

# African American Art in the 20th Century

February 6  
through  
May 23, 2021

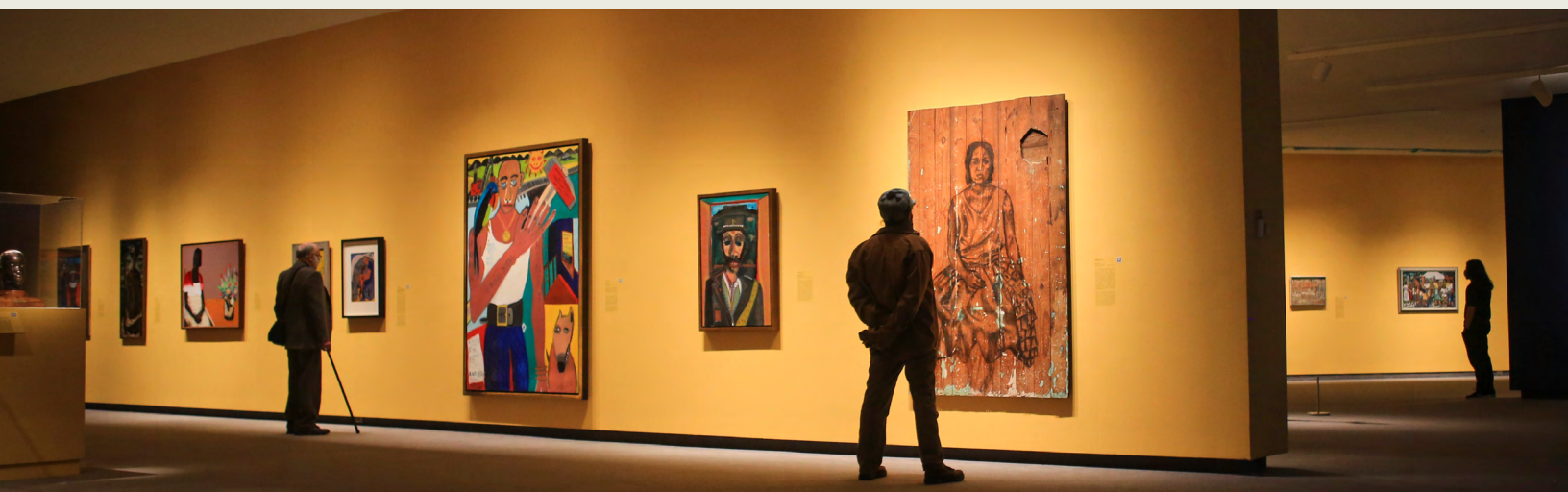
EDUCATOR  
GUIDE



WICHITA ART MUSEUM

**The Wichita Art Museum is an educational institution, and students and teachers are fundamental. We want every student and teacher to have an enriching, dynamic museum experience. WAM welcomes all teachers and students to **embrace and engage** with the art museum as a **supportive** educational organization. Our goal is to create a specialized **learning environment** that enhances your classroom curriculum by building on students' curiosity, critical thinking, and visual literacy. Former Representative and civil rights leader John Lewis once said, museums "can help educate" and "inform people . . . It is my hope and prayer that when children and those not so young walk through this museum they will be able to feel and touch, almost smell a sense of history. I think it would make our nation and our people a better nation and a better people."**

FRONT COVER: Frederick Brown, *John Henry*, 1979. Oil on canvas, 84 x 60 1/8 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Gift of Gerald L. Pearson © 1979, Frederick J. Brown



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**My pictures express my life and experience . . .  
the things I have experienced extend to my national,  
racial, and class group. I paint the American scene.**

**—Artist Jacob Lawrence**

## Exhibition Overview

*African American Art in the 20th Century* features 45 works by African American artists working in a significant period in American history. Moments these artists lived through span industrialization, the Great Migration, the Jazz Age, Jim Crow laws, world wars, and more. The artworks featured showcase personal and community experiences—family, culture, music, heritage, and the inspiration and adversity of their time—translated to powerful visuals. They lend a voice to the multifaceted dialogues about art and American identity. The exhibition’s selected works span a century of creative expression in various media and represent numerous artistic styles.

