

# Collaborative Collage

## NORTON SIMON MUSEUM | ART IN THE CLASSROOM



*Nosegay on a Marble Plinth*  
and detail

c. 1695

Rachel Ruysch

(Dutch, 1664/5–1750)

Oil on canvas

14¾ x 11½ in. (37.5 x 29.2 cm)

The Norton Simon Foundation

### Objective

Learn to challenge your assumptions by taking a closer look at art, the world around you and your peers.

### Background

It's easy to walk past Rachel Ruysch's small **still life** in the galleries and assume that it's just another flower or **vanitas** painting, but viewers who take a closer look might be surprised to find a bee, a dragonfly and other scientifically observed details. Ruysch's paintings show a precise knowledge of flowers and insects, gleaned from the collection of rare natural-history specimens owned by her father, a scientist and professor of anatomy and botany. Ruysch was one of the highest-paid painters of her time, despite the career limitations imposed on women artists and the fact that she had 10 children.

### Discussion

Take some time to look at Rachel Ruysch's *Nosegay on a Marble Plinth* as a class, making note of its small size and dramatic lighting.

- As a class, analyze Ruysch's use of the elements of art to communicate a mood or sense of interest. Looking closely at this picture, is there anything you see that surprises you?
- This is a 17th-century Dutch painting. Knowing this background and looking at its subject matter, what might you assume about the painting's creator?



## Materials

A large, dark poster board with a table or vase shape cut from lighter paper pasted onto it, a large light-colored poster board, drawing and collage materials, including pencils, colored pencils, various papers, scissors and glue.

## Activity

Together with your classmates, create a collaborative still-life collage on a large poster board.

- Choose or invent a flower, insect or other still-life object that you feel somehow represents you, using either drawing or collage.
- Trace the shape of your object on a separate paper, and write a brief explanation of how and why your contribution to the **still life** reflects you and your unique story. Include something special about you that other people might miss if they don't take the time to look past their assumptions and get to know you.



- Cut out and glue your object, along with a small number assigned by your teacher, to the dark-colored poster board to create a collaborative **still-life** collage.
- Then cut out your written explanation and glue it in the same position as your object, along with the corresponding number, to a separate light-colored poster board.



## Reflection

Spend some time looking at the finished collage and your classmates' contributions. Then take turns introducing and explaining your contribution to the collage.

What, if anything, about your peers' contributions surprises you? Do you think this artwork represents you and your classmates?

## Variations

This project can be scaled up or down and made more simple or complex, depending on grade level.

**Older Students:** Talk about how you think people stereotype you and how it affects you, and examine your own biases as well. **Students with Special Needs:** Say a word describing Ruysch's painting and then combine it with the words your classmates chose to make a poem as a group. Then choose an object that is special to you to draw or collage, and add your artwork to those of your classmates on a poster board. What word would you choose to describe your artwork? Create another class poem using this word and the words your classmates chose to describe their artworks.

## Vocabulary

**Still life:** the depiction of primarily inanimate objects, such as flowers or fruit, by an artist.

**Vanitas:** a still-life painting containing symbols of death or change as a reminder that life and earthly pleasures are temporary, but death is certain.

## Curriculum Connections

**Visual Arts: Grade 5:** Identify and describe the elements of art; communicate values, opinions, or personal insights through an original artwork; identify and design icons, logos and other graphic devices as symbols for ideas and information. **Grade 6:** identify and describe all the elements of art found in selected artworks; discuss works of art as to theme, genre, style, idea and differences in media; describe how balance is effectively used in art; select specific media and processes to express moods, feelings, themes or ideas. **Grade 7:** describe selected artworks, using the elements of art and the principles of design; develop skill in using mixed media while guided by a selected principle of design; explain the intent of a personal artwork and draw possible parallels between it and the work of a recognized artist; analyze the form and content of artworks. **Grade 8:** analyze and justify how their artistic choices contribute to the expressive quality of their own artworks. **Grades 9–12:** identify and use the principles of design to discuss, analyze and write about visual aspects in artworks, including their own; create original artworks of increasing complexity and skill in a variety of media that reflect their feelings and point of view; demonstrate in their own artworks a personal style and an advanced proficiency in communicating an idea, theme or emotion.

**English Language Arts: Pre-K–2:** Ask and answer questions about key details in an [artwork]; participate in collaborative conversations. **Grade 3–12:** cite [visual] evidence to support analysis of what an [artwork] says; analyze the structure an [artist] used to organize an [artwork]; engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners.