

Connections through Visual Art:

A Celebration of Culture and the Collective Consciousness

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Abstract

Cassopolis, Michigan holds and dearly protects a unique culture. Although this small town is relatively unknown, its residents live and think differently due to an extraordinary history with the Underground Railroad. Unlike many Underground Railroad stations, ex-slaves didn't simply pass through the town but stayed to raise generations.

In 1846 their community (black and white) bravely stood together against the United States government to fight for the rights of all humans. They risked their lives and in the process gained an extraordinary understanding of equality and acceptance of diversity.

Just as Cassopolis' history has been previously overlooked, so the master narrative has ignored slave potters. The richly expressive Ugly Jugs were purposefully created, and with enormous risks. Yet, the: who, what, where, when, and why are lost. I have found a way to help my students celebrate their unique culture by linking slave pottery and the collective consciousness.

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Racism in America 2013

On November 4, 2008, America's forty-fourth president was elected. Four years later he was re-elected for a second term. These events marked a threshold never crossed by our nation because Barack Obama is African American. These elections were remarkable for all Americans, but not for the same reasons.

One would think that having an African American President proves we are moving forward and becoming a more colorblind society. Not so. Racism has actually risen during Barack Obama's presidency. "A recent Associated Press online poll concluded that racial prejudice in America has slightly increased since Obama's election. The survey said that a majority of Americans, 51%, express explicit racial prejudice toward blacks, compared to 48% in 2008" (Blake, John, 11/1, 2012 CNN).

Racial intolerance has a stranglehold on our country. "... some experts would say race relations have taken some steps backward, as shown by what the Southern Poverty Law Center said is a rise in the number of white Americans who joined hate groups in 2008 and 2012" (Miller, Larry, 2013).

The sad truth is, even Americans who say they are not racist often pass judgment based on fear or cultural ignorance. "... we're never going to erase race as a factor in American life. It is a birth defect within which this country was born out of slavery; we're never really gonna be race-blind" (Condoleezza Rice, CBS News, 2011). After desegregation, freedom rides, affirmative action, and the election and re-election of an African American President, will America ever really embrace diversity? The question remains, is the former Secretary of State correct?

Cassopolis: A Unique Rural Community

I teach in a truly unique school district. I immediately recognized the difference between Cassopolis and other communities and believe that is why I was hired. Among other interview questions, the hiring committee asked what I knew about their town. I began my answer by saying that I had stopped at McDonald's for a cup of coffee before the interview. I noticed a group of eight elderly men sitting together in a corner of the restaurant. They were carrying on as old men do—telling stories, teasing each other, and laughing. Their camaraderie hinted that this was probably a weekly get-together. All around the country old men meet for coffee. However, the men in Cassopolis were different. These seventy to eighty year-old men were integrated: some were African American and some were Caucasian.

I told the hiring committee that I had only witnessed this unconditional acceptance of diversity once, while visiting Cayman Brae (a tiny island in the Caribbean). I added that if the old men in Cassopolis were able to sit together and enjoy each other's company without the interference of racism, then I imagined the children in the community might be the same. Eyes lit up, and I was hired.

On the first day of my teaching career in Cassopolis I was astounded at the unusual diversity. The students filling the seats were a very even mix of Caucasians, African Americans, and more impressively, bi-racial students. I knew that this was an extraordinary school district. I've had the pleasure of being welcomed into an extremely tight-knit community of open-minded people.

It would be difficult in this country to find another district of students like those in Cassopolis. They are racially color-blind, but not in the sense of awkward political correctness or idealism. They are comfortable in addressing and joking about their differences. White students are good-naturedly teased about being too pale or tanning too much, and black students about

getting too much sun. Girls lovingly fuss and touch each other's hair and often comment on the positive and negative sides of hair textures. All of my students, no matter what their color—claim to have “ashy” skin. Conversations are curiously open and free. Brawls are usually over romantic relationships gone wrong—never because of race issues. Black, white, and in-between students integrate in the classrooms, cafeteria, gymnasium, dances, parties and friendships. In Cassopolis, self-imposed ethnic segregation doesn't occur.

Integration is not exclusive to a particular age group in Cassopolis. A large number of marriages are ethnically mixed. In an article entitled *Two Generations Under Freedom*, written by Booker T. Washington in 1903, he noted that there were already a dozen integrated marriages in Cass County. Cassopolis residents from infants to the very old are all skin colors. Eye colors range from light gray to a brown so deep that the pupil disappears. Hair color and texture, and facial features are a striking combination of African American and Caucasian.

Cassopolis High School Demographic

The following is a photograph of students who decided to eat lunch in the art room in March of 2013 (Figure 1). They arrived in four desegregated groups. This common scenario, provided for me the perfect opportunity to take a photo and stage an impromptu survey.

Out of ten students, nine have racially mixed families. The boy (giving the thumbs-up sign) who said his family and close relatives are 100% African American has very fair skin, so it is likely that his family is also racially mixed.



Figure 1: Representative group of friends at Cassopolis High School.

Demographic of Cassopolis

Cassopolis is relatively unknown. It quietly sits at the bottom of Michigan and is often not even labeled on TV weather maps (Figure 2). There is not a lot of industry, no entertainment except a bar, a McDonald's, and a few small family-owned restaurants.

Many families live below the poverty line. Seventy-two percent of the students in the district receive free or reduced lunch (Bright, 2013). Out of the 933 K-12 students enrolled in the district, thirty are known to be homeless (Parks, 2013). Many of my students have a relative in prison, and some have already spent time in jail themselves. They know Cassopolis as a poor, one-stoplight town. It's not surprising that the young people in Cassopolis are dubious when I speak of their remarkable culture.



Figure 2: Cassopolis's location in Cass County, Michigan

Cassopolis: An Integrated History

Regarding racial differences, our nation has moved from absolute intolerance to, at best, cautious acceptance. Many Caucasians profess to not being racist, yet they admit that suspicions rise if they see a group of young black men. Cassopolis' mature view on ethnicity is poles apart from the other towns in Cass County, and for that matter, America. This incredible acceptance of diversity began over 177 years ago.

In the 1960s African Americans were just beginning to exercise some of the freedoms that the Thirteenth Amendment offered—nearly 100 years after those laws went into effect. Demands of integration and fair legislation for people of color were finally being heard.

Mid-century Americans watched a nation in tumultuous upheaval and change. At that time Cassopolis had been thoroughly integrated for many generations. “Since 1836 when Henry H. Way, a Quaker from Wayne County, Indiana, brought Howell Lawson, a self-emancipated African American to Cass County, self-emancipated, freed and free African American settlers streamed into Cass County. By 1845 the Michigan census recorded fifty free African Americans in Cass County” (Smith Tucker, 2010. P.13).

The United States census of 1860 documents over 1300 African Americans living in Cass County. Out of 17,895 residents total, that establishes that nearly 8% of the county's population was African American. This number was significantly higher than the census counts in Chicago at the time, where the African American population was still under 1,000. “No one seemed to mind if you were born free or self-emancipated as long as you were willing to work” (Smith Tucker, 2010. P.13).

This accepting environment encouraged freedom seekers to settle in Cass County. Many ex-slaves and their families built cabins on Quaker farms. Freed and self-emancipated slaves were invited to work for a wage and send their children to school. They were even allowed the

right to seek justice in a court of law. "... the experiences of Cass's African Americans were unlike those of northern urban African Americans because the economic dependency that developed between Cass's white and African American populations helped minimize racism, [and] promote cooperation between the races" (Michigan History Magazine, July/August, 1980).

Unbeknownst to the ex-slaves in Cass County, Kentucky slave owners from whom they had escaped were plotting to destroy their freedom. Cassopolis, Michigan may currently be an unassuming town, but a significant historical event took place there that created even more solidarity between the African Americans and Caucasians.

The Kentucky Raid of 1847

Before daylight on the morning of August 11th, 1847, bounty hunters from Kentucky rode in under the direction of Boone County Sheriff John L. Graves and secretly spread out around Cass County. Their plan was to capture and return the "property" of the Kentucky slave owners. Many African Americans' cabins were entered by force. Several people escaped capture by jumping out windows and fleeing to safety in the homes of their Quaker friends. Once there, they alerted the community. After a morning of cabin raids, nine African Americans were collected and shackled.

In the meantime, "One posse of white and black residents discovered the raiders' wagon and sank it in Birch Lake, while another surprised and captured one of the raiding parties" (Chardavoyne, 2004, P. 6). The Kentucky raiders met resistance as they hastily prepared to gather and force their captives back to Kentucky. Their plan was to meet at Odell's Mill with the captives. By chance, this is where the enraged Cass County residents had taken their captured raiding party. A valiant and threatening crowd of between two and three hundred white and black farmers brandishing pitchforks, clubs, and fence stakes surrounded them. As the threat of violence escalated, a few Cassopolis residents convinced the bounty hunters to go to the

courthouse to allow their captives a fair trial (Figure 3). Believing that they had the law on their side and to avoid a losing battle with angry townspeople, the Kentucky raiders naively agreed.

“What the Kentucky Raiders thought would be an easy victory in court turned out to be a stunning defeat. Sitting in for the absent Cass County Circuit Court Commissioner, was Ebenezer McIlvain, who was also an abolitionist and Niles Underground Railroad agent. Before Commissioner McIlvain, Josiah Osborn charged the raiders with trespassing. William Merriman had been badly beaten and bloodied; he charged several raiders with assault. Henry Shepard, Cass County’s African American Underground Railroad conductor, charged some of the Kentuckians with breaking into his home. To keep themselves from going to jail, the Kentuckians had to post bail” (Smith Tucker, 2010. P.17).

Merriman and Henry Shepard were African Americans. The fact that they were able to press charges against the white bounty hunters during the antebellum era is proof of the unusual racial integration and legal rights permitted to blacks in Cass County.

“Furthermore, the court issued a writ of habeas corpus, which effectively presumed the innocence of the African Americans and placed the burden of proving that the African Americans were ‘slaves’ on the raiders” (Smith Tucker, 2010. P.13).

“The Kentuckians had to comply with Commissioner McIlvain’s orders. They posted bail to return another day with the papers they thought would be sufficient to prove their claims and win the case” (Smith Tucker, 2010. P.13).

“On Monday the raiders appeared in court with bills of sale, copies of the US Constitution and the 1793 US Fugitive Slave Law. In addition to those documents, however, Commissioner McIlvain requested a copy of the laws of the state of Kentucky. Unable to produce the Kentucky laws showing that slavery was legal there, the Kentuckians lost their case, and Commissioner McIlvain released the captives. That night Henry Shepard and Zachariah

Shugart flanked by additional guards led the nine captives and thirty-four other African Americans out of Cass County to an Underground Railroad station in the home of Dr. Nathan and Pamela Thomas in Schoolcraft, Kalamazoo County” (Smith Tucker, 2010. P.13).

“Miss Pamela quickly called on neighbors to help. Kitchens, butteries, pies safes, and cellars... all were emptied of meat, bread, cookies, pie, cake, vegetables and fruit.

When the wagons arrived the food was waiting. The villagers handed food to the terrified fugitives as they sat huddled together in the wagons. There was no time to stretch cramped muscles. Slave hunters were close behind” (Schwartz, 1990. P. 82).



Figure 3: County Seat: Cassopolis, Michigan - Courthouse as it appeared in 1847

Breaking the Law to Protect a Culture

In a turn of events, the enraged Kentuckians had been duped. Believing they were law-abiding citizens, they followed due process to rightfully collect their property. In utter disbelief and anger they wrote articles entitled “The Cassopolis Outrage,” that appeared in five issues of the *Licking Valley Register* of Covington, Kentucky. In the October 22, 1847 issue, one Kentuckian wrote:

Our citizens have been, by a desperate mob, robbed of their property. They have been outraged, abused, and insulted by those very villains who had enticed their slaves from the State. They are gentlemen of standing and character and their statements are entitled to the most implicit confidence. They went, as they had a right to do, in pursuit of fugitive slaves. They found them and got them in possession; but by the vilest prostitution of State authority, as well as in open violation of the law of the United States, they were forcibly taken out of their hands and marched triumphantly off by an infuriated and unprincipled mob. [The gentlemen had] to bear the taunts and scoffs of devils incarnate.

Were the citizens of Cass County in the right? Absolutely not, according to The Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, which states that it was lawful to own slaves. The Act also gave slave owners the right to seek and capture run-away slaves—even if they crossed state lines. Cass County residents broke the laws of the United States of America because they were passionate abolitionists who fervently embraced equality for all people. Additionally and probably more importantly, the ex-slaves had become their friends. Many towns were involved in the Underground Railroad, but most of them were stations, not the end of the line. African Americans made their new homes in Cass County because Quakers and other residents welcomed and even helped their new neighbors to buy small farms. “Initially they simply passed through Cass County on their way to Canada. But as time passed, the slaves enjoyed greater immunity from the dangers of pursuit and recapture, and many of them finding occupation... remained here with friends, thinking that they would be nearly as safe as in Canada” (Wheeler and Brunn. 1968. P. 218.)

