

# Classroom Activities

## For the Mendel Art Gallery School Program Poster

The Mendel PotashCorp School Hands-on Tours 2011-12 poster features a reproduction of a great sculpture to use in the classroom! Here are some activity ideas to teach ideas related to that artwork...

### The Artwork

**Clint Neufeld**

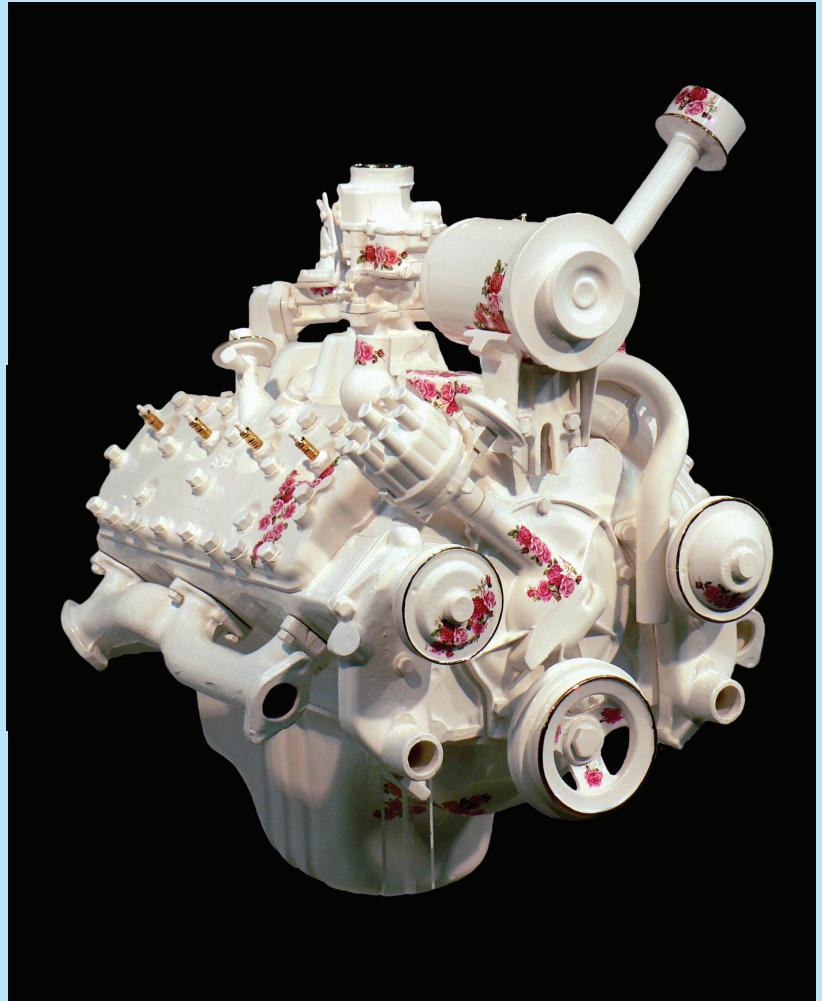
***American Beauty*, 2008**

**ceramic, acrylic**

Collection of the Mendel Art Gallery.

Local sculptor Clint Neufeld is a rising star on the art scene. He works in a well-equipped studio that he built himself on family farmland near Osler. Neufeld grew up in Warman, Saskatchewan, and worked on local farms in his youth. He enlisted in the Canadian infantry, serving in the former Yugoslavia. He moved to Manitoba and became a firefighter. After travelling through Asia, he eventually received his MFA from Concordia University in Montreal. Each of these life experiences has influenced his artistic practice.

Taking the grease-monkey's pre-occupation with muscle cars, he replicates the components of engines, transmissions, and axles in ceramic, finished like fine china, and sets them on elegant stands and furniture such as teacarts and chaises lounges. In combining his interests in engines, fine china, and art history, Neufeld takes familiar forms and asks us to see them from a different point of view. The resulting sculptures ask viewers



to consider men's garage "tinkering" in terms of aesthetics, transformation, and even love. Some may perceive that he is challenging masculine identity and feminine pursuits, and is referencing the impact of changing technologies. Neufeld says "Guys gathering around to tinker on a car or truck engine together—it may be a dying art. In part, what I want to do is celebrate this activity and all that it entails."

# Activity Suggestions

## Activity 1: Transform a Familiar Object

These four activities are variations on this theme...

### Variation A: Everyday Sculptures

Clint Neufeld says he is “simply interested in taking familiar objects and transforming them just a bit, so that we can look at them from a different point of view” (quoted in the *Flatlanders Mendel Exhibition Catalogue*, 2008). He starts with an object that most would not see as a work of art, like an engine or a car axle, and reinvents it as an attractive ceramic sculpture. Ask your students how they define a work of art. Does art need to look a certain way, be found in a specific place, or serve a particular function?

