

# OCTOBER GALLERY EDUCATION ONLINE RESOURCES

*Inspired by Nnenna Okore*

*Created by OG Education in collaboration with RISC*

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## **Who is Nnenna Okore?**

Nnenna was born in Nigeria and currently lives in the USA where she lectures in Art at North Park University, Chicago. She received her BA degree in Painting from the University of Nigeria (First Class Honors) in 1999, and an MA and MFA. in Sculpture from the University of Iowa in 2004 and 2005

## **What Influenced Okore to become an artist?**

Much of Nnenna's work is inspired by rural life and her childhood years in Nsukka, a small university town in Southern Eastern Nigeria. Her work connects to memories of the natural landscape, discarded objects, dilapidated buildings, nests and shelters.

"As a child, I was fascinated by the social, natural, and artificial\* conditions in rural dwellings around the University campus. Embedded within its landscape were evocative imageries captured within its rocky slopes, and architectural structures. I came across several stunning traditional art and architectural forms, such as, roofed shrines characterized by huge mounds of sand under a thatched structure, and yam barns and fences that traced the borders of people's compounds" Nnenna Okore

## **What are the main themes and materials used in Okore's work?**

Nnenna was inspired by all aspects of rural life, in particular the culture and innovation of reusing discarded objects, seeing all materials as precious commodities. Living in America has made her reflect on the way societies regard and value their materials and resources and also the impact of consumerism on our natural environment. When she moved to America she was surprised at the abundance of materials, how much people consume and how much of it is just thrown away. Even though there is a huge recycling industry in America, she felt that it was seen in a different light to how it is used and understood by people in Nigerian society.

She uses a variety of discarded and found materials, in particular paper, such as newspapers, magazines and old phone books. In her work she transform them into shields, baggages made from plastic bags or a rope made from paper.

## EXAMPLES

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*Nnenna Okore, Here and Now, 2017.  
Cheesecloth, jute string, dye and wire, 209 x  
203 x 33 cm.*

Each visceral sculpture is created through various repetitive and labour-intensive processes, like teasing, twisting, dyeing and sewing, applied to natural materials such as cheesecloth, burlap and paper.



*Nnenna Okore, Rope, 2008.  
Newspaper, Dimensions variable.*

# ACTIVITY

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**Activity:** Make your own paper

**What you will need:** Scrap paper, Blender, water, mesh, wooden frame, stapler, plastic basin, fabric square (felt or flannel) and a sponge

**How to introduce the activity :**

Show some of Okore's work and discuss and ask why they think she uses found materials rather than brand new ones.

**The Activity:**

- + Rip recycled paper into small bits, and place into the blender (about half full). Fill the blender with warm water. Run the blender slowly at first then increase the speed until the pulp looks smooth and well blended. ( 30 -40 seconds) Check that no flakes of paper remain. If there are, blend longer.
- + The next step is to make a mould. The mould, in this case, is made simply by stretching a mesh (such as net curtains, or aluminium mesh from a car repair shop) over a wooden frame and stapling it. It should be as tight as possible, or you can buy a deckle.
- + Fill the basin about half way with water. Add 3 blender loads of pulp (the more pulp you add the thicker the finished paper will be). Stir the mixture.
- +Place the mould into the pulp and then level it out while it is submerged. Gently wiggle it side-to-side until the pulp on top of the screen looks even.
- +Slowly lift the mould up until it is above the level of the water. Wait until most of the water has drained from the new paper sheet. If the paper is very thick, remove some pulp from the tub. If it is too thin, add more pulp and stir the mixture again.
- + When the mould stops dripping, gently place one edge on the side of a fabric square (felt or flannel square). Gently ease the mould down flat, with the paper directly on the fabric. Use a sponge to press out as much water as possible. Wring the excess water from the sponge back into the large plastic tub.
- + Hold the fabric square flat and slowly lift the edge of the mould. The wet sheet of paper should remain on the fabric. If it sticks to the mould, you may have pulled too fast or not pressed out enough water. It takes a little practice. You can gently press out any bubbles and loose edges at this point.
- + Repeat the steps above, and stack the fabric squares on a baking sheet. Save one fabric square to place on the top of the stack. Use another baking sheet to press the remaining water out of the stack (do this outside or in the bathtub, it can make a mess).
- + After you press the stack, gently separate the sheets. They can be dried by hanging on a clothesline or laying them out on sheets of newspaper. When they have dried peel them off the fabric and voila! You have paper!

# ACTIVITY

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**Activity:** create architectural forms in response to their natural and human made environment

**What you will need:** paper materials such as old phone directories, shredded paper, cardboard boxes, scraps of paper, hole punch, washing line, wire, plastics, thread, needles.

**How to introduce:**

Discuss Arcutectural forms in your area, examples of this could be: a local bridge, a bee-hive, trees, old buildings and new buildings

Ask the students what you think these structures say about the time they were built or who was involved in the being there?

**What to do:**

Pupils will create their own structures in the classroom. This may be collaborative. Using paper materials such as old phone directories, shredded paper, cardboard boxes, scrapsof paper, hole punch, washing line, wire, plastics, thread, needles. How are they going to join the materials? How will they make the material stronger (roll it, scrunch it)? Encourage students to experiment and play with the paper. Ask them to consider the most important features of these structures- protection, comfort, aesthetics (their shape and form).