An Increasingly Integrated Culture

In 1840 only eight African Americans lived in Cass County. Because they were not only accepted, but welcomed, in twenty years' time the number of black residents increased to more than 1,292. These families became part of the community. Their children began attending school with white children, as schools in Cass County made it policy to integrate since 1869.

As time went by, residents of Cass County grew more and more comfortable with the divergent cultures. Blacks and whites began marrying. By 1968 inter-racial marriages had taken place for so long that George Hesslink wrote in the *Journal of Negro Education*, "these mixed-blood Negro [land] owners, most of whom were not physically identifiable as Negroes." During a time in history that race riots and turmoil rocked the nation, Mr. Hesslink added, "The long history of good white-Negro relations may provide the strength to effect a peaceful transition to an integrated community" (Hesslink, 1968).

The children of Cassopolis have a long rich history of interracial harmony. This didn't begin with their parents or even their grandparents. It wasn't inspired in the 1950s when the civil rights movement gained momentum. It didn't happen in the 1970s by forced desegregation. This amazing embrace of cultural diversity began when Howell Lawson came to Cass County in 1836. The community fought for these values 166 years ago during the Kentucky Raid. Not long after, interracial families began forming and children were the final proof that this was a place of equality.

Although many people in Cass County were involved in the Kentucky Raid, Cassopolis is the only town in the county that thoroughly adopted human commonality. Edwardsburg and Dowagiac are no more than ten minutes' drive from Cassopolis, yet both have displayed significant racial intolerance. It is genuine pleasure teaching in a community with a truly rich and

rare history of human solidarity. Is it feasible to hope that someday this attitude of racial acceptance be achieved everywhere?

Culturally Responsive Art and the Collective Consciousness

The collective consciousness of Cassopolis lives in my students. Even if they are not aware of it, (and many are not) the incredible history of this small town tremendously impacts their lives and attitudes. Many descended from free slaves who had been searching for a safer place to raise their families. In Cass County, they joined a community of emancipated or self-emancipated slaves escaping the laws of antebellum doctrine, and forward thinking whites who fought for the rights of all people. Those who are new to Cassopolis soon realize that this town is different, and they quickly meld into the prevailing acceptance of diversity.

Within my classroom I have heard numerous conversations regarding the acceptance of others. These are not teacher-facilitated discussions designated for Black History Month. My students talk about their white kin and their black kin. If not physically, most students in Cassopolis are integrated in heart and mind. Thanks to the culture created by the early residents of Cassopolis, they are immersed in diversity well beyond contemporary politically correct phrases.

Providing culturally responsive art lessons is imperative in order to engage students. So often educators highlight a culture or ethnicity with which only some of the students can identify. The rest learn to appreciate interesting traditions and customs through art, but don't necessarily have an emotional connection to the information.

I try to connect to the essence of my students and agree with the Expressionist theory that "becoming aware of expressive qualities of art can bring children in touch with an emotional realm. Imaginative role-playing associated with creative acts produces a safe realm in which to

experience empathy. Children can imaginatively participate in allegorical depictions. They can safely experience emotions through their imaginative projections...” (Siegesmund, 1998).

Ugly Jugs: History Lost

Many people are unaware of Cassopolis: a small town with a big history. Much the same is the master narrative of slave pottery. Art history books laud the value of African Art but the historical work of slave potters appears to be completely ignored.

Years ago I was intrigued by images of anthropomorphic pottery. These symmetrical vessels with disturbing, crude faces have many names, two of which are Ugly Jugs or Face Vessels (Figure 4). All one has to do is look at this pottery to know there is story behind the expressive faces. Sadly and shamefully, nobody thought to record the history. Ugly Jugs, (as they have been dubbed by historians, but not necessarily by slave artists) are only recently being recognized as an important link to African American history. However we can only speculate why this art began, because Ugly Jugs were created by “property,” not skilled artisans.



Figure 4: Ugly Jug, Milwaukee Art Museum

Slave Potters: Information and Speculation

Before the Thirteenth Amendment, enslaved people created functional storage and cooking vessels. The lucrative Southern pottery industry depended on skilled artisans. Slaves dug clay along riverbeds, turned vessels on potter's wheels, and loaded huge underground kilns. Slave owners watched their workers carefully and controlled their every move. At some point in time these artists began adding faces to vessels. "Whenever African Americans were able to exert a degree of control over their working or living conditions, there usually merged interesting tangible signs of their concerns and values" (Vlach, 2012).

Nobody is able to confirm, but many historians agree that slaves began creating vessels with faces in the mid-1800s. Author Leonard Todd was attracted to the art form and began investigating slave pottery. To his surprise he learned that his ancestors owned the *only* artistically documented African American slave potter, a man named Dave. This was surely a slave name, as owners named and changed their slave's names as they saw fit. Even though he would have been under antebellum laws, Dave could read and was allowed write. For unknown reasons he was even permitted to sign his name to the pottery he created.

Mr. Todd believes there is strong evidence that Dave created at least one Ugly Jug. Furthermore, he has reason to believe that a slave named Romeo, (known as Cilucangy in Africa, who was brought to America on the slave ship known as the *Wanderer*) was the first slave to create an Ugly Jug in America (Figure 5). Romeo may have introduced Dave to the idea of adding faces to clay vessels, as documentation suggests that they worked at the same pottery, at the same time in Edgefield, South Carolina.

