

**Ohio Standards Connections:**

**Fine Arts**

Historical, Cultural and Social Studies  
Creative Expression and Communication  
Analyzing and Responding  
Valuing the Arts/Aesthetic Reflection  
Connections, Relationships, and Applications

**Social Studies**

**People in Societies-**

Students use knowledge of perspectives, practices and products of cultural, ethnic, and social groups to analyze the impact of their commonality and diversity within local, national, regional, and global settings.

**Social Studies Skills and Methods:** Students collect, organize, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple sources to draw logical conclusions, communicate this information, and apply what they have learned.

**Language Arts**

Acquisition of Vocabulary  
Concepts of Print, Comprehension Strategies and Self-Monitoring Strategies  
Informational, Technical and Persuasive Text  
Literary Text  
Writing Process and Applications  
Writing Conventions  
Research

# Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson

## More Than a Chair

**Lesson Summary:**

Students will critically examine Aminah Robinson's chair to gain an understanding of the artist and her personal view of family and community. Students will design their own chair drawings based on personal experiences and family/community histories. Students will discuss the concept of symbolism and metaphor and use these concepts in designing their chairs and then in writing poems about their chairs. Students will research families and/or communities through interviews and primary sources. Optional: Students in groups or as a class design an actual chair.



*Gift of Love*, 1974-2002, collection of the artist, promised gift to the Columbus Museum of Art



Example of a chair design by a college student

**Estimated Duration:**

2-8 class periods (depending on components included)

**Commentary:**

Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1940. When she was a little girl, her father taught her how to draw and how to make books from homemade paper and "hogmawg," a

mixture of mud, clay, twigs, leaves, lime, animal grease, and glue. Her mother taught her weaving, needlework, and button work. She knew she wanted to be an artist and began going to art school on Saturdays while she was still in high school and then continued after she graduated from high school. Aminah creates sculpture, paintings on cloth, drawings, and books.

Aminah began working on this chair in 1974. She had just bought her own house and needed some furniture. She used a root from a tree her father found and scraps of wood to build the frame. She tanned the leather herself and carved into it the figures of a man, woman, and child and the title of the piece, "Gift of Love." She surrounded the chair with hogmawg figures representing her mother, father, and other community members. She also included a person who walks forward but looks back. This figure is a symbol or a metaphor for the African concept of *Sankofa*, the need to understand the past before moving forward. On the back of the chair she placed her friend and mentor, woodcarver Elijah Pierce, and an African king whom she had met on her trip to Africa in 1979. There are a number of music boxes embedded in the chair as well. There are lots of common, ordinary objects such as buttons, shells, and clothespins in the chair.

**Pre-Assessment:**

Discuss the following questions with students and assess their understanding of community, *Sankofa*, and the materials the artist has used in the chair. How do you think it would feel to sit in this chair? Why do you think Aminah Robinson put her mother and father on the chair? Why do you think she included a person who walks forward and looks backwards? Why do you think she included music boxes? The title "Gift of Love" is a way to describe the chair and the chair itself symbolizes the artist's view of her community. Why do you think she calls this chair *Gift of Love*? How do you define "community"? How does this chair reflect the artist's community? How do you define your community? How would you go about researching the history of the community where you live?

**Scoring Guidelines:** Teachers should conduct ongoing teacher assessment and student self assessment throughout instruction.

**Post-Assessment:**

At the completion of all sessions, the artwork and final assessment are combined in the evaluation of student learning. Guide students as they participate in discussion to develop criteria for the finished artwork. **Scoring Guidelines:** Refer to Student and Teacher Assessment Chart at end of lesson plan.

**Instructional Procedures:**

**Design a chair**

1. Discuss the concept of metaphor and simile (figures of speech in which a word or phrase is used in place of another to denote a likeness or comparison) with students. In art, one idea can represent another through the use of symbolism. Have students think about the people, events, places that make up their own particular communities and that they might include in their own chair. Have them think about symbols that could represent ideas about their families and communities in the design of a chair. Have them make a list of important people, events, and ideas they would like to include in their chairs and the symbols that could represent them.

2. Discuss with students interviewing techniques (Refer to [www.storycorps.net/resord-your-stroy/question-generator](http://www.storycorps.net/resord-your-stroy/question-generator) for effective interview questions.) and the use of primary and secondary sources for research (See <http://ipr.ues.gseis.ucla.edu/info/definition.html> for explanation of these two types of sources. Have them research their family or some aspect of the community such as the history of their school. Have them record their findings in journals.

3. Have students create a drawing using graphite and colored pencils of their design for a chair that represents them and their community. It can be conventional or imaginary, but it must have a place for a person to sit. Have them add details to the chair that represent people and places that are important to them. Have them write notes on their drawing to explain the figures, objects, and any music they have want to include (see attached example).