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*African American Art in the 20th Century* is organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum and reflects its vision to a “long-standing commitment to Black artists and the acquisition, preservation, and display of their work.” *African American Art in the 20th Century* is organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The C.F. Foundation in Atlanta supports the museum’s traveling exhibition program, *Treasures to Go*. The William R. Kenan Jr. Endowment Fund provided financial support.

The Wichita presentation of this exhibition has been generously underwritten by presenting sponsors Koch Family Foundation and Emprise Bank. Generous support has been provided by Louise Beren, Berry Foundation, DeVore Foundation, Sharon and Alan Fearey, Sonia Greteman and Chris Brunner, Gridley Family Foundation, Kristin and Will Price, and Julie and Bill Nicholson. 2021 exhibitions and public programs are generously supported by the Downing Foundation. All museum exhibitions receive generous sponsorship from the Friends of the Wichita Art Museum and the City of Wichita.






## Pre-Visit Activities

### Exploration of Themes

Introduce students to the teaching themes of the exhibition *African American Art in the 20th Century*. The following activities in this guide follow three themes: **Identity**, **Celebration**, and **Adversity**. These themes can help shape the conversation, curriculum-related activities, and overall interaction with the artworks. They provide a common lens to view and relate to the art and the African American experience. They serve to provoke deep thoughts and critical thinking.

The art lessons in this guide are aligned to State of Kansas standards. The standards for Visual Art are indicated at the beginning of each lesson. Each standard begins with a “VA” and then references a specific skill the lesson addresses. A complete list of Kansas Visual Arts Standards can be found here: [ksde.org/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Career-Standards-and-Assessment-Services/Content-Area-F-L/Fine-Arts-Dance-Media-Arts-Music-Theatre-Visual-Arts/Visual-Arts/Visual-Arts-Standards](https://ksde.org/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Career-Standards-and-Assessment-Services/Content-Area-F-L/Fine-Arts-Dance-Media-Arts-Music-Theatre-Visual-Arts/Visual-Arts/Visual-Arts-Standards)



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Benny Andrews, *Portrait of the Black Madonna*, 1987. Oil and collage on canvas, 36 x 48 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Gift of the Andrews Humphrey Family Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



Sargent Johnson, *Mask*, about 1930-35. Copper on wood base, 15 1/2 x 13 1/2 x 6 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. Gift of International Business Machines Corporation

### **Celebration**

What brings you joy in life? Art can be a vehicle for exploring the joys of life and memorializing celebrations, both large and small. For many African American artists in the early 20th century, focusing on Black culture, life, music, and history was a celebration of their heritage and experience.

### **Identity**

What makes you who you are? Identity can be personally, culturally, or artistically defined. Personal identity includes those internal differences that make each person unique, while similarities with other individuals can be grouped by cultural and artistic identity. Ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, gender, and more can define cultural identity. Artistic identity places an artist within a period or category of art based on their style and use of artistic elements. At the dawn of the 20th century, African American artists carved a place for themselves, often inserting an African American perspective into modern American art and beyond.

### **Adversity**

What hardships have you faced? Some people's hardships stem from the color of their skin. Discrimination against the Black community is a large part of American history that continues still today. Many African American artists in the 20th century explored the discrimination they faced daily in their artworks. Black artists had limited opportunities and struggled to find success, rarely making a living from their artworks alone. Despite this, African American art helped expose their adversities to the dominant art world and helped foster community among other Black artists and community members.

**My purpose is to paint the life of my people as I know it.**

**—Artist Romare Bearden**

## Glossary of Terms

Introduce students to the glossary of terms related to the exhibition, including visual art terms and contextual terms from history, social, and political concepts. Discuss or research terms before your museum visit.

**Abstraction:** A style of art that is not realistic or life-like. There is more emphasis on lines, shapes, colors, or materials.

**Assemblage:** Joining different materials and objects together to create a three-dimensional work of art.

**Civil Rights Era:** The fight for social justice for African Americans to end institutional racism and segregation. It started in 1954 and lasted through the 1960s. Many of the things they fought for are still fought for today with groups like Black Lives Matter.

**Collage:** A two-dimensional form of **assemblage** made by adhering pieces of paper, wood, cloth, or other materials to a flat surface to create an artwork.

**Color Field Painting:** A style of American abstract painting prominent from the late 1940s to the 1960s, which features large expanses of color covering most of the canvas.

**Culture:** An umbrella term for a group of people with similar customs, beliefs, art, and more.

**Discrimination:** The unequal treatment of various groups based on race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, and other categories.

**Expressionism:** A style of artwork that communicates a strong feeling rather than something that carefully describes details from life.

**Ethnicity:** Identification of people through their social group with a common national, linguistic, or cultural tradition, and, in some cases, a shared religion.

**Folk Art:** Artwork created by artists with no formal training, also called self-taught, intuitive, or untrained art. Folk art usually reflects the artist's culture or tradition.

**Great Migration:** After slavery was abolished, the South was still a difficult and often unsafe place for African Americans. When World War I began, many industrial jobs in the North became available. Millions of African Americans moved North to urban centers.

**Harlem Renaissance:** During the Great Migration, many African Americans settled in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. Around the late 1910s until the mid-1930s, Harlem became the location for a resurgence of African American culture that included literature, music, art, and more.

**Minority:** A culture, ethnicity, or race that is singled out and receives unequal treatment from the dominant culture.

**Race:** A term that divides people into social groups based on physical characteristics, usually skin color. Different races are human-made categories with no biological basis.

**Racism:** Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people based on their race or ethnicity.

**Rhythm:** The repeated pattern of a sound or beat. In artwork, it refers to visual motion.

**Systematic/Structural/Institutional Racism:** When racism is woven into society to the point that many see it as the norm. The result is a denial of benefits, privileges, and or fundamental human rights to minorities. It often impacts housing, justice, public health, banking, and education.

**Segregation:** The institutional separation of an ethnic, racial, religious, or other minority group from the dominant majority.

**Social Justice:** The view that everyone should have social, economic, and political equality and access.

**Social Realism:** A movement that became popular between World War I and World War II. Social realist artists often portrayed the poor and working-class people to call attention to inequality. Social realist artists also sought to make art more accessible and understandable to the general public.

**Tone:** The quality of color; its lightness or darkness.



## Expanded Pre-Visit Activities

The activities suggested here are optional but recommended. They are designed to help deepen vocabulary understanding, historical context, and explore students' connections and develop empathic responses as platforms for viewing the artwork in the exhibition.

### **Word Webs (grades K-12)**

Students work independently or in groups to create a word-web, thinking of words associated with each conceptual theme (Identity, Celebration, Adversity) or with a term from the glossary. The word-web can include explanations, ideas, and examples.

### **Personal Reflections (grades 3-12)**

**Identity Prompt:** Have students write or draw how they see themselves, family, or friends. Questions for the students: Think about your morals, culture, favorite things, and personality. What are the things that tell others about you? How is it different or the same as your family or friends?

**Celebration Prompt:** Have students write or draw how they celebrate themselves, friends, and family. Questions for the students: What do you celebrate and why? How does it differ, or is it the same as others?

**Adversity Prompt:** Have students write or draw a time in their lives that they were excluded. Questions for the students: How did this event make you feel at the time? How do you feel about it now? Are there times when you have excluded others?

## Post-Visit Activities

*African American Art in the 20th Century* explores the themes of **Identity, Celebration, and Adversity**. It expands on numerous social and political changes during the 20th century in America, both within the mass culture as well as those specific to the African American experience. The post-visit activities are organized into these three themes and span various subject areas and grade levels. They are flexible and adaptable to your individual curriculum needs. They foster closer study of an artwork, introduce key concepts or essential understandings, connect experiences with artwork to other learning, and ignite imagination and creativity for the student.