# ACTIVITY

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**Activity:** Paper body sculptures

**What you will need:** Paper waste, plastic bags, paint

**How to Introduce:** Ask students to think about the types of clothing they wear to special occasions, uniforms for a school or club (sports, scouts), or their favourite fashion item this season. Ask them to describe how they feel when they are wearing them, does it make you stand out in a crowd or blend in with a group? Is there a particular way that they wear it that is unique to them (the way they wrap a scarf or tie a belt)?

Looking at Nnenna Okore's work ask pupils to imagine them being worn as clothing. considering the colours, textures and the form: how and where would they be worn (also see activity 1).

**What you do:**

Pupils can work in groups or individually to design and make paper body sculptures: sculptures that

people can wear, that shelter the body, but also say something about the person wearing it.

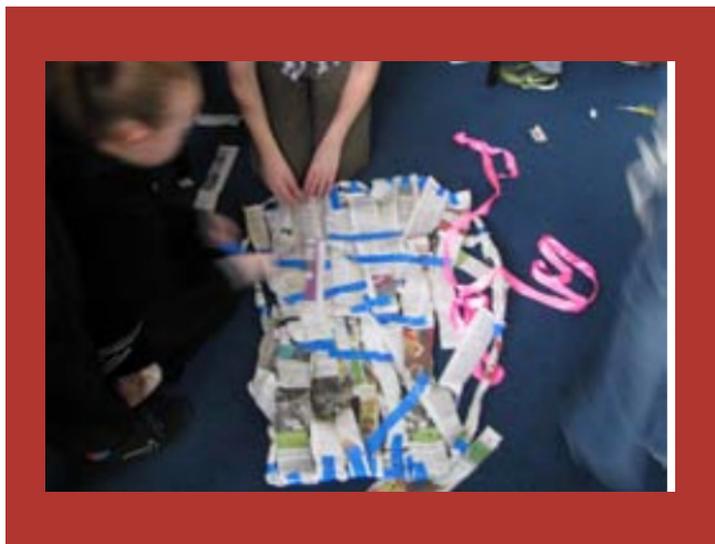
- where will it be worn?

- how will it be worn?

- how do you think the person feel wearing it?

Encourage pupils to be free with their designs (they do not have to make something that looks like a familiar) They can take inspiration from natural forms, natural and synthetic architecture.

Show pupils how they can create different textures and patterns by manipulating the paper. They can also use paints to dye the paper.



# ACTIVITY

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**Activity:** Learn more about Feminism and create discussion

**What you will need:** Statements/questions below about Women.

**Introduce:** In Okore's travels, she attended the fifth Regional Conference on Women in Dakar (1994) Senegal and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China (1995). She organized Youth Service Workshops in Nsukka, and other youth art workshops in Swaziland. Her interests include membership in the Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF).

In January 2021 only 33.9% OF UK PARLAIMENT ARE WOMEN, which makes the UK the 39th country in the ranking of women in national parliaments, with only 2 of the world's governments having over 50%. <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=1&year=2021>

On average MALE ARTISTS' WORK SELLS FOR 10 TIMES MORE than equivalent female artists' work.  
(Sotheby's -The Independent)

Women only won the RIGHT TO VOTE IN 1928

MARIE CURIE DISCOVERED RADIO ACTIVE METALS

WOMEN OWN LESS THAN 20% OF THE WORLD'S LAND.

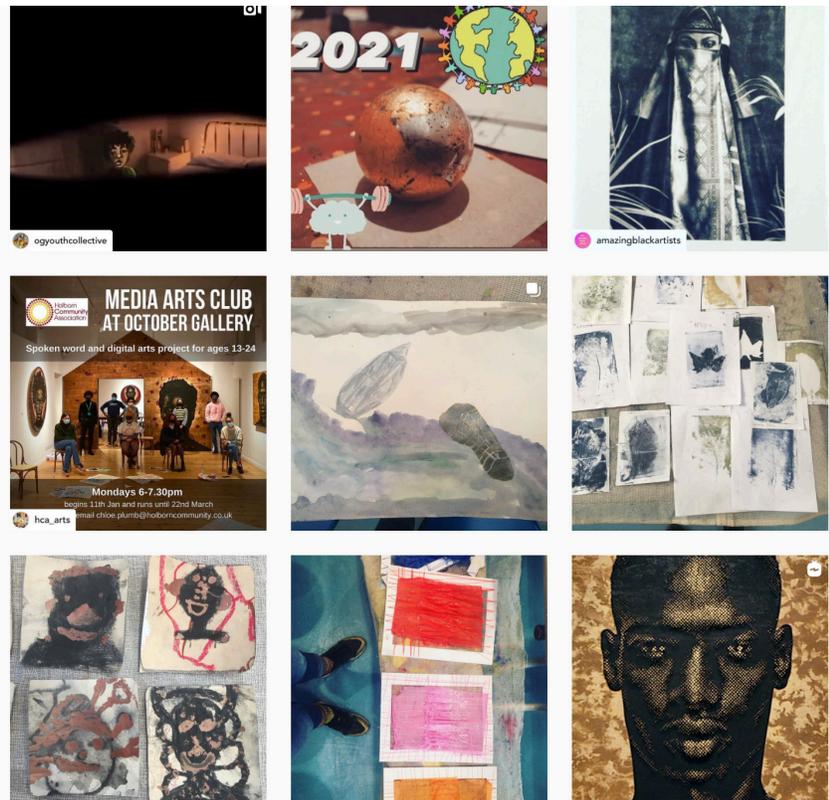
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/women-own-less-than-20-of-the-worlds-land-its-time-to-give-them-equal-property-rights/>

How many MALE ARTISTS can you name?

How many FEMALE ARTISTS can you name?

WHY do you think that is (if more male artists are known)?

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