

# STEAM LESSON PLAN

Created by Josephine Langbehn, Carter Leeka, Susan Oles, Trevor Reeh, McKenzie Phelps & Laura Huntimer  
Grade Level Middle school (adaptable for lower and higher grades)

**INSPIRED BY** Mickalene Thomas (American, b. 1971), *Din, une très belle négresse 1*, 2012

## PROJECT TITLE: Confident Collages

### DRIVING QUESTION

**How do artists create mirrors for us?**

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES: Put these on the board or have students write them in a notebook/journal.

- *I will create a collaged portrait.*
- *I will respond to the world's textures and patterns around me.*
- *I will present my thoughts on confidence.*
- *I will connect with a classmate by creating their likeness.*

### CONTENT STANDARDS

[NEBRASKA CONTENT AREA STANDARDS](#)

[IOWA CORE STANDARDS](#)

### THE FOUR C'S FOR STEAM CAREER READINESS SKILLS

- **Critical Thinking:** Students will study confidence, write about it, and reference it in an artwork.
- **Creativity:** Students will create a collaged portrait inspired by Mickalene Thomas and discuss the parts of art.
- **Collaboration:** Students will work with a partner to explore portraiture.
- **Communication:** Students will visually communicate a classmate's confidence in a portrait.

**VOCABULARY:** background, collage, confidence, craft, elements of art (shape, line, texture, space, value, color, and pattern), embellish, gaze, high or fine art, macro/micro, portrait/portraiture, sitter, rhinestones/sequins

**RESOURCES:** [Thomas Teaching Poster](#); [Thomas Pinterest board](#); [Nelson Teacher Resource Center](#)

- Resource - [Mickalene Thomas, Figuring History, Seattle Art Museum](#)
  - Resource - [What Makes Glitter Sparkle, Wonderopolis](#)
  - Resource - [5 Sparkling Facts About Sequins, Mental Floss](#)
  - Images - [MickaleneThomas.com](#)
  - Article - [What makes a muse? Mickalene Thomas on the power of the model, Allyssia Alleyne, CNN](#)
  - Video - [Figuring History - "Le déjeuner sur l'herbe: Les trois femmes noires," Mickalene Thomas, Seattle Art Museum, YouTube](#)
  - Video - [Mickalene Thomas, The Female Lead](#)
  - Video - [BOMB Exclusive: Mickalene Thomas, BOMBmagazine, YouTube](#)
  - Video - [How to create a Grid Transparency, mrlundgren1, YouTube](#)
- Preview all resources before sharing with students.



Mickalene Thomas (American, b. 1971), *Din, une très belle négresse 1*, 2012, acrylic, oil, enamel, and mixed media on wood panel, 102 x 84 in. (259.1 x 213.4 cm)  
Joslyn Art Museum, Museum purchase, gift of The Sherwood Foundation, 2019.6 © 2019 Mickalene Thomas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

**SUGGESTED MATERIALS:** Post-it notes, transparency sheets, painting materials, large sheets of heavy watercolor paper or thick multimedia paper, variety of collage materials (textured papers, patterned papers, sequins, beads, shiny or sparkly materials, glitter glue), glue.

## PROCEDURE

**Overview:** Students will understand confidence, how it is part of who they are, and how to observe it in others.

**Engage:** Write the word CONFIDENCE on the board. Hand out post-its in a variety of colors, assigning each one a question. Have students put their answers around the word and discuss highlights from them to determine characteristics of someone who is confident.

**Ask students...**

- What does confidence look like?
- Who is someone you think is confident?
- Who is your person? (Hopefully someone from their life, but if students have a difficult time, suggest considering a famous person)
- Why is that person confident?
- What are the positive aspects of confidence? Negative ones?

**Deliverables: Tell students they will...**

- Create a portrait inspired by Mickalene Thomas
- Write an essay about confidence or create a dialogue between two works of art

**Art Talk:** Discuss the difference between "craft" and "high or fine art." Talk about the materials Thomas uses in her works. Look then specifically at Joslyn's portrait of her sitter, Din. Note how the rhinestones highlight certain features including her eyes to then talk about her gaze, referring back to the earlier discussion of confidence. For older students, discuss how the artist claims a space for black bodies in portraiture.

