

IN THE REALMS OF HENRY DARGER

A HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

from the



AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

Education Department

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VISITING THE AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

Thank you for choosing the American Folk Art Museum for your students. The museum offers a range of discussion-based gallery and artmaking programs for students, including single visits and multisession museum-school partnerships. For more information on current programs for students, please call 212. 265. 1040, ext. 381, or e-mail grouptours@folkartmuseum.org. For information about educator programs, please call 212. 265. 1040, ext. 119. Information about all programs, which are offered Mondays through Fridays, anytime between 10:30 AM and 4 PM, can also be found on the museum's website, www.folkartmuseum.org.

Planning Your Visit

The museum is a contracted vendor with the New York City Department of Education (vendor number: MUS005000, contract number: QR1640A). To make your reservation, call 212. 265. 1040, ext. 381, or e-mail grouptours@folkartmuseum.org. Reservations must be made at least one month in advance.

- Groups must have one adult chaperone per every ten students.
- Chaperones and teachers are responsible for supervising groups.
- The museum does not allow self-guided groups. All groups must have a reservation with a museum guide.
- Tours in select languages, including American Sign Language and visual descriptions, are available. Additional lead time may be necessary to schedule such a tour.

To discuss options for multisession museum-school partnerships, which include classroom and museum visits and can be tailored to your curricular needs, please call 212. 265. 1040, ext. 381.

Payment and Cancellation

For full payment and booking information, please visit www.folkartmuseum.org.

Accessibility



The museum is fully accessible and welcomes visitors and groups with special needs. American Sign Language interpretation for gallery tours and auditorium programs is available by request with one-month advance notice. Gallery tours with verbal imaging and tours of touch objects from the museum's collection are available by request with one-month advance notice. Two wheelchairs are available for use during your visit. For details, please contact the education department at 212. 265. 1040, ext. 381.

Lunch

The museum does not have a place for groups to enjoy bag lunches. There is a public outdoor park with benches directly across from the museum.

Getting Here

The American Folk Art Museum is located at 2 Lincoln Square (Columbus Avenue at 66th Street).

- Buses may drop off school groups in front of the museum. There is no parking lot.
- Subway: 1 to 66 Street—Lincoln Center/Broadway
- Bus: M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, M6, M7

The museum's branch gallery is located at 2 Lincoln Square, Columbus Avenue at 66th Street.

- Subway: 1 to 66 Street/Lincoln Center
- Bus: M5, M7, M11, M20, M66, M104

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Henry Darger's epic *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion* (popularly known as *In the Realms of the Unreal*) conjures a world that, at times, uses imagery both provocative and disturbing to the viewer. Its heroines, the brave Vivian Girls, fight the evil Glandelinians to free child slaves who endure various forms of torment. As we know virtually nothing about Darger's motivation, scholars and critics are left to speculate about his fascinations and obsessions. It is not surprising that some have focused on the more sensational aspects of his work.

Educators, such as the high school teachers who helped to create this curriculum, may welcome the opportunity to open a discussion with students about the important and difficult issues that young people face. Though set in a fantasy world, *In the Realms of the Unreal* suggests a broad range of topics, including gender, violence, exploitation, and heroism. Students may see an immediate connection to the heroes and villains that inhabit comics and cartoons.

This curriculum may be used as a guide to examine Darger's art not only as a remarkable body of work but as a vehicle for a dialogue between students and teachers on some of the more challenging topics of our time.

RESOURCES

Books

- Anderson, Brooke Davis. *Darger: The Henry Darger Collection at the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.
- Bonesteel, Michael, ed. *Henry Darger: Art and Selected Writings*. New York: Rizzoli, 2000.
- Jablonski, Joseph. "Henry J. Darger: The Homer of the Mad." In Ron Sakolsky, ed., *Surrealist Subversions: Rants, Writings & Images by the Surrealist Movement in the United States*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Autonomedia, 2002.
- Koide, Yukiko, and Kyoichi Tsuzuki, eds. *Henry Darger's Room: 851 Webster*. Tokyo: Imperial Press, 2007.
- MacGregor, John M. *Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal*. New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2002.
- Prokopoff, Stephen. *Henry Darger: The Unreality of Being*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1996.

Articles and Reviews

- Allen, Stewart Lee. "The Selling of Henry Darger." *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, September 9, 1998.
- Anderson, Brooke Davis. "The Henry Darger Collection at the American Folk Art Museum." *Folk Art* 26, no. 4 (winter 2001/2002): 60–68.
- Cotter, Holland. "A Life's Work in Word and Image, Secret until Death." Review of "Henry Darger: The Unreality of Being," Museum of American Folk Art, New York/University of Iowa Museum of Art. *New York Times*, January 24, 1997.
- DeCarlo, Tessa. "The Bizarre Visions of a Reclusive Master." *New York Times*, January 12, 1997.
- MacGregor, John. "Henry Darger: Art by Adoption." *Raw Vision* 13 (winter 1995/1996): 26–35.
- MacFarquhar, Larissa. "Thank Heaven for Little Girls: The Lubricious Fantasies of Henry Darger." Review of "Henry Darger: The Unreality of Being," Museum of American Folk Art, New York/University of Iowa Museum of Art. *Slate*, February 13, 1997. <http://www.slate.com/id/2911> (accessed January 24, 2008).
- Morris, Randall. "Good vs. Evil in the World of Henry Darger." *The Clarion* 11, no. 4 (fall 1986): 30–35.
- Polanski, G. Jurek. "Henry Darger: Realms of the Unreal." Review of the exhibition at Carl Hammer Gallery, Chicago. *ArtScope.net*, October 2000. <http://www.artscope.net/VAREVIEWS/Darger1000.shtml> (accessed January 24, 2008).
- Prokopoff, Stephen. "Henry Darger—The Unreality of Being: On Preparing, Organizing, and Mounting a Darger Exhibition." *Folk Art* 21, no. 4 (winter 1996/1997): 46–53.
- Shaw, Lytle. "The Moral Storm: Henry Darger's Book of Weather Reports." *Cabinet* 3 (summer 2001). <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/3/henrydarger.php> (accessed January 24, 2008).
- Vine, Richard. "Thank Heaven for Little Girls." *Art in America* 86, no. 1 (January 1998): 72–79.

Film

Yu, Jessica. *In the Realms of the Unreal: The Mystery of Henry Darger*. DVD. New York: Wellspring Media, 2005.

Websites

American Folk Art Museum:

<http://www.folkartmuseum.org>

Public Broadcasting Service, "P.O.V.: In the Realms of the Unreal":

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/intherealms>

"Realm of the Unreal: A Page about Henry Darger":

<http://www.henrydarger.info>

HENRY DARGER
(1892-1973)

DARGER'S LIFE AND LEGACY

Henry Darger was born in Chicago in 1892. When he was nearly 4, his mother died of an infection incurred after she had given birth to a baby girl who was then given up for adoption. Darger lived with his father, an impoverished tailor, until 1900, when he was placed in a Catholic institution for young boys, the Mission of Our Lady of Mercy. He attended public school during this period and was apparently highly intelligent, showing a particular interest in the Civil War. After evincing signs of behavioral problems and the recommendation of several medical evaluations, however, he was sent to live in an asylum for “feeble-minded” children in Lincoln, Illinois. The institution housed fifteen hundred children, many of whom were severely developmentally disabled, and there is no doubt that Darger received only a rudimentary education during the years he lived there. After his father died in 1905, Darger made several attempts to escape from the asylum; in 1909, at age 17, he succeeded. He returned to Chicago, where he lived for the rest of his life, working more than fifty hours a week as a dishwasher, bandage roller, and janitor for local hospitals. He led a solitary life and attended mass several times each day at a Catholic church near his home. In 1930, he rented a large second-floor room on Chicago’s North Side, which he inhabited until the age of 80, when he became too weak to climb the stairs and moved to a home for the elderly run by the Little Sisters of the Poor—coincidentally the same mission where his father had spent his final years seven decades earlier. Within six months, on April 13, 1973, Henry Darger died at the age of 81.

