

Beyond Betsy McCall

Karen Herbert La Du

As a child I loved Barbie dolls and I made their clothes, but my skills were lacking and I never achieved the quality I desired. Not so with paper dolls. The couture workshop for the paper dolls was always in action.

As an adult artist, my exploration of my childhood pastime has grown up into mixed-media interactive art—retooled into a lesson designed to spark the imaginations and creative energy of today's children. In this lesson, students will design a figure, a wardrobe, and an environment.

The Art Problem

Students will make figures about 6" (15 cm) high. The figure can be a self-portrait, a friend, a child, or a creature purely from imagination. They will also each make an environment from a cigar box. The figures will be cut from tag board or file folders, painted with acrylic paints, and limbs will be attached with round-head paper fasteners. Clothing and other accessories will be made from heavy drawing paper and colored with colored pencils or markers.

The environment can be simple or elaborate, but should complement the figure. Possibilities for

decorating the environment are unlimited. Fabric, paper, or wallpaper can be used for the lining. Scenes can be painted inside or out, and found objects can be added for embellishment.

Procedures

Have students draw an attached head and body, and separate arms and legs on tag board or old file folders. Punch holes to connect the body and limbs in the shoulders, hips, and top of the arms and legs

(each leg can be made as one piece or two). Decorate the parts of the figure as desired, and then attach all the parts with paper fasteners. Embellish the cigar box to coordinate with the theme of the figure. Display together.

Questions to Generate Ideas for Characters

- Who is the figure?
- Who would the figure like to be?
- What does the figure look like?
- What do the figure's imaginary friends look like?
- What does the figure wear?
- Where is the figure?

Extensions

Students can work in groups to create figures that relate to each other and can be used in an original drama.



There are many cultural references that can be used to provide background for using the figures as puppets: Bunraku, Balinese shadow puppetry, and European marionette traditions. ☺

Note: For those too young to remember, Betsy McCall was a paper doll feature in *McCall's Magazine*.

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NATIONAL STANDARD

Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories.

WEB LINK

www.khladu.com

Materials

- tag board or old file folders
- cigar boxes
- scissors
- round-head paper fasteners
- colored pencils
- markers, black and colors
- found objects
- fabric, wallpaper, and other interesting papers
- acrylic paints
- paintbrushes
- hot glue, white glue
- small wooden blocks