

Altered Landscapes: Collages Inspired by Edward Burtynsky

CREATED WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY: Lauren Eng, Catherine Schechter, and Amelia Epp

TOPICS: Creating collages using magazines and texture rubbings;
Exploring the environmental impact of human waste

SUBJECT(S): Visual Art, Social Studies, and Language Arts

GRADE(S): 4-7

UNIT DURATION: 3 lessons



Edward Burtynsky, *Oxford Tire Pile 9a & 9b*, Wesley, California (diptych), 1999, digital chromogenic print, 48 x 60 inches (each). Images courtesy of the artist.

OVERVIEW & CULMINATING TASK:

In this cross curricular unit students will explore the photographs of Canadian artist Edward Burtynsky who depicts landscapes that have been impacted by humans. Students will explore the effects that human waste has on the environment through discussion, writing, and the creation of collages.

Born in 1955 in St. Catharines, Ontario, Burtynsky is a graduate of Ryerson University and Niagara College. He links his early exposure to the sites and images of the General Motors plant in his hometown to the development of his photographic work. His imagery explores the intricate link between industry and nature, combining the raw elements of mining, quarrying, manufacturing, shipping, oil production and recycling into eloquent, highly expressive visions that find beauty and humanity in the most unlikely of places.

BIG IDEAS (What students will understand):

- Through art making, one's sense of identity and community continually evolves. (Arts Education 7)
- Complex global problems require international cooperation to make difficult choices for the future. (Social Studies 6)
- Personal choices and social and environmental factors influence our health and wellbeing. (Physical and Health Education 5)

CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES (What students will do):

- Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of personal, social, cultural, historical and environmental contexts in relation to the arts.
- Interpret and communicate ideas using symbols and elements to express meaning through the arts.
- Sequence objects, images or events, and recognize the positive and negative aspects of continuities and changes in the past and present.

CONCEPTS & CONTENT (What students will know):

- Variety of local works of art and artistic traditions
- The urbanization and migration of people effecting the earth
- Symbolism and metaphor to explore ideas and perspective

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S) (What students will keep considering):

- What ideas about the relationship between humans and the environment does Edward Burtynsky communicate through his photographs? How does he communicate these ideas?

FIRST PEOPLES' PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING:

- Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

MATERIALS & TECHNOLOGIES:

- digital images of Edward Burtynsky photographs (see end of document for large images)
- digital projector/computer
- 8.5" x 11" white cartridge paper or printer paper (6 pieces each student)
- crayons (with paper wrapping removed) or woodless pencil crayons in a variety of warm and cool colours
- 18" x 12" grey or white construction paper
- scissors
- glue sticks
- pencils
- sharpies
- magazines
- printed Trash Tracing Templates (see end of document)

VOCABULARY:

environment, landscape, contrast, line, colour, texture, pattern, horizon, background, mid-ground, foreground, diptych, symmetry, balance, repetition, overlapping

RESOURCES & REFERENCES:

- Edward Burtynsky landscape photos: <https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/projects/photographs>
- Documentary film about the work of Edward Burtynsky: <https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/projects/films/manufactured-landscapes>
- Art terms glossary: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms>

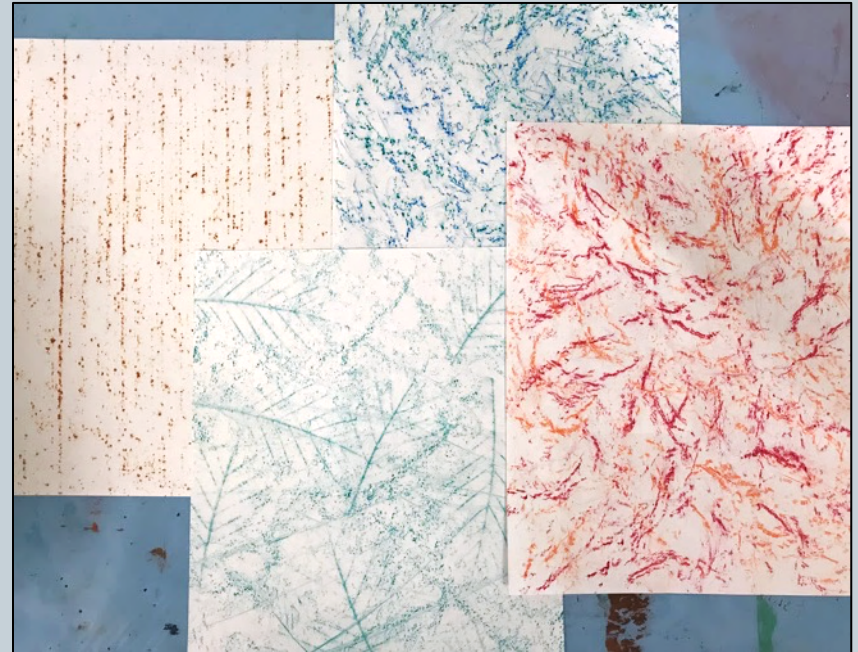
ADAPTATIONS & MODIFICATIONS:

