

I Know a Man... Ashley Bryan: Resource and Activity Guide for Educators **Grades 4-6 English Language Arts and Visual Art**

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Introduction

"Ashley Bryan is a gentle activist, and I believe that history will remember him as one of the more important humanitarians of our time."

— Mary Laury, Schoodic Arts for All, Executive Director

I Know a Man... Ashley Bryan paints a tender portrait of a uniquely American life. An exploration of the work and philosophy of 95-year-old artist Ashley Bryan, this short film is rich with connections to English Language and Visual Arts content areas. By providing ideas for **discussions**, creative **activities**, and **resources** for students and teachers, this Educator Guide serves as a springboard for deeper learning in response to the film's topics and themes.

The film asks us to consider **Essential Questions**:

- How do people find "purpose"? What makes life worth living? Does this change as we get older? If so, how?
- What inspires artists to create? Can art be used to help people?

Each activity in this guide can stand alone or be done together in any order. Activities come complete with essential questions, material lists, and relevant core standards. Since you know your students best, we encourage you to adapt activities to serve your needs!

Pre-Viewing Discussion Questions

Time required: 5-10 minutes

Common Core State Standards: SL4-6.1; SL4-6.1c; SL4-6.1d

Before the film, get students thinking about the **Essential Questions**. Try these prompts:

1. Do you know anyone older than 90 years old? What do you know about their life story? What questions would you like to ask a person who was born nearly one hundred years ago? (*Goal: think about how life changes as people age, and the wisdom and challenges of a long lifetime*)
2. Who comes to mind when students hear the word "artist"? Do they think mostly of visual artists, or musicians, writers, or actors as well? Can they think of any artists who make more than one form of art? (*Goal: think about all the different*

ways people can make art, and think about their reasons for making art in different forms)

Watch and Write: Artist Mediums

Common Core State Standards: L4-6.6; RI4-6.7

A **medium** is a material, method, or form an artist uses to communicate their message. Before watching the film, see how many artistic mediums your students can name (*paint, clay, glass, colored pencils, watercolors...*) As your students watch, have them each make their own list of the mediums Ashley Bryan uses or mentions.

After watching, compare lists. How many mediums were mentioned in total? Did you name them all? Which medium was your favorite?

Key: In the film, we see Bryan create paintings, sea glass mosaics, puppets, sketches, poetry, stories, paper cut-out illustrations, and linoleum block prints.

Vocabulary: Reference Glossary

Below is a list of terms, references, and definitions your students may not be familiar with that appear in *I Know A Man...Ashley Bryan*. You may choose to hand out the list or review only the items that you anticipate will be new for your class.

Portfolio: A set of pieces of creative work intended to demonstrate a person's ability to a potential employer.

(<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/portfolio>)

The draft: Mandatory recruitment into the military.

(<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/draft>)

World War Two: A war (1939–45) in which the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) were defeated by an alliance eventually including the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and the United States.

(https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/second_world_war)

Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Two cities in Japan. Hiroshima was the target of the first atom bomb, which was dropped by the United States in 1945 and resulted in the deaths of about one third of the city's population. Together with a second attack on Nagasaki three days later, this led to Japan's surrender and the end of the Second World War.

(<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hiroshima>)

Spirituals- A religious song of a kind associated with black Christians of the southern U.S., thought to derive from the combination of European hymns and African musical elements by black slaves.

(<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/spiritual>)

Sea Glass- Physically and chemically weathered glass found on beaches along bodies of saltwater. Sea glass is nature's way of recycling bottles, jars, and other man-made glass! (<https://bytheseajewelry.com/what-is-sea-glass-or-beach-glass/>)

Langston Hughes- (1902–67), Black American writer. He began his career with *The Weary Blues* (1926), a series of poems on black themes using blues and jazz rhythms. (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hughes,_langston)

Socrates- (469–399 BC), Greek philosopher.

(<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/socrates>)

Post-Viewing Discussion Questions

Common Core State Standards: RI4-6.3; SL4-6.1

Time required: 5-10 minutes

Use the below questions for a conversation as a whole class, or split students into groups, assigning them each a question. If time allows, encourage students to represent their answers creatively, in both written and visual or performance form. (Ideas: posters, murals, paper sculptures, songs, or dances.) Anticipated responses are included next to each question in italics.