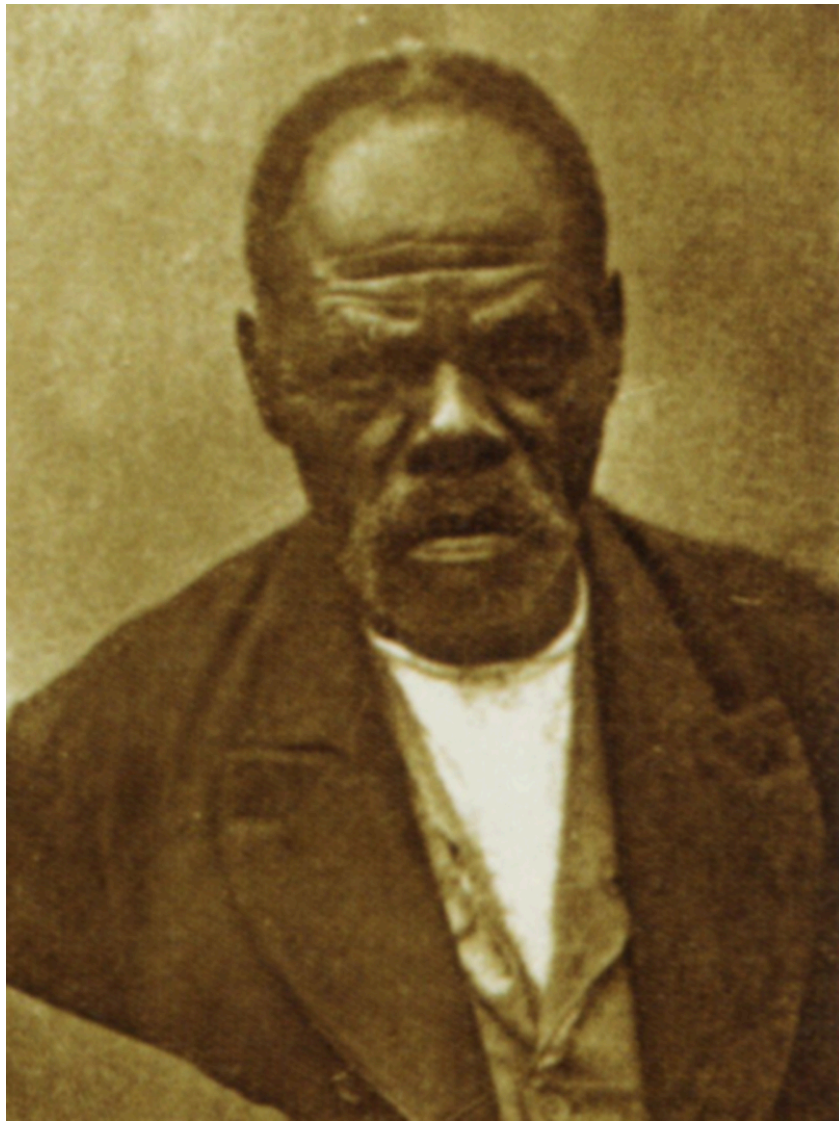


Figure 5: "Romeo" as a freed man

Around 200 vessels have been found, and so little is known about the slave artists that one can only speculate why Ugly Jugs were created. Some think that these jugs were a way for slaves to cling to a culture from which they were kidnapped. The faces might have implied ancestral devotion just as African masks and effigies. Shards of Ugly Jugs have been found at grave sites. It is theorized that slaves believed that if the vessel broke within the first year after a loved one's death that their soul was wrestling with the devil. It is also possible that the face on the jugs depicted a terrifying slave owner. This may have been the slave's quiet way of venting frustrations. A more paranoid viewpoint theorized that the vessels were used for mysterious voodoo rituals.

It is my opinion that they were created to fill a spiritual need. The people who made the Ugly Jugs came from Africa where masks were worn in secret dance rituals (Figure 6). When a dancer donned a mask, it was believed that he was no longer himself, but instead became the creature or deity that the mask represented. African tribes also created effigies of functional art that enabled the user spiritual power or blessings.

It is my opinion that the artists who created the Ugly Jugs were combining the idea of the functional effigy and ceremonial mask. Since slaves were not allowed luxuries, these vessels were of practical use and held food or drink. Slaves may have believed that they took on the spirit and strength of the being depicted on the jug from which they ate or drank. I am more resolved in my opinion after reading the following from Diane Bacha. "It's known that more than 100 of the *Wanderer's* unwilling passengers were sent to the Edgefield region at around the time face jugs first emerged. Most of these new slaves were from Kongo societies (not to be confused with the Congo), a culture with a tradition of sacred vessels, or nkisi, that attract and channel spiritual powers."

Cassopolis Students: Engaging, Empathizing, and Expressing

The reasons remain elusive why slave artists added human features to pottery. Art is a curriculum in which students can act upon their curiosities, reflect on cultures, decide where all of it fits into their life, and visually express their opinions. The fact that there is not a definitive explanation that addresses the existence of Ugly Jugs seems to intrigue my high school learners all the more.

Within the Ugly Jug Unit I introduce all the theories of which I am aware. Curiously, students in Cassopolis most often embrace the theory that Ugly Jugs were created to depict the face of a cruel master. That may be because my students' teen lives are filled with strife and challenges, but I tend to believe that this engaging artwork unleashes the collective consciousness.

Students begin building their vessel after we discuss the theories surrounding the creation of Ugly Jugs. As their vessels grow taller and their hand-building techniques improve, they are (without being aware of it) internalizing and empathizing with the slave potters. The finished product is an externalization of the students' understanding and hypothesis as to why slave artists may have originally added ugly faces to vessels. The final expressions on students' Ugly Jugs vary from extremely disturbing to joyful. The Slave Narratives further express how each student identifies with the subject matter. As Jiwon Kim so perfectly states, "Imagination provides both self-knowledge and knowledge of other people.... provide[s] the means for understanding—of self, others, institutions, [and] cultures (Kim, 2009). Black, white, and biracial students in Cassopolis feel kinship across the line of ethnicity. This is the perfect assignment to help students connect with their ancestors who began this rich interracial accepting culture.



Figure 6: Cassopolis art students building their vessels



Figure 7: Cassopolis students' Ugly Jugs dry before bisque firing.



Figure 8: Student Artwork- Kathryn Templeton

Slave Narrative by Student Kathryn Templeton

Caroline and The Ugly Jug

Only being 12 years old, getting sent away from everything you once called home, and not knowing where you will end up is kinda hard to take in. My family came from Africa. My mom don't really remember exactly where in Africa.

Hi my names Caroline. I was a slave till I was about 30. By the time I was 30, it was illegal for people to keep slaves, so I was let go. After I got let go I got a job doing housework for some people. When I got enough money, I hired someone to teach me how to read and write.

My mom was a slave for many years. While she was at a plantation my mom met a man. They snuck out to see each other almost every night. When the owner found out my mom was pregnant, he killed my father and sent my mom off to a different plantation.

At this plantation the owner's wife made him keep us together till I was old enough to do things without her. After the owner's wife had gone missing I started picking fruit and mom was sent out to the fields. Sometimes we got to see each other but not very often.