Students with difficulties using scissors may need support. Students with beginner language and writing skills may need support with writing their paragraph in Lesson #3.

DISCUSSION & ACTIVITIES (Teacher Action/Student Action):

LESSON #1 (intro & creating rubbings):

- Before introducing students to the artwork of Edward Burtynsky, pose the following discussion questions:
 - What do you think happens to old tires? Where do they go once they are no longer being used? How much space do you think old tires take up in the world?
- Introduce students to Edward Burtynsky's photographs *Oxford Tire Pile 9a & 9b, Wesley, California* (see end of document for large images to project). Look at the images in silence first and then pose questions for discussion:
 - What do you notice about these images?
 - What shapes are repeated in the photographs?
 - Why do you think the artist split the image in two? Explain that the photographs are an example of a diptych, which is an artwork made up of two parts. Discuss the artist's use of symmetry.
 - Point out the area of grass and sand in the images. Ask students: Why do you think the artist included part of the existing environment in the photographs? Point out that the inclusion of this space gives the viewer a glimpse of the original environment. This space also serve as a compositional device. The ground provides a contrast to the density and weight of the tire pile; this

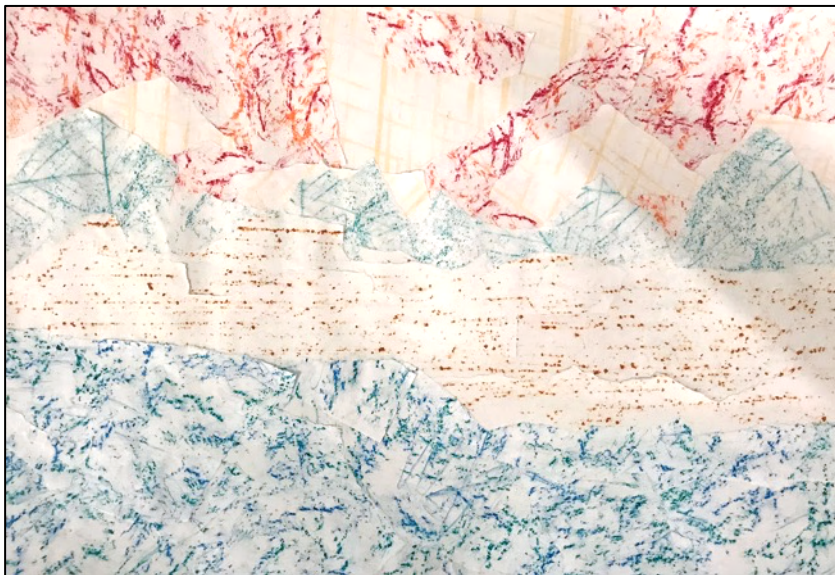


4 rubbings made using both natural and human-made textures and both warm and cool colours. The texture on the far-right has been created by overlapping red and orange.

area provides a place for the eye to rest.

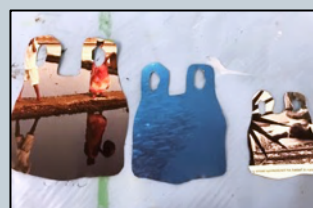
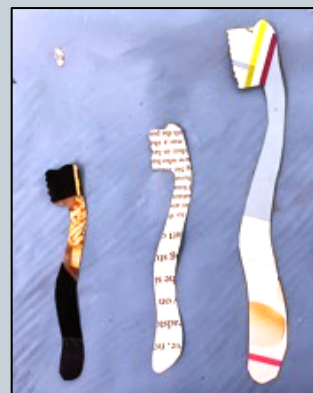
-What is the artist's message? What story is he trying to tell?

- View Edward Burtynsky's website as a class or have students work in pairs: <https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/projects/photographs>. Have students consider the following questions and share their responses with the class:
 - Describe Burtynsky's use of colour, texture, pattern, and line in his photographs of landscapes.
 - Would you describe these images as beautiful? Why or why not?
 - Why might Burtynsky create beautiful images depicting the impact of humans on the environment?
 - How do these images make you feel?
 - What message might Burtynsky be trying to communicate?
- If possible, view with students the documentary film *Manufactured Landscapes* (2006) about the work of Edward Burtynsky: <https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/projects/films/manufactured-landscapes>.
- Explain to students that, inspired by Edward Burtynsky's photographs, they will create their own collages depicting a landscape altered by human-created waste.



Landscape collage created using torn sheets of crayon rubbings.

- Students will begin by creating rubbings that will be used to collage a landscape background. Have students brainstorm a landscape that they plan to use for their collage. View Burtynsky's photographs online for inspiration.
- Have students brainstorm a list of 6 crayon colours that they plan to use for their background. Students should include a selection of both warm and cool colours (i.e. blue, green, black, yellow, pink, and red).
- Distribute 6 sheets of 8.5"x11" cartridge or printer paper to each student. Using their 6 different coloured crayons, students will create rubbings of 6 different textures. Students will entirely cover each sheet of paper with 1 texture in 1 colour. Demonstrate how to press firmly with the side of the crayons (with the paper removed) in order to create bold rubbings.
- For more depth and to create bolder rubbings, students may overlap 2 shades of a colour (i.e. light and dark green) on a single sheet of paper (see examples of rubbings on previous page).
- Students can seek out textures both inside and outside the school. Students should experiment with capturing a combination of both natural textures (i.e. leaves, tree bark) and human-made textures (i.e. manhole covers, burlap, metal siding, concrete). Explain to students that this connects to Burtynsky's photographs which depict both natural environments and human-created waste.



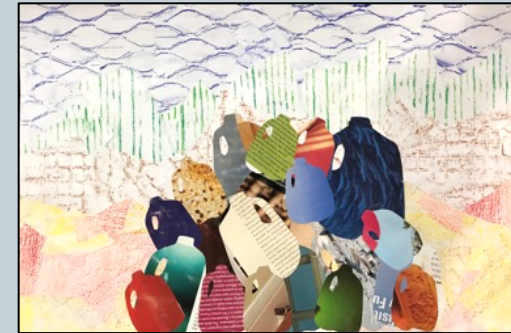
Examples of shapes cut out from magazine paper using the Trash Tracing Templates.

LESSON #2 (creating collaged landscape backgrounds & tracing trash templates):

- Students will tear each of their 6 sheets of rubbings into 4-6 pieces. Students will arrange these torn pieces on a sheet of grey or white 18" x 12" construction paper to create their landscape background. Students may tear their rubbings into smaller pieces, if necessary.
- Suggest to students that they begin with designing the part of their landscape that is furthest away, such as the sky. They should then add layers of paper, moving towards the foreground or the closest up part of the landscape (i.e. adding mountains, flat ground, and then water as is done in the example to the left).
- Students don't need to use all of their pieces of torn paper. They may put their unused scraps of paper into a shared bin that could be drawn upon by the entire class.
- Students should glue their torn paper down once they've finished arranging their landscape (see example to the left).
- Have each student choose one of five Trash Tracing Templates found at the end of this document. These templates should be printed onto 8.5"x11" printer paper.
- Each student should carefully cut out the three shapes provided on their Trash Tracing Template (small, medium, and large).
- Students should use a pencil or sharpie to trace their shapes onto magazine pages. Students should aim to trace 8-10 small images, 6-8 medium, and 4-6 large. They should look for a variety of colours and patterns to trace their shapes onto (see examples to the left).
- After students finish tracing their shapes they should cut them out. To speed up this process, students can fold a magazine page in half and trace on one side. They can then cut through both halves of the paper to create 2 shapes at once.
- Students should save their cut out trash shapes in folders or envelopes to be used in the next lesson.