Shortly after Darger had moved out of his room, his landlords, Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner, discovered hundreds of paintings, found images, and hand-bound volumes of Darger’s literary work among the clutter he had accumulated over the years. Nathan Lerner, an artist himself, recognized the merit of the works and took charge of the estate. Not long after its discovery, Darger’s work gained a unique stature among the world of “outsider art,” though some scholars have argued that it transcends all categorization.

The American Folk Art Museum today owns the largest public collection of works by Henry Darger in the United States. The museum’s holdings include more than two dozen paintings, the complete manuscripts of all of Darger’s books, and thousands of sketches, tracings, maps, and source material. In 2001, the institution founded the Henry Darger Study Center, which promotes and facilitates scholarly research.

DARGER'S WRITINGS

The magnitude of Henry Darger's writings leaves one spellbound. They include a six-volume weather journal kept daily for ten years (1957–1967); several personal diaries; *The History of My Life*, an autobiography of more than five thousand pages; and *Further Adventures In Chicago: Crazy House*, a sequel to *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in what is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnean War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*, the artist's masterful, illustrated epic about another world torn apart by war.

Darger began to work on *In the Realms of the Unreal* when he was about 19 years old. Writing in longhand on legal-size paper first, he then typed the entire epic and began illustrating it. When it was completed, after decades of work, the typewritten manuscript was 15,145 pages long and comprised thirteen volumes. Hundreds of large, scroll-like paintings bound into three huge volumes accompany the narrative.

In the Realms of the Unreal is the tale of seven little girls—the Vivian Girls—who set out to rescue abducted children who have been enslaved by the adult Glandelinians. The heroes in this tale are always the children, the villains typically adults. This story of war and peace, of good versus evil, loosely parallels many of the events of the American Civil War. Darger was a Civil War enthusiast, and he chronicled the flags, maps, and officers in separate journals. In his version of conflict, the enslaved people are white children who usually appear unclothed—Darger poignantly captures the powerlessness of any enslaved peoples by depicting them as young, innocent, and naked. The nakedness of the children also exposes their mixed gender, which is a compelling aspect of the artist's imagery, open to many interpretations.

DARGER'S VISUAL WORLD

Henry Darger's artistic creation is essentially literary in conception. His paintings, originally bound into volumes, are illustrations for his epics. Darger created these works on paper over a period of several decades. (The work remains undated, and scholars are still uncertain about the length and dates of Darger's artistic career.) As he matured into a facile painter and confident colorist, his paintings grew in scale—his sophisticated compositions are often more than nine feet in length. Further, the majority of his works is double-sided, and each painting possesses an overwhelming individual presence. Darger's ability to create images of different scale, as well as the extended, panoramic format of pieced paper he developed, probably contributed to the growing complexity and density of his visual works.

While he was a capable draftsman who expressed his true talent through color, composition, content, and sheer scale, Darger was also a willful draftsman. In other words, he experimented with various techniques to get the effect he wanted. In order to achieve his aesthetic vision, Darger created inventive techniques involving collage and appropriation from popular media. If he could not master the freehand rendering of the human figure, he would trace images from magazines, comic books, and other print sources he collected. Many paintings show carbon residue left from tracing the figures onto the newsprint he typically used. Darger repeated favorite images over and over, sometimes even in the same painting. He would also visit his corner drugstore to have a favored pose from a popular-media source photographically reproduced and resized. In this manner, he created a library of numerous images stored in brown drugstore envelopes and labeled according to their intended uses. Darger freely and unapologetically appropriated images, and if all else failed, he simply cut and paste reproductions directly onto his watercolor paintings, creating a collage.

It is possible to discern three stages in Darger's artistic development. The earliest paintings are blunt and forceful and favor strong contrasts and rich, dark coloration. These works, such as the military portraits and Blengins, are usually composed on single sheets of standard-size paper and are painted only on one side. There is a heavy reliance on collage elements, and figures are painted directly over printed sources or traced. Many of the works include lengthy textual passages and descriptions similar in format to newspaper captions.

As Darger's art continued to evolve, his renderings grew in compositional complexity and skill, marking a second phase in his artistic development. Single and group portraits gave way to scenes of multiple figures set in landscapes or interior settings, with an emphasis on narrative action. A simple but functional perspective was formulated, strengthened by an overall intensity of color. Collage became less prevalent, with the artist drawing virtually the entire ensemble of images. It was during this period that Darger developed the format of several sheets of paper glued together horizontally, as in a comic strip, to form a narrative sequence. Texts are less extensive than in earlier years but continue to define characters and action.

In his final artistic phase, Darger turned again to collage. This is evident in sequences in which he pasted action cutouts of soldiers from newspaper comics. Darger's most characteristic device emerged during this phase: the tracing of images of his principal protagonists—children—from coloring books and other sources and manipulating the size photographically to fit the scale of the painting. A singular innovation is the intrusion of one or more oversized images into the composition.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DARGER'S ARCHIVE

Henry Darger's vast writings and many paintings are supported by his archive, which is now housed in the American Folk Art Museum's collection. The archive includes the artist's personal collection of books and clippings from newspapers, magazines, comics, cartoons, and coloring books—the full breadth of resource material for his paintings and visual output. The items feature subject matter common to many of Darger's works: girls, clouds, landscapes, weather, war, disasters, and plants. Reflecting the artist's obsessive nature, there are hundreds and hundreds of clippings featuring the same subject, often the exact same image in many versions and in multiples. The archive also includes more than a hundred negatives and photo enlargements, which further illustrate Darger's creative process. Finally, there are more than five hundred sketches and studies—often called “tracings”—in ink and pencil. Ranging in size from a few inches square to 20 × 24" and executed on tracing, typing, wax, and drawing paper, these studies correct the commonly held view that Darger was not an able draftsman. Indeed, the delicate and sensitive studies are a testament both to his skill with the pencil and perhaps to his own doubt in his ability. Darger's brilliance as an artist rests partly in his talent for making his drawings much more than tracings through his complex process and sure hand.

The myriad clippings in Darger's archive point out how his paintings reflect our culture, or at least elements of it. American popular media is evident everywhere: The once mysterious Blengins of Darger's invention, for instance, have predecessors in an ice-cream ad showing a winged troll stirring a vat of cream and in a phallic-winged creature from the comic *Mandrake the Magician*. His use of large flowers and palm trees in lovely landscapes also echoes numerous advertisements in magazines and newspapers.

The archive is important for another reason. So often the work of the self-taught artist is seen as a “happy accident” or an unexplainable occurrence having no roots or foundation in culture, time, and place. The archive solidly reveals how Darger engaged in a creative process and made deliberate aesthetic decisions, and demonstrates that this twentieth-century self-taught artist was clearly rooted in the American experience. While Darger worked in isolation and kept his project private, he was in no way cut off from the communal experience, whether that experience was religious, occupational, emotional, political, or some combination of these. The contents of the archive prove that he was engaged in the life of his church and place of employment, that he had personal relationships (albeit few), and that he was aware of and interested in current events such as the world wars and in historical moments such as the Civil War.

LESSON PLANS

THE ARTIST AND SOCIETY

Unit Objectives

Students will

- examine the notions of “artist” and “artistic production” and investigate the interactions between an artist and his or her social environment;
- learn to use some of the vocabulary of art criticism to raise and respond to questions concerning the role of the artist in society and the nature of the creative process.

The lesson plans in this unit relate to the following

New York State Learning Standards:

Learning Standards for the Arts

- *Standard 3:* Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.
- *Standard 4:* Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

Learning Standards for English Language Arts

- *Standard 1:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.
- *Standard 3:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.

Introduction

An extensive body of writing—words, rhymes, and journals—exists outside the realm of published works. Likewise, a wealth of visual art is being created outside the walls of professional studios and not shown in galleries and museums. The work of Henry Darger, created in solitude yet rich in imagery and derived in part from the popular culture of his time, will serve as motivation for the lessons in this unit, which address definitions of the terms *art* and *artist* and issues revolving around art criticism, while raising questions concerning the relationship between artist and society. Creative hands-on projects will be part of two of the lessons.

Related Vocabulary

Aesthetic	Imagery
Appropriation	Naïve
Critique	Narrative
Iconography	Outsider

THE ARTIST AND SOCIETY—LESSON PLAN I

Aims/Objectives

Students will

- investigate the idea of artistic production in isolation from society;
- acquire information about the life and work of Henry Darger.

Materials

- Reproductions of the two color plates illustrating Darger's creative process
- Reproductions of 175 *At Jennie Richee. Everything is allright though storm continues.*
- Copies of the chart "What Constitutes Art?" (page 17)

Do Now/Motivation

Define, in writing, the term *artist*.

Procedure

Use a few of the student responses to the "Do Now" question as a starting point for discussion. Distribute, or write on the board, the chart "What Constitutes Art?" Have the students work individually or in groups and lead them in a discussion of their ideas about the artworks or events listed on the chart. Do they constitute "art"? How does society define these works and events? Show reproductions of the images listed under "Materials" (see above) as motivation for a discussion of Darger's work, life, and use of popular-culture imagery.

Summary/class discussion: How do we define the term *artist*?

Assessment/Homework

Ask the students to clarify, in writing, their definition of the term *artist*, considering why, or why not, they believe that Henry Darger was an artist.

WHAT CONSTITUTES ART?

Artwork or arts event	Who created it?	What is its purpose?	Who is the intended audience?
Mural on a building			
Stained-glass window			
Santo figure on a home altar			
Drawing in a sketchbook			
Writing in a journal			
Rock concert			

THE ARTIST AND SOCIETY—LESSON PLAN II

Aims/Objectives

Students will

- investigate the interaction of popular culture and artistic production by examining the use of images from popular media in the work of Henry Darger;
- create an original work of art using materials and processes that mirror the ones Darger employed.

Materials

- Reproductions of various Darger paintings
- Clippings from magazines (if possible, use images that reflect the identity and tastes—music, fashion, etc.—of your students)
- Paper or illustration boards (at least 8 × 10")
- Scissors
- Glue or glue sticks

Do Now/Motivation

- Where do you think Darger found his visual inspiration?
- Where did he find the pictures that helped him create his artworks?

Procedure

For a few minutes, have the students write brief answers to the “Do Now” questions. Ask volunteers to share their answers. Discuss the images used in popular media in Darger’s time. Some questions to guide the discussion:

- Why might an artist borrow an image from an existing illustration or photo?
- How do borrowed images give Darger’s work a familiar look? Or do the borrowed images create a different effect (for example, an element of surprise or displacement)? Use some of Darger’s works to support your answer.
- Darger’s use of images from popular media of his time gives his paintings a look that ties it to a specific time period and identifiable aesthetic, taste, or way of viewing the world. Where did he locate images of children? How are these images different from those we see in the media today?
- You may notice that all the girls are white and many of them are blond. What does this say about the media of Darger’s time?
- We are going to create artwork using images from contemporary popular culture. How do you expect these artworks will differ from Darger’s work?

Activity: Using magazine clippings, make a collage that re-creates Darger’s narrative (or your own story) in the visual language of contemporary American life. Use overlapping images and add drawn background elements or details.

Summary/class discussion: How did Darger use popular (found) images in his work?

Assessment/Homework

Hang collages for class review. Some questions to guide the discussion:

- How does the collage reflect contemporary American culture?
- What personal vision, message, or story does the collage convey?
- How does the popular culture of our time influence the way you tell a story or communicate an idea?

The students may respond to any of these questions for homework.

THE ARTIST AND SOCIETY—LESSON PLAN III

Aim/Objective

Students will create personal journals or sketchbooks.

Materials

- Composition books or spiral notebooks
- Construction paper or oak tag
- Colored masking tape
- Narrow ribbon (24" per book)
- Glue or glue sticks
- Diagram for making a book (page 21)

Do Now/Motivation

What are some of the differences between writing, or drawing, in a personal journal or sketchbook and writing, or creating a visual work of art, that will be viewed by other people?

Procedure

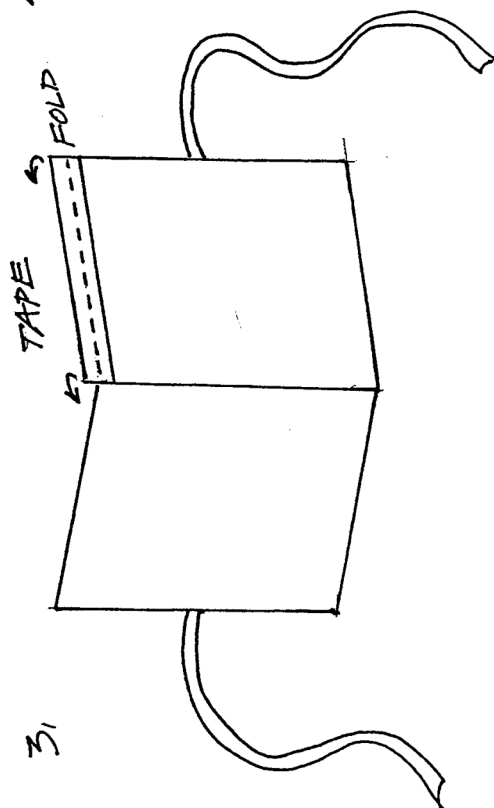
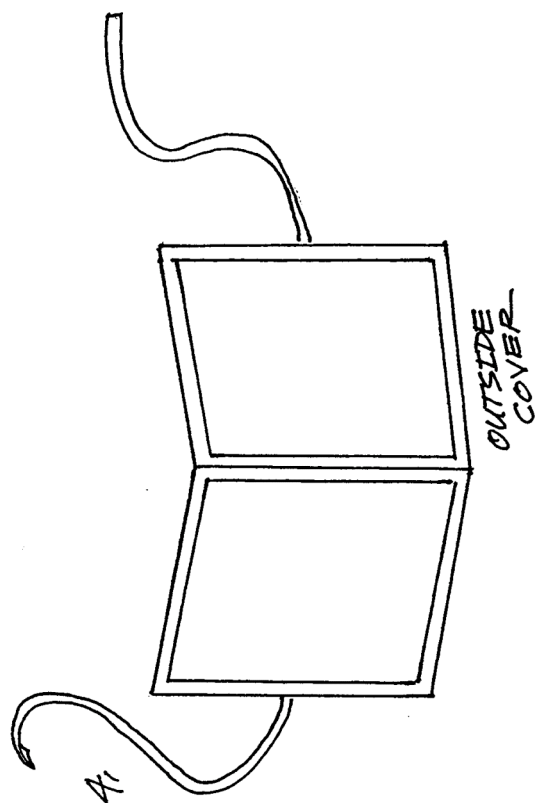
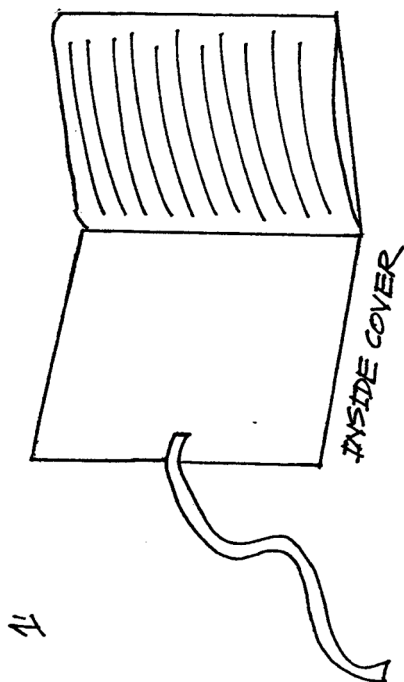
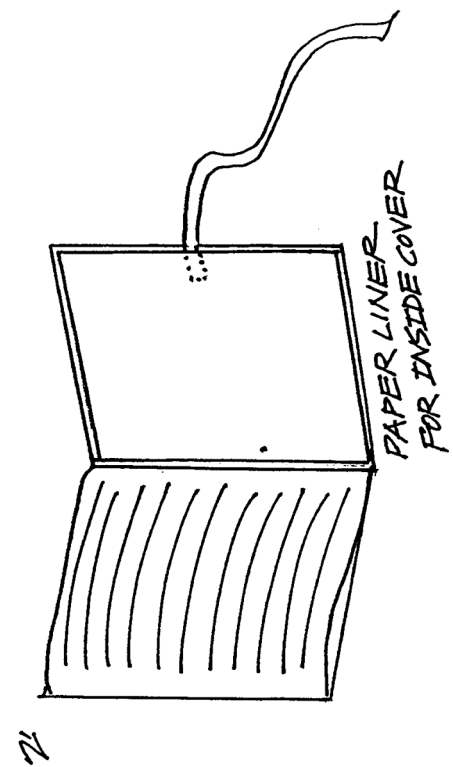
For a few minutes, have the students write a brief answer to the “Do Now” question. Ask volunteers to share their answers. Topics may include privacy, spontaneity, freedom of expression, and lack of concern over criticism. Ask the students if any of them keep journals, diaries, or sketchbooks.

Construct personal journals:

- Instruct the students to cut paper to fit the inside and outside covers of notebooks, and to cut ribbons to 12-inch length.
- Have the students open their books. Using glue or glue sticks, each student should affix one end of the ribbon to the left edge of the cover, about midway down its length. Only about one-half to one inch of ribbon will be glued down; the rest will extend outside the book. This will become a tie to secure the book for privacy.
- Now have each student glue down a piece of paper to cover the end of the ribbon and line the inside cover. Repeat the process on the back cover.
- Have each student close their book and glue down papers to cover the outside cover, front and back. Instruct them to use masking tape to create decorative edges; half of the tape will be folded over the front, half over the back.

Assessment/Homework

The students may use collage or drawing to further personalize their books. The books may be used for creative-writing projects, journal writing, sketching, etc.



CHILDREN AND ADULTS

Unit Objectives

Students will

- examine the concepts of “children” and “adults” and investigate the interactions of children and adults in the work of Henry Darger;
- look to Darger’s writings and poetry to respond to questions about the roles of children and adults in our society.

The lesson plans in this unit relate to the following

New York State Learning Standards:

Learning Standards for the Arts

- *Standard 3:* Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.
- *Standard 4:* Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

Learning Standards for English Language Arts

- *Standard 1:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.
- *Standard 2:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.
- *Standard 3:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.

Introduction

The world Darger created in his writings and visual art is filled with children—some of whom are victimized, such as the child slaves held by the evil Glandelinians, and others who are heroines, such as the seven Vivian Girls who come to the child slaves’ rescue. Scholars have looked for connections between Darger’s subject matter and his personal history; when Darger was nearly 4 years old, his mother died after having given birth to a baby girl, who was then given up for adoption and whom Darger presumably never saw. Whatever the reasons, it is clear that in Darger’s imagined world children play a central role. In his autobiography, *The History of My Life*, he writes, “Unlike most children I hated to see the day come when I will be grown-up. I never wanted to. I wished to be young always.” In this unit, students will consider the unconventional roles that children and adults play in Darger’s written and visual works and look for correlations with their own perceptions of age-based roles.

Related Vocabulary

Limitation	Portray	Symbolic
Pine	Slavery	

CHILDREN AND ADULTS—LESSON PLAN I

Aim/Objective

Students will consider how Henry Darger portrays the struggle of children in his work.

Materials

- Copies of Darger's poem "We Sigh for the Child Slaves" (page 24)
- Reproductions of *At 5 Norma Catherine. but are retaken*.

Do Now/Motivation

- As a young person, what, if anything, holds you back?
- What or who places limits on you?

Procedure

For a few minutes, have the students write brief answers to the "Do Now" questions. Ask volunteers to share their answers. Some questions to guide the discussion:

- Are these limitations imposed forever?
- Why are these limitations set in the first place?

Read Darger's poem "We Sigh for the Child Slaves." Some questions to guide the discussion (students should support each answer with a quote from the poem):

- What limitations do these children seem to have?
- Do these limitations seem to be imposed forever?
- Does the ending leave you with a feeling of hope or hopelessness?
- Who do you think the *we* is in "We Sigh for the Child Slaves"?

Show *At 5 Norma Catherine. but are retaken*. Some questions to guide the discussion:

- What is your initial reaction to this painting?
- What part of the painting stands out most for you? Why?
- How and by whom are these children being limited?
- If this painting was untitled, what title would you give it? Why?

Summary/class discussion: How does Darger show the struggle of children in his writings and visual art?

Assessment/Homework

Have the students express their thoughts about what children today struggle with. Ask them to pick one of these struggles and write a poem about it, re-creating the style of Henry Darger's "We Sigh for the Child Slaves."

WE SIGH FOR THE CHILD SLAVES

We sigh for the child slaves, we dread the pains of those new,
Their raking sorrows are many, their joys are few,
None are singing, none are dancing,
All hearts are breaking, none are entrancing,
They wait to welcome the good soldiers and the true.

The daylight of unhappy children is waning, their sad evening is near,
Their sun of brightness has set, yet no stars of joy shall appear,
Still, none are singing, none are dancing,
All in sorrow are pining, all hearts in sorrow, none entrancing,
They still wait for the dawn of a glad new year.

Their trees of life shall wither, the sparks of life shall fall,
Sorrow still shall come, death in its most horrible aspect shall call,
Everything now comes alarming, all are in grieving,
And all rebel hearts are basely deceiving,
But hope shall abide to comfort them all.

Soon the horrible war tale shall be told, the thunder of cannon shall be sung,
The storming miles of rebel lines shall be broken,
Their wedge formation shall be unstrung,
All battles' roar shall be alarming, all battle horrors shall bring much grieving,
But all happiness child-slave hearts shall be receiving,
When back every line of rebels shall be flung.

With child-freedom coming, a new tree shall spring from the roots of old.
And in peaceful times many a blossom shall its leaves unfold.
Everything for children will be cheering, all childish hearts shall then be gladdening,
Vivian Wickey shall fall, rebellion shall go down with joy maddening,
The storm of war shall be over,
And the boughs of the trees shall be laden with fruit as of old.

CHILDREN AND ADULTS—LESSON PLAN II

Aim/Objective

Students will examine how Henry Darger creates a distinction between children and adults in his work.