After I was old enough, they put me in the fields planting stuff and tending to the crops. When I first started, they whipped me because I worked too slow. My mom saw the bruises and asked what they were from, so I told her. She got really mad and said "If they hurt you again tell me and I will take care of it. No one beats my baby girl."

A couple days later I got really sick and they still sent me out to the fields and made me work. I was really slow because I was coughing. Since I was slow they whipped me. They whipped me so bad I could barely move. My mom heard me screaming and ran over and went off on them.

She got reported to the owner and the next day we both were ordered to his office. She got yelled at for trying to help me. He said, "Maybe, if this little girl would do her work she wouldn't get whipped."

After he said that my mom got so mad she hit him. His nose started to bleed. He pulled out a knife and stabbed my mom till she was dead. I saw the whole thing. I was sitting right there. I couldn't believe my mom was gone. Now I had nobody. The next day I was shipped to a different plantation. The difference is this owner didn't beat me. He was really nice. When I got there he told me I was going to be taught how to make pottery and that would be my job. I made an ugly jug, which is a jug with a ugly face. I made this in resemblance of my previous owner. I made his eyes red because of when he killed my mom, and because when I looked in his eyes I saw an evil soul.

He was yelling all the time and only had some teeth. That's why his mouth is wide opened with only a few teeth. The ugly jug is pink because he sat on his butt every day and never got any sun. I really hate that man.

After I was freed from slavery I found out where my previous owner lived. That's where I was headed. Back to the place where I last saw my mom; where that horrible man lived.

When I got there I asked for him and they said he died. They said he killed his wife and many more women, so all the men slaves got together, and went after him. They beat him to death. I was happy to hear that because that's what that terrible man gets for not only killing not only my mom, but all those other people too.



Figure 9: Student Artwork: Janye' Butts

Slave Narrative by Student Janye' Butts

July 1835

My name is Silvia and I am 13 years old and my family and I are slaves. I love to write in my diary me and my sister made. I have to be very safe and only write at night, and hide it under the floors in the cabin. So my masta don't see that I can write or read. Slaves that are caught doing those things face big consequence as I have heard.

July 1836

One night I overheard my grandma talking about things called "ugly jugs". So I decided to make one of my own, since I always dreamed of being a princess I decided to make mine look like one. I gave her red berry lip oil because that's what Mrs. Allen always wears and its "BEAUTIFUL" I have rolling eyes to show the relationship between those white folk and I. I made my ugly jug a reflection of myself.

July 1837

I've always wondered what it would be like to dress nice and have nice things. Like my masta's wife Mrs. Allen, she wears all types of things I would love to wear.

July 1838

Dreams are never an option for people my color. Well that's always what I heard from other people like me. But deep down in my heart I know dreams are real and can come true. Like my grandmamma told me, never give up on something you really want.

July 1839

My masta thinks I'm so dumb, today he looked at me and said, "Gal do you know the difference between fried and baked chicken?" "I just looked at him and rolled my eyes, and said "Yes masta", I'm sorry I made a mistake.

July 1840

I hate the name Sue. That's what those white folk out there call me, but really they don't know my name is Silvia. That's what my family calls me. Sometimes I just want to yell it out, but everything has a consequence for colored people.

July 1841

I wish I wasn't black!

July 1842

Today my friend Anna got sold to one of them rich white dumb folk. I hate those people. They think they can have anything they want.

July 1848

I'm back! My masta let one of them ugly dogs search our cabin to make sure we wasn't hidden nothing. My diary was almost found, so I had to stop writen.

July 1849

I wish I was one of them white folk at times so I could see the world beyond here. I know somewhere people like me live better than this.

July 1850

I would LOVE to be princess!

July 1851

Red is my favorite color, so after I get done working in the kitchen, I go to the cabin and put on my red berry lip oil and act like I'm someone I'm not.

July 1852

One day I hope all this will be over and I can be a princess as my father tells me I am every day.
IT'S ME SILVIA!

My Artwork: Finding “Ugly”

I was inspired as I watch my students create Ugly Jugs and write their Slave Narratives. I began my body of artwork without focus, and soon realized I was off track. Just as I had instructed my students that their jug had to represent someone, I also had to follow the same criteria in order to build a unified thesis exhibit. I needed to find “ugly”.

I discovered my inspiration as I researched the Kentucky Raid. The spirit of Sheriff Graves and the Kentucky bounty hunters were the perfect depictions for my ugly Jugs.

As I added faces to the vessels, I mentally created a character, much like an author would. Then I stepped into the spirit of these men; remembering that they were racists, and at the same time, they thought they were simply doing a job commissioned by law-abiding citizens. The third step was to imagine the terror the Cass County ex-slaves experienced, as their cabins were stormed in the early morning hours of August 17, 1847. To fully empathize with the African American families whose lives were turned upside down, I had to imagine I was looking at the Raiders.



Figure 10: Thesis Artwork “Sheriff Graves”



Figure 11: Thesis Artwork "Swamp"



Figure 12: Thesis Artwork "Deacon"

Ugly Jug Lesson Plan



Birmingham Museum of Art
www.artsbma.org

Ugly Jugs

Instructor: Shelly Johnson

Grades: 9 - 12

Class: Ceramics

Allocated Time: Ten - 55-minute Class Periods

Outcome

In this lesson students learn about and reflect upon how it may have felt to be a slave potter in the south during the antebellum era. Students will imagine and express themselves as slave artists through visual and language arts.

Objectives

The Learner will

- Hand-build a sturdy symmetrical vessel using the coil method.
- Pull at least one handle correctly and securely attach it to the vessel.
- Understand vocabulary regarding technique and slave pottery.
- Add an expressive face to the vessel from the point of view of a slave potter.
- Students will learn about the history of slavery during the antebellum era.
- Write a personal slave narrative - to accompany a photo of their Ugly Jug on art web site.

Visual Art Standards

- 1.3 Demonstrate understanding of organizational principles and methods to solve specific visual art problems.
- 2.2 Create artwork using materials and techniques with skill so that personal intentions are carried out.
- 3.5 Recognize and understand the relationships between personal experiences and the development of artwork.
- 4.3 Analyze the correlation between art, history, and culture throughout time.
- 5.7 Analyze the impact of visual culture on society.

Social Studies Standards

- K1.6 Analyze events and circumstances from the vantage point of others.

English Standards

- CE 1.1.8 Proofread to check spelling, layout, and font; and prepare selected pieces for a public audience.
- CE 1.2.3 Write, speak, and create artistic representations to express personal experience and perspective.

