

Art Making: Reflecting On and Reimagining Your Washington, D.C.

Target grade range: 6-8

DPCS Curricular Unit: Everyday DC

DPCS Curricular Arc: Interaction/Other

DPCS Curricular Theme: Community and Viewpoint

Final Project: Create photos of community identity to exhibit in the Everyday DC event.

Vocabulary (primary sources: Art, Books, and Creativity curriculum [<https://nmwa.org>] and <https://learnersdictionary.com/>)

- **Abstract art**: Art based on the real world, but its forms may be simplified, exaggerated, or contorted; the colors may be unrealistic; and the space may be flattened or distorted.
- **Artist's book**: An art form that uses elements of traditional book structures such as covers, binding, and pages in combination with the elements of art. It is a three-dimensional work meant to be viewed from multiple sides.
- **Analogous Colors**: Three colors next to each other on the [color wheel](#), including a tertiary color.
- **Appropriation**: Using or incorporating imagery or text created by someone else in a new artwork.
- **Asymmetrical**: Having two sides or halves that are not the same.
- **Background**: The part of the picture that seems farthest from the viewer.
- **Collaborative**: Involving or done by two or more people or groups working together to achieve or do something.
- **Complementary Colors**: Two colors opposite each other on the [color wheel](#).
- **Foreground**: The part of the picture that seems closest to the viewer.
- **Juxtaposition**: The placement of different things together in order to create an interesting effect or to show how they are the same or different.
- **Layering**: Building up a physical or digital surface by overlapping lines, shapes, and forms.
- **Middle Ground**: The part of the picture midway between the foreground and background.
- **Symmetrical**: Having sides or halves that are the same.
- **Tertiary Color**: A color made by mixing equal parts of a primary color and a secondary color, e.g. red-orange.
- **Visual Texture**: The way something looks like it might feel.

Inspiration

NMWA's collection includes artwork about Washington, D.C., by artists who have lived and worked in our city. Each artwork tells a unique story or shares a personal perspective based on the lived experience of the artist who created it. Consider, for instance:

- [Georgia Mills Jessup](#) (1926, Washington, DC–2016, Columbia, MD)
 - A native Washingtonian and life-long resident of the area, Georgia Mills Jessup described herself as a “melting pot,” given her African American, Native American, and European heritage. Jessup contributed immensely to the educational and cultural life of the D.C. we enjoy today. She attended Dunbar High School, Howard University, and The Catholic University of America; taught in D.C. Public Schools for 13 years; helped establish the precursor to the [National Children's Museum](#); and was the first artist-in-residence at the [Anacostia Community Museum](#). Her abstracted artwork, like [Rainy Night, Downtown](#), reflects the dynamism and diversity of any bustling city, yet provides clues—a street sign that reads “St. H N.W.” and a marquee for the “Trans Lux” movie theater, which was located at 738 14th St NW from 1937 to 1975—revealing that the subject is her hometown. Jessup’s warm analogous colors imply light; visual texture suggest atmospheric conditions; and asymmetrical and layered composition energize the scene.
- [Clarissa Sligh](#) (b. 1939, Washington, DC)
 - Clarissa Sligh was born in Washington, D.C., and she grew up in Northern Virginia. At the age of 15, she became the lead plaintiff in the 1955 school desegregation case in Virginia (Clarissa Thompson et. al. vs. Arlington County School Board). Sligh went on to earn a bachelor of fine arts (B.F.A.) and master of fine arts (M.F.A.) from Howard University. Known for her photo-text images, artists' books and installations, Sligh’s work addresses personal memory, history, and identity. Her accordion artist’s book *What’s Happening with Momma?* juxtaposes family photographs taken by adults and the artist’s childhood memories of her sister’s home birth, thereby revealing multiple perspectives of a shared experience.
- [Renée Stout](#) (b. 1958, Junction City, KS)
 - Renée Stout has called Washington, D.C., home since 1985, and especially loves roller-skating at the [Anacostia Roller Skating Pavilion](#). Her art explores personal and collective memory, city life, and urban decay. Stout’s works sometimes recall specific places and memories unique to her life in Washington D.C., and other times touch on universal experiences lived or witnessed in cities. Her loose-leaf artist’s book [Seven Windows](#) is named after the windows she looked out of at her 52 O St., NW artist studio, where she had a view of [So Others Might Eat \(SOME\)](#), a non-profit for people experiencing homelessness and food insecurity, and those helped by its services. Her collaborative pocket accordion artist’s book with writer Carol A. Beane, [the streets of used to be](#), is a collection of illustrations and poems more generally about lives lived on the streets and about people’s efforts to survive with some measure of dignity.

- [Alma Woodsey Thomas](#) (1891, Columbus, GA–1978, Washington, DC)
 - Alma Woodsey Thomas was born in Columbus, Georgia, but moved with her family to Washington, D.C., in 1907 to seek relief from the racial violence in the South. She lived in the same [home](#) in Logan Circle for over 70 years, and after graduating from Howard University, taught art at Shaw Junior High School for 35 years. Thomas's abstract paintings, like [Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses](#), express her love of vibrant color and the natural world. She regularly depicted flowers and trees she observed at the [U.S. National Arboretum](#) and [Kenilworth Park and Aquatic Gardens](#), in addition to those growing in her own yard.
- Curious about other artists inspired by D.C.? Check out the online exhibition [DMV Color](#), which features an eclectic assortment of contemporary works by women of African American, Asian American, and Latina heritage with ties to the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia—known locally as the DMV. The artists' books, graphic novels, photobooks, and zines depict intimacies of family life, legacies of enslavement, dislocation tied to immigration, changes resulting from rampant development, and other topics that illustrate facets of life in the DMV.

Materials/Tools

- Sketchbook for brainstorming, storyboarding, notetaking, and writing
- Paper (number, size, weight, and type will depend on the artist's book format you select)
- Pencil
- Pen
- Ruler
- Scissors
- Glue
- Digital camera/smartphone
- Copier/scanner
- Bone folder or ruler edge (for paper folding)
- Boxes, cans, other containers as a vessel for your book (optional)
- Digital photography editing and desktop publishing design software (optional)
- Crayons, colored pencils, or markers (optional)
- Paint and brushes (optional)
- Magazines, newspapers, etc. for collaging (optional)

Art-Making Activity

You will create an artist's book inspired by personal and collective experiences in Washington, D.C. The final book must incorporate original photographs and text that express community identity. In addition, you can incorporate other media, e.g. appropriated photographs, found text, collage, mark making, or paint.

1. In your sketchbook:
 - a. Define “community” and “identity” in your own words.
 - b. Write down or sketch about at least two Washington, D.C., communities of which you are proud to be a member.
 - c. Write down or sketch about at least two places that you feel most yourself in Washington, D.C.
 - d. Write down or sketch about three positive memories or experiences you have about Washington, D.C.
2. Research artists' books to see example formats and styles.

An artist's book is a work of art in book form. Objects in this medium can be entirely handmade or mass-produced and vary in the degree of focus on content, form, and materials. Many artists encourage readers to rethink the nature of the book and reading in new and unexpected ways. Contemporary artists' books range from fine craft letterpress works to one-of-a-kind or limited-edition art objects presented in a wide variety of materials and book formats. Artists incorporate typography, papermaking, paper engineering, bookmaking, design, fine art, graphics, creative writing, and digital media into their book works.

Review NMWA's online exhibition series “The Book as Art” to explore artists' books by book format:

- [According to Accordions](#) (accordion-fold books)
 - [Altered Albums](#) (artists' books made out of pre-existing books)
 - [Books in Disguise](#) (books that have unique forms resembling or composed of other objects)
 - [Codex Curiosities](#) (books bound with covers and spines)
 - [Moveable Marvels](#) (books with elements that move and are interactive, e.g. pop-up books)
 - [Unbound Books](#) (books with loose pages that aren't bound with covers or spines)
3. Decide if you would like to create an artist's book on your own or collaboratively.
 - a. If you select to work collaboratively, consider who you would like to work with on this project and why.
 - i. Those who have similar life experiences as you, or those with different life experiences than you?
 - ii. Those you have a lot in common with, or those who have different interests?
 - iii. Those who you are friends with, or those who you think you can work well with?
 - iv. Those who have similar skills as you, or those who excel at something that you might not?

- b. Compare your sketchbook brainstorming with possible partners to identify similarities and differences. Discuss how those ideas might come together in a collaborative artist's book that represents and acknowledges each partner's story.
4. Next, select from these project options, or invent your own! Keep in mind the artist's book format/container you select should reflect the story or theme of the book's contents.
 - a. My Community Pop-Up (solo)
 - i. Take pictures of important places in the community, and incorporate the photographs into a pop-up book. Check out [Colette Fu's](#) work for inspiration.
 - b. Our Community Pocket Accordion (group)
 - i. Each group member takes pictures using the same prompt and writes a caption for their photo. The final product shows a variety of interpretations of the same theme. OR
 - ii. Each student has a different writing prompt and another student is tasked with taking a photograph to illustrate a classmate's writing prompt. This process is similar to how Renée Stout and Carol A. Beane collaborated to create [the streets of used to be](#). Stout created illustrations based on Beane's poems. OR
 - iii. Each student has a different photography prompt and another student is tasked with providing a caption for a classmate's image.
 - c. [Exquisite Corpse](#) (group)
 - i. Image-first: Each student is tasked with taking a photograph of their community to be used for the foreground, middle ground, or background in a tunnel book. The result is a collaborative, composite image depicting a landscape of a D.C. community. Then all students should work together to create captions or a story inspired by the composite image. OR
 - ii. Writing-first: Fold a sheet of paper into equal parts. You will need twice as many parts of the paper as members of the group (e.g. if you have the group members, fold the page so it has six equal parts). The first student writes one sentence about their community in the first section, folds it back, and writes a second sentence in the following section. The next student uses the visible sentence to inspire their two sentences, and so on. Take photos inspired by the finished writings and incorporate text and images into an accordion book.
5. Now that you have decided on a format and project, visit the [ABC Curriculum](#) for book making instructions and "how to" videos.
6. Create a book prototype, or model, using inexpensive paper before you make your final product. This ensures you have cut all of your pages to the correct size, leaves room for adapting/editing of your original concept, and allows you to practice folding *before* you start adding your photographs and text.

7. Create your final product. Don't forget that your artist's book: 1) should be inspired by personal and collective experiences in Washington, D.C., and 2) must incorporate original photographs and text that express community identity.
8. Display your artist's book during a gallery walk in your classroom or as part of a larger D.C. exhibition.

Resources

- Images of inspiration artists and artwork (see below)



Georgia Mills Jessup, *Rainy Night, Downtown*, 1967; Oil on Canvas, 44 x 48 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Savanna M. Clark; © Georgia Mills Jessup



Clarissa Sligh, *What's Happening with Momma?*, 1988; Silkscreen and letterpress on paper, 6 1/2 x 11 1/2 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Clayre Baessler Liammari; © Clarissa Sligh



Renée Stout, *Seven Windows*, 1996; Iris prints on paper, 10 x 12 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Museum purchase: United States Department of Education Fund; © Renée Stout



Writer Carol A. Beane (left) and artist Renée Stout (right) showing their collaborative artist's book *the streets of used to be*.



Alma Woodsey Thomas, *Iris, Tulips, Jonquils, and Crocuses*, 1969; Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 50 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; © Estate of Alma Woodsey Thomas; Photo by Lee Stalsworth