

## “Beadies” Narrative Bead Collage



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Beads take the spotlight as a medium for expression and storytelling.

Thousands of years before written alphabets, visual symbols allowed early civilizations to record their events and traditions. Among these symbols, bead-making stands out as one of the earliest forms of art. Small and simple, beads have represented significant stories throughout history.

Beads tell the story of commerce, trade routes, and the meeting places of different cultures. Lightweight and small, they travelled easily between continents to be traded as valuable commodities.

Revealing clues to the past, beads can tell about the person(s) who wore them: their status, occupation, and wealth. Certain materials, colors, and patterns might indicate their marital status or identify them with a particular clan or tribe.

Even in the modern era, beads can tell a story of spirituality, beliefs, and connections with ancestors. An example to note is the Growing Thunder Collective, a group of women who are committed to preserving traditional Dakota/Nakota needle and beadwork so that future artists will have the knowledge, skills, and designs that were passed down to them through generations.

Throughout history, beads have most often been used for decorative arts. In the contemporary art world, there are a few artists who integrate the symbolic language of beadworking in order to express their ideas. In her assemblage "Kitchen", artist Liza Lou glorifies the overlooked daily work of women with an encrustation of sparkling beads on everyday objects. In his "Soundsuits" series and installation "Until", Nick Cave incorporates beads to explore themes of identity, unity, and social justice.

Students begin this lesson by creating their own beads and charms. They then use a variety of manufactured beads to design colorful patterns and arrangements on a self-adhesive surface. These small artworks, called "Beadies," are low-relief collages that sparkle and shine. **Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.**



### Required Materials:

**Staedtler Fimo Soft Polymer Clay**, set of 12 basic colors, 10.58 oz pkg (33228-1019); share two across class

**Art Alternatives Fettle Knife**, 4.75" hard blade (30707-1003); need one for cutting clay

**Richeson Student Clay Modeling Tool Sets**, canister set of 35, assorted (30387-1035); share one set across class

**Amaco Polyroller**, 8" long x 1" dia, (33058-1001); share one between two students

**Kunin Presto Peel & Stick Felt**, 9" x 12" sheets, choice of colors (24296-); share one sheet between nine students

Bead assortments, recommend:

**Blick Clay Bead Assortment**, set of 28 colors (84744-1029)

**Hygloss Assorted Plastic Beads**, 10 to 12 oz (60716-1005)

**John Bead Craft Beads Star Mixes**, 70g pkgs, assorted color choices (84775-)

**Elmer's Glitter Glue**, 6 oz Blue (65304-5016) or Pink (65304-3066); share three across class

### Optional Materials:

**Chromacryl Pouring Medium**, 16 oz (92009-1016)

**Beadalon Pin Backs**, 1" long, pkg of 10 (63871-1001)

**Adhesive Magnet Roll**, 1/2" x 10 ft (61413-1016)

**Sculpey Work 'n Bake Clay Mat**, 7 3/4" x 13" (34801-1713)

**Excel Bent Nose Pliers**, 5.25" long (34260-1005)

**Richeson Muffin Pan**, 7-1/8" x 7-1/8", 4 wells (03037-1002)

Ready to order materials?

Go to [www.DickBlick.com/lesson-plans/beadies-narrative-bead-collage](http://www.DickBlick.com/lesson-plans/beadies-narrative-bead-collage) to access a product bundle for your convenience.



### Preparation

1. Divide polymer clay into small pieces using a flat-edge scraping tool or fettling knife. Distribute to group in muffin tin pans.
2. Cut adhesive felt into 3" x 4" pieces.

### Process

1. Start with an expressive bead-making session using polymer clay and small modeling tools. Make charms, beads, letters, icons, etc. about 3/4" square or smaller and no more than 1/4" thick.

Create as many as time and materials

allow. Items should lie flat, rather than 3-dimensional, standing pieces. Without the goal of a finished product in mind (necklace, bracelet, etc), students are encouraged to just enjoy the process of making items.

If necessary, provide prompts to stimulate ideas. Favorite games, activities, foods, pets, etc. Beads can also be non-representational designs. Beads do not need to be drilled with holes or stringable.

2. Place beads on baking mat or baker's parchment paper and bake according to instructions included with Sculpey package. Allow to cool before touching.
3. Place an assortment of colorful beads in muffin trays to distribute around group. Any small bead will work: alphabet beads, pony beads, Perler beads, plastic beads, glass beads, wooden beads, or seed beads.
4. Peel protective backing from felt, exposing the adhesive beneath.
5. Begin by creating a border around the edge of the felt piece. This can be done with bead assortments or with a piece of cord. Position first, then press firmly down onto the adhesive.
6. Arrange personal polymer clay beads, charms, letters, and icons onto the adhesive area and press in place. If beads are difficult to pick up and place, use a pair of jewelry pliers.
7. Fill the area surrounding the polymer beads with more beads. Consider pattern, repetition, and color harmony when selecting and placing beads.



8. Once the felt piece is filled and the bead collage is finished, apply glitter glue or pouring medium over the arrangement in a thin layer. This will stiffen the felt, seal the beads in place, and add a protective, high-gloss finish. Tap sides of bead collage to gently send vibrations through the piece and force air bubbles out.
9. Once glue is dry, the piece will be rigid. Finished "Beadie" can be displayed in a collaborative arrangement. Apply a pin-back on the back side to make a wearable piece of art or attach a magnet to display on a locker or appliance.



*Step 1: Create miniature polymer clay beads, charms, icons, letters, etc. Bake to harden.*



*Step 2: Arrange personal beads and charms with bead assortments onto a piece of adhesive felt. Stick in place.*



*Step 3: Cover with a light coat of glitter glue or pouring medium to seal beads in place.*

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### Options

- Before applying beads to adhesive felt, cut into shapes: ovals, stars, hearts, etc. Beadies can be any shape or size.

### National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

#### Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

#### Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

