Romare Bearden: Working with Juxtaposition

Worksheet – Write your answers in complete sentences.

Name_________________Key___________________________Period_______________________

1. Why did Bearden turn his attention away from Baseball?
   a. In order to play for the major leagues he was asked to pass himself off as being white but he refused this request which ended his baseball career.

2. Why was the Great Depression especially hard on African-Americans and what effect did it have on Bearden?
   a. During this period of economic hardship, conditions were especially difficult for African-Americans. Prejudice made it doubly hard for blacks to find jobs and they were even banned from certain professions (even major league baseball). Bearden saw no future for himself in the game and turned his attention to art.

3. What major effect did he have on contemporary American art?
   a. He used “scrap” materials in a new way to deliver powerful messages about African-American life. He used collage to express his feelings about the conflicts, barriers, and hardships faced every day by most African-Americans. By juxtaposing many photographic images of varying size and viewpoint, the artist is able to visually communicate a sense of disorientation and alienation.

4. How did Bearden’s work, *Prevalence of Ritual: Baptism* (pg 3) reflect the time and place that he lived?

During the mid-60’s and the civil rights movement, African-Americans expressed their anger at being treated as second-class citizens. They held marches, sit-ins and redefining themselves by changing their names, hairstyles and clothes to reflect their pride in their African heritage. *Prevalence of Ritual: Baptism*, is based on a memory from a ceremony from his childhood and it reflects many of the social and political issues of the time.
5. **How and what** kind of emotion did Bearden express in *Prevalence of Ritual: Baptism*?
   a. Bearden juxtaposes African masks and sculptures with oversized fragments of body parts like mouths, teeth, hands. The “Accusing eyes” and “anguished faces,” as the artist called them, suggest hostility and sadness but also express a sense of pride.

6. Where was Bearden born and where did he move to when he was 3 years old?
   a. Bearden was born in North Carolina and moved to Harlem in New York City after he had turned three years old.

7. What were the subjects of Bearden’s collages that he became famous for?
   a. His early memories of Southern sharecroppers, Black urban life, family gatherings, and jazz music became the subjects of the collages for which he later became famous.

8. **Describe** and **analyze** the artwork on page 5, *Southern Limited*.

   The mournful sound made by the *Southern Limited* is echoed in the eerie pink sky and desolate gray landscape it passes through. Distorted, patched figures and rough textures frame the work’s focal point – the tiny train in the distance.

9. How does the shapes, colors, textures and space impact the meaning of that Bearden used in “*Morning of the Rooster*?” (page 4)

   The simplified shapes and bright fabrics in “*Morning of the Rooster*”, convey a sense of peace and joy despite the bare surroundings.
10. How did Bearden suggest life in a big-city neighborhood in “The Dove”?

The unsettling fragmentations, scale changes, overlapping shapes, shifting perspectives, and jarring angles in “The Dove” (page 5) suggest life in a poor, overcrowded but vitally alive big-city neighborhood.

11. How did the public respond to Bearden’s photomontages?
   a. Because they made a unique statement about black pride, Bearden’s “montage paintings” were immediately popular and critically acclaimed.

12. Bearden had a love for both music and art. How is creating music and his collage similar?
   a. A collage artist works with everyday materials – paper scrapes, photos, fabrics – arranging and rearranging them as a musician would arrange musical notes. Like a musician, Bearden was able to create a definite mood with all these fragments.

13. How did Bearden suggest “sound” in “Blues at the Crossroads” on page 6? What do the strong diagonals and curves suggest?

Bearden uses enlarged details – fingers, mouths, saxophones, piano keys, trumpet parts – to suggest the way the sounds are woven together. The diagonals and curves suggest the dynamic, passionate nature of the music being created.
14. On page 7, what mood does “Solo Flight” suggest to you and what sound does the brilliant pink color suggest?

The single photo used in this work is the composition’s focal point – the trombone. The freely painted watercolor wash surrounding the instrument echoes the spontaneous, magical sounds the musician is creating.

15. On page 7, what mood does “Encore” suggest to you and why?

In “Encore”, stylized shapes, bright colors, and sharp edges suggest a soulful, polished jazz performance.

16. In the “Woodshed” on page 7, what does the artist tell you of this musician’s surroundings and his haunted expression?

Bearden emphasizes his poverty by incorporating torn photos and ripped bits of cloth. The musician’s isolation is intensified by placing him outside. His wife is seen at a distance framed in the doorway, visually and emotionally cut off from him and his music.
17. How did Bearden convey the powerful feeling of genuine folk music in his photomontage, “Three Folk Musicians” (pp. 8-9)?

Bearden’s fragments, scale changes, rough textures, dislocation, and bright colors convey the rough, raw, powerful feeling of genuine folk music.

18. What quality within “Three Folk Musicians” creates a sinister, mysterious quality?
   a. The masklike faces and hint of striped uniforms give the musicians a sinister, mysterious quality.