



# Curriculum Guide & Activity

Louise  
Nevelson

ICA  
MIAMI



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## INTRODUCTION

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In this course, educators discuss how artists work Louise Nevelson's signature works of monochromatic assemblages made from found wood painted in black, white, or gold. A pioneering female sculptor, Nevelson is among the most significant American sculptors of the twentieth century. She is considered an important influence invalidating female subjectivity as a valid topic in art and challenging the assumptions about the kind of art women were expected to make.

By viewing the artist's work, students will learn that Nevelson painted her sculptures black to obliterate the past histories of the pieces and unify the work in the black "silhouette, or essence, of the universe." Black was not a negation for Nevelson, but rather everything, a totality, as it contained all of the colors. Accordingly, she felt the black paint provided her works with an air of greatness and regal enormity.

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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Students will explore how artist Louise Nevelson uses found wooden objects to create sculptural forms that convey an aspect of her identity.



All images courtesy the artist.

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# FOR TEACHERS - FLORIDA STATE STANDARDS

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## Language Arts

### LAFS.3.RL.3.7

Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

### LAFS.3.L.3.5

Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., describe people who are friendly or helpful).

## Visual Arts

### VA.3.C.1.2

Reflect on and interpret works of art, using observation skills, prior knowledge, and experience.

### Access Point #: VA.912.F.1.In.a

Select and use techniques, structural elements of art, and principles of design to create a variety of artworks in different or unusual ways.

## Social Studies

### SS.3.C.2.1

Identify group and individual actions of citizens that demonstrate civility, cooperation, volunteerism, and other civic virtues.

### SS.912.H.1

Standard 1: Identify and analyze the historical, social, and cultural contexts of the arts.

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## KEY DISCUSSION

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During the initial discussion, posed questions will draw upon students' critical thinking skills by having them analyze their peers' work, including artist Louise Nevelson, using established or derived criteria to support conclusions and judgments about artistic progress. Additional students will compare artwork, architecture, designs, and models to understand how technical and utilitarian components impact aesthetic qualities.



All images courtesy the artist.

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# VOCABULARY TERMS

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## ASSEMBLAGE

A collection or gathering of things or people.

## INSTALLATION

Used to describe large-scale, mixed-media constructions, often designed for a specific place or for a temporary period of time.

## FOUND OBJECT

A natural or man-made object, or fragment of an object, that is found (or sometimes bought) by an artist and kept because of some intrinsic interest the artist sees in it.

## MONOCHROMATIC

An artwork created using only one color or hue. It can use different shades of one color but, by definition, should contain only one base color.

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

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Louise Nevelson was born Leah Berliawsky in 1899 in Pereiaslav, Poltava Governorate, Russian Empire. Even though the family lived comfortably, Nevelson's relatives had begun to leave the Russian Empire for America in the 1880s. Nevelson's first experience of art was at the age of nine at the Rockland Public Library, where she saw a plaster cast of Joan of Arc. Shortly thereafter she decided to study art, taking drawing in high school. Starting in 1929, Nevelson studied art full-time at the Art Students League. Nevelson credited an exhibition of Noh kimonos at the Metropolitan Museum of Art as a catalyst for her to study art further. After working in painting, clay, and carved wood, Nevelson embarked upon her signature monochromatic assemblages made of found wood in the 1950s painted black, white, and even gold to harmonize the divergent surfaces of her materials. Louise Nevelson has been a fundamental key in the feminist art movement. Credited with triggering the examination of femininity in art, Nevelson challenged the vision of what type of art women would be creating with her dark, monumental, and totem-like artworks which were culturally seen as masculine. Nevelson believed that art reflected the individual, not "masculine-feminine labels", and chose to take on her role as an artist, not specifically a female artist.



All images courtesy the artist.

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## ABOUT THE WORK

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Based on *Untitled* (1976–78), an important work in ICA Miami’s permanent collection, this presentation features a selection of Nevelson’s assemblages from the 1970s. The sculptures exhibited here, both wall-mounted and freestanding, are made of scraps of wood and furniture—chair legs, a baseball bat, balusters, and a headboard—found on the streets of New York that create intimate portraits of Nevelson’s day-to-day urban context. Nestled into box-like structures scaled to the human body, these works highlight the artist’s use of sculpture as a reflection of her immediate social and geographical environment. “You see, when a car goes over a piece of wood and it comes out with all sort of things—dents. Those are my drawings,” she said. “What’s the use in drawing them when it’s much more direct doing it the way I do? It’s immediate, it’s true, and it’s there. . . . New York, for instance, is my mirror. . . . When you encompass the whole city it becomes a great twentieth-century work of art.”



