Joyce J. Scott is an artist from Baltimore, Maryland, who uses her art to encourage people to think about history, identity, community, and other complex ideas. She is well known for her beadwork, using a technique called the peyote stitch, also known as diagonal weaving, to create jewelry and sculptures like *Cobalt Rain*.

Look closely at this artwork. How many figures can you find? How do you think it was made? What do you think the artist wants us to reflect on?

*Cobalt Rain* explores the intertwined nature of creative and destructive forces. Across many world religions, blue can signify divinity, plenitude, and the unknowable depths of the sea and the universe. At the center of this work, a blue figure’s body transitions into strands of beads that cascade down like falling rain, which can be both life-giving and disastrous. This central figure’s rich blue hue references the chemical element cobalt, which has been used to create colorful paint and glass pigments throughout history and is also a necessary part of the human diet. Additionally, cobalt is a component of highly destructive “dirty” bombs that spread radioactive contamination through dust and smoke.

Surrounding the central blue figure are seven smaller forms. A red beaded body perches on top of the blue figure’s head. Instead of legs, it has a tail-like cord that coils around the neck and shoulders of the blue figure and weaves between other beaded bodies. A yellow figure hangs upside down in the arms of the central figure, while a brown body made of clay and beads emerges as if being born. Three skeletons nearby reference both death and the Day of the Dead, a holiday celebrated by people of Mexican and Central American descent that commemorates and honors deceased ancestors. At the bottom of the rain-like blue strands, a mermaid-like form hangs in a net of brown beads.

Scott incorporated figures from previous works into *Cobalt Rain*. Repurposing elements of an earlier artwork into a new artwork is part of her artist’s toolkit. Instead of discarding things, Scott discovers new ways to value materials and use them in new contexts.

**Classroom Activities**

- Joyce J. Scott explores the opposition of creative and destructive forces in this artwork. Invite students to choose a topic that has multiple points of view and craft arguments to support each side.

- Invite students to make their own beaded sculpture with beads and string. Students can start with a simple bead stitch. Once familiar, invite students to try the peyote stitch that Scott used to create *Cobalt Rain*.

**Simple Beaded Lizard Tutorial:**
[instructables.com/How-To-Make-Faux-Stained-Glass-From-Tissue-Paper-A](instructables.com/How-To-Make-Faux-Stained-Glass-From-Tissue-Paper-A)

**Peyote Stitch Tutorial:**
[wikihow.com/Do-Peyote-Stitch](wikihow.com/Do-Peyote-Stitch)
Cobalt Rain, Joyce J. Scott