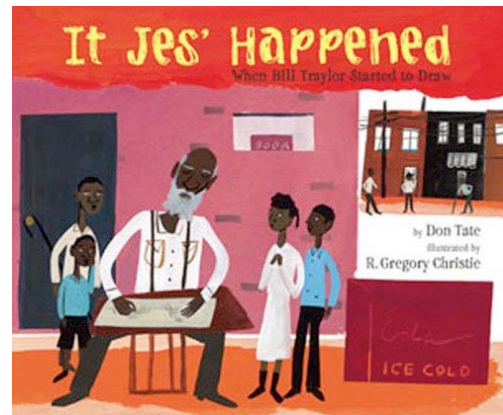


It Jes' Happened: Bill Traylor's Narrative Lexicon

Art Curriculum created for the award-winning picture book *It Jes' Happened: When Bill Traylor Started to Draw* by Don Tate and illustrated by R. Gregory Christie (Lee & Low Books)



Curriculum created by Art Educator Kelly McConnell. McConnell, an Art Educator professor at Maine College of Art, was awarded the 2007 "Excellence in Published Resources Award" by the American Association of Museum's Standing Professional Committee on Education

Audience: Appropriate for Elementary Grade Levels, can be adapted for Middle School

How will Bill Traylor's visual stories influence others to depict their own?

The award-winning picture book *It Jes' Happened: When Bill Traylor Started to Draw* by Don Tate and illustrated by R. Gregory Christie (Lee & Low Books) describes the way that Bill Traylor (1854-1949) discovered drawing, painting, and visual storytelling as an eighty-five-year-old after a lifetime of sharecropping in Alabama.

This unit of three lessons encourages viewers of self-taught artist Bill Traylor's work to look deeply at the symbols, repetitive figures, and forms of his work; to see how they are arranged to tell specific stories from the artist's life; and to employ these methods to tell their own personal stories through pictures.

Pictographs served as the earliest form of writing, and similarities between ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, word symbols from Native American cultures, and the Maori people of New Zealand, can be found in the way Traylor tells his stories.

Lesson One: Bill Traylor Lexicon Discovery Game

The first lesson in this unit is a discovery game to be played in conjunction with the touring exhibit, *Bill Traylor: Drawings from the Collections of the High Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts* or through the exhibition catalog, other Bill Traylor monographs, or through images online.

Lesson Two: Bill Traylor's Story Constructions

In the second lesson, learners create their own story "constructions" using stencils, visual prompts, and Traylor's own working materials and methods.

Lesson Three: Pictograph Diary

In the third lesson, learners create a diary using found papers and cardboards to record their day-to-day life and memories through pictographs and writing.

Lesson One

Bill Traylor Lexicon Discovery Game

Duration: One hour group lexicon discovery game

How will learners identify and describe individual symbols and forms found in Traylor's work?



How will learners use what they see to discuss form, process, mood, interpret Bill Traylor's stories and relate them to experiences in their own lives?

Objectives:

- The learner will be able to describe reasons Traylor's work was made and its purpose.
- The learner will be able to discern what repeated symbols and forms found in Traylor's work are universal and how they relate to personal narrative.
- The learner will be able to identify what part of the story an individual symbol tells.
- The learner will be able to discuss the materials and processes used in Traylor's artwork.

National Standards for the Visual Arts:

1. Content Standard: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. know the differences between materials, techniques, and processes
- b. describe how different materials, techniques, and processes cause different responses

2. Content Standard: Using knowledge of *structures and functions

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. know the differences among visual characteristics and purposes of art in order to convey ideas
- b. describe how different *expressive features and *organizational principles cause different responses

3. Content Standard: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. explore and understand prospective content for works of art

4. Content Standard: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures
- b. identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times, and places

5. Content Standard: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. understand there are various purposes for creating works of visual art
- b. describe how people's experiences influence the development of specific artworks
- c. understand there are different responses to specific artworks

6. Content Standard: Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. understand and use similarities and differences between characteristics of the visual arts and other arts disciplines

Vocabulary:

