

Automatic Drawing and Nellie Mae Row

Created in collaboration with:



Compelling Question			
What does it mean to be “really free” when making art?			
State Standard(s)	Ohio/High School/Visual Art 2 PE (HS I, II) 1 PR (HS I, II, III, IV) 6 PR (HS I, II, III, IV) 3 RE (HS I, II, III) 4 RE (HS IV)		
Learning Goals	<table border="0"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Students will understand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nellie Mae Rowe’s sources for images ■ Imagery in artworks may have a valid meaning to the artist even if not apparent to the observer ■ Making artworks is not dependent on fine art materials ■ Creating art is accessible for all </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Students will be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify and describe sources for generating ideas for artworks ■ Demonstrate technical skill, ranging from exploratory to advanced, with various media when creating images from the imagination ■ Visually express complex concepts and meaning in their artworks ■ Use appropriate and arts-specific vocabulary to define and describe techniques and materials used to create works of art ■ Analyze and explain the relationship between the content and ideas in an artwork and the media, materials and composition used </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Students will understand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nellie Mae Rowe’s sources for images ■ Imagery in artworks may have a valid meaning to the artist even if not apparent to the observer ■ Making artworks is not dependent on fine art materials ■ Creating art is accessible for all 	<p>Students will be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify and describe sources for generating ideas for artworks ■ Demonstrate technical skill, ranging from exploratory to advanced, with various media when creating images from the imagination ■ Visually express complex concepts and meaning in their artworks ■ Use appropriate and arts-specific vocabulary to define and describe techniques and materials used to create works of art ■ Analyze and explain the relationship between the content and ideas in an artwork and the media, materials and composition used
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Supporting Question

What “rules” challenge or inhibit you when you want to make art?

Supporting Question

How can we approach art without that set of rules?

Supporting Question

How does being a self-taught artist, like Nellie Mae Rowe or yourself, relate to being free in making art?



Automatic drawing

“For inspiration, Rowe tapped into her subconscious in ways that the Surrealists had given credence to decades earlier, copying visions as she remembered them from her dreams and engaging in automatic drawing.”

Commentary from The High Museum of Art, Atlanta, originator of Really Free: The Radical Art of Nellie Mae Rowe

high.org/exhibition/really-free-the-radical-art-of-nellie-mae-rowe

Automatic drawing

“Influenced by the writings of psychologist Sigmund Freud, the literary, intellectual, and artistic movement called Surrealism sought a revolution against the constraints of the rational mind; and by extension, the rules of a society they saw as oppressive.”

From MoMA Learning, Tapping the Subconscious

moma.org/learn/moma-learning/themes/surrealism/tapping-the-subconscious-automatism-and-dreams

Automatic drawing

In psychology, “automatism” refers to involuntary actions and processes not under the control of the conscious mind—for example, dreaming, breathing, or a nervous tic. Automatism plays a role in Surrealists techniques such as spontaneous or automatic writing, painting, and drawing; free association of images and words; and collaborative creation.

From MoMA Learning, Tapping the Subconscious

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How to try it

- Engage students in the discussion around the four Questions listed with this lesson plan
- Gather materials - Ask your students to bring in supplies and enlist your Visual Art teacher for help
- Encourage students to try automatic drawing and give classroom time for drawing
- If students falter or need a prompt:
 - Fill the page, leave no empty space
 - Start by drawing or outlining your hand

Found paper sources

- Newspaper
- Inside of tissue or cereal boxes
- Envelopes from the mail, opened up for the inside surface
- Sketch pad paper
- Graph paper
- Handwriting paper
- Fliers
- School programs

How Rowe started

“When I draw I first take a common pencil...then I use my colors. I don’t care if the color is ink, watercolor, crayon or pencil, whatever matches is what I will use. What paper is best is the one I will use.”

From the article, section 5

“I draw what’s on my mind...It will come to me...I may make a start with a straight mark, and it will come to me what I want to make...I just guess at what I do; it just comes in my mind.”

From the article, section 5

“Things come to me in my sleep and sometimes I will get up in the night and make a start of what I’ve seen...Most of the things that I draw, I don’t know what they are by name...it is what it is...I draw things you haven’t seen born into this world.”

From the article, section 5

“The pictures I am proud of that I have made are of my hand. I leave my hand.”