

## Kids @ CAM – At Home Family Projects

Spotlight on CAM's Collection

### ROMARE BEARDEN

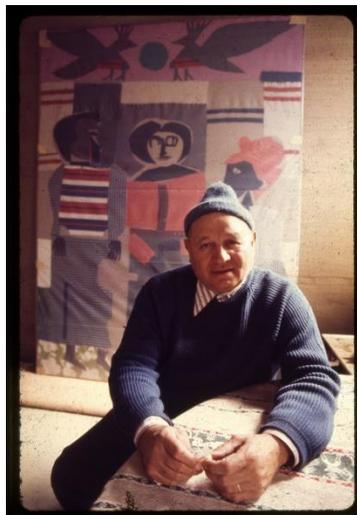
About the Artist:

*“You should always respect what you are and your culture because if your art is going to mean anything, that is where it comes from.”*

Romare Bearden (1912 – 1988) is considered one of the most important American artists of the 20th century. He was also an author and songwriter. His artwork depicted the African-American culture and experience in creative and thought provoking ways. Born in North Carolina in 1912, Bearden spent much of his career in New York City. Virtually self-taught, his early works were realistic images, often with religious themes. He later transitioned to abstract and Cubist style paintings in oil and watercolor. He is best known for his photomontage compositions made from torn images of popular magazines and assembled into visually powerful statements on African-American life.

The works of Romare Bearden cover a wide range of techniques, themes, and styles. While living in Harlem, he became excited about modern art, particularly, Cubism, post-Impressionism and Surrealism as well as the excitement of the Harlem Renaissance. His paintings often depicted scenes of the American South. Romare Bearden is perhaps best known for his collage and photomontage compositions, which he began creating in the mid-1960s. During this time, he felt he was struggling in his art between expressing his experiences as a black man and the obscurity of abstract painting. Combining images from magazines and colored paper, he would work in other textures such as sandpaper, graphite and paint.

Influenced by the Civil Rights movement, his work became more representational and socially conscious. Bearden's collage work has also been compared to jazz improvisation. Growing up during the Harlem Renaissance, he was exposed to many of the jazz greats. Duke Ellington was one of his first patrons. Bearden wrote songs for Billie Holiday and Dizzy Gillespie and later designed a record cover for Wynton Marsalis. In his collages, Bearden's images reflect some of the elements of jazz with its interplay among the characters and improvisation of the materials used. In the last few years of his life, Bearden and his wife made plans for a foundation that would aid in the education and training of talented art students. The Romare Bearden Foundation opened in 1990.



## ART AT HOME – Bearden Conversation Collage

### What You Will Need:

- Large background paper
- Magazines to cut out
- Colorful construction paper or cardstock to cut out
- Paint
- Paint brushes
- Scissors
- Glue

**Take a close look at 'The Conversation'. Before you begin, ask yourself these questions (or ask a friend and have a conversation about 'The Conversation'): Who are the two people in the foreground? What is their relationship? What can you tell about them based on their clothes and body language? What are they talking about? Where are they? Where is the train going or coming from? Come up with as many questions as you can based on what you see to tell a story about this piece.**

- Step 1 – Using the story you came up with for Bearden's collage as inspiration, write your own brief story (a paragraph) about a conversation between two people including details of who they are, where they are and any information you want to depict in your collage.
- Step 2 - Using your paint, create the background of the collage by painting the sky and the land.
- Step 3 – Place the painting to the side to dry.
- Step 4 – Cut out images from magazines to use in your conversation collage.
- Step 5 – Cut out your paper to create your people and their clothes, as well as any images for the background.
- Step 6 – Place all components of your collage on the now dried background painting.
- Step 7 – Start by gluing down the first layer of pictures and shapes.
- Step 8 – Complete the collage by gluing the top layer down.
- Step 9 – Clean up your work area.

### Tips:

- Look at many images of Bearden's work before you begin for inspiration.
- You will not be drawing any part of this piece – everything will be made by collaging so think of yourself as 'drawing with scissors'.
- Do not work about perfection – Bearden's figures often had exaggerated features that were not to scale.

### Questions for Discussion:

- Show someone the collage you created and ask them the same questions you asked yourself about Bearden's 'The Conversation'. Have a conversation with them based on their answers.

**Follow Up Project Suggestion:**

- Romare Bearden liked to use his art to tell a story, often a personal story about his life and culture. Think of a story from your life or your family and create it using the same multi-media collage techniques. Listen to your favorite music while you are working!

