BUILDING A COLLECTION

"I discover stuff every time I look at them." —Cheech Marin

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students view the Cheech Marin/Chicano Art segment of Craft in America: Collectors. They learn about The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art and Culture in Riverside, California named for collector and entertainer Cheech Marin that houses his extensive collection of Chicano art. After examining examples of Chicano art, students explore the world of collecting, considering what kinds of things are collected and why, what students themselves may currently collect, and



what kind of collection they might imagine owning. To practice collecting, researching, and presenting, students work in small groups to make a "mini museum" of common items discovered and gathered in the classroom. They apply criteria to determine their choices, research facts about their collection, and decide on plans for presentation. Students carefully label and present their mini museums on a desktop or other designated space and visit each group's museum. Next, students repeat the same steps to create a collection of their choice for a more deeply considered museum of objects, as represented by images found online. Their final mini-museums are presented and displayed during an opening event.

Grade Level: 9-12

Estimated Time: five class periods

Craft In America Theme/Episode: COLLECTORS

Background Information

Best known as one half of the hilariously irreverent, satirical, counter-culture, no-holds-barred duo Cheech and Chong, Cheech Marin is a paradox in the world of entertainment. Cheech is an actor, director, writer, musician, art collector, and humanitarian. Cheech is recognized today as a preeminent Chicano art advocate. In the mid-1980s, he began developing what is now arguably the finest private collection of Chicano art. Furthering his goal to introduce Chicano art to a wider audience, Marin has entered a partnership with the City of Riverside, California, and



Riverside Art Museum to create The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture.

Key Concepts

- People collect things that interest them.
- Collectors can learn about the things they collect by researching them.
- Collectors can share their collection with others.

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Critical Questions

- Why do people collect things?
- How can we find out more about items we collect?
- How can people share their collections with others?

Objectives

Students will:

- curate a collection by selecting objects according to specific criteria.
- generate and investigate questions about items in their collection.
- present their collection to an audience.

Vocabulary

Chicano, mi gente, chongo, facsimile, juxtapose, collection/collector, criterion/criteria, curate/curator, display, present, pedestal, gallery, opening.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Art, Music, Social Studies, Spanish, Technology:
 The Smithsonian Institution features an online Many Lenses project that encourages examining objects from their collections through multiple perspectives. The online exhibits are recommended for classroom use. To find out more about Many Lenses: nmaahc.si.edu/explore/many-lenses

These two exhibits from the *Many Lenses* collection feature Chicano culture: *Lowriders: Cars with Identities.* A lowrider car can be seen in the Cheech Marin segment. The National Museum of African American History and Culture website features photos and short essays on the importance and meaning of lowriders within Chicano culture, West Coast hip hop culture, and Native American culture. nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/lowriders

Grounds for Solidarity. The Poor People's Movement was an activist demonstration begun by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that took place in Washington, D.C., in 1968. Scroll down to find the essay on Chicano Power in this online exhibit: nmaahc.si.edu/explore/many-lenses

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

This lesson addresses the following standards. The performance standards listed here are directly related to the lesson's goals.

• Presenting:

Anchor standard 4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation. VA:Pr4.1.8a

Develop and apply criteria for evaluating a collection of artwork for presentation.

VA:Pr4.1.la

Analyze, select, and curate artifacts and/or artworks for presentation and preservation.

Anchor standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and works for presentation. AV:Pr5.1.6a

Individually or collaboratively, develop a visual plan for displaying works of art, analyzing exhibit space, the needs of the viewer, and the layout of the exhibit.



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• Responding:

Anchor standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

VA:Re.7.1.la

Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences.

• Connecting:

Anchor standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, historical, and cultural contexts to deepen understanding.

VA:Cn11.1.8a

Distinguish different ways art is used to represent, establish, reinforce, and reflect group identity.

Resources and Materials for Teaching Resources

- Craft in America COLLECTORS episode, <u>craftinamerica.org/episode/collectors</u>, Cheech Marin's segment, and Craft in America's website, <u>craftinamerica.org</u>
- Images of the work of artists featured in the video, for display in the classroom and for students to share and examine closely
- Computer and printer for printing images of collections
- Before the lesson, gather a simple collection to use as an example for discussions about criteria, curating, and presenting. Some suggestions are bottle caps, cookie cutters, novelty keychains, or items from nature such as feathers or leaves.

Worksheets

- Worksheet 1: Building a Collection
- Worksheet 2: You, the Expert
- Worksheet 3: People have to see this!

Materials

- Sketchbooks
- Markers, pens and pencils
- Scissors
- Rulers
- White glue, stick glue
- Tape, tape gun for mounting images
- 3 by 5-inch index cards: About 10 per student to make labels and tags for the presentation of the collections (add more for the option under Extensions for making small artworks). Index cards are handy, inexpensive, and a useful weight, but other paper may be substituted.
- Assorted cardboard such as mat board scraps, recycled cereal and cracker boxes, or manila file folders for mounting collection printouts
- Paper punches and string for making attachable tags that hang from collection items
- Material options for presentations: Small boxes of various sizes to form display pedestals, bulletin board and tacks, blue removable painter's tape for hanging displays on walls



INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Overview

Students will view the COLLECTORS episode, focusing on the segment featuring art collector and entertainer Cheech Marin and the museum named for him that features his collection of Chicano art. Using the questions on Worksheet 1: Building a Collection, the teacher guides the class to listen for and record information about Cheech Marin's collection. The teacher demonstrates the mini museum project and, in small groups, students spend a class period creating a collection from items found in the classroom. Meanwhile, students are thinking about their final collection and what they will choose to collect.

Using Worksheet 2: You, the Expert, students (individually or in small groups) search and select images for their own choice of a collection. Research on the collection occurs alongside choosing objects. Students prepare the image collection by mounting the images on cardboard and preparing labels for each item. Students then use Worksheet 3: People have to see this! to plan and prepare a gallery opening to present their collections to each other, and to any invited guests.

A note about collections: While many students likely have actual collections, in this lesson all students form a collection by finding and gathering images online. They print the images and mount them on cardboard for display, using the mounted prints to represent the actual objects. This allows all students to "collect" expensive or hard to obtain objects including artworks, jewelry, antiques, natural specimens, pop culture collectibles, etc. Students who already have an actual collection about which they are passionate can follow the same process to represent their collection, add to it, and research more about it.

Size and display: Because the collections will be shared at an opening, it is a good idea to limit the size and number of collection images so that there is room for them all to be effectively displayed. Students may fit the images on a 3 by 5-inch index card, similar to art postcards sold in museums. Six or so images might be enough for a desk-sized display.

Before Viewing

Introduce the scope of the lesson to students, sharing the key concepts, critical questions, and objectives. Let them know they will be looking at a museum collection and that they will create their own facsimile of a collection. Ask for volunteers to record some responses on the board to the following questions:

- What have you collected in the past? Remind students of how young children often collect things from nature or toys.
- Where did you keep your collection?
- What do you collect now?
- How have you displayed the objects you collected?
- Do you know anyone among your friends or family members who has a collection?
- How do they display their collections?
- If money were no object, what would you like to collect? Students who have had a collection in the past or have one now may want to share why they collect what they collect. Invite students to share how they started their collections.
- Did they start with just one object and slowly add to the collection, or did they begin with several objects at one time? Explain that in the video they will encounter an individual

who collects artworks. Suggest that as they watch the video, they should try to determine why the collector collects what he does and how he displays his collection.

Have students review the questions on Worksheet 1: Building a Collection before showing the video. While viewing, pause the video at different times so students can record their answers. Students may want to work together in small groups to spot and share the answers to the questions. (See the teacher discussion guide for possible answers.) Class discussion can happen during and after viewing. Address new vocabulary when appropriate. For example, with question one, define criteria with students when Cheech first talks about what he collects.

After Viewing

Learn about collectors and collections

Refer to the questions on the worksheet and review student responses. Elicit from the students that Cheech created a museum to house his collection of Chicano art. Ask the following questions:

- How is The Cheech museum similar to and different from art museums you have encountered?
- What kinds of collections does an art museum typically have?
- What other kinds of museums are there? And what are in their collections?

Possible answers: There are larger museums with themes of cultures, history, science, computers, nature, aquariums, and small niche museums focused on neon signs, dolls, pinball machines, and all manner of objects.) The lists on the board become a reference for students to brainstorm ideas for their own collections.

This may be a good time to elicit student responses about ideas for their collections, as some may already have ideas. The Chicano art in the video shows many interesting and beautiful works. Students may want to make Chicano Art the focus of their collection!

Studio Production

Curating and Research

Use your teacher collection to demonstrate curating (selecting, arranging) and research. (You may want to make labels ahead of time to share at the presentation end of this demo.)

Example: Using bottle caps, invite students to examine them. Discuss the terms criteria (standards, plural) and criterion (singular) and how to develop criteria for a collection. Say, I like the metal bottle caps more than the plastic ones. So metal will be one criterion for my collection. Bottle caps that have some design on them are more interesting to me, so that will also be a criterion. Ask several students to help research bottle caps online and, as a class, try out various search terms. These can be added to the lists on the board.

What are some search terms we could use? Bottle caps, metal bottle caps, collecting
metal bottle caps, valuable bottle caps, history of metal bottle caps..." Allow students to
share facts they find, and ask if they have any more ideas for criteria for the collection. A
final overall theme for the collection, after embedding criteria, might be: "Metal bottle
caps from 1950s soda pop bottles."

Explain that curators not only collect or acquire objects for a collection, but also make decisions about how the collection will be displayed. Ask the students:

• What do curators need to think about as they arrange objects for public viewing? Curators who arrange objects for viewing must keep in mind how visitors to the exhibition will encounter each object. They need to think about which object in the collection should be seen first, second, and so on. Curators consider how two objects that are next to each other (or juxtaposed) "speak" to one another. Curators also create labels for objects in a display. Labels can be short, with simple descriptive information—what the object is, if it has a title, if it was created by someone, its origin, or when it was created. Labels also can be more informative, containing ideas about the object's importance, its history, or its meaning, for example. Longer labels such as these often invite the viewer to think about the object in certain ways; for example, "Notice the delicate edges of the teacup and the vibrant colors on its inside," or "The anger on the face of the man in black reminds us that this is not a happy scene." Show and explain to students the labels you created for the collection.

If you've gathered small boxes, you can explain how pedestals work to highlight or separate objects, and use one to elevate a bottle cap. Invite student participation by letting them arrange the objects and labels, guiding them to think about what makes a successfully curated and organized display.

Activity: Mini Museum Challenge

Curating, Research, and Presenting to a Public

Organize students in small groups that will each create a mini museum. Tell students this game-like challenge (because it will be fast) is to find a category of items in the room (such as markers, pencils, erasers, etc.) or among their personal items (such as gum packages, makeup, keys, etc.) that will become a mini museum collection. After they gather the items, circulate to help the groups create criteria to narrow down, or curate, what stays in the collection. Give students some time to find and record several facts about the collection through online research.

For example, for a pencil collection, students could research who invented the pencil and when, how pencils are designed and manufactured, what kinds of pencils people might collect, and so on. Hand out index cards for the groups to make labels about the collection for presenting it to others. Remind students that their labels may be short or longer, depending on the information they wish to share with the viewer. Demonstrate that the cards can lay flat or be folded into a tent to stand. Information added to cards may include a title card for the entire collection; and labels for each pencil including a description, an interesting fact, and perhaps "donor" credit. Agree upon a time limit, set a timer, and make sure all mini museums are completed at that time.

Allow students to tour each group's collection. After they have had time to view the collections, discuss with students what they liked about the mini museums they encountered. Ask the students:

- What, if anything, surprised you in completing this challenge?
- What did you enjoy most?
- Least?
- What are the "take-aways" from this challenge as you begin to create your own mini museum?



Collecting Objects and Planning Displays

Worksheet 2: You, the Expert

Explain that students will now use what they have learned about curating a collection as they create their own final mini museum with objects of their own choosing. Because they will be using images of objects (and not actual objects) in their mini museum, they are able to think "out of the box" as they select what they want to collect and display. This might be a good time to brainstorm a list of the kinds of objects they might choose to collect. Distribute Worksheet 2. The worksheet provides space for listing the objects they find online for their collection, and space to take notes about facts they find to enhance their collection.

Remind students that researching their collection can be a way to enjoy it even more. Cheech Marin started learning about art by reading art books from his local library. He is an expert on Chicano art because he continually learns by looking closely, talking to artists, and gathering information. He says about the piñata standing in the traditional landscape in one painting, "The juxtaposition of those two images ... he looks like he belongs there." Cheech Marin knows that "juxtapose" means placing something next to something else, and in art, it is usually a clue about meaning. He recognizes the traditional landscape painting depicted behind the piñata. Because he researches and studies his collection of art, he "gets" what the painting represents: The piñata as a Chicano individual living in, and making space for themself, in an Anglo space. Challenge students to uncover interesting facts as they engage in research about their chosen objects.

Circulate while students choose and research objects for their collection, and as they plan for their display. Help students print out their images. Show them how to trim the images and the cardboard backings for the images to the same size as the index cards. (The index cards make a handy pattern for this.) Demonstrate ways they can mount the images on the cardboard: They can use small dots of glue, or use the tape gun or other double sided tape. Or make a glue and water solution (equal parts white glue and water mixed in a jar.) Using a paintbrush, apply the solution to the back of the image. Place the glued side on the cardboard and carefully smooth out any wrinkles. Let it dry.

Planning for Public Display

Worksheet 3: People have to see this!

Planning a gallery opening within a class period gives students the opportunity to practice real world skills of interacting with "the public", an invited staff member, and each other, in a more organized and formal way. The worksheet guides students in planning and preparing the presentation of their collection. Go over the worksheet with students as a class, and then allow them to work together to read, think about, and add their answers in spaces provided.

Help students finalize a plan for the opening. This often means useful discussions about what is permissible, including answering questions about inviting friends outside of the class, or if refreshments will be allowed. It can be an opportunity for students to practice the process of making decisions and of compromise.

Explain that an opening at a gallery or museum is a celebration of the first day of a new exhibit. Individuals or the public are invited to see the exhibit for the first time. There may be beverages or snacks; special guests may be invited. Openings happen at museums (which do not sell the

objects/art) and at galleries, which are smaller, private businesses (which will usually offer the objects/art for sale.)

CLOSING STRATEGIES

Reflection

After the opening, invite students to share their experience with presenting their collection to others. Here are some useful prompts:

- Whose collection did you enjoy viewing?
- Did any label information stand out and catch your attention?
- Besides your collection, what other collection might you like to own?
- Whose collection do you think might be the most valuable? Why do you think that?
- Were any collections meaningful in some way?
- What did you learn from talking with others about your collection or theirs?
- Can you think of other ways you are a curator in daily life?
- How might this experience influence the way you encounter museum exhibits in the future?

Assessment

By conversing with students throughout the lesson, by witnessing the students' collecting, curating, researching and presenting work, and by examining the students' worksheets; and it should be evident that the student:

- formed and curated a collection using criteria.
- researched items in their collection.
- presented their collection to an audience.

Extensions

1. Look more closely at Chicano art and artists

Consider an in depth exploration of one or more of the Chicano artists featured in the video, including those listed here:

- Francisco Palomares
- Yolanda González
- Frank Romero
- Jaime "Germs" Zacarias
- Shizu Saldamando

2. Create multiple artworks for trading and collecting

A simple printing project can allow for the fast production of multiple works of art. Students can design index card-sized prints to share and trade with each other to create an art collection. Making a printing plate from craft foam is a fast, simple and effective technique, especially if specialized printing tools are not available. You will need: index cards, craft foam, cardboard such as cereal and cracker boxes, scissors, white glue, acrylic or tempera paint, kitchen sponges cut into 1-inch squares, and lids from plastic containers to hold paint.

To make a printing block, use scissors to cut a piece of cardboard to the 3 by 5-inch size of an index card. Students may decide to glue an extra layer of cardboard to the first to make a sturdier base. Students should follow these steps: Sketch design ideas in a

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sketchbook and then choose one. Draw the shape or shapes needed on the craft foam and cut them out. Glue the shapes to the printing plate, keeping in mind the images should be reversed (for example, a letter or number) so they will print correctly and not backwards. Let printing plate glue dry thoroughly.

To print, pour a small puddle of paint on a lid. Dampen a sponge cube with water and squeeze out as much water as possible. (A damp sponge will allow the paint to be picked up and yet stay on the sponge surface for dabbing on the printing plate; otherwise the dry sponge will simply absorb all the paint.) Dab the sponge on paint, and then on a second clean plastic lid to remove blobs of paint; then dab on the foam areas of the printing plate and quickly turn the plate over onto the index card. Press firmly and evenly to transfer the paint. Lift off the printing plate to reveal the print. Repeat painting of plate to continue printing. Plates can be gently cleaned with damp, not soaked, paper towels and can be used for a quantity of prints before wearing out. After prints dry, use a pencil to sign each print with the date and your name in the lower right corner. Again using pencil, number the edition (the total number of prints you made) in the lower left corner in this way: Count the total number of prints. In an edition of ten prints, the first print would be numbered 1/10, the next 2/10, then 3/10, etc. Now they are ready to trade and collect.

Authors

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Worksheet #1: Building a Collection

"Take me where you will, oh obsession!"—Cheech Marin

1.	What do you think Cheech means by the above quote? What does it say about his collecting?
2.	What are Cheech Marin's criteria for choosing the works in his collection?
3.	Cheech Marin has a personal connection to his collection of artworks. How would you describe that connection?
4.	Cheech Marin is enthusiastic when he talks about the artworks in his collection. List some evidence of his enthusiasm.
5.	In his role as a collector and a buyer of artworks, Cheech Marin has some influence with artists. Artist Francisco Palomares says: "The part that collectors play is what gives an artist inspiration, resources, affirmations, opportunities; but it's also giving you an emotional kind of refueling to give you that confidence; that they're willing to put value into what you have been dedicating your life to." Circle the things in Francisco Palomares' statement that you believe apply to Cheech Marin. Ask questions about anything you don't understand.



Worksheet 1: Building a Collection Teacher's Guide

"Take me where you will, oh obsession!"—Cheech Marin

- 1. What do you think Cheech means by the above quote? What does it say about his collecting? He is excited by collecting art, and finding new pieces to add to his collection. He sort of jokes about it, as though he can't stop collecting.
- 2. What are Cheech Marin's criteria for choosing the works in his collection?

 One criterion for Cheech's collection is that the art is made by Chicano artists. Another is that he has to really like it, or even love it. He says, "I fell in love with this right away" and also "I generally only buy something that has been haunting my dreams." He also points to specific things he likes about various works, using words like playful and different. He describes a "hand to canvas kind of painting." That could refer to being able to see the brushstrokes as evidence of being painted by hand.
- 3. Cheech Marin has a personal connection to his collection of artworks. How would you describe that connection?

 Cheech states he is Chicano, and what that means. He is proud of his Chicano heritage. So he is familiar with the cultural references in many of the works. He says "This is our neighborhood, these are the people in our neighborhoods." Artist Francisco Palomares refers to "mi gente," which means "my people" referring to the Chicano connections and perspectives that Francisco paints and that Cheech collects.
- 4. Cheech Marin is enthusiastic when he talks about the artworks in his collection. List some evidence of his enthusiasm.

 The quote above about "obsession" is one example. He says "Adios!" to the sculptured figure at his house, as though it is a friend. When he talks about the girl interacting with the enormous mural, he sounds happy and says, "It was a remarkable interaction with art, maybe the most remarkable I've ever seen."
- 5. In his role as a collector and a buyer of artworks, Cheech Marin has some influence with artists. Artist Francisco Palomares says this: "The part that collectors play is what gives an artist inspiration, resources, affirmations, opportunities; but it's also giving you emotional kind of refueling to give you that confidence; that they're willing to put value into what you have been dedicating your life to."
 - Circle the things in that statement that you believe apply to Cheech Marin. Ask questions about any you don't understand.
 - Evidence can be found in the video for all of these as Cheech talks about and talks to artists. He is an enthusiastic supporter of their work.

Worksheet 2: You, the Expert

"Being a collector, what you learn is what is original, what is different." —Cheech Marin

"This is our neighborhood, these are the people in our neighborhoods."—Cheech Marin

Cheech's collection represents his Chicano identity and culture. Will your collection represent you in some way? What will be the criteria for your collection? Keep in mind that you can collect art for this project, including Chicano art!

Your task is to collect five or six images of objects online that will form a small collection. That means you need criteria: A set of standards to keep your collection organized. Whether it is Chicano art, wristwatches, or model trains, you should be able to find interesting examples, and facts about them, online. Size your images to 3 by 5 inches before printing them out. Your teacher will show you how to mount the images on cardboard backings.

List all your objects here:

Research your objects online. Look for interesting facts about your collection. If you can't find enough, ask for help from classmates. Trying different search terms can help. Record interesting facts below. Then curate them for your labels. Decide which are the best to use.



Worksheet 3: People have to see this!

"When I got the collection up to a significant amount I made the decision that people have to see this!" —Cheech Marin

Consider the following as you prepare to present your curated and researched collection.

You may have a collection or two at home that you display-that is, you arranged it in an organized manner that shows it in an inviting way. But presenting takes the display a step further: It means sharing it with people other than yourself. Keep in mind the way you arrange and label the collection might make it more inviting to examine.

Final Curatorial Tasks

- 1. What do you think viewers might find interesting about your collection? Think about some facts you discovered, or unusual examples that surprised you, that you could highlight with an additional label. Record your ideas here:
- 2. How will your class display all the collections? Will they fit on desktops or other surfaces like counters? Should you hang collections on walls or bulletin boards? Think about how your class will view them, with everyone walking around the room. Talk to your teacher and classmates to plan this. Write some ideas here:
- 3. You may not have an enormous lenticular artwork as seen in The Cheech museum, (the mural by the de la Torre brothers) but you have a collection of images that represent something that is interesting to you. You can share that enthusiasm in your labeling by including interesting facts. What interesting facts have you shared?
- 4. Find a classmate to interview. Ask, "Why did you choose this particular collection?" Have your classmate ask you the same question. Now try answering this question in more than one way, because sometimes answering a big question improves with practice. Write your best answer here:
- 5. How did your classmate answer the same question? Write their best answer here:

Planning Your Gallery Opening

- 6. Your opening can take place during a class period. (A fast, one day only art show that appears and then is gone the next day is called a pop-up.) You will set up and present your display, complete with labels, for classmates and any guests to examine. Your class might decide to have refreshments. If so, make a plan for this. What would your class need to gather to provide some refreshments? Make a list here:
- 7. Inviting some guests allows you to present your collection to people who haven't seen it already (as your teacher and classmates have.) Seek permission from your teacher to ask a staff member, or a friend not in the class, to visit for a few minutes to see your collection and others. (Fellow students will likely need a permission pass.) List who you would like to invite:

Creating a Gallery Guide

8. A gallery guide listing the collectors and collections can be printed and handed out or made available on the class page online. Or it can simply be made into a sign for the classroom. Who in your class would be a good choice to be in charge of organizing the guide? Maybe you? Write some names here:

The example here shows a possible template for a gallery guide. The student (or team of students) will need to collect this information from each collector or collector group so they can create the document. Fill in the information needed, then share the information with the students organizing the document.

Period 5 Visual Arts Gallery Presents: Collections

The Collectors and their collections:

Name(s): Collection:

Short description or statement about the collection: