

# Teacher Resource: Bill Traylor: Drawings from the Collections of the High Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts

#### Introduction

Use this resource to prepare your students for a visit to see this exhibition or as follow-up after your visit. This exhibition can complement your K-12 curricula in language arts, social studies, math, and/or visual arts.

## Bill Traylor: Drawings from the Collections of the High Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts

This exhibition includes approximately 63 drawings and paintings by self-taught Alabama artist Bill Traylor. Traylor began making art near the end of his life, and his works are notable for their flat, simply defined shapes and vibrant compositions in which memories and observations relating to African American life are merged. Traylor is recognized as one of the finest American artists of the 20th century.

#### **About Bill Traylor**

Bill Traylor (1854?–1949) was born into slavery on a plantation in Alabama. After emancipation, he continued to live and work on the plantation until sometime before 1928, when he moved to Montgomery. There he worked as a laborer until he was physically unable to continue, then began receiving modest government assistance. Under the challenging conditions of Depression-era Alabama, Traylor survived on the streets in the then primarily black enclave of Monroe Avenue. He slept on the floor of local businesses and spent his days sitting on the sidewalks, creating the more than 1,200 drawings.

Using modest materials, Traylor recorded events from his past as well as his observations of life in the Monroe Avenue area. Traylor sold or gave most of his work to Charles Shannon, a local artist who befriended him, for modest sums or in exchange for art supplies. Shannon preserved Traylor's artworks for approximately forty years before reintroducing them to the public in the 1970s, and they now rank among the most important examples of self-taught art ever created.

#### **Drawings of People**

The human figures that appear in many of Traylor's lively drawings represent particular people who passed by as he sat on the sidewalk creating his drawings. The place where he drew was in the heart of Montgomery's African American community, boasting numerous black-owned and -operated businesses and an African American middle class eager for the latest music, fashion, and style. This was the bustling, chaotic, thriving black community that Traylor chronicled.

#### **Drawings of Animals**

Animals feature prominently in Bill Traylor's imagery. A large portion of his work is devoted to pictures of farm animals he remembered in vivid detail from the plantation on which he worked for much of his life. He repeatedly drew solitary images of chickens, pigs, goats, cows, horses, and mules, conveying a sense of individuality in each one. In addition, exotic animals were featured in the annual parade that came through Montgomery. Some years the parade route went through the neighborhood where Traylor drew, quite possibly the inspiration for some of his exotic animal drawings.

#### **Drawings of Constructions and Exciting Events**

Bill Traylor was once asked what was going on in a particular drawing, and he simply replied, "That's an exciting event." From this, his animated, multi-figure compositions have come to be known as "Exciting Events." Many include constructions with organic or architectural elements, or combinations of both. Some of these puzzling objects probably have their origins in things from the plantation, while others may have been inspired by Montgomery's urban landscape near the streets where Traylor sat to draw. These drawings remain mysterious and compelling in their ambiguity, encouraging viewers to supply their own narratives.

#### K-12 Lesson and Activity Ideas

#### Art

#### No Mistakes

Bill Traylor never erased when creating his artwork. Have students sketch a portrait of a classmate without any erasing.

#### Right Outside Your Front Door

Bill Traylor sat on Monroe Avenue and drew depictions of the people and events around him. Have students sit in front of the school and create a work of art that depicts the people, places, and events they see.

#### Remember When

Many of Traylor's drawings depict animals and events from his time on the plantation. Have students create a work of art that depicts an early memory, perhaps of a pet.

#### Reuse and Recycle

Even though his friend Charles Shannon would supply him with new pieces of poster board, Bill Traylor preferred to create his artworks on cast-off pieces of cardboard found in the street. He was inspired by the smudges, marks, and stains on them. Ask students to create a work of art on recycled materials found at home or at school (ie. inside of a cereal box or on the back of an old assignment).

#### Get Excited

Traylor described his drawings that depict action as "exciting events." Have students create a work of art that depicts an exciting event from their own lives.

#### Social Studies and U.S. History

#### Focus on Folk Artists

Bill Traylor was born a slave on a plantation in Alabama. After being emancipated, he continued to work on the plantation for many years before moving to Montgomery. His years on the plantation had a significant influence on his artwork. Assign a research project where each student investigates both the artworks and the life of an American folk artist, focusing on how the artist's life influenced their work. In addition to Traylor, suggested artists include Howard Finster, Mattie Lou O'Kelley, Lonnie Holley, Thornton Dial, Ulysses Davis, Nellie Mae Rowe, Jimmy Lee Sudduth, and Mose Tolliver.

#### **Building Communities**

The street in Montgomery where Bill Traylor lived and worked was at the heart of the city's African American community. African Americans wanted to buy from one another to support the community and the neighborhood flourished, boasting black-owned and –operated newspapers, restaurants, rooming houses, pharmacies, and banks, all frequented by an African American middle class. Ask students to select, research, and present about a historically African American neighborhood or community.

#### **Language Arts**

#### Say What?

As a class, examine one of Traylor's drawings that depict two people interacting with one another. Have students work in pairs to name the characters, describe their personalities, then write and perform a dialogue between the two.

#### Before, During, and After

Present students with one of Traylor's depictions of an "exciting event." As them to examine it closely, then write about what happened right before this moment, what is happening in this moment, and what will happen next.

#### Compare and Contrast

Show students two of Traylor's similar drawings of either people or animals. Ask them to create a chart where they compare and contrast the two works of art using descriptive words.

#### Math

#### Shaping Up

Bill Traylor used basic geometric shapes as the foundation for the majority of his drawings. Photocopy images of some of Traylor's drawings, then have students outline the basic shapes that make up the composition.

#### Get in Shape

Have students create their own work of art using basic geometric shapes. For younger students, provide stencils or cutouts for them to trace. Encourage students to enhance these shapes to create a person, place, or animal.

#### Vocabulary

<u>Folk art</u>: Created by people who had little or no formal artistic training. They may not have known or cared about the "acceptable" artistic styles of the time. These people may not have made a living by making art and likely did not know other artists.

<u>Self-taught artist</u>: Someone who creates art but has not had any formal training. They may have seen artworks by others, but they choose to rely on their instincts and create art their own way, with little interest in making it acceptable to the art world.

#### Resources

<u>Richard Panchyk, American Folk Art for Kids with 21 Activities</u>: Contains student-friendly explanations of the different types of folk art and folk artists and includes a variety of art-making activities inspired by American folk artists.

<u>Folk Art Revealed</u>: Developed by the American Folk Art Museum, this resource provides over forty folk art lesson plans for teacher of grades K-12. <a href="http://www.folkartrevealed.org/lessons">http://www.folkartrevealed.org/lessons</a>

<u>Faces and Places</u>: Developed by the National Gallery of Art, this online tool allows students to create folk-art inspired portraits and landscapes. http://www.nga.gov/kids/zone/facesplaces.htm

### **Georgia Performance Standards**

A docent-guided tour of *Bill Traylor: Drawings from the Collections of the High Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts* and the corresponding activities in this resource can support the following Georgia Performance Standards:

#### **Kindergarten**

#### Social Studies

SSKCG1

The student will retell stories that illustrate positive character traits and how the people in the stories show the qualities of honesty, patriotism, loyalty, courtesy, respect, truth, pride, self-control, moderation, and accomplishment.

#### **Mathematics**

MKG1 Students will correctly name simple two and three-dimensional figures, and recognize

them in the environment.

MKG2 Students will understand basic spatial relationships.

MKD1 Students will pose information questions, collect data, organize, and display results using

objects, pictures, and picture graphs.

#### Reading/Language Arts

ELAKR1 The student demonstrates knowledge of concepts of print.

ELAKR5 The student acquires and uses grade-level words to communicate effectively.

ELAKLSV1 The student uses oral and visual skills to communicate.

#### Visual Arts

VAKMC.1 Engages in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas.

VAKMC.2 Formulates personal responses.