Materials

White clay
Glaze
Drying boards
Clay tools

Slip
Newspaper
Plastic bag

Resources

Online images of Authentic Ugly Jugs
Unchained Memories (DVD in library)
Slave Narrative: Mary Reynolds (teacher copy)
Coded slave song lyrics and translation
YouTube videos: Steal Away and Follow the Dipping Gourd
Handout: Symmetrical Coil Vessel instructions
Photos of expressive faces

Vocabulary

- Ugly Jug/Face Vessels
- Coil technique
- Symmetrical
- Score
- Slip
- Expressive features (ugly)
- Slave potters
- Dave the slave potter
- Romeo (slave potter)
- Coded slave song: signal song, map song
- Theory

Procedures

DAY ONE

Anticipatory Set

1. Play slave spirituals as students enter the room. (Musical)
2. Teacher: The music you heard was coded slave songs. While a listener might think that slaves were singing about Christian beliefs, Steal Away was actually a signal song. Slave owners often thought themselves righteous Christians. They would have been pleased to hear their slaves sing of a new found faith in Jesus. Many slave owners believed made it their duty to turn the unbelieving and therefore sinful African slaves into Christians. However, Steal Away was actually a song that signaled that it was time to “steal away” or escape slavery, and travel north to freedom.
3. Play the YouTube version of Mahalia Jackson performing Steal Away, and display the lyrics. (Musical, Linguistic, Intrapersonal)
4. Class watches scenes of Unchained Memories DVD (Visual, Linguistic, Interpersonal)
5. Teacher: Close your eyes and think about someone you know who you think is ugly. Now I am going to ask you a question that requires a bit of thought. Is the person physically ugly by our current standard of beauty or is that person’s ugliness coming from the inside? Give students time to reflect.

6. Teacher: Open your eyes. Besides a bad nose or funny chin (i.e. physical features) what makes a person ugly? Class discussion. (Intrapersonal, Interpersonal. Abstract-Random)
7. Teacher: Today we will begin to create something ugly.
8. Introduce Ugly Jugs (Visual, Linguistic, Interpersonal)
 - Who made them and why?
 - Stories about Dave (the slave potter) and Romeo (some historians believe he was the first slave potter to create an Ugly Jug in America).
 - Show online images of authentic slave-built Ugly Jugs.

DAY TWO

1. Play YouTube version of Follow the Drinking Gourd and display the lyrics and translation as students enter the room: (Musical)
2. Teacher: Do you remember what type of song Steal Away was? *Answers: Coded song. Signal song.*
3. Let's listen again to another kind of coded song. Follow the Drinking Gourd is a coded slave song called a map song. Map songs provided information to future runaway slaves. Map songs instructed escapees when to leave, where to go, and who will help. Follow the Drinking Gourd actually meant to follow points on the Big and Little Dippers, (which look like gourds and includes the North Star) to Canada.
4. Teacher: The initial Ugly Jug vessel was likely created by turners, (potters who made wheel thrown vessels). However there is evidence that these artists use additional techniques (i.e. coil technique) to finish the work. It is possible that one slave potter made the vessel and another added the face. Why might this have happened? *Answer: It took years of practice to become a skilled turner.*
5. Teacher demonstrates coil technique. (Visual, Abstract-Sequential)
 - Rolling and cutting slab
 - Rolling coils (1/4" thick)
 - Scoring and slipping coil to base
6. Teacher demonstrates how to make and use a template.
7. Students begin building. Display instructions for building a symmetrical coil vessel. (Bodily Kinesthetic, Concrete Sequential)

DAY THREE TO FINISH

1. Students build and finish symmetrical vessels. (Bodily-Kinesthetic, Logical-Mathematical Abstract-Sequential. Concrete-Sequential)
 - As individuals build and finish the vessels, remind them that they are going to create an expressive face. Ask students to imagine themselves as a slave potter and reflect upon why

they are creating an Ugly Jug. Remind them that they will be writing a narrative. (Intrapersonal, Concrete-Random)

2. When a few students are ready to create the face: teacher demonstrates how to build and add expressive facial features, and also how to pull and attach handles. (Visual, Abstract-Random, Concrete-Random)
3. Teacher will discuss personal aesthetic and composition.
4. Questions to ask students during the building process:
 - Why did slaves create Ugly Jugs? Why are these only theories?
 - What technique are we using to create Ugly Jugs? Is this the method of slave potters?
 - Who was Dave? Who was Romeo? Were these their real names?
 - Why do we use a template to build a symmetrical vessel?
 - Why is it important to score and smooth coils?
5. Students write Slave Narrative. This paper will be read and edited by a peer, turned into teacher for editing, re-written, typed and turned in to teacher. (Linguistic, Abstract-Random)

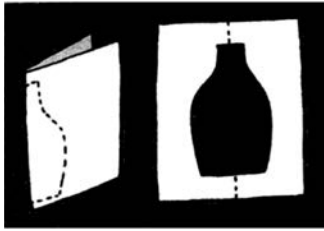
Closure

1. Questions:
 - What made Dave the slave potter unusual?
 - Who was Romeo?
 - Why did slaves become an important part of the Southern pottery industry?
 - What National law gave bounty hunters the right to cross state lines to capture runaway slaves?
2. Students present their Ugly Jug and narrative to the class. Short class critique follows each presentation. (Visual, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Linguistic, Abstract-Random)

Accommodations

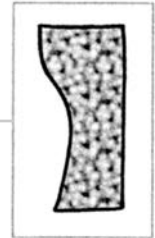
1. Wedge clay for students who are unable - due to mental or physical disabilities.
2. Select ceramic tools that enable students with difficulties to reach and manipulate of clay.

Symmetrical Coil Vessel



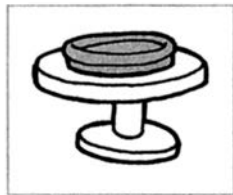
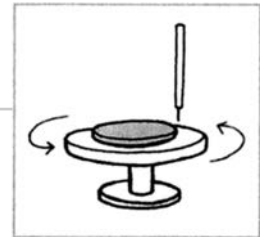
Fold a piece of construction paper in half, and on the fold; draw one side of a vessel shape. Cut the shape out, open the paper; decide if you like the shape.

Once you are satisfied with the vessel shape, cut out a cardboard template. Cut out only one side of the shape and eliminate the top and bottom space.



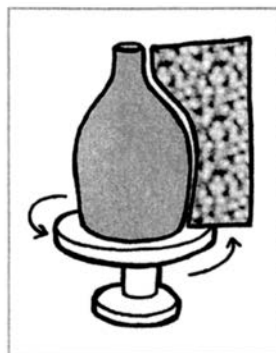
Roll a small slab and place it in the center of a trim wheel. Make sure the slab measures about 1/2" in depth.

Use the needle tool to trim a circle. This is easy to do if you rotate the trim wheel once you penetrate the clay slab. Remove the excess clay.



Roll an even coil and place it on the circular slab. Score the top edge of the circular slab where the coil is to be attached. Score the coil and slab so they join.

Continue to add coils on top of coils. Score edges so the clay from one coil mixes with the other. Begin smoothing the inside and outside edges once you get a few rows of coils built up on the walls of the vessel. Begin referring to the cardboard template for shape.



Continue to build coil walls. Spin the trim wheel, and carefully hold the template up to the spinning vessel. It is your aid in making sure the vessel ends up symmetrical. Texture may be added before the vessel is leather hard, either by pressing shapes into it or spinning the wheel and carving out crevasses.

Follow the Drinking Gourd

Lyrics and Translation

**When the sun comes back and the first quail calls,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
For the old man is waiting for to carry you to freedom,
If you follow the Drinking Gourd.**

When the sun comes back and the first quail calls

It was safest to cross the Ohio River when the water was frozen. Quails migrate south for the winter. Slaves knew that it was a safe season to travel when they heard quails call.

Follow the Drinking Gourd

A drinking gourd looks like the constellations the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper. A star on the Big Dipper aligns with the North Star, which is on the Little Dipper and points due north.

For the old man is waiting for to carry you to freedom

Old man is Peg Leg Joe, an actual or legendary man who acted as a Conductor on the Underground Railroad. Literal or not this verse meant there would be someone waiting to help.

**The river bank makes a very good road,
The dead trees show you the way,
Left foot, peg foot, traveling on
Follow the Drinking Gourd.**

The river bank makes a very good road

Travel along the banks of the Tombigbee River.

The dead trees show you the way, Left foot, peg foot

Look for trees that have been marked with mud drawings of a left foot and pegged foot. This mark distinguishes the Tombigbee River from others that run north and south.

**The river ends between two hills,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
There's another river on the other side,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.**

The river ends between two hills

The Tombigbee River turns into small streams and wetlands. Travel north over one hill.

There's another river on the other side

Runaway slaves should travel north to The Tennessee River.

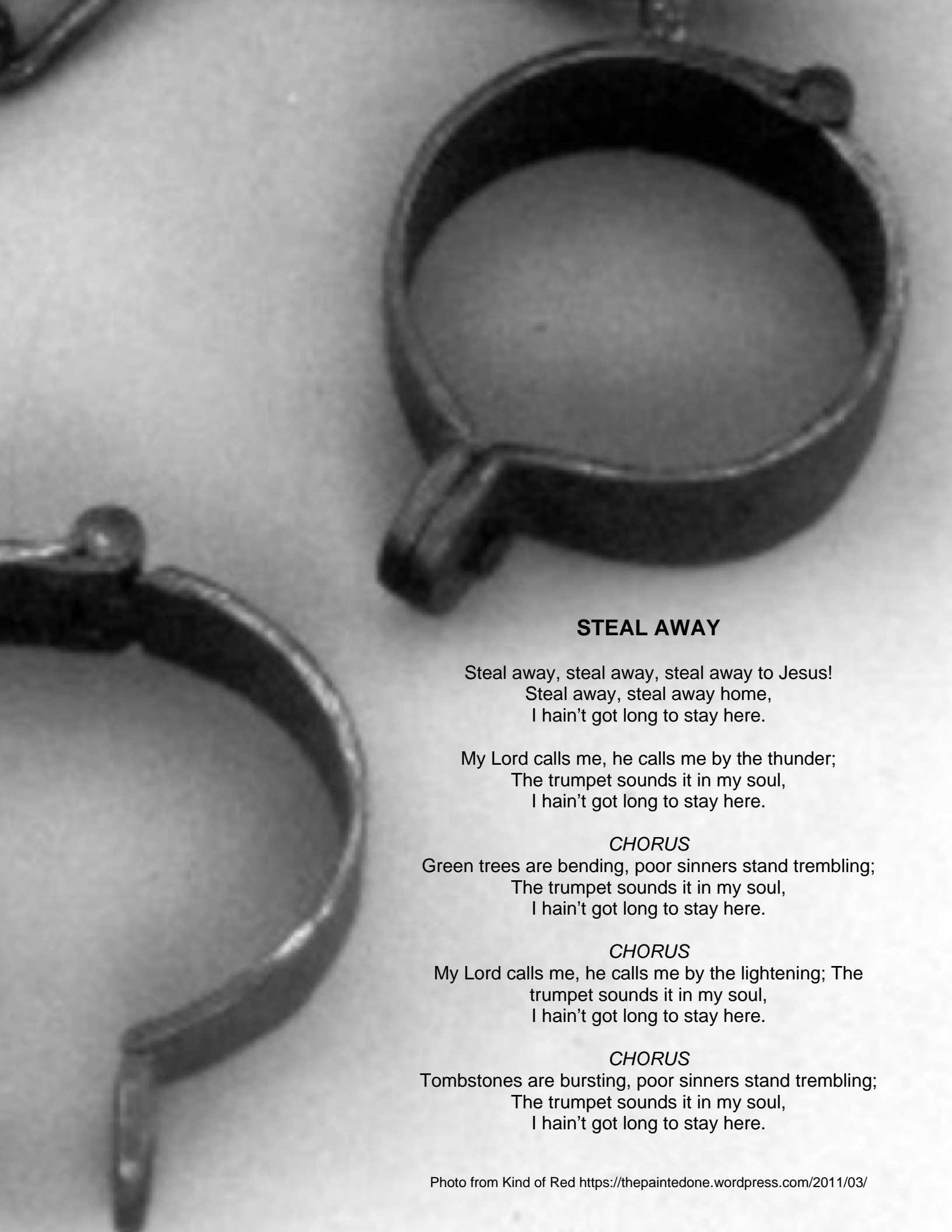
**Where the great big river meets the little river,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
For the old man is awaiting to carry you
to freedom if you follow the Drinking Gourd.**

Where the great big river meets the little river

The Tennessee joined the Ohio River. Slaves were to cross the Ohio River.

For the old man is awaiting to carry you to freedom

An Underground Railroad Conductor will meet them on the north bank of the Ohio River.



STEAL AWAY

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus!
Steal away, steal away home,
I hain't got long to stay here.

My Lord calls me, he calls me by the thunder;
The trumpet sounds it in my soul,
I hain't got long to stay here.

CHORUS

Green trees are bending, poor sinners stand trembling;
The trumpet sounds it in my soul,
I hain't got long to stay here.

CHORUS

My Lord calls me, he calls me by the lightening; The
trumpet sounds it in my soul,
I hain't got long to stay here.

CHORUS

Tombstones are bursting, poor sinners stand trembling;
The trumpet sounds it in my soul,
I hain't got long to stay here.

Student Reflection

Ceramics - Ugly Jug: Slave Pottery

Name _____

1. In your opinion, why did slaves create Ugly Jugs?
2. What was the most difficult part of this art assignment?
3. How did you solve this problem? *or* What *would* you do next time to avoid this difficulty?
4. What are you most proud of?

Student _____ Class Period _____

Ceramic Assignment: Ugly Jugs: Slave Pottery

CATAGORY	Rubric			
	Excellent 1	.75	Average .5	Needs Work 0
Objective				
<p>Student met all the objectives of the assignment and fully understood and executed target concept(s) or technique(s).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Student applied understanding of slavery and slave pottery to create a work of art that intentionally explores point of view, possible Ugly Jug origin, and expression. ○ Student is able to define and use vocabulary correctly. 				
Creativity				
<p>Student approached the assignment with unique ideas and surprising creativity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ugly Jug is expressive, and surprisingly unique. ○ Student's slave narrative is communicative of features on Ugly Jug. 				
Craftsmanship				
<p>Student implemented excellent craftsmanship throughout the artwork.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Vessel is sturdy, and handle and facial features are secure and correctly attached. ○ Vessel is symmetrical. ○ Vessel is free of unintentional texture (clay scraps, pocks, and bulges). ○ Glaze is applied with care and intentional use of color is apparent. 				
Growth				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ As evident in the reflection sheet, student shows growth in understanding and identifying key aspects of the visual arts. ○ Student took the time to develop the idea and build the assignment to the highest expectations. Accountable in finishing: (class time, lunch, after school, homework, etc) 				
Total Score out of 4				

Michigan Secondary Level Visual Art Standards: 1.3, 2.2, 3.5, 4.3, 5.7

Artist Statement

To say Cassopolis embraces diversity is an understatement. Among other towns in Cass County, Cassopolis boasts a distinctive culture. Black and white exists, but metaphorically speaking, the dominant color is gray.

Years ago I recognized the unusual racial harmony in Cassopolis, yet was puzzled as to how it came to be. When I learned about the Kentucky Raid I had an “Aha” moment. Many generations ago, Caucasians (led by the Quakers) living in Cass County became friends with ex-slaves. They worked together, fought together, and built a town that understood the importance of fellow human beings. This bond of human equality lives in the students today.

My goal as an educator is to create engaging units for high school students. At this age students are self-focused. They thrive when allowed to express personal experience and emotion.

As students build their vessels and improve ceramic skills they start to relate to the vessel as a newly created individual. It doesn't seem to matter whether or not the face on the vessel ends up being a villain or an ally. Once they begin devising a story behind the face, they become emotionally attached to the Ugly Jug. In my opinion, there are two reasons for this engagement and attachment. First, the visual interpretation of the slave narrative unfolds as the students create art with clay. Second, clay is an art medium that is earth itself. Just as the slave potters found life in clay, my students also feel that living force.

As an artist, I can't help but to be emotionally involved with clay. When working with clay we are essentially asking mud to stand up. As any potter understands, this is somewhat of a miracle. As I form and manipulate clay I am deeply aware of a positive connectedness with the earth. I usually embrace this harmonious attitude, but realized it was a hindrance as I struggled to create my thesis exhibit. It got in my way of creating artwork that expressed what I was trying to say.

The students' vessels and slave narratives helped guide me in making my art "ugly". Their personal experiences and expression unveiled during the creation of their ugly jugs helped me home in on the spirit of the Kentucky Raiders.

Once I knew my emphasis had to be the Raiders I fully understood and admired the fortitude and will of the collective consciousness in Cassopolis. The racial harmony we see now is due to the strength of ancestors who were willing to fight for human dignity. This obligation to protect a culture is much the same as the slave potters who were willing to risk life and limb in order to stay connected to the community from which they were kidnapped.

As this thesis comes to an end, I am satisfied to have been on a journey that honors the overlooked slave potters, the brave citizens of Cass County who risked their lives to defend the rights of all people, and the community of Cassopolis that continues to embrace unity and diversity. At the same time, the Ugly Jug Unit has engaged students and opened dialog about Cassopolis' unique and rich culture of diversity. My thesis is a celebration of the collective consciousness, diversity, expression, and visual art.

Appendix

The culmination of this thesis comes full circle when I sell the Ugly Jugs I create and donate 100% of the profits to the Cassopolis art department. This money is for the students in Cassopolis, who, after all, have been my inspiration.



With this signature, I give Mrs. Johnson permission to use my photograph (above) in her thesis paper.
(Student signatures from printed version are redacted).

Non-Exclusive License to Exhibition or Print
(sample form)

I, (student name) _____, grant Shelly Johnson license to print an image of my artwork in her thesis paper.

I also give Mrs. Johnson permission to include my name, my photo, photo of my artwork and artist statement and Slave narrative as part of her thesis paper. I also give her permission to use any of these in her thesis presentation.

I understand that I will receive no monetary compensation for m artwork.

I understand by granting Mrs. Johnson a non-exclusive license to my artwork, I am retaining the copyright* to my work.

I warrant that the artwork used for this project is an original work that is not a copy, reproduction, or rendering of another person's copyrighted work.

Student Full Name: _____

Title of Work: _____

Student Signature: _____

(Student signatures from printed version are redacted).

*Individuals automatically receive a copyright upon the creation of an original work.

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List of Interviews

Bright, R. Food Services, Cassopolis Public School District. Interview 2/2013

Hillsdale, S. Alumni of Cassopolis High School. Interview 3/2/2013

Mourning, L. Alumni of Cassopolis High School. Interview 3/2/2013

Parks, S. Cassopolis Public School District Homeless Liaison. Interview 3/2013

Wuepper, J. Cassopolis District Library Local History Branch Manager. Interview 2/2013

Additional Reading

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