# Celebration





Palmer Hayden, *The Janitor Who Paints*, about 1930. Oil on canvas, 39 1/8 x 32 7/8 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Gift of Harmon Foundation

**I decided to paint to support my love of art,  
rather than have art support me.**

**—Artist Palmer Hayden**

## Celebrate Someone Special

Elementary grade levels (K-5)

**Object** (pictured on page 11): Palmer Hayden, *The Janitor Who Paints*.

**Essential Question:** How does art celebrate significant people?

STANDARDS	
VA:Re7.1.1a	Select and describe works of art that illustrate daily life experiences of one's self and others.
VA:Re8.1.1a	Interpret art by categorizing subject matter and identifying the characteristics of form.
VA:Re8.1.2a	Interpret art by identifying the mood suggested by a work of art and describing relevant subject matter and characteristics of form.
VA: Re7.2.3a	Determine messages communicated by an image.
VA:Re8.1.3a	Interpret art by analyzing use of media to create subject matter, characteristics of form, and use of media.
VA:Re8.1.4a	Interpret art by referring to contextual information and analyzing relevant subject matter, characteristics of form, and use of media.
VA:Re11.1.4a	Through observation, infer information about time, place, and culture in which a work of art was created.
VA:Re8.1.5a	Interpret art by analyzing characteristics of form and structure, contextual information, subject matter, visual elements, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.
VA:Cn11.1.5a	Identify how art is used to inform or change beliefs, values, or behaviors of an individual or society.



## CONNECT

Palmer Hayden (1890–1973) was a prominent artist during the Harlem Renaissance. His artistic beginnings started with his passion for sketching as a young boy and continued throughout his lifetime. He had several odd jobs working in Washington D.C., serving in the US Army, and working as a janitor in Greenwich Village in New York City. Hayden was a life-long artist and never stopped drawing and making art. His love of life and people is paramount in all of his art.

Questions for the students:

- What do you see?
- Who are the figures?
- What are they doing?
- Where are they?

Hayden's *The Janitor Who Paints* was inspired by another artist friend who was also a janitor, Cloyd Boykin, who never received credit for his work. He wanted to shed light on the social and economic standings of those Black Americans who wanted to be artists and struggled to make a name for themselves. His paintings often chronicled the Black experience and urban life of the Harlem Renaissance.

## CREATE

A Letter of Praise

Have students think of an important person in their lives that they would like to celebrate. Have students brainstorm a list of why they are celebrated, asking the following:

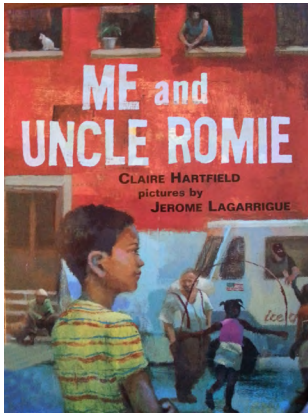
1. How are you related to this person?
2. What do you like about this person?
3. What qualities make them special to you?
4. What does this person do for a living?
5. How have they been successful?

Now have the students compose an informal letter for this person using their list.

## EXPAND

- Have students write a dialogue between the two characters in the artwork. Break into pairs and imagine together what the conversation would be.

## Additional resources and links



*Me and Uncle Romie* by Claire Hartfield

Grade level: K-4

A fictional telling of a boy's learning experiences and homage to his uncle, Romare Bearden.

More on the artist, Palmer Hayden:

[britannica.com/biography/Palmer-Hayden](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Palmer-Hayden)

[americanart.si.edu/artist/palmer-hayden-2130](https://americanart.si.edu/artist/palmer-hayden-2130)

More on the artwork, *The Janitor Who Paints*:

[journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/587918](https://journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/587918)

[americanart.si.edu/artwork/janitor-who-paints-10126](https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/janitor-who-paints-10126)



Palmer Hayden,  
National Archives,  
Washington, D.C.,  
[britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com)

This image has been removed at the request of ARS.

Click here to view the image:

<https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/bopping-birdland-stomp-time-jazz-series-33816>

Romare Bearden, *Bopping at Birdland (Stomp Time)*, from *the Jazz Series*, 1979. Color lithograph on paper, 24 x 33 1/4 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Gift of Eugene I. Schuster © 2021 Romare Bearden Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

## The Rhythm and Tone of Art

### Intermediate grade levels (6-8)

**Object** (pictured on page 15): Romare Bearden, *Bopping at Birdland (Stomp Time)*, from the *Jazz Series*.

**Essential Question:** How do artists convey tone and rhythm in their work?

STANDARDS	
VA:Cr2.1.6a	Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods, and approaches in making works of art and design.
VA: Re7.2.6a	Analyze ways that visual components and cultural associations suggested by images influence ideas, emotion, and actions.
VA: Re7.2.7a	Analyze multiple ways that images influence specific audiences.
VA:Re8.1.7a	Interpret art by analyzing artmaking approaches, the characteristics of form and structure, relevant contextual information, subject matter, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.
VA:Cr1.1.8a	Document early stages of the creative process visually and/or verbally in traditional or new media.
VA: Re7.2.8a	Compare and contrast context and media in which viewers encounter images that influence ideas, emotions, and actions.
VA:Re8.1.8a	Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, artmaking approaches, and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.



**Once you get going, all sorts of things open up. Sometimes something just seems to fall into place, like piano keys that every now and again just seem to be right where your fingers come down.**

**—Artist Romare Bearden**

## CONNECT

Romare Bearden (1911–1988) was an artist, poet, songwriter, and baseball player. Bearden’s memories of the railroad, school, and childhood music were fixed in his mind and became an essential part of his artwork. As a boy, the artist moved to New York City with his parents and was inspired by Harlem Renaissance artists. He was a master at creating the sounds, feelings, and colors of his upbringing, and he often looked to the music of Harlem’s famous jazz and blues clubs for many of his subjects.

Questions for the students:

- ➔ What is the first thing that catches your eye, and why?
- ➔ What is going on in this image?
- ➔ Describe the setting; where does this scene take place?
- ➔ Describe the colors you see.
- ➔ How would you describe the overall mood?
- ➔ Would you like to visit this place, why or why not?

*Bopping at Birdland (Stomp Time), from the Jazz Series, features Birdland, a New York City jazz club that opened in 1949 and was often frequented by famous stars such as Marilyn Monroe and*

**BIRDLAND**

Frank Sinatra. Jazz is a style of making music that embodies the emotion and feelings of the musician. It is a mixture of different kinds of sounds, and its distinguishing feature is improvisation. Improvisation allows for some freedom while still contained within a structure, just like a visual artist can freely create as long as it remains on the page. The structure for jazz is the overriding melody, where the musicians play it differently each time. Often, the band members do a solo to try out new skills and fully improvise and explore their sound. The rhythm of jazz can shift and change as a wide variety of instruments plays the song.

## CREATE

### Jazz Inspired Art

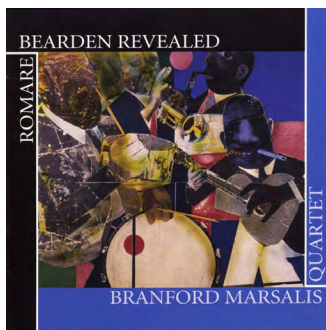
#### MATERIALS

Listening device and music selections  
Markers, colored pencils, or paint  
Paper (appropriate to color medium)

Just like Romare Bearden listened to music for inspiration, have your students listen to two different jazz recordings to create improvisational art. Play the recordings for your students and have them draw freehand on two different sheets of paper, one for each recording, while they play. Have the students think about the sounds they hear and how they make them feel. How can these expressions be conveyed in their artwork?

One way to do this is to have them think about tone. Just as colors belong to a cool or warm family, some sounds can have a “cool” or “warm” tone. Artists create tones by choosing among many colors and using a range of shades and tints of a single color or both. Lines and shapes can have a mood or rhythm. Lines help direct motion, direction, and energy in a work of art. Expressive lines are dynamic and follow undetermined paths. Lines and shapes can be expressive, embodying a more organic form and creating a mood and rhythm in an artwork.

At the end, have the students compare their two artworks to find similarities and differences in the tone. Optionally, have students present both artworks and have other students guess which artwork goes with what recording.



Selection one:

“J Mood,” Branford Marsalis Quartet,  
*Romare Bearden Revealed* CD.

Listen on YouTube:

[youtube.com/watch?v=puSkbYvELCM](https://youtube.com/watch?v=puSkbYvELCM)



Selection two:

“Weather Bird,” Louis Armstrong, trumpet,  
accompanied by Earl Hines, piano,  
*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, 1923-1934*.

Listen on YouTube:

[youtube.com/watch?v=Dv\\_9B7W7Q0w](https://youtube.com/watch?v=Dv_9B7W7Q0w)

## EXPAND

- Explore other artworks with a musical influence by Romare Bearden.
- Read some poetry by Bearden and compose