A Train Without Tracks

Cut paper collages inspired by the Underground Railroad
Subject: Art  
Grade level: 4th Grade  
Topic: Cut paper collages inspired by the Underground Railroad  
Lesson length: 2 class periods

Objectives
Students will visit the National Underground Freedom Center and discuss their impressions in class  
Students will observe examples of cut-paper designs by Henri Matisse and create their own designs inspired by the Underground Railroad

Connections
1. Students make sense of and communicate ideas with the visual arts  
2. Students create works of art to convey a point of view  
3. In the products they make, students show that they understand how time, place and society influence the arts such as language, literature and history

Materials
Reproductions of cut paper collage by Henri Matisse  
His Promised Land: The Autobiography of John P. Parker, Former Slave and Conductor on the Underground Railroad by John P. Parker, Stuart Seely Sprague  
Train Without Tracks: Secrets of the Underground Railroad A Home –based Arts USA/Children’s Historical Learning Activity Book  
colored construction paper, scissors and glue

Procedure
Part one of this lesson begins with a review of what students know about the Underground Railroad. I purposely chose 4th grade classes who had visited the Underground Railroad Freedom Center during the 3rd grade. In this discussion, I let students explain to each other their thoughts on the dangers that enslaved people faced on their flight to freedom. Next, I introduced characters such as John Parker, Harriet Tubman and Henry Box Brown and explained their contributions to the UGRR. I then displayed examples of cut-paper collages by Henri Matisse and explained how he “drew” with scissors when he became too old to paint. I also pointed out how the visual impact abstract figures can create. Day one wraps up with students sketching ideas for their collages. Part two is a work day: students choose a background color (we used various shades of blue and purple construction paper for night skies) and collect different colored scraps for their figures. Using scissors and glue, students create their collage.

Assessment
Assessment will be based on in-class observation and completion of an Underground Railroad cut paper collage