4. Have them write poems about the chairs they have designed. Have them include at least one metaphor or simile (see attached examples of poems). Collect the poems and the drawings without having the students sign them. Pass the drawings and poems out to the class, making sure that the students do not receive their own poems. Have the students read each other's poems and have the rest of the class try to identify the author.

5. [Optional] Divide the class into groups and have them design and build a community chair. They can build their own chair or find one at home or a garage sale to use as a base. They should discuss and decide how each or the group will be represented. They should collaborate on the materials to use so that the chair is unified. Have them select music and record it to accompany the chair.

### **Differentiated Instructional Support**

This lesson can be tailored to grade level and available time by selecting appropriate components. For example, it can be simplified for younger students by eliminating some of the components such as designing an actual chair.

### **Extensions**

1. Create an exhibition of the chairs and the related writing.
2. Create a class anthology of the students' writings and drawings.

### **Homework Options and Home Connections**

Students interview family and neighbors to gain an understanding of family and neighborhood history.

### **Interdisciplinary Connections**

This lesson connects the visual arts, music, social studies, and language arts.

### **Materials and Resources:**

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|---------------------|--|
| <i>For teachers</i> | Image of Aminah's chair; other examples of her work in books and from this Website; examples of poetry with metaphor and simile.   |
| <i>For students</i> | Drawing paper, colored pencils; For actually creating a chair: old chair, found objects that are supplied or students gather, wood, leather, nails, glue; journals (provide or have students purchase or make) |

### **Key Vocabulary**

Hogmawg – Aminah Robinson’s word for a mixture of mud, clay, twigs, leaves, lime, animal fat, and glue used to make art objects three-dimensional

Metaphor – a figure of speech that compares unlike things (the heart is a drum)

Primary sources- actual records that have survived from the past, such as letters, photographs, articles of clothing; sources created by people who actually saw or participated in an event and recorded that event or their reactions to it immediately after the event.

Sankofa – from the Akan; the African concept of learning from the past

Secondary sources- Accounts of the past created by someone either not present when the event took place or removed by time from the event.

Simile- a figure of speech that compares unlike things using like or as (the heart beats like a drum).

Symbolism- using something to represent something else (the American flag is a symbol of the United States)

**Technology Connections** Have students do an online search to find out the history of their towns, neighborhoods and/or schools; have them search for good interviewing techniques such as those at <http://www.storycorps.net/record-your-story/question-generator/list>

**General Tips.** To make an actual chair, students can use one their families are willing to part with or they can check out the nearest thrift shop.

**Attachments** Poems written about Aminah’s chair; Final Assessment Rubric

Poems inspired by Aminah's chair, *Gift of Love*

### **Gift of Love**

Sit in this chair  
Smell the love  
Talk to friends  
Hear the music  
Listen to the sound of love  
Touch the folding change  
Of the new materials  
Make new friends  
Be one with and love  
The sound of the chair.

Isaac, Grade 5

In the night  
I climb up to dream.  
Held close so close  
by the strongest arms.  
Rocking in this chair  
I wonder...I wander

Safe in this chair  
of mud, of wood, of animal skin,  
I am a child of the past  
and a child for tomorrow  
Catching the wisdom  
Learning the stories  
Listening to the heartbeats.

Mim Chenfeld, poet/teacher

When I look at this chair  
I see me as an African Queen  
with all my people beside me  
We cherish each other like family  
We are some of the people  
who are part of your history.

Quo'Shonda, Grade 5

## FINAL ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

<i>The student:</i>	Excellent	Good	Acceptable	Needs Improvement
RESEARCHED	researched and recorded interviews in journal about family or community history <b>and</b> use of primary sources	researched and recorded interviews in journal about family or community history <b>or</b> use of primary sources	researched and recorded interviews in journal about family or community history but did not resolve	no evidence of researched and recorded interviews or primary sources
DREW	drew chair representing themselves or family or community; included detailed explanatory notes	drew chair representing themselves or family or community; included explanatory notes	drew chair representing themselves or family or community; included some explanatory notes	did not complete drawing of chair or did not include explanatory notes
CONNECTED	used multiple examples of creativity through use of symbolism and metaphor and media	used some examples of creativity through use of symbolism or metaphor and media	used few examples of creativity through use of symbolism or media	used little creativity with no evidence of symbolism
WROTE	wrote poem with two or more metaphors and/or similes	wrote poem with a metaphor or simile	wrote poem but did not include a metaphor or simile	no evidence of written poem
CONSTRUCTED (optional)	created a functioning, well crafted and original chair with a unified design that tells a family or community story	created a functioning and well crafted chair with a unified design that tells a family or community story	created a functioning and well crafted chair but does not tell a family or community story	created a chair that does not tell family or community story and design is not unified or incomplete