- Ask each student to bring a disposable, everyday object to class. Examples of household items could include old kitchen utensils, unwanted toys, even recycling bin items like plastic bottles.
- Transform the objects by painting and decorating them to draw attention to their form, rather than their function.
- Consider the transformed objects as sculptures...are they now art?

### Variation B: Drawing on the Ordinary

Show your students objects that are functional, yet decorative, such as teapots, shoes, and umbrellas. Consider that most of the items we use in our everyday lives were designed by someone.

- Show an example of a simple household object, like a pencil, and discuss the design features together. Try to think of all the aspects the designer considered, including how shape, size, colour, and materials relate to function and appearance.
- Ask your students to think of another ordinary object that would not normally be considered beautiful, and draw it in a way

that results in an exciting artwork. They can draw it from a dynamic angle, zoom in on an interesting section, and/or enhance the colours and form of the object.

- Invite them to show through their drawings that even the most commonplace or unattractive items can be a starting point for a striking work of art!

### Variation C: Conceptual Combinations

Neufeld is inspired by the car engines he associates with men’s garage tinkering, and the finely decorated dishes that might be found in a grandmother’s china cabinet.

- Generate two lists: one for objects the students classify as masculine, and another for feminine objects. The items could be ones usually used or appreciated by people of one gender, or they may have characteristics that make them seem either masculine or feminine.
- Ask students to individually select an object from one of the lists. Now challenge them to think of a way to give that object characteristics usually associated with the other gender, like Clint’s delicately cast and floral-painted engine in the poster image.
- The students can create a plan for their object including written description and diagrams, to show the steps they would take to create their imagined artwork. Encourage them to visualize reinventing their object in any media, from 2-dimensional artworks and sculptures to film
- Ask them to include how they would exhibit their work of art; Neufeld displays his car parts on fancy chaise lounges and stuffed ottomans, adding to the contradictions and drawing attention to beauty in unexpected places and forms.

## Activity 1: Continued

### Variation D: Casting for New Meaning

Clint Neufeld uses casting to create ceramic replicas of engine parts, transmissions and axles. The objects he chooses are functional machines, but his delicate ceramic copies can only function as artworks.

- Choose a few small, functional objects with simple yet interesting forms that are suitable for casting (such as a light bulb or apple—an object without hooks or twists that could disturb the mold when lifted out).
- Help the students create molds from the objects by filling containers with damp sand, and pressing the objects into the sand to create impressions.
- Mix plaster of paris and slowly pour it into the impressions. When the casts are dry, they can be dug out and brushed off.
- The students can then further transform their cast objects with paint and small decorations. Ask them to think about the different ways the object could be transformed. The students could reveal or disguise the object's original function, lend it masculine or feminine qualities, or create an attention-getting or contemplative object
- Invite them to use patterns and colours that lend their cast object meaning beyond its form, such as Neufeld's use of fine china patterns.



## Activity 2: Hybrids

Ask students to think of two objects that are very different from one another, and find a way to combine them in a drawing. The new creation could be simply half of one object and half of the other: either joined at the middle, or divided into small parts and rearranged. Students could also try combining aspects of each object, for example using the texture of one and the form of another.

## Activity 3: Primping your Ride

Have students bring a mode of transportation to school—they could bring bikes, skateboards, rollerblades, scooters, or running shoes. “Primp” the rides by adding temporary enhancements like ribbons, pipe cleaners and paper chains. The decorations can be used to make the vehicles more unique and personalized for each student.

## Activity 4: Outdated Technology

Neufeld's sculptures are a celebration of something he considers a dying art—the activity of gathering to tinker with engines. He also chooses car parts from older vehicles and preserves them through his artworks. Ask students to think of other activities that are becoming outdated or are becoming less popular, such as sock darning, playing marbles, and reading books. Challenge students to design an advertisement for one of these pastimes to create fresh interest in it. The ad could include new equipment (real or imagined) to help modern people connect to the activity.



## Activity 5: Gender Stereotypes

Ask students to consider if certain colours, patterns, lines, shapes and textures might be considered masculine or feminine. Have each student make a drawing that has either feminine or masculine qualities. Encourage them to keep the drawings abstract, and to use only shapes, colours, and patterns. Ask them to keep the gender of their drawing a secret, but to write “masculine” or “feminine” on the back of the page, as well as their own gender. (This artwork is \_\_\_\_\_. I am \_\_\_\_\_.) Afterwards, look at the drawings all together and have the students vote (by a show of hands) whether it was made by a female, or a male, and whether it is meant to look masculine or feminine. Then separate the drawings into groups of masculine and feminine. What are the similarities and differences? Do the ones that represent the gender of the artist have different characteristics than the ones showing the opposite gender? The drawings can be used as a springboard for discussion about gender traits and stereotypes.

## Activity 6: ARTSask

Check out ARTSask ([www.artsask.ca](http://www.artsask.ca)), our project partnership for online learning showcasing Saskatchewan and Canadian visual art. ARTSask includes other work by artists working with similar themes; look under Common Place, Technobabble, Records & Keepers, and Identity.