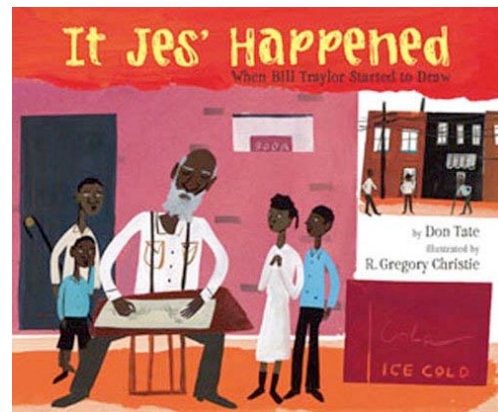
Lexicon, symbol, pictograph, slave, plantation, sharecropper, self-taught, Depression, Montgomery, Alabama, form, content, process, mood, interpretation, visual narrative, illiterate

Materials:

Cards depicting a lexicon of symbols and forms pulled from Bill Traylor's drawings and paintings (included in this document)

Instructional Resources:

- ***It Jes' Happened: When Bill Traylor Started to Draw*** by Don Tate and illustrated by R. Gregory Christie (Lee & Low Books)
- ***Bill Traylor: Drawings from the Collections of the High Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts*** by contributors Susan Crawley, Leslie Paisley, Margaret Lynne Ausfeld, Fred Barron, and Jeffrey Wolf



Art Curriculum created by Kelly McConnell for the picture book ***It Jes' Happened: When Bill Traylor Started to Draw*** by Don Tate and illustrated by R. Gregory Christie (Lee & Low Books)

(Prestel Publishing),

- ***Deep Blues: Bill Traylor 1854-1949*** by Josef Helfenstein and edited by Roman Kurzmeyer (Yale University Press)
- ***Bill Traylor: His Art, His Life*** by Frank Maresca (Alfred A. Knopf)

Direct Instruction:

- Each learner in the lexicon discovery game Match/Attach will be given a card that depicts a symbol or form taken from Bill Traylor's lexicon of repeated imagery.
- The learner will be asked to look at every piece in the exhibit (or in the available books or online imagery) using the card as a lens to view all of the images.
- The learner might locate the card symbol in its closest "match," which would be an almost exact replica of what is in Traylor's drawing or painting.
- The learner could also look to see where the symbol could "attach" to an image to add to the story narrative, make a connection with another piece, or complement the existing composition.
- While learners are viewing each piece, educators will be on hand to encourage discussion, compare/contrast, give historical background, and use questioning techniques to support construction of viewer knowledge and vocabulary for describing art works.
- Once every piece in the exhibit is viewed by all learners, a signal will be given to instruct all of the learners to lay their card down on the floor in front of the piece that s/he feels is the best match/attach.
- Each learner will be encouraged to discuss their chosen art work as it relates to the card. The conversation will start, "My card matches this drawing because..." or "I have chosen to attach my card to this painting because..."
- Talking prompts may include: *What do you see? What is going on in this story? What personal stories of your own do you attach to this story? How does your card fit in? What is the meaning of the symbol on your card? What part of the story does it tell and why? Do you think words or pictures better tell this story?*
- Who, what, where, when, how questions will support the acquisition of vocabulary for talking about art.
- Questions about form, process, mood, and other interpretation will encourage an open-ended aesthetics-based critique.

Clean up:

Cards will be returned to the educators

Modifications for Exceptionalities:

All learners will start at their own level and are encouraged to take risks in conversation to support higher-order thinking. Younger students will be able to "match." Older students and gifted students will be able to extend conversation by having the card "attach." The game is properly paced so that air-time is monitored, interaction between speakers is active, and learners can move freely in the gallery while following rules.

Assessment:

Informal assessment of objectives takes place during conversation in the exhibit

Lesson Two
Bill Traylor's Story Constructions

Duration: One half hour drawing activity

How will learners employ and manipulate Bill Traylor's lexicon of symbols, forms, materials and working methods to create their own personal narrative story constructions?

Objectives:

- The learner will be able to use the graphic symbols, methods and materials found in Bill Traylor's work to create personal narrative.
- The learner will be able to discern what repeated symbols and forms found in Traylor's work are universal and how they relate to personal narrative.
- The learner will be able to verbally and visually describe the story.
- The learner will combine abstract and literal elements to depict a story.



National Standards for the Visual Arts:

1. Content Standard: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories
- b. use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner

2. Content Standard: Using knowledge of *structures and functions

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. use visual structures and functions of art to communicate ideas

3. Content Standard: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. explore and understand prospective content for works of art
- b. select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning

4. Content Standard: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures
- b. identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times, and places
- c. demonstrate how history, culture, and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art

5. Content Standard: Reflecting upon and *assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. understand there are various purposes for creating works of visual art
- b. describe how people's experiences influence the development of specific artworks
- c. understand there are different responses to specific artworks

6. Content Standard: Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. understand and use similarities and differences between characteristics of the visual arts and other arts disciplines

Vocabulary:

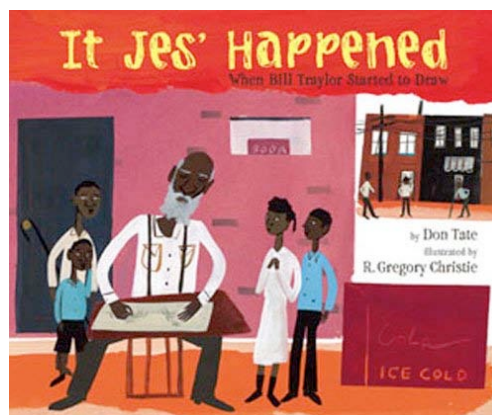
Lexicon, symbol, pictograph, construction, sculpture, composition, mixed media, form, content, process, mood, interpretation, visual narrative, abstract, literal, realistic

Materials:

Cards depicting a lexicon of symbols and forms pulled from Bill Traylor's drawings and paintings; cut stencils of shapes and symbols from lexicon; "ripened" boxes, shirt cardboard, brown paper; pencils; colored pencils limited to blue, black, red, brown, and green; clip boards

Instructional Resources:

- ***It Jes' Happened: When Bill Traylor Started to Draw*** by Don Tate and illustrated by R. Gregory Christie (Lee & Low Books)
- ***Bill Traylor: Drawings from the Collections of the High Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts*** by contributors Susan Crawley, Leslie Paisley, Margaret Lynne Ausfeld, Fred Barron, and Jeffrey Wolf (Prestel Publishing),
- ***Deep Blues: Bill Traylor 1854-1949*** by Josef Helfenstein and edited by Roman Kurzmeyer (Yale University Press)
- ***Bill Traylor: His Art, His Life*** by Frank Maresca (Alfred A. Knopf)



Direct Instruction:

- Learners will be asked to picture in their mind's eye a story they each want to tell. Based on this story, they will be asked to choose their own "ripened" background material based on its characteristics, colors, and textures. Bill Traylor responded to the smudges, cracks and irregularities of his materials in his artwork. In your own artwork a tear could become a bird, or a stain could grow wings and become a bird.
- Working in the gallery exhibit, participants will be able to use Bill Traylor's drawings and paintings as inspiration. Outside of the exhibit, learners can use Bill Traylor monographs or images online. They will also be invited to look at the cards from the Match/Attach game as well as use prepared stencils to start to create compositions.
- Composed constructions can be colored in using the supplied pencils. Personal, literal and abstract forms should be added to the construction to create personal meaning and complete the story. Participants will be encouraged to verbalize while working to actively mesh verbal and visual narrative.

Clean up:

All unused materials will be returned to their storage containers. The finished artwork will be taken home.

Modifications for Exceptionalities:

- Stencils and visual prompts will be supplied to help with the creative flow and support developing drawing skills.
- Paper in a range of sizes will be supplied.
- Hand over hand help with pencil grasp or even dictated drawing are options for all learners to share a visual story.
- For gifted students, extensions include creating a mixed media collage construction or an additive 3-dimensional sculpture made from found objects designed to tell a personal story.

Assessment:

- Formative assessment in process will take place to make sure participants understand and can apply pertinent vocabulary and concepts.
- Product outcomes will demonstrate the ability to create drawn constructions, employing understanding of composition and arrangement of symbols and forms to tell a story.
- Ability to create on one's own the third lesson in this unit, "Pictograph Diary" will serve as a summative assessment of understanding of the way visual narrative is used to tell a story.

Lesson 3: **Pictograph Diary**

Duration: One half hour art activity with extended period of journaling

How will learners apply what they know about Bill Traylor's use of pictographs to record events in their daily lives or memories in the form of a visual diary?

How can a learner develop their own lexicon or shorthand for recurring events, themes, and memories?

How can a learner supplement a visual diary with written reflections?



Objectives:

- The learner will be able to apply the graphic symbols, methods and materials found in Bill Traylor's work to create personal narrative.
- The learner will be able to discern what repeated symbols and forms found in Traylor's work are universal and how they relate to personal narrative.
- The learner will be able to create his/her own set of repeated symbols and explain how they relate to personal narrative.
- The learner will be able to visually describe the story and add anecdotal notes.
- The learner will combine abstract and literal elements to depict a story.

National Standards for the Visual Arts:

1. Content Standard: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes
Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories
- b. use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner

2. Content Standard: Using knowledge of *structures and functions

Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. use visual structures and functions of art to communicate ideas

3. Content Standard: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas
Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. explore and understand prospective content for works of art
- b. select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning

4. Content Standard: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures
Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures
- b. identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times, and places
- c. demonstrate how history, culture, and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art

5. Content Standard: Reflecting upon and *assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others
Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. understand there are various purposes for creating works of visual art
- b. describe how people's experiences influence the development of specific artworks
- c. understand there are different responses to specific artworks

6. Content Standard: Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines
Achievement Standard:

Students

- a. understand and use similarities and differences between characteristics of the visual arts and other arts disciplines

Common Core Literacy Standards for Writing:

Production and Distribution of Writing

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.K.5 With guidance and support from adults, respond to questions and suggestions from peers and add details to strengthen writing as needed.

Common Core Literacy Standards for Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.1a Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about the topics and texts under discussion).
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.1b Continue a conversation through multiple exchanges.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.3 Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.4 Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.5 Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions as desired to provide additional detail.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.6 Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

Vocabulary:

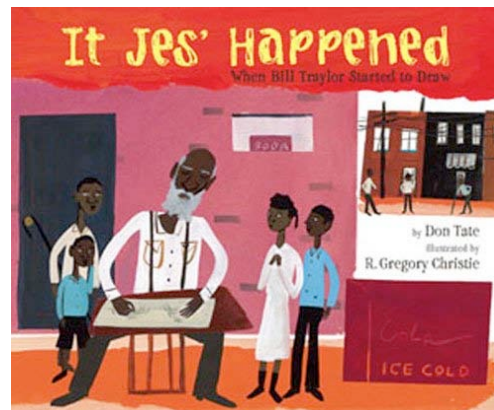
Lexicon, symbol, pictograph, sequence, form, content, mood, interpretation, visual narrative, literal, realistic, diary, memory

Materials:

“Ripened” or “found” shirt cardboard or cereal boxes, paper, diary materials, pencils; colored pencils limited to blue, black, red, brown, and green; clip boards

Instructional Resources:

- ***It Jes' Happened: When Bill Traylor Started to Draw*** by Don Tate and illustrated by R. Gregory Christie (Lee & Low Books)
- ***Bill Traylor: Drawings from the Collections of the High Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts*** by contributors Susan Crawley, Leslie Paisley, Margaret Lynne Ausfeld, Fred Barron, and Jeffrey Wolf (Prestel Publishing),
- ***Deep Blues: Bill Traylor 1854-1949*** by Josef Helfenstein and edited by Roman Kurzmeyer (Yale University Press)
- ***Bill Traylor: His Art, His Life*** by Frank Maresca (Alfred A. Knopf)

**Direct Instruction:**

- Learners will construct a journal or diary using a “ripened” or “found” cardboard and papers or other items found in a paper recycling.
- Learners will be asked to picture the events of a previous day and choose one image that most defines it and draw that image as a Bill Traylor-influenced pictograph on the first page of the diary.
- Working in the gallery exhibit, participants will be able to use Bill Traylor’s drawings and paintings as inspiration. Outside of the exhibit, learners can use Bill Traylor monographs or images online.
- Learners will be asked to both write about that pictograph and why the image was defining.
- Learners will create a key to their pictographs on a separate sheet or in the back of the diary.

Clean up:

All unused materials will be returned to their storage containers. The constructed diary will be taken home.

Modifications for Exceptionalities:

- Stencils and visual prompts will be supplied to help with the create flow and support developing drawing skills.
- Paper at a range of sizes will be supplied.
- Hand over hand help with pencil grasp or even dictated drawing are options for all learners to share a visual story.

Assessment:

- Product outcomes will demonstrate the ability to create drawn constructions, employing understanding of composition and arrangement of symbols and forms to tell a story.
- Ability to create on one's own Pictograph Diary will serve as a summative assessment of understanding of the way visual narrative is used to tell a story.