All images courtesy the artist.

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## RECOMMENDED READINGS

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### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

#### [Iggy Peck, Architect by Andrea Beaty](#)

Iggy has one passion: building. His parents are proud of his fabulous creations, though they're sometimes surprised by his materials—who could forget the tower he built of dirty diapers? When his second-grade teacher declares her dislike of architecture, Iggy faces a challenge. He loves building too much to give it up! With Andrea Beaty's irresistible rhyming text and David Roberts's puckish illustrations, this book will charm creative kids everywhere and amuse their sometimes bewildered parents.

#### [Dreaming Up: A Celebration of Building by Christy Hale](#)

A clever introduction to architecture. Each spread shows children playing on one side and a photograph of a famous building on the other. The children, done with watercolor in a fairly standard illustrative style, are pictured working with toys that mirror the featured buildings' form.

### MIDDLE/ HIGH SCHOOL

#### [Everything, Everything by Nicola Yoon](#)

My disease is as rare as it is famous. Basically, I'm allergic to the world. I don't leave my house, have not left my house in seventeen years. The only people I ever see are my mom and my nurse, Carla.

But then one day, a moving truck arrives next door. I look out my window, and I see him. He's tall, lean, and wearing all black—black T-shirt, black jeans, black sneakers, and a black knit cap that covers his hair completely. He catches me looking and stares at me. I stare right back. His name is Olly.

#### [The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams](#)

The Glass Menagerie is a "memory play," in which Tom recalls scenes from his youth during the height of the Depression. It shows his mother, Amanda, trying to maintain a lost gentility in the midst of overwhelming poverty and cajoling her children into her idea of happiness. Tom also has a disabled older sister, Laura, who resembles her collection of class animals in her delicate [inner?] beauty and fragility.

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## RECOMMENDED READINGS

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[CBS Sunday Morning Profile on Sculptor Louise Nevelson](#)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axSNOTLluN8&ab\\_channel=CBSSundayMorning](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axSNOTLluN8&ab_channel=CBSSundayMorning)

[The Met: Nevelson in Process, 1977 | From the Vaults](#)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnfEmNRzoCs&ab\\_channel=TheMet](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnfEmNRzoCs&ab_channel=TheMet)

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## ACTIVITY

### Monochromatic Assemblage

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Appropriate for 3-6 grades and Middle School

Nevelson purposefully selected wooden objects for their evocative potential to call to mind the forms of the city, nature, and celestial bodies. While the individual wooden pieces had an intimate scale, they became monumental when viewed holistically within the assemblage's combined environment.

Activity Prompt: Students will create a monochromatic assemblage sculpture that reflects an aspect of their identity. The assemblage should consist of various objects gathered within the home in addition to a monochromatic color. Have students consider the meaning, attributes, and association with their chosen color palette for the assemblage.

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## ACTIVITY MATERIALS

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Paper Bag



Assorted Colored Markers



Colored Construction Paper



Liquid Glue / Glue Stick



White Cardstock Paper

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# ACTIVITY

## Monochromatic Assemblage

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### Activity Instructions

1. First go around your house and gather random objects. Make sure the objects you collect vary in shape and size. Once you have all your objects, spread them out near you so it can be easily accessible.
2. Now think about how you want to use some of your items. If you have, let's say a water bottle, you might want to cut it and only use half. Start to play around with your objects and assemble them on to your base before you start gluing things down.
3. After playing around with how you want your items to look, the next step is to glue down pieces to your base. Be careful in gluing things down and not moving your items too much.
4. Slowly glue down items that have touched the base first then worked my way up with the layered items.
5. After you have glued everything down, set it aside to dry. This may take a couple of hours depending on how much glue you used.
6. Once everything is dry, grab your acrylic paint and paint brush.
7. Use any color you like just as long as it is one solid color. Then start covering your entire artwork.
8. After everything is covered, set aside to dry one final time.
9. Once complete and dry, show off your artwork to your friends and family. Ask yourself "Did covering the items in paint change how you see your found objects?"