LESSON #3 (collage completion & reflection):

- Explain to students that they will arrange their cut out trash shapes on top of their textured landscape background.
- Encourage students to experiment with a variety of arrangements before deciding upon their final composition.
- To spark ideas for compositions, revisit some of Burtynsky's photographs as a class and pose the following reflection questions:
 - Where is your eye drawn to in this composition? Why?
 - How does your eye move through this composition? Why?
 - Is this composition symmetrical? Asymmetrical?
 - Has Burtynsky created balance within this composition? How?
- Students may arrange their trash shapes in a single large pile, in multiple small piles, scattered throughout the landscape, etc. (see examples to the right for ideas). Emphasize to students that they should overlap their trash shapes.
- Once students have decided on the arrangement of their trash shapes they can then glue them down using glue sticks.
- Display the completed collages so that students can view them all together. Pose the following discussion questions:
 - What are some of the different ways that your classmates have used textures to create a landscape background?
 - What are some of the different ways that your classmates have arranged the piles of trash in their compositions?
 - How do these artworks make you feel? Are they upsetting to see? Pleasing to the eye?
 - How is garbage damaging the earth?
 - What changes does humanity have to make to prevent damage to the earth?
 - What are some ways that we can contribute to helping the earth? In the neighbourhood? In the classroom? At home?
 - What are some ways you can cut down on single use items?
- In a paragraph (number of sentences depending on writing level), ask the students to answer the following questions:
 - Describe the landscape that you created in your collage.
 - How did you choose to arrange your trash shapes within the composition. Why?
 - What are some ways that you, as an individual, can decrease waste and pollution? Can you make an impact beyond your individual actions? How?
 - Why should this matter to you?
- Students should draft, edit, and create a final copy of their paragraph.



Examples showing different ways in which the trash shapes can be arranged in the final collages.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

After Lesson #1 have students write an Exit Question expressing their reactions to Burtynsky's photographs *Oxford Tire Pile 9a* and *Oxford Tire Pile 9b*.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

After students complete their art piece and paragraph, have students share their ideas with a partner. Individual students may choose to read their paragraphs to the class. Evaluate and comment on students' completed work.

EXTENSIONS & POSSIBLE CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS:

Extensions could include lessons on the following topics:

Recycling:

- Teach the students about how to properly sort recycling into the blue bins at school.
- Discuss the process of recycling (i.e. Where do our recycled items go? What is done with them?).

- Provide information about specific items such as plastic water bottles, which are one of the biggest waste products in our landfills and oceans. Ted Ed video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6xINyWpB8
- Start a bin to recycle markers and used glue sticks in the classroom. Staples partnered with Terracycle to recycle used markers, pens, highlighters etc. This helps to prevent markers from ending up in the land fill: <https://www.terracycle.com/en-CA/brigades/writing-instrument-retail-based-brigade#@48.84550943931856:-123.91315483754504zoom:11&1-20of1>

Reusing:

- Teach the students about ways they can reuse products in their life. For example, you could start a class clothing drive in which students donate old clothing or material to second hand stores or thrift stores.
- Share information about the amount of power, pollution, and chemicals needed to make clothing. Ted Ed video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiSYoegb_VY

Reducing:

- Explore, as a class, ways to eliminate or reduce single use items such as plastic bags, plastic straws, plastic bags, etc.

AFK RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS:

Looking for more art lesson ideas? Looking for ways to connect art to other areas of the curriculum? Visit the AFK Resources page to find lesson plans for all grade levels!

<http://tiny.cc/AFKResources>



Edward Burtynsky, *Oxford Tire Pile 9a & 9b, Wesley, California* (diptych), 1999, digital chromogenic print, 48 x 60 inches (each). Images courtesy of the artist.