1. "I know a man like a child..." What does Ashley Bryan mean when he describes himself this way in his poem? Is he childlike, and if so, how? Why might it be difficult for people to stay "childlike"? (*Ashley Bryan mentions that everyone has an "inner child," which he maintains through his work, teaching children, and learning new skills and mediums.*)
2. Did you notice any deeper meaning to Bryan's *Beautiful Blackbird* book? Can stories like these be effective in sending messages about serious topics? Why or why not? (*Beautiful Blackbird sends an anti-racist message. If practical for your group, consider reading the book and having a larger discussion about fables and allegory.*)
3. What obstacles did Ashley Bryan overcome on his journey to become a successful artist? Have those obstacles influenced his art? (*Bryan's art about racism and Black American traditions are informed by obstacles he overcame: growing up in poverty, segregation and racism when applying to college, getting drafted for WWII*)

Activity: "I Know A..." Poetry Writing

Time required: 40-50 minutes

Common Core State Standards: RL4-6.2, RL4-6.10, W.4-6.3d

Essential Question: How do people find "purpose"? What makes life worth living as we age?

Suggested Materials:

- Writing paper
- Art paper
- Colored pencils, crayons, or markers

The Artist, by Ashley Bryan

I know a man, like a child
He loves to paint
He can paint anything he sets his heart to.
He knows that to have anything he loves
He can have it fair and forever
If he paints a picture of it.
He knows that to face anything that hurts he can do it.
Transform the sorrow if he paints a picture of it.
This is how he lives
This is what he does.

Activity:

1. Pass out copies of the above poem, featured in the beginning of the film, and read it aloud as a class. The first four words serve as the film's title, and the themes relate to the Essential Question about aging. Ask students what they think the poem tells us about Ashley Bryan. Why does he love to paint?
2. Have students make a list of some of their own interests and favorite activities. (*Ex: sports, art forms, social activities, school subjects*)

- _____ by _____
- I know a _____
(description of themselves)
- He/she loves _____
(favorite activity)
- One line about how they like to do the activity
Three lines about why they like the activity
(Including how the activity makes them feel)
- Two lines about how they hope to do the activity in the future
- This is how he/she _____.
(verb)
- This is what he/she _____.
(verb)

- Paper plates, cups, or bowls
- Pom poms or cotton balls
- Straws or toothpicks
- Legos or old blocks
- Pebbles, twigs, leaves, flowers or shells
- Newspapers and magazines
- Felt, foam, or fabric scraps
- Sea glass
- Broken toys, odds and ends (anything that can be repurposed)
- Anything else you can imagine!

Activity:

Ashley Bryan uses **found objects** to make puppets. Found objects are natural or man-made objects that are found by an artist and repurposed into an artistic material. Often, artists will use objects to inspire their work, taking notice of their shape, color, or texture to spark their imagination. Recycling existing materials helps both the art and the Earth's environment!

You might choose to offer the option to make either a puppet or a portrait, or structure this activity around one form in particular. Your available materials can help guide this decision. Large materials like boxes, bags, cardboard, and fabric make good bases for puppets. Smaller materials, assembled on canvas or poster board, are best for portraits.

Prep: Asking students to aid in the object finding process can be helpful for you and fun for them. Search around home or your school for anything that seems interesting—think outside the box! Plan how to best arrange objects/supplies “buffet style” in your classroom, so students can select the objects most inspirational to them.

1. Each student should imagine a famous person, historical figure, or fictional character/mythological figure who inspires them. They should spend some time looking at photos or doing other research about their chosen person. You might choose to narrow this prompt by focusing on a time period or fictional work you are studying.
2. Give students no more than ten minutes to select found objects from the “buffet” to use for either a puppet or a portrait of their chosen person. Encourage them to not think too hard about what they will use each object for—instead choosing objects they are inspired by, or that remind them of the person.
3. Use the remaining time to construct the puppets and/or portraits. Portraits can be assembled by gluing objects to poster board, foam core, or another thick material. For bigger objects, hot glue may be necessary.
4. Have each student write a short “Artist Statement” about their puppet and/or portrait. Why does their chosen person inspire them? Do any of their found objects have special meaning related to the subject?
5. Display the finished portraits and/or puppets around the room. Can students tell what person inspired each artwork? What were some of the most interesting object choices?
6. **Puppet Show Extension:** If students made puppets, give them a chance to use them in performance! Students can work in groups of 2-3 to script, rehearse, and perform a short piece featuring their puppet characters. Depending on the people who inspired their work, they might choose to structure the scene as a conversation between different famous figures, or a re-enactment of an event in

history or literature. Encourage students to create a “stage” for the puppets that hides the arms of the puppeteers, using large boxes, desks, or paper.

Resources

Ashley Bryan Center Website: <https://ashleybryancenter.org/index.html>

Hanoch Piven, Found Object Portrait Artist: <http://www.pivenworld.com/>

Found Object Art Information: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/f/found-object>