VAKMC.3 Selects and uses subject matter, symbols, and/or ideas to communicate meaning.

VAKCU.1 Identifies artists and offers ideas about what art is and who artists are.

VAKCU.2 Views and discusses selected artworks.

VAKAR.1 Discusses his or her own artwork and the artwork of others.

VAKAR.2 Utilizes a variety of approaches to understand and critique works of art.

VAKC.1 Applies information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production

of artworks.

VAKC.2 Develops life skills through the study and production of art.

#### Grade 1

#### **Mathematics**

M1M1 Students will compare and/or order the length, height, weight, or capacity of two of more

objects by using direct comparison or a nonstandard unit.

M1G1 Students will study and create various two and three-dimensional figures and identify

basic figures (squares, circles, triangles, and rectangles) within them.

M1G2 Students will compare, contrast, and/or classify geometric shapes by the common

attributes of position, shape, size, number of sides, and number of corners.

M1G3 Students will arrange and describe objects in space by proximity, position, and direction

(near, far, below, above, up, down, behind, in front of, next to, and left or right of).

#### Reading/Language Arts

ELA1R5 The student acquires and uses grade-level words to communicate.
ELA1LSV1 The student uses oral and visual strategies to communicate.

#### Visual Arts

VA1MC.1 Engages in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas.

VA1MC.2 Formulates personal responses.

VA1MC.3 Selects and uses subject matter, symbols, and/or ideas to communicate meaning.

VA1CU.1 Identifies artists as creative thinkers who make art and share ideas.

VA1CU.2 Views and discusses selected artworks.

VA1AR.1 Discusses his or her artwork and the artwork of others.

VA1AR.2 Uses a variety of approaches to understand and critique works of art.

VA1C. 1 Applies information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production

of artworks.

VA1C. 2 Develops life skills through the study and production of art.

#### Grade 2

#### Mathematics

M2G1 Students will describe and classify plane figures (triangles, square, rectangle, trapezoid,

quadrilateral, pentagon, hexagon, and irregular polygonal shapes) according to the number of sides and vertices and the sized of angles (right angle, obtuse, acute).

M2G2 Students will describe and classify solid geometric figures (prisms, pyramids, cylinders,

cones, and spheres) according to such things as the number of edges and vertices and the

number and shape of faces and angles.

Students will describe the change in attributes as two and three-dimensional shapes are M<sub>2</sub>G<sub>3</sub>

cut and rearranged.

#### Reading/Language Arts

The student acquires and uses grade-level words to communicate. ELA2R3 The student uses oral and visual strategies to communicate. ELA<sub>2</sub>LSV<sub>1</sub>

#### Visual Arts

VA2MC.1	Engages in the cr	eative process to	generate and visualize ideas.

VA2MC.2 Formulates personal responses.

VA2MC.3 Selects and uses subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning. Identifies artists as creative thinkers who make art and share their ideas. VA2CU.1

Views and discusses selected artworks. VA2CU.2

Discusses his or her artwork and the artwork of others. VA2AR.1

Uses a variety of approaches to understand and critique works of art. VA2AR.2

Applies information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production VA2C. 1

of artworks.

#### Grade 3

#### Reading/Language Arts

ELA<sub>3</sub>R<sub>2</sub> The student acquires and uses grade-level words to communicate effectively.

ELA<sub>3</sub>LSV<sub>1</sub> The student uses oral and visual strategies to communicate.

#### Visual Arts

VA3MC.1	Engages in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas	ς.
V 1 1, 31/1 C 1	brigages in the creative process to generate and visualize ideal	• ∙

VA3MC.2 Formulates personal responses to visual imagery.

VA3MC.3 Selects and uses subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning.

VA3CU.1 Investigates and discovers the personal relationship of artist to community, culture, and

world through making and studying art.

Views and discusses selected artworks. VA3CU.2

Discusses his or her artwork and the artwork of others. VA3AR.1

VA3AR.2 Uses a variety of approaches to understand and critique works of art.

VA<sub>3</sub>C.1 Applies information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production

of artworks.

Develops life skills through the study and production of art. VA<sub>3</sub>C.<sub>2</sub>

#### Grade 4

#### Reading/Language Arts

ELA4R3 The student understands and acquires new vocabulary and uses it correctly in reading

and writing.

The student participates in student-to-teacher, student-to-student, and group verbal

ELA4LSV1 interactions.

The student listens to and views various forms of text and media in order to gather and ELA4LSV2 share information, persuade others, and express and understand ideas.

#### Visual Arts

VA4MC.1 Engages in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas.

VA4MC.2 Formulates personal responses to visual imagery.

Selects and uses subject matter, symbols, and/or ideas to communicate meaning. VA4MC.3

Investigates and discovers the personal relationship of artist to community, culture, and VA4CU.1 world through making and studying art. VA4CU.2 Views and discusses selected artworks. Uses a variety of approaches to understand and critique works of art. VA4AR.2 Explains how selected elements and principles of design are used in artwork to convey VA4AR.3 meaning and how they affect personal responses to and evaluation of the artwork. VA4C.1 Applies information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production of artworks.

#### Grade 5

VA4C.2

#### Social Studies

SS5H1 The student will explain the causes, major events, and consequences of the Civil War. The student will analyze the effects of Reconstruction on American Life. SS5H2 The student will describe how life changed in America at the turn of the century.

SS5H3

Develops life skills through the study and production of art.

#### Reading/Language Arts

The student understands and acquires new vocabulary and uses it correctly in reading ELA5R3 and writing. The student participates in student-to-teacher, student-to-student, and group verbal ELA5LSV1 interactions. The student listens to and views various forms of text and media in order to gather and ELA5LSV2

share information, persuade others, and express and understand ideas.

#### Visual Arts

VA5MC.1 Engages in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas. VA5MC.2 Formulates personal responses to visual imagery. Selects and uses subject matter, symbols, and/or ideas to communicate meaning. VA5MC.3 Investigates and discovers the personal relationship of artist to community, culture, and VA5CU.1 world through making and studying art. Views and discusses selected artworks. VA5CU.2 VA5AR.2 Uses a variety of approaches to understand and critique works of art. Explains how selected elements and principles of design are used in artwork to convey VA5AR.3 meaning and how they affect personal responses to and evaluation of the artwork. Applies information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production VA5C.1 of artworks. Develops life skills through the study and production of art.

#### Grade 6

VA5C.2

#### Reading/Language Arts

The student participates in student-to-teacher, student-to-student, and group verbal ELA6LSV1 interactions. ELA6LSV2 The student listens to and views various forms of text and media in order to gather and

share information, persuade others, and express and understand ideas.

#### Visual Arts

VA6MC.1 Engages in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas. VA6MC.2 Identifies and works to solve visual problems through creative thinking, planning, and/or experimenting with art materials, tools and techniques.

Interprets how artists communicate meaning in their work. VA6MC.3

VA6MC.4	Engages in dialogue about his or her artwork and the artwork of others.
VA6CU.1	Discovers how the creative process relates to art history.
VA6CU.2	Investigates and discovers personal relationship to community, culture, and the world through making and studying art.
VA6AR.2	Critiques personal artworks as well as artwork of others using visual and verbal approaches.
VA6AR.3	Reflects and expands use of visual language throughout the artistic process.
VA6C.1	Applies information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production of artworks.
VA6C.2	Develops fluency in visual communication.
VA6C.3	Expands knowledge of art as a profession and/or avocation.

## Grade 7

Reading/	Language Arts/
----------	----------------

ELA7LSV1	The student participates in student-to-teacher, student-to-student, and group verbal
	interactions.
ELA7LSV2	The student listens to and views various forms of text and media in order to gather and
	share information, persuade others, and express and understand ideas.