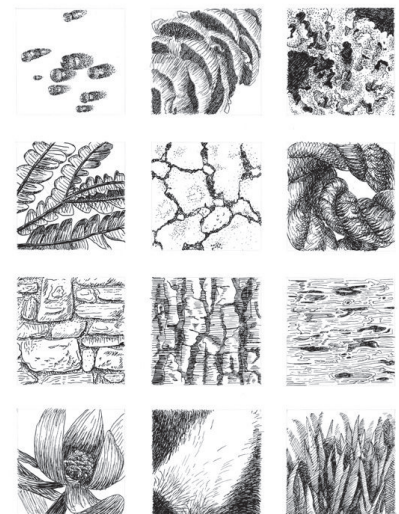
**Ask students...**

- Why and how does Thomas use craft materials in her works?
- How does Thomas draw on the history of portraiture in Western art?
- How does she challenge it?

**Description of Activity:**

Show students Thomas' *Din, une très belle négresse 1*, 2012, asking them to study the work of art. Start the activity by introducing or reviewing the parts of art—shape, line, texture, space, value, color, and pattern.

- Share more works by Thomas while continuing to explore the elements of art. Have students focus on texture and patterns, and instruct them to take photos or sketch examples they see in their world.
- Discuss scale of the artist's work. Using transparencies, have students create a grid they can use when sketching or photographing to take what they see to transfer to the upcoming collage project.



Source: Madeira High School Visual Arts Program,  
<https://madeirahsart.weebly.com/>

- Students can start collecting items that will be used in an art project. Have students bring items that they would like to use, but also items to share with classmates.
- Divide students into pairs and have students tell each other stories about where they felt confident. One student will be the sitter sharing the story while the other takes photos or sketches, then switch. They can practice posing or showing how their face looks when they are confident.
- Students can start making their collage portraits first by laying out their partner's face and applying paint to use as the underpainting.
- Show students more works by Thomas for inspiration. Have students look at their sketches or photos of their parts of art to include in their collage.

**Ask students...**

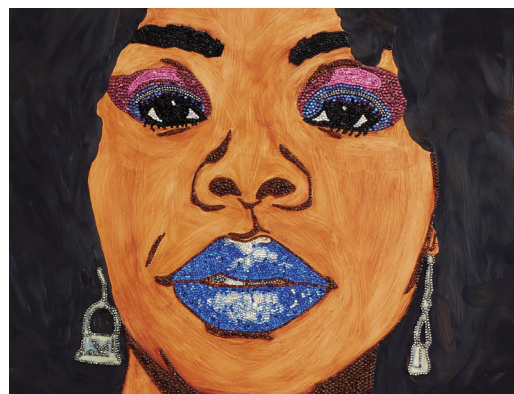
- What do you remember about your partner's story?
- What textures or patterns reflect that?
- Once students have collected their materials, have them start to layout the collage. Create layers with papers and sketch out then paint patterns they want to incorporate and use with the decorative papers.
- Share how Thomas uses rhinestones to accentuate features of her sitter.

**Ask students...**

- How do you think Thomas decides what parts of her sitter to highlight?
- What do you want to feature in your portrait?
- How will you do that?
- Have students gather the sequins they would like to use in their portraits. Look closely at them and investigate why sequins, glitter, and rhinestones sparkle.
  - Talk about how colors refract.
  - Study how these materials are produced.
- Have students add these embellishments to their portrait and share them with the class in an art walk in the classroom where students can image they are at a museum.
- Students can take time to reflect on what they learned about confidence and write an essay about it. Encourage them to think about artists, musicians, actors, and others in the arts communicate it. Refer to music, using for example Aretha Franklin's song "Respect."



Mickalene Thomas (American, b. 1971), *Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971), Mama Bush: (Your love keeps lifting me) higher and higher*, 2009, rhinestone, acrylic and enamel on panel, 84 x 72 in. (213.4 x 182.9 cm), LM12190 © 2019 Mickalene Thomas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Mickalene Thomas (American, b. 1971), *Detail. Din, une très belle négresse 1*, 2012, acrylic, oil, enamel, and mixed media on wood panel, 102 x 84 in. (259.1 x 213.4 cm), Joslyn Art Museum, Museum purchase, gift of The Sherwood Foundation, 2019.6 © 2019 Mickalene Thomas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



- For younger students, select another artwork and encourage them to create a dialogue between the two works.
  - For example, use Joslyn's portrait of Din and perhaps a portrait of Thomas' mother to see what they would tell each other.
  - Another option is to use a work by another female in Joslyn's collection such as Angelica Kaufman's *A Portrait of Mary Tisdal Reading* (ca. 1771-72)



IMAGES (LEFT TO RIGHT): Mickalene Thomas (American, b. 1971), *Portrait of Mnonja*, 2010, rhinestones, acrylic, and enamel on wood panel, 96 x 120 in. (243.8 x 304.8 cm), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, 2011.16 © 2019 Mickalene Thomas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; Angelica Kauffmann (Swiss, 1741-1807), *A Portrait of Mary Tisdal Reading*, c. 1771-72, oil on canvas, 24 3/4 x 29 3/4 in. Joslyn Art Museum, Museum purchase with funds from The Jack Drew Art Endowment Fund for 18th-and 19th-Century Art, 2016.9

**Closing:** Have students take a selfie or take a photo of each student, asking them to give a confident pose. Hang up to share with other classes or grades.

**Assessment:** Get a variety of sequins and assign each color or shape a positive attribute. Using that system or code, have students embellish their classmates photograph.

## **STEAM LESSON PLAN** Joslyn Art Museum uses the Nebraska Department of Education's STEM Approach as a guide, but we took the liberty of adding the "**A**" to emphasize the **ARTS**.

NDE's STEM Approach reflects an integrated and interdisciplinary philosophy to teaching and learning that emphasizes collaborative school-based, work-based, family-based, and community-based experiences as a context for helping students to master key competencies within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Teaching and learning resources, experiences, and example activities included within NDE's STEM Approach serve as a standards-based framework for supporting the engagement of students in hands-on, authentic, and contextual learning experiences that provide students with the opportunity to learn STEM content while promoting essential career readiness skills, including communication, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking.

NDE's STEM Approach strives for compatibility with all content-areas, all grade levels, and all career clusters, not just those traditionally defined as STEM.

# PORTRAITURE IN THREE PARTS: AFTER MICKALENE THOMAS

Inspired by Mickalene Thomas, *Din, une très belle négresse 1*

Created by Barber, <http://barberpaintspeople.com/>

Grade Level Grades K-12 (adaptable for all levels)

## OVERVIEW

Students will be encouraged to deeply examine the portrayal of portraiture by responding to a basic set of questioning.

## ANTICIPATORY SET

Create a mental space for students so they may come up with who they would like to portray first in their minds and then on canvas or paper. Review mannerisms, passions, trajectories, and past experiences.

Ask Students to picture a memory of a specific person in their mind:

1. Hold the memory in your mind. Think about the energy of that person.
2. What is in the peripheral surrounding that person?
3. Is there something in the peripheral that can be repeated/turned into a motif? Should it be repeated/turned into a motif?
4. What is the mood of the scene?
5. Think about the color of that mood.
6. Think about the space/air between the person and the objects around them.
7. What is the temperature of the mood?
8. How sharp is the feeling of the scene? Would it be more appropriate to use a pencil or a brush?
9. Would the person be embarrassed, happy, etc. to be depicted? How would they feel about your work?
10. How loud is too loud? How quiet is too quiet?
11. Would a portrait do the person justice? Would an object from your memory of that person serve the same role as a portrait? Would the person themselves be too loud?
12. Are you lying to yourself?



Mickalene Thomas (American, b. 1971), *Din, une très belle négresse 1*, 2012, acrylic, oil, enamel, and mixed media on wood panel, 102 x 84 in. (259.1 x 213.4 cm), Museum purchase, gift of The Sherwood Foundation, 2019.6

## STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will grasp the dynamic of portraiture.
- Students will understand the importance of space, background, and material.
- Students will gain an appreciation for journaling and contemplation before creating art

## RESOURCES:

- Mickalene Thomas Teaching poster\*
- [30 Americans: Get the Word Out Podcast, YouTube](#) (featuring Blackburn Alternative Program students)

- [Meet the Artist: Mickalene Thomas on Her Materials and Artistic Influences, SAAM](#)
- [Mickalene Thomas, Artist, The Female Lead](#)
- [Absent Narratives Resource Collection, Minnesota Humanities Center](#)
- \*available through the Nelson Teacher Resource Center at Joslyn Art Museum
  - Preview all resources before sharing with students.

#### **VOCABULARY:**

- Collage
- Subtraction
- Reverse engineering
- Assemblage
- Mixed media

#### **MATERIALS:**

- Drawing and acrylic painting materials
- Patterned collage paper
- Magazines and collage materials
- Sheets of fine art papers
- Scissors nor x-Acto blades
- Containers for water
- Glue / Brushes for glue
- Brushes for painting (water-based)
- Cutting boards
- 23"x19" (approximate) mixed media papers

#### **LESSON OUTLINE**

1. Draw/paint/assemble space (background) for the portrait.
2. Draw/paint/assemble the portrait.
3. Draw/paint/assemble materials according to the narrative of the painting.

These can be executed on separate sheets combined at the end or on one sheet of paper. This should be a two-day (or two-three hour) project for all grade levels.

#### **EXTENSIONS**

- Reverse engineering
- Develop reading and comprehension—analytical skills.

#### **CONTENT STANDARDS**

[NEBRASKA CONTENT AREA STANDARDS](#)

[IOWA CORE STANDARDS](#)

# PIECES OF ME

Inspired by Mickalene Thomas, *Din, une très belle négresse 1*

Created by Hilary George, Art teacher, Blackburn Alternative Program, [hilary.george@ops.org](mailto:hilary.george@ops.org)

Grade Level Grades 9-12 (easily adapted to fit grades 6-8)

## OVERVIEW

Looking to the work of contemporary artist Mickalene Thomas for inspiration, we will explore a variety of non-traditional media to create an embellished self-portrait. We will also discuss absent narratives in history and the importance of representation in art.

## ANTICIPATORY SET

*Din, une très belle négresse 1* by Mickalene Thomas will be displayed. If possible, take a video of the artwork while at Joslyn and narrate anything you would like to highlight for the students, move around so students can see some of the sparkle and textures that cannot be captured via still image.



## STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Students will be able to use non-traditional media to create a Mickalene Thomas-inspired self-portrait.
- Students will view the artwork of Mickalene Thomas and answer the question "who gets to be painted?"

## RESOURCES:

- Mickalene Thomas Teaching poster\*
- [30 Americans: Get the Word Out Podcast, YouTube](#) (featuring Blackburn Alternative Program students)
- [Meet the Artist: Mickalene Thomas on Her Materials and Artistic Influences, SAAM](#)
- [Mickalene Thomas, Artist, The Female Lead](#)
- [Absent Narratives Resource Collection, Minnesota Humanities Center](#)

\*available through the Nelson Teacher Resource Center at Joslyn Art Museum

- Preview all resources before sharing with students.

## VOCABULARY:

- Medium/Media
- Visibility
- Representation
- Self-Portrait
- Contemporary Art
- Absent Narratives

**MATERIALS:\***

- 8" x 8" or 8" x 10" canvas
  - Hot glue/glue guns
  - Rhinestones
  - Acrylic paint
  - Feathers
  - Glitter
  - Glitter glue
  - Elmer's glue
  - Permanent markers
  - pencil
  - yarn
  - Fabric/paper/wallpaper scraps
  - Printer
- \*this list is not exhaustive

**LESSON OUTLINE**

1. Begin with visual examples of Mickalene Thomas' artwork such as *Din, une très belle négresse 1*
  - who is the subject?
  - what materials do you see being used in her work?
2. Watch one or both of the following videos to hear from Mickalene Thomas about her media, her message, and the importance of representation in art.
  - [Meet the Artist: Mickalene Thomas on Her Materials and Artistic Influences, SAAM](#)
  - [Mickalene Thomas, Artist, The Female Lead](#)
3. Discuss the importance of representation in art and the danger of absent narratives.
4. Empower students to give themselves a space in their artwork.
5. Students will each take a photograph that they will use as their self-portrait (this does not have to be a traditional portrait, it can be a close-up of their eye, a hand, their shoe, etc.).
6. Print the picture (fit to page).
7. Transfer the image by shading the back side of the paper and drawing over the details with a ballpoint pen. Modifications- have students draw from the image instead of transferring or mod podge the image to the canvas. Try to set up every student for success with experimenting with and applying non-traditional media.
8. Trace your lines with permanent marker.
9. Begin application of media (I suggest at least 3 different media)
10. Display student work as a collective highlighting the personal narratives of each student and the inspiration from Mickalene Thomas.
11. Have students reflect on the process they went through while completing this project.



## **EXTENSIONS**

- Use this lesson as an arts-based evaluation to go along with personal narratives in English
- Examine absent narratives that exist in our Social Studies curriculum/Nebraska's adoption of new Social Studies standards to combat an accumulation of absence. Portraits of historical figures could be done in place of self-portraits

## **CONTENT STANDARDS**

### NEBRASKA CONTENT AREA STANDARDS

#### Create

FA 12.2.1.a – Analyze multiple ideas and materials to demonstrate planning and refining.

FA 12.2.1.b – Create and communicate a personal voice, with intention, through a body of work.

FA 12.2.1.e – Synthesize knowledge of relationships between advanced technique, skill and craftsmanship.

FA 12.2.1.f – Demonstrate respect for accepted procedures regarding responsible care of equipment and materials

#### Respond

FA 12.2.3.a – Identify and describe works of art that reveal different ideas

FA 12.2.3.c – Interpret and explain expressive qualities of artistic styles and movements

#### Connect

FA 12.2.4.a – Investigate how artists define, shape, and empower their lives

### IOWA CORE STANDARDS