAGE + CAVE

## WONDER

Now that you have spent time viewing and thinking about Nick Cave's sculpture *Rescue*, what do you still wonder about this work? If you could ask the artist or the sculpture anything, what would you want to know most? Use the question starters below to write three questions.

Why is...	I am curious about...	What part....	Are we...
Who is...	How did you...	What if...	Is she...
Where...	Did you know...	Suppose that...	Do you...

My questions about Nick Cave's *Rescue*:

1.

2.

3.