Materials

Reproductions of *To escape forest fires they enter a volcanic cavern. Are helped out of cave, trap by Blengiglomenean createns. / Persued by forest fires, Proving the bigness of the conflarration It is 40 miles away and advancing fast. / How when they were put in a rat infested cell, they by using the rats and even a few mice they caught they managed to escape after being persued and hounded.*

Do Now/Motivation

Define the words *children* and *adults*.

Procedure

For a few minutes, have the students write brief answers to the “Do Now” question. Ask volunteers to share their answers. Some questions to guide the discussion:

- What is the role of a child?
- What is the role of an adult?
- What exactly has to happen for a child to become an adult?

Show *To escape forest fires they enter a volcanic cavern . . .* and the text inscribed in the upper right: “How when they were put in a rat infested cell, they by using the rats and even a few mice they caught they managed to escape after being persued and hounded. These Glandelians were afraid of rats and mice. Some Soldiers.” Questions to guide the discussion:

- What emotions are the girls showing, and what are they doing?
- What emotions are the men showing, and what are they doing?
- Are our definitions of *children* and *adults* recognizable here? How so?

Summary/class discussion: How does Darger depict the differences between children and adults in his artwork?

Assessment/Homework

Ask the students to find a picture in a magazine that has children and/or adults in it. Have them describe how what was discussed in today’s class is depicted in this image.

FORCES OF NATURE

Unit Objectives

Students will

- examine how Henry Darger used simple materials to depict weather scenes;
- become familiar with landscape, weather, and forces of nature as artistic tools for expressing emotions and mood;
- investigate Darger’s weather journal and the impact of forces of nature on his life.

The lesson plans in this unit relate to the following

New York State Learning Standards:

Learning Standards for the Arts

- *Standard 1:* Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts and participate in various roles in the arts.
- *Standard 2:* Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in arts in various roles.
- *Standard 3:* Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.

Learning Standards for English Language Arts

- *Standard 1:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.
- *Standard 3:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.
- *Standard 4:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for social interaction.

Introduction

For ten years, from December 31, 1957, through December 31, 1967, Darger kept a daily weather journal. In it he noted the Chicago weather as it changed throughout the day, commented on the success of the weather reporter’s predictions, and occasionally added how the weather affected him personally. Some neighbors recalled that when greeted on the street, the weather was the one topic Darger would comfortably discuss. Darger’s autobiography, *The History of My Life*, is primarily the tale of a tornado he named Sweetie Pie. In his illustrations and text for *In the Realms of the Unreal*, the weather and other forces of nature, such as fires and tornadoes, are major characters, affecting the lives of the protagonists. In this unit, students will examine Darger’s depictions of weather and consider how these depictions create different moods. In addition, students will have an opportunity to explore different aspects of the artist’s comprehensive weather journal.

Related Vocabulary

Allegory	Morality
Foreshadow	Symbolism

FORCES OF NATURE—LESSON PLAN I

Aim/Objective

Students will analyze Henry Darger's paintings and identify his techniques for depicting the weather.

Materials

Reproductions of *At Jullo Callio. And again escape and being persued by wild Glandelinian soldiery suddenly dash into a party of Christian soldiery and are rescued.*

Note

As the figures in the painting might be distracting for students who have not previously familiarized themselves with Darger's work, we suggest a discussion of gender and some story background (see *Heroes, Heroines, and Gender—Lesson Plan III*, page 35) before examining the weather depicted in this painting. You may also choose to use images from other units in this lesson plan.

Do Now/Motivation

- What materials do you think would enable you to represent weather most accurately?
- List types of weather you could depict.

Procedure

For a few minutes, have the students write brief answers to the "Do Now" questions. Ask volunteers to share their answers. Then, divide the students into small groups and, for a few minutes, have them examine *At Jullo Callio. And again escape and being persued by wild Glandelinian soldiery suddenly dash into a party of Christian soldiery and are rescued.* Some questions to guide the discussion:

- What words would you use to describe Darger's depiction of the weather?
- How does the weather influence the mood created in this image?
- How did Darger use his limited materials to effectively paint a storm? Focus on line, color, wash, and tone.

Summary/class discussion: How would you best describe Darger's depiction of the weather?

Assessment/Homework

Ask the students to choose an emotion (sadness, joy, etc.) and attempt to express it through a painting of the weather.

FORCES OF NATURE–LESSON PLAN II

Aims/Objectives

Students will

- examine Henry Darger’s weather journal as a conceptual exercise and record of accuracy;
- make connections between Darger’s weather journal and his drawings;
- infer how the weather functioned as an entry point for Darger to connect with the larger world.

Materials

- Yesterday’s weather report (newspaper or other media)
- Copies of the excerpt from Darger’s weather journal (page 29)

Do Now/Motivation

- Considering yesterday’s weather report, how accurate do you think are the weather reports you see on television, hear on the radio, or read in the newspaper or online?
- What is your understanding of how people predict the weather?

Procedure

For a few minutes, have the students write brief answers to the “Do Now” questions. Ask volunteers to share their answers. Then, have the students look over the excerpt from Darger’s weather journal for five to ten minutes. Some questions to guide the discussion:

- How important do you think the weather was in Darger’s life? What did you see in his records that leads you to this opinion?
- What subject or idea fascinates you, and why? Have you ever kept track of this subject in some formal way (a list, a journal) or informal way (noting it in your mind, collecting objects)?
- How did Darger respond to the accuracy of the weather reporter in his record?
- How do you think Darger’s interest in weather relates to his artwork?
- How do you think his knowledge of the weather influenced the way he illustrated it?

Summary/class discussion: What connections exist between Darger’s weather journal and his drawings?

Assessment/Homework

To gain a better understanding of Darger’s daily documentation of the weather, have students keep a detailed diary for a week, charting one particular aspect of their day-to-day lives.

EXCERPT: DARGER'S WEATHER JOURNAL

January 20, 1963

He [the weather reporter] was right on the prediction of snow flurries and becoming very windy today, but the snow was very fine. He said little change in temperature but he was greatly wrong in that. It was 8 below, and 5 above was warmest. And he had said high in the 20s. He was right, though, on West to Northwest wind, but wrong on increasing to 18 to 28 miles per hour. It was between 30 and 40 miles per hour.

HEROES, HEROINES, AND GENDER

Unit Objectives

Students will

- discuss the characteristics of a hero and further investigate the connections between gender roles, accomplishments, and heroism;
- examine select writings and paintings by Henry Darger;
- consider Darger’s concept of heroism.

The lesson plans in this unit relate to the following

New York State Learning Standards:

Learning Standards for the Arts

- *Standard 1:* Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts and participate in various roles in the arts.
- *Standard 2:* Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in arts in various roles.
- *Standard 3:* Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.

Learning Standards for English Language Arts

- *Standard 1:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.
- *Standard 2:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.
- *Standard 3:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.

Introduction

Darger’s epic *In the Realms of the Unreal* is set in two lands at war over the issue of child slavery: In Glandelinia, evil adults have enslaved innocent children, whom seven young sisters from Abbieannia—the Vivian Girls—come to rescue. There are many heroes and heroines in this tale, including Darger himself, the colonel Jack Francis Evans, and, most prominently, the seven Vivian Girls. Darger used a variety of materials to visually represent his protagonists in active battle and at rest. This unit will invite students to critically examine Darger’s visual art and discuss how we identify heroes in our society.

Related Vocabulary

Androgynous	Hermaphrodite
Collage	Heroism
Gender	Portray

HEROES, HEROINES, AND GENDER—LESSON PLAN I

Aims/Objectives

Students will

- investigate notions of bravery and heroism and discuss their own criteria for heroism;
- critically examine the text and artwork of Henry Darger and consider his concept of heroism.

