

# Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson

## 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

**History-** Students use materials drawn from the diversity of human experience to analyze and interpret significant events, patterns, and themes in the history of Ohio, the United States and the world.  
**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

## Lesson Plan: Storyline Approaches to Learning

### Lesson Summary:

Contemporary artist Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson has dedicated herself to documenting her family's stories, her community's layered past, and well-known and not-so-well-known aspects of African-American history. Inspired by Robinson's art work, students will create a storyline book based on their own family histories obtained through interviews, primary sources, and secondary sources.



*Picking Blackberries, Nuts, and Medicinal Nuts, 2000-2007*

**Estimated Duration:** 3-6 weeks

### 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. The artist uses hogmawg in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional work. Her mother taught her weaving, needlework, and button work. She knew she wanted to be an artist from the time she was very young and began going to art school on Saturdays while she was still in high school and then continued after she graduated from high school. At an early age, she also listened carefully to the stories told to her by her elders and she recorded these stories in her journals. For example, her Aunt Cornelia recounted experiences of being captured in Africa and sent to Sapelo Island, Georgia, as a slave. Robinson documents these stories in her books, woodcut prints, and paintings on cloth and paper.

**Downloadable images that relate to this lesson plan are available in the “Teach” section of this Web site:**

*Poindexter Village- First Families*

*Makin’ Sweet Soap*

*One Day in 1307 AD: King Abubakari II*

*Roots Begin with Goree Island*

*Life Along Water Street*

### **Pre-Assessment:**

Discuss the work of Aminah Robinson in class. For related information, borrow from the school or public library *Symphonic Poem: The Art of Aminah Brenda Lynn; A Street Called Home* by Aminah Robinson; and *To Be a Drum*, a book written by Evelyn Coleman and illustrated by Aminah. Read and discuss these books with the class. Show students examples of Aminah’s art downloadable from this site. Ask them: What stories is Aminah telling? How do you think she learned about family stories? What kinds of materials does she use to make her work? Why do you think she uses buttons, neckties, and other fabrics? What are some primary sources someone could look at to find out about their family’s history? (marriage license, military discharge paper, letters, diary, photos, entries in a family bible or book, etc.)What kinds of primary sources does your family have?

### **Scoring Guidelines:**

The pre-assessment discussion and exploration provide opportunities to gather information on students’ prior knowledge about the use of primary and secondary sources, their familiarity with the artist, and their experience in talking with family elders. Participation notes could be made to monitor students individually.

### **Instructional Procedures**

1. Download images or obtain books Aminah has illustrated and discuss them with the class. Emphasize story she tells in each example. Discuss her work in *To Be a Drum*. Have them list the important points in the story such as: Africa before slavery; Middle Passage; Slave auction; Slaves working in the fields; Slave survival through dance and music; Civil War; Freedom to invent; Freedom to create; Freedom to protest; Freedom to be what you want to be.

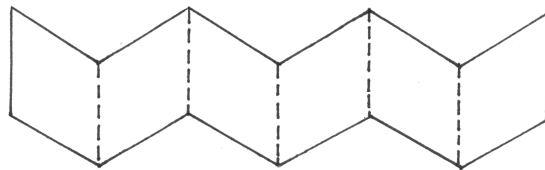
2. Discuss *Sankofa*, the African concept of the necessity of understanding the past in order to go forward. This idea is central to Aminah's work. Introduce the concept of listening to and interviewing elders in order to know the past.

3. Have students interview their grandparents or any other older family member from their father and/or mother's side of the family. Use the GREAT QUESTIONS below and have them take notes in their journals. They should also have their families look for any documents that might serve as **primary sources** such as marriage licenses, birth certificates, or military papers. The students should note any important information and include it in their story line. When they share their stories with the class, they should note any primary sources they used. In their journals, have them sketch a family tree that begins with at least their grandparents and ends with them and their siblings.

4. Students select at least four important and/or interesting points from their interviews to include in their accordion books.

5. Have the students create a storyline accordion book with the information they obtain. Their storylines should combine drawings and words to illustrate stories they have learned from their families. The illustrations can be of stories of everyday occurrences or they can be about an important event such as a holiday gathering, a wedding, or a birth.

To actually make the storyline book, students sew pieces of heavy construction paper together with buttons and thread in the style of Aminah Robinson (see *Life Along Water Street*). Their books can be horizontal or vertical.



6. Students enter captions describing important/interesting points about their subject leaving room for illustrations.

7. Students select the media (pen and ink; colored pencil; fabric, etc) and illustrate their books.

8. Students share their final book with class.

**Differentiated Instructional Support** This lesson can be modified for grade levels 4-12.

**Extension** Instead of focusing on their own lives, students can focus on events from American or world history and create a storyline book such as one on the Civil War, on modern inventions, or any subject related to classroom curriculum.

**Homework Options and Home Connections**

Students need to do interviews outside of class and also work with their families to find primary source material.