#### Visual Arts

VA7MC.1	Identifies and works to solve problems through creative thinking, planning, and/or experimenting with art methods and materials.
MA-MO	1 0
VA7MC.2	Identifies and works to solve problems through creative thinking, planning, and/or experimenting with art methods and materials.
VA7MC.3	Interprets how artists create and communicate meaning in and through their work.
VA7MC.4	Participates in dialogue about his or her artwork and the artwork of others.
VA7CU.1	Discovers how the creative process relates to art history.
VA7CU.2	Investigates and discovers personal relationships to community, culture, and world
	through creating and studying art.
VA7AR.2	Critiques personal artworks as well as artwork of others using visual and verbal approaches.
VA7AR.3	Reflects and expands the use of visual language throughout the artistic process.
VA7C.1	Applies information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production of artworks.
VA7C.2	Develops fluency in visual communication.
VA7C.3	Expands knowledge of art as a profession and/or avocation and increases personal life skills through artistic endeavor.

## **Grade 8**

Reading/I	anguage Arts	
TI A OT OTTA	TTL	_

ELAOLSVI	The student participates in student-to-teacher, student-to-student, and group verbar
	interactions.
ELA8LSV2	The student listens to and views various forms of text and media in order to gather and
	share information, persuade others, and express and understand ideas.

Engages in the creative process to generate and visualize ideas.
Identifies and works to solve problems through authentic engagement (thinking,
planning, and experimenting) with art methods and materials, exploring the nature of creativity.
Demonstrates how artists create and communicate meaning in artworks.
Participates in aesthetic dialogue about his or her artwork and artwork of others. Discovers how the creative process relates to art history.

VA8CU.2 Investigates and discovers personal relationship to community, culture, and world

through making and studying art.

VASAR.1 Critiques personal artworks as well as artwork of others using visual and verbal

approaches.

VASAR.2 Reflects and expands the use of visual language throughout the artistic process.

VA8C.1 Applies information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production

of artworks.

VA8C.2 Develops fluency in visual communication.

VASC.3 Expands knowledge of art as a profession and/or avocation and develops personal life

skills through artistic endeavor.

#### Grades 9-12

#### Sociology

SSocIC1 Students will analyze forms of social inequality.

#### **United States History**

SSCG1 The student will demonstrate knowledge of civil liberties and civil rights.

SSUSH9 The student will identify key events, issues, and individuals relating to the causes, course,

and consequences of the Civil War.

SSUSH10 The student will identify legal, political and social dimensions of Reconstruction. SSUSH22 The student will identify dimensions of the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1970.

#### Reading/Language Arts

ELA9RC3,

ELA10RC3 The student acquires new vocabulary in each content area and uses it correctly.

ELEA9R2,

ELEA10R2 The student understands and acquires new vocabulary and uses it correctly in reading

and writing.

ELA9LSV1, ELA10LSV1,

ELA11LSV1.

ELA12LSV1 The student participates in student-to-teacher, student-to-student, and group verbal

interactions.

#### Visual Arts

VAHSVAMC.1 Engages in the creative process, imagines new ideas by using mental and visual imagery,

conceptualizes these ideas by using artistic language and contextual understandings in assessing learning, and develops a personal artistic voice that gives unique form to these

concepts.

VAHSVAMC.2 Finds and solves problems through open-ended inquiry, the consideration of multiple

options, weighing consequences, and assessing results.

VAHSVAMC.3 Cultivate critical thinking and logical argumentation in aesthetics.

VAHSVAMC.4 Analyzes the origins of one's own ideas in relation to community, culture, and the world.

VAHSVACU.1 Articulates ideas and universal themes from diverse cultures of the past and present.

VAHSVACU.2 Demonstrates an understanding of how art history impacts the creative process of art

making.

VAHSVAAR.2 Critiques artwork of others individually and in group settings.

VAHSVAAR.3 Develops multiple strategies for responding to and reflecting on artworks.

VAHSVAC.1 Applies information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production

of artworks.

VAHSVAC.2 Develops 21st century life and work skills and habits of mind for success through study

and production of art.

VAHSVAC.3 Utilizes a variety of resources to see how artistic learning extends beyond the walls of the

classroom.