Materials

- Copies of “Why Little Girls Are Heroines of This Story,” an excerpt from Darger’s *In the Realms of the Unreal* (page 33)
- Reproductions of *At battle of Drosabellamaximillan. Seeing Glandelinians retreating Vivian girls grasp Christian banners, and lead charge against foe*

Do Now/Motivation

- Define the term *hero*.
- Reflect on the following questions: Can men be heroes? Women? Children? Why? Why not?

Procedure

For a few minutes, have the students write brief answers to the “Do Now” question. Ask volunteers to share their answers. Then, without disclosing the work’s title, ask the class to closely examine *At battle of Drosabellamaximillan. Seeing Glandelinians retreating Vivian girls grasp Christian banners, and lead charge against foe*, and to consider their responses to the question. Some questions to guide the discussion:

- What is happening in this picture?
- What are the girls doing? And the men?
- Which characters look like they are in charge/acting bravely/running scared?

Read the title of the painting.

- Does this change your perception of the picture?

Distribute copies of “Why Little Girls Are Heroines of This Story” and have the students read it as a whole class or individually. Ask the students to look specifically at how the author describes a “hero.”

Some questions to guide the discussion:

- Who do you think are braver—men or women?
- Which gender does our society celebrate more for its heroism?
- Why do you think we have the perception that one gender is braver than another?
- Are all heroes brave?

Summary/class discussion: What does it take to become a hero?

Assessment/Homework

Ask the students to consider whether or not there is a braver gender. Have them write one page and support their thoughts with several examples from times when they were fearful or fearless.

EXCERPT: "WHY LITTLE GIRLS ARE HEROINES OF THIS STORY"

Although, dear readers, in this big story, boys and men play usual and principal parts in the dreadful battles, and during the great war encounter many terrible adventures, by land, sea, fire, water, and so forth, the reason the story runs so much with little girls as the actual heroes in this warfare is because, under most circumstances, women are braver than men. I go to show that by putting little girls in this story as the real heroines, that little girls do and are brave enough, for a fact, to be able to play and show any amount of nerve and courage, full equal or moreso [sic] than boys or men or women who may take part in active warfare.

It has been known, often from my own experience, that boys often do think and even say, which is a mistake, that girls are sissies, cowards, have no courage at all, will run from little snakes and spiders and mice, but I have myself seen many girls and women who were the opposite, and men who were more scared of mice. In moments of great peril, women are to the fullest, braver and more collected than men. Indeed, my own great and many experiences lead me to go even farther. I can easily prove that among any civil or army population, whether trained in bearing arms or not, the average little girl herself can be cooler and more courageous than the average person, whether man or woman.

HEROES, HEROINES, AND GENDER—LESSON PLAN II

Aim/Objective

Students will examine how Henry Darger developed his heroic characters through biographical narrative and illustration.

Materials

Reproductions of *Untitled (Portrait of Colonel Jack Francis Evans)*

Do Now/Motivation

Take five minutes to look at *Untitled (Portrait of Colonel Jack Francis Evans)*.

- What kind of a person do you think is represented in this picture?
- What visual clues lead you to think this?

Procedure

For a few minutes, have the students write brief answers to the “Do Now” questions. Ask volunteers to share their answers. Then, ask the students to read the text surrounding the portrait, or to read portions of it out loud. Some questions to guide the discussion:

- What do you now know about the portrayed person that you didn’t suspect from just the visual clues?
- Why do you think Darger used an image of a woman to portray Colonel Jack Francis Evans?
- How did Darger solve the problem of combining text and image on one page? How might he have chosen to do this differently?
- Do you think Darger succeeded in his portrayal of a hero? Why? Why not?

Summary/class discussion: How did Darger represent his hero Colonel Jack Francis Evans?

Assessment/Homework

Ask the students to choose a character from a fictional story or a historical figure and create a character study that includes an image and text describing the person and his or her accomplishments.

HEROES, HEROINES, AND GENDER—LESSON PLAN III

Aims/Objectives

Students will

- discuss depictions of gender in the work of Henry Darger;
- enter into a discussion about diversity, sensitivity, and tolerance.

Materials

Reproductions of

- *Untitled (Portrait of Colonel Jack Francis Evans)*
- *At Jullo Callio. And again escape and being persued by wild Glandelinian soldiery suddenly dash into a party of Christian soldiery and are rescued.*

Do Now/Motivation

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines the word *androgynous* as “having the characteristics or nature of both male and female.” Give several examples of androgyny that exist in Darger’s paintings.

- What effect do you think androgynous portrayal produces?
- Why do you think Darger might have used this device?

Procedure

For a few minutes, have the students write brief answers to the “Do Now” questions. Ask volunteers to share their answers. Then, introduce a discussion about gender, or “the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex.” Some questions to guide the discussion:

- How did Darger portray the Vivian Girls?
- What, if any, significance would you assign to Darger’s blending of male and female characteristics in his artwork?
- Are connections evident between gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender people and the characters in Darger’s paintings?
- Is tolerance an issue in Darger’s work? How does this play itself out in the story?
- Who do you feel are the most empowered characters in Darger’s work? The soldiers? The girls? The fantasy creatures?

Summary/class discussion: How is gender investigated in Darger’s work?

Assessment/Homework

Have the students write a short story about a character who defies stereotypes.

GOOD AND EVIL

Unit Objectives

Students will

- examine ideas surrounding good and evil and recognize that there are complexities in life that often make choices more challenging;
- be introduced to the powerful artworks of Henry Darger, which revolve around good and evil, and develop critical sensitivity to the power and appeal of both good and evil;
- investigate why people have been fascinated with ideas surrounding good and evil in literature, art, philosophy, and religion from biblical times to the present.

The lesson plans in this unit relate to the following

New York State Learning Standards:

Learning Standards for the Arts

- *Standard 3:* Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.
- *Standard 4:* Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

Learning Standards for English Language Arts

- *Standard 1:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.
- *Standard 3:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.

Introduction

Throughout history, people have been fascinated with ideas surrounding good and evil. These ideas are considered in a variety of art forms, including fairy tales, fables, novels, comics and cartoons, songs, films, television programs, and video games. In the world of fiction, good usually triumphs over evil—but not without challenges along the way. Darger’s epic novel *In the Realms of the Unreal*, however, has two endings: In one, concluding a series of harrowing trials and complex adventures, the heroic Vivian Girls emerge triumphant, while in the other, they are defeated by the evil Glandelinians. In this unit, students will explore descriptions of good and evil in Darger’s work through formal analysis and a careful consideration of narrative devices the artist employed. In addition, students will link Darger’s depictions to depictions of good and evil in contemporary popular culture. Creative hands-on projects will be part of both lessons in this unit.

Related Vocabulary

Antihero	Imagery	Symbol
Conflict	Morality	Universal
Graphic	Narrative	

GOOD AND EVIL—LESSON PLAN I

Aims/Objectives

Students will

- learn about Henry Darger and consider what may have motivated him to devote many years of writing and artmaking to the subject of good versus evil;
- investigate how Darger intensified the drama in his paintings through the specific use of color and composition and the depiction of certain characters.

Materials

- Reproductions of *At Jennie Turner Children tied to trees in path of forest fires. In spite of exceeding extreme peril, Vivian girls rescued them* / *1 Vivian Girl Jennie observes with spy glass great massacre of children and brings the attention of her sisters to it.*
- Colored pencils
- Marking pens
- Paper

Do Now/Motivation

What is good, and what is evil?

Procedure

For a few minutes, have the students write brief answers to the “Do Now” question. Ask volunteers to share their answers. Then, show the students *At Jennie Turner Children tied to trees in path of forest fires. . . .*

Some questions to guide the discussion:

- Danger and evil are sometimes more “thrilling” when the villains are absent. Where are the villains in this painting?
- In the left part of the painting, we see vulnerable, naked children tied to trees. Though unseen, how do we recognize the villains?
- What mood does Darger’s use of color create? (Some thoughts: His use of color heightens the drama. The dark palette in the left part suggests sinister forces lurking through the tree bark, and the contrasting hot oranges and yellows indicate fire and destruction.)
- Why do you think Darger paired the picture on the left with the picture on the right? (Some thoughts: Darger enhanced the sense of evil by strongly contrasting the scene on the left with the one on the right, which depicts the seven Vivian Girls with their white horses in a grassy patch. The soft yellow, purple, and green colors contribute to the calm setting. Consider Darger’s composition, in which he placed the figures on the right in a smooth horizontal plane and the figures on the left in a more chaotic arrangement.)

Activity: Create an image of a dramatic moment from your imagination, or your life experience, in which good and evil play a role.

Summary/class discussion: In which ways does a consideration of good and evil help you understand yourself and the world in which you live? Can creating a fictitious universe help people gain control over their existence?

Assessment/Homework

Ask the students to examine comic strips and find as many examples as they can in which issues of good and evil are expressed graphically. The found examples should be brought to class.

GOOD AND EVIL—LESSON PLAN II

Aim/Objective

Students will relate concepts of good and evil to the heroes, villains, and antiheroes in Henry Darger's visual artwork.

Materials

- Reproductions of *Untitled (Battle scene during lightning storm. Naked Children with Rifles)*
- Paper and pencils or wire, fabric, and recycled materials

Do Now/Motivation

- What examples of good and evil do you find represented in comics or magazine images?
- What visual characteristics in images lead you to define the depicted as either good or evil?
- Is it difficult to locate such depictions?

Procedure

For a few minutes, have the students write brief answers to the “Do Now” question. Ask volunteers to share their answers. Then, consider familiar heroes and villains from video games and movies.

Generate a list of these characters with the students. Some questions to guide the discussion:

- What is the appeal of a hero? (Some cues: attractiveness, strength, courage, unselfishness, kindness, cleverness, cunning.)
- What is the appeal of a villain? (Some thoughts: They may include many of the same characteristics as those of the hero, in addition to power, competitiveness, defiance, daring, and mastery.)
- Why do stories and games about pitting the forces of good and evil against each other continue to have universal appeal? (One thought: Human nature is complex with potential for good and evil.)

Examine *Untitled (Battle scene during lightning storm. Naked Children with Rifles)*. Some questions to guide the discussion:

- What do you see? (Notice: Some children are fleeing, others are injured or dead. Children are also drawn prominently in the foreground shooting at an unseen enemy.)
- What does Darger do to enhance the feeling of turbulence and disjunction in the scene? (Notice: Along with the poised rifles, a lightning storm, and darkness loom in the background.)
- Why do you think Darger painted large, pretty flowers in this horrific scene? (Some thoughts: Flowers may make the war imagery more palatable. Flowers and birds symbolize “goodness.” The house in the upper right of the composition adds touches of serenity and security to the scene—feelings Darger may have longed for and only found in his artistic universe. These elements contrast with the stormy elements at the upper left.)

- Is war ever justified? (One thought: Characters such as James Bond, Robin Hood, and Zorro break the law in order to fight injustice. Discuss the appeal of these characters.)

Summary/class discussion: How are concepts of good and evil related to the heroes, villains, and antiheroes in Darger's visual artwork?

Assessment/Homework

Have the students draw or create a figure that has symbolic and literal elements of "goodness," enabling it to protect, befriend, and support them. Ask the students to take note of what their figure first looks like as they imagine it in their mind. Some questions to guide the discussion:

- What does this tell you about your perceptions of which characteristics are equivalent to "good," and which are equivalent to "evil"?
- What visual clues can you use to communicate your concept (color, value, symbols, location of figure in a setting, etc.)?

FANTASY AND REALITY

Unit Objectives

Students will

- explore the power of fantasy and the universal interest in mythology, fables, and fairytales;
- consider fantasy from the point of view of psychology, religion, literature, and art;
- examine two works by Henry Darger to better understand how fantasy and reality stoked his creativity.

The lesson plans in this unit relate to the following

New York State Learning Standards:

Learning Standards for the Arts

- *Standard 3:* Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.
- *Standard 4:* Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

Learning Standards for English Language Arts

- *Standard 1:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.
- *Standard 3:* Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.

Introduction

For thousands of years, myths, legends, and fables have fascinated people of all ages. Fantastic elements in literature and art teach, inspire, entertain, and frighten the audience, while providing them with a sense of emotional security and release. For medicine men, shamans, and religious leaders, mythology has served to address inexplicable forces in nature. Myths, legends, and fables often foster rules of conduct and moral behavior. At the same time, they may create unfortunate stereotypes.

For artists, fantasy is often synonymous with imagination, the creative spark that allows them to soar in ways never dreamed possible. Darger created an alternate universe, retiring to his room in Chicago every night to write tales of good and evil and to draw magnificent pictures to illustrate his stories. This solitary man was so involved with his fantasy world and the characters in his epic that he was overheard by his neighbors acting out conversations with himself using different voices. In Darger's epic novel *In the Realms of the Unreal*, the heroines, the seven Vivian Girls, endure unspeakable cruelties from their enemies, the Glandelinians, during their quest to free the child slaves held in captivity in Glandelinia. Assisting the girls in their exploits of charging armies, captures, explosions, and forest fires are a panoply of supporters, the most important being the Blengins, who take on many forms throughout the narrative, from serpents to dragonlike creatures to flying beasts with wingspans of more than a hundred feet. In this unit, students will examine the seemingly universal

appear of fantasy through analyses of Darger's paintings and of popular fiction. Creative hands-on projects will be part of both lessons in this unit.

Related Vocabulary

Ambiguous	Myth
Anthropomorphic	Narrative
Creativity	Reality
Fable	Symbol
Fairy tale	Transformation
Fantasy	

FANTASY AND REALITY—LESSON PLAN I

Aims/Objectives

Students will

- share myths and stories they know that combine fantasy and reality and consider why these stories have such broad appeal;
- analyze how Henry Darger employed fantasy and reality to accelerate the action of his monumental tale;
- further recognize the variety of forms that Darger's fantastic creatures assume to maintain continued interest in the story.

Materials

- Reproductions of *To escape forest fires they enter a volcanic cavern. Are helped out of cave, trap by Blengiglomenean createns. / Persued by forest fires, Proving the bigness of the conflarration It is 40 miles away and advancing fast. / How when they were put in a rat infested cell, they by using the rats and even a few mice they caught they managed to escape after being persued and hounded.*
- Colored pencils
- Marking pens
- Illustrated magazines and/or comic strips
- Scissors
- Glue or glue sticks

Do Now/Motivation

What is fantasy, and what is reality?

Procedure

For a few minutes, have the students write brief answers to the “Do Now” question. Ask volunteers to share their answers. In the discussion, someone may suggest that any picture of reality is really an approximation. Are dreams fantasy or reality or both? Share *To escape forest fires they enter a volcanic cavern . . .* with the students. Some questions to guide the discussion:

- Which visual elements approximate reality?
- Which visual elements are completely fantastic?
- How do the two aspects interact?
- Why do you think Darger paired the scene on the left with the scenes in the middle and on the right? Do the pictures in the middle and on the right feature the same elements of fantasy and reality?

Activity: Create a scene in which real and fantastic elements are present. You may mix time and space and “travel” wherever your imagination or dream takes you. Use your own drawing skills and collage elements from popular magazines or comic strips.

Summary/class discussion: How does fantasy add dimensional richness and spirituality to people's inner lives?

Assessment/Homework

Ask the students to choose a chapter or episode from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, L.L. Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, or a similar text and prepare themselves to discuss how the author transforms reality by adding fantastic elements to the story in an original way.

FANTASY AND REALITY—LESSON PLAN II

Aims/Objectives

Students will

- analyze Henry Darger's motivations for creating an alternate world;
- study Darger's universe by investigating the cast of characters and the plot in his epic work, *In the Realms of the Unreal*;
- personalize the idea of creating a universe of one's own through writing or drawing.

Materials

- Reproductions of *To escape forest fires they enter a volcanic cavern. Are helped out of cave, trap by Blengiglomenean createns. / Persued by forest fires, Proving the bigness of the conflarration It is 40 miles away and advancing fast. / How when they were put in a rat infested cell, they by using the rats and even a few mice they caught they managed to escape after being persued and hounded.*
- Colored pencils
- Marking pens
- Illustrated magazines and/or comic strips
- Scissors
- Glue or glue sticks

Do Now/Motivation

The American mythologist Joseph Campbell stated that “Poets are simply those who have made a profession and a lifestyle of being in touch with their bliss.” What do you think he means?

Procedure

For a few minutes, have the students write brief answers to the “Do Now” question. Ask volunteers to share their answers. Then, study the paintings listed under “Materials” with the students. Some questions to guide the discussion:

- Darger tells us that this is a Blengin. How does it differ from other creatures we have previously encountered in Darger's work?
- Which elements of this Blengin are fantastic? Which parts are realistic?
- How does Darger enhance personality, attractiveness, and the spirit of this Blengin? Consider form, color, rhythm, and line.

Activity: Create your own alternate universe through a drawing or written journal entry. Think in terms of past, present, and future settings and the possibility of time travel.

Summary/class discussion: How does fantasy allow people to fulfill dreams and longings and satisfy emotional and spiritual needs?

Assessment/Homework

Ask the students to pick a song, story, or picture in which fantasy and reality blend and some transformation takes place in a character or a place.

COLOR MAY DEVIATE FROM ORIGINAL



175 AT JENNIE RICHEL. EVERYTHING IS ALLRIGHT THOUGH STORM CONTINUES. / Henry Darger (1892-1973) / Chicago / mid-twentieth century /
watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper / 24 x 108 1/4" / American Folk Art Museum, museum purchase, 2001.16.2a / © Kiyoko Lerner / photo by James Prinz

COLOR MAY DEVIATE FROM ORIGINAL



TO ESCAPE FOREST FIRES THEY ENTER A VOLCANIC CAVERN. ARE HELPED OUT OF CAVE, TRAP BY BLENGIGLOMENEAN CREATENS. / PERSUED BY FOREST FIRES, PROVING THE BIGNESS OF THE CONFLARRATION IT IS 40 MILES AWAY AND ADVANCING FAST. / HOW WHEN THEY WERE PUT IN A RAT INFESTED CELL, THEY BY USING THE RATS AND EVEN A FEW MICE THEY CAUGHT THEY MANAGED TO ESCAPE AFTER BEING PERSUED AND HOUNDED. / Henry Darger (1892-1973) / Chicago / mid-twentieth century / watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper / 19 x 70" / American Folk Art Museum, museum purchase, 2000.25.1a / © Kiyoko Lerner / photo by James Prinz

COLOR MAY DEViate FROM ORIGINAL



AT JULLO CALLIO. AND AGAIN ESCAPE AND BEING PERSUED BY WILD GLANDELINIAN SOLDIERY SUDDENLY DASH INTO A PARTY OF CHRISTIAN SOLDIERY AND ARE RESCUED. / Henry Darger (1892-1973) /

Chicago / mid-twentieth century / watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper / 19 x 47 3/4" / American Folk Art Museum, museum purchase, 2002.22.1a / © Kiyoko Lerner / photo by James Prinz

COLOR MAY DEVIATE FROM ORIGINAL



AT BATTLE OF DROSABELLAMAXIMILLAN. SEEING GLANDELINIANS RETREATING VIVIAN GIRLS GRASP CHRISTIAN BANNERS, AND LEAD CHARGE AGAINST FOE / Henry Darger (1892-1973) / Chicago / mid-twentieth century / watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper / 19 x 47 3/4" / American Folk Art Museum, museum purchase, 2002.22.1b / © Kiyoko Lerner / photo by James Prinz

COLOR MAY DEViate FROM ORIGINAL



AT JENNIE TURNER CHILDREN TIED TO TREES IN PATH OF FOREST FIRES. IN SPITE OF EXCEEDING EXTREME PERIL, VIVIAN GIRLS RESCUED THEM / 1 VIVIAN GIRL JENNIE

OBSERVES WITH SPY GLASS GREAT MASSACRE OF CHILDREN AND BRINGS THE ATTENTION OF HER SISTERS TO IT. / Henry Darger (1892-1973) / Chicago / mid-twentieth century /

watercolor, pencil, colored pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper / 18 x 47 1/2" / American Folk Art Museum, gift of Carl Lobell and Kate Stettner in honor of Frank Maresca, 2000.25.2b / © Kiyoko Lerner / photo by James Prinz

COLOR MAY DEVIATE FROM ORIGINAL



UNTITLED (Battle scene during lightning storm. Naked Children with Rifles) / Henry Darger (1892-1973) / Chicago / mid-twentieth century / watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper / 24 x 74 3/4" / American Folk Art Museum, gift of Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner, 1995.23.1b / © Kiyoko Lerner / photo by Gavin Ashworth

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HENRY DARGER'S CREATIVE PROCESS: GIRL IN POLKA-DOT DRESS SEQUENCE

Left to right:

Source illustration from magazine with pencil markings, 8 x 7 1/4"

Negative, 5 x 4"

Photo enlargement with pencil markings, 11 x 14"

Photo enlargement of girl with pencil markings, 8 x 10"

Carbon tracing, 14 x 11"

Carbon tracing and pencil on paper, 12 x 7 1/2"

American Folk Art Museum, museum gift and purchase, 2003.7.40a-f

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photos by Gavin Ashworth, New York

These images illustrate how Darger appropriated subject matter from popular media for his work.

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HENRY DARGER'S CREATIVE PROCESS: BUSTLE SKIRT BECOMES FLOWER STEM

Left to right:

Source illustration from coloring book of woman with bustle skirt, 13 1/2 x 10 1/2"

Carbon tracing and pencil on paper, 10 1/2 x 8"

Carbon tracing and pencil on paper, 10 1/2 x 8"

American Folk Art Museum, museum gift and purchase, 2003.7.28a-c

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photos by Gavin Ashworth, New York

These images illustrate how Darger appropriated subject matter from popular media for his work. The bustle skirt in the original illustration is transformed into the base of the fantastic red and yellow flower in the center of the painting 175 At Jennie Richee. Everything is alright though storm continues.

COLOR MAY DEVIATE FROM ORIGINAL



AT 5 NORMA CATHERINE. BUT ARE RETAKEN. / Henry Darger (1892-1973) / Chicago / mid-twentieth century / watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper / 23 x 36 3/4" / American Folk Art Museum, gift Sam and Betsey Farber, 2003.8.1a / © Kiyoko Lerner / photo by Gavin Ashworth

COLOR MAY DEVIATE FROM ORIGINAL



UNTITLED (Portrait of Colonel Jack Francis Evans) / Henry Darger (1892-1973) / Chicago / mid-twentieth century / watercolor, pencil, ink, and collage on board / 13 3/4 x 11 1/2" / American Folk Art Museum, museum purchase, 2002.22.5 / © Kiyoko Lerner / photo by Gavin Ashworth