**Interdisciplinary Connections** This arts-based lesson relates directly to social studies and language arts.

**Materials and Resources:**

*For teachers* Books by and about Aminah Robinson; reproductions of her work. Obtain a copy of *To Be A Drum*, written by Evelyn Coleman and illustrated by Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson (Albert Whitman & Company, 1998)

*For students*

- Heavy construction paper or cloth
- Cloth markers
- Buttons, beads, ties, fabric scraps
- Needle and heavy thread or embroidery floss
- Fabric glue
- Downloadable images from this Web site

**Key Vocabulary**

**Family tree-** an illustration that shows the relationships between members of a family

**Hogmawg-** a mixture of mud, pig grease, dyes, sticks, glue, and lime that Robinson uses in two- and three-dimensional work

**Middle Passage-** the period between the 1500s and 1860s when millions of Africans were forced into ships and brought to the Americas as slaves

**Primary sources** are firsthand documents such as poems, diaries, court records, and interviews. Primary sources are records of events as they are first described, without any interpretation or commentary. They are also sets of data, such as census statistics, which have been tabulated, but not interpreted.

**RagGonNon** – Amianh Robinson’s word for a complex work of art that is never finished

**Sankofa**- the African concept of the necessity of knowing one’s past in order to live in the present and go forward in the future

**Secondary sources** offer an analysis or a restatement of primary sources. They often attempt to describe or explain primary sources. Some secondary sources not only analyze primary sources, but use them to argue a contention or to persuade the reader to hold a certain opinion. Examples of secondary sources include: dictionaries, encyclopedias, textbooks, and books and articles that interpret or review research works

**Storyline** – a story based on a particular timeline of events

### **Technology Connections**

Students use Aminah’s World Web site to learn about the artist’s life and work

**Research Connections** Students conduct research based on interviews, primary sources, secondary sources, and online searches.

**General Tips** If students have difficulty in finding significant milestones in from their family interviews, they can also incorporate historical events from the particular time and place in which their stories take place.

## GREAT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for interviewing older family member from

[www.storycorps.net/resord-your-stroy/question-generator](http://www.storycorps.net/resord-your-stroy/question-generator).

### Growing Up

1. Where and when were you born?
2. Where did you grow up?
3. What was it like?
4. Who were your parents?
5. What were your parents like?
6. Did you ever get into trouble? What was the worst thing you did?
7. Do you have sisters or brothers? What were they like growing up?
8. What did you look like?
9. Were you happy? What is your best memory? Your worst?
10. What was your favorite toy?
11. Did you have a nickname? How'd you get it?
12. How did you spend a perfect day when you were young?

### School

1. Did you enjoy school?
2. What kind of student were you?
3. What did you do for fun?
4. Are you still friends with anyone from that time in your life?
5. What are your best and worst memories of grade school? Middle school? High school?
6. Do you have a teacher that greatly influenced you? If so, tell me about him or her.

### Love and Relationships

1. When did you first fall in love?
2. What was your first serious relationship?

### Marriage

1. How did you meet your husband/wife?
2. How did you know he/she was "the one"?
3. How did you propose?
4. What were the best times? The worst times?
5. What advice do you have for young couples?

### Raising Children

1. How did you first find out you were going to be a parent? How did you feel?
2. Can you describe the way you felt when you first saw your child?
3. How has being a parent change you?
4. What are your dreams for your children?

### **Working**

1. What do you do (what did you do) for a living?
2. Do you like your job?
3. When you were young, what did you hope to be?
4. What lessons have your life work taught you?
5. If you could do anything now, what would you do?
6. Do you look forward to retiring? Or have you retired? What are your plans?

### **Family Heritage**

1. What is your ethnic background?
2. Where is your mom's family from? Where is your dad's family from?
3. What traditions have been passed down in your family?
4. Who were your favorite relatives?

### **Military Service**

1. Were you in the military?
2. Did you go to war? What was it like?
3. How did serving in the military change you?
4. During your service, can you recall times you were afraid?
5. What did you learn from your time in the military?

### **Hand-It-Down**

1. What advice do you have for me?
2. What is the most important thing you have learned from life?
3. Do you have any regrets?
4. What are your plans for the future?

## STORYLINE - ASSESSMENT

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

	Excellent	Good/Proficient	Average/Marginal	Needs Improvement
<u>Interviews/journal</u> Conducts interview with older person using suggested questions; records responses in organized fashion in journal				
<u>Organization</u> Selects interesting and important items to enter in timeline book; sites primary source, if possible				
<u>Understanding</u> Recognizes and describes Robinson's work orally or in written paragraph with detail and clarity				
<u>Implementation</u> Creates a book that creatively combines and communicates family history and original art				

If you could do this project over again, what would you do differently?

What did you learn from completing this project?



STORYLINE – FINAL ASSESSMENT

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

	Excellent	Good/Proficient	Average/Marginal	Needs Improvement
<u>Interviews/journal</u> Conducts interview with older person using suggested questions; records responses in organized fashion in journal				
<u>Organization</u> Selects interesting and important items to enter in timeline book; sites primary source, if possible				
<u>Understanding</u> Recognizes and describes Robinson’s work orally or in written paragraph with detail and clarity				
<u>Implementation</u> Creates a book that creatively combines and communicates family history and original art				

OVERALL RATING: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS: