



Family Stories Through Art

A Collage and Writing
Workshop

Led by Sharon Santillo

Dedicated to Beth Olshansky,
my mentor at the University of New Hampshire,
who showed me the power of art-based literacy

All my workshops are about saving your stories. Don't be scared of the art, it's a way into language. And we use a most flexible forgiving art form, collage. I tell people collage is kind of like carpentry except you don't have to "measure twice and cut once." No measuring and you can cut as many pieces as you like. Paper is cheap and plentiful. Move pieces around and only glue them down if they look right.

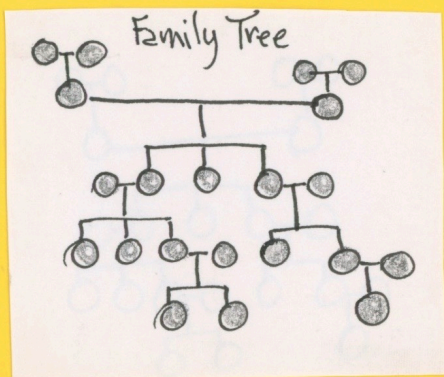
And all the time you are moving pieces, cutting and pasting, you are working out your story in your mind, and talking about it with your classmates. So when the time comes to write, we like to say, our stories nearly write themselves.

But why save our stories? Ongoing research at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia is showing passing on family history is one of best things we can do for the young people in our families. Teens who knew more stories about their extended family showed "higher levels of emotional well-being, and also higher levels of identity achievement" It is hard enough growing up. If we can help by passing on our stories, that's easy. We all have lots of stories.

Why use art to lead writing? Using different parts of brain at the same time, the visual and the verbal, opens up a new creative space for language and vocabulary. Collage is particularly effective at keeping us from being bogged down in detail. Collage illustrator and teach Molly Bang said it best, "Collage keeps us to the emotional basics."

Family History

Research shows importance of passing on stories to future generations

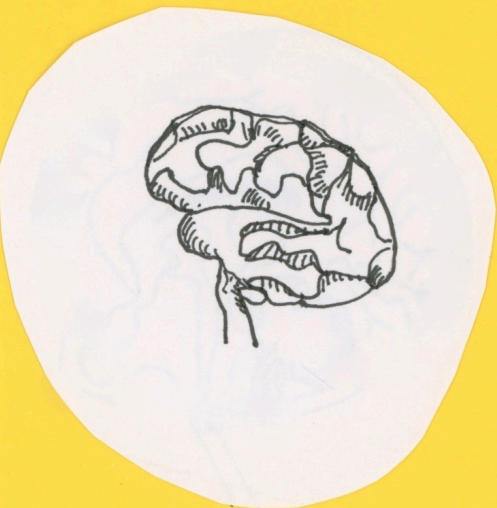
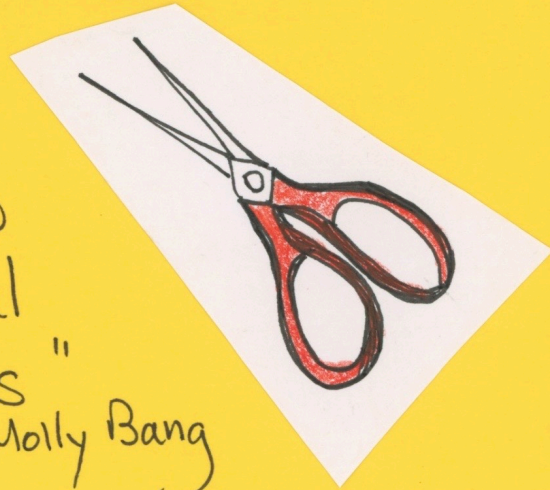


Start with Art

Why collage?

Visual and verbal modes together enhance brain function and memory recall

"Cut paper keeps us to emotional basics"
Molly Bang



What is a typical workshop like?

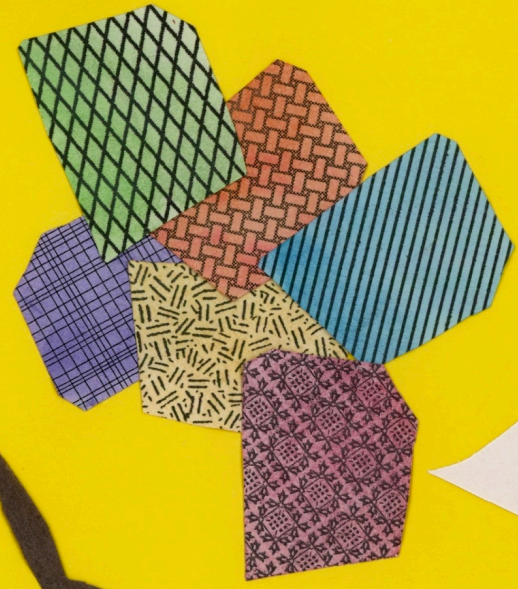
Day 1 evening session: Gather the group to create some textured painted papers to add to the collection of found papers giving them time to dry overnight. Some of the techniques need wet watercolor, some need a thicker paint to work textures into. Wear clothes that you won't worry about getting paint on. All materials provided and no experience necessary to experience success.

Day 2 full day: In the morning session, thinking cinematically, we will cut and paste the opening scene and write the first draft of beginning of our story.

In the afternoon, we will come in closer focusing on the problem/conflict/change of our story. We will do this first in our art, maybe using bigger shapes, more intense colors, and then in our writing.

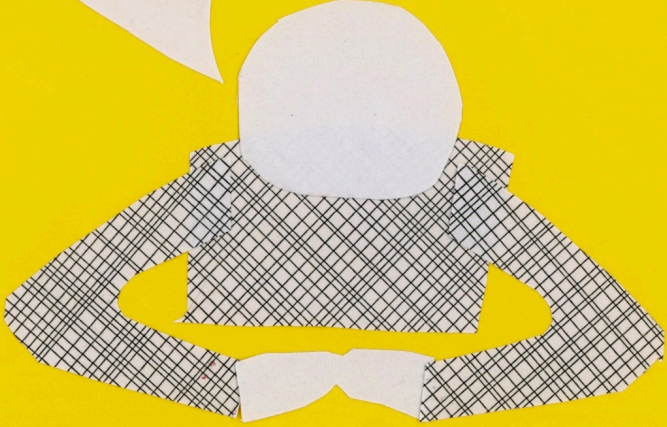
Day 3 full day: In the morning, our focus will be the ending collage. The resolution of the conflict in art is often with horizontal compositions, softer colors.

In the afternoon, cover design, dedication, about the author page, publishing tips, are all discussed.



1

Pick a story



2

Gather papers and collage

3

Story practically writes itself!



Ah... a family treasure in only ten hours



4

What kinds of stories do people choose for their books?

Stories of family members, childhood memories, places that hold importance, how they met their spouse, beloved pets, holidays, the stories just keep coming. No one ever seems to lack for stories. And that is all participants need to bring—bring your stories!

I work along with my students and model that I have the same challenges. All are encouraged to share as we gather for each session but never any pressure to do so.

The photo opposite is of a workshop in 2016 held at Chautauqua Institution in New York. When I look at it, I recall each of the stories and delight in the fun we had together and know these stories are saved and being passed on to future generations.



About your workshop leader



Sharon Santillo is passionate about saving family stories, both yours and her own. In her workshops, she guides students in finding their voice using collage art to lead to writing. She has twelve years experience leading family story workshops overlapping twenty-seven years in art education, She was the Massachusetts Art Educator of the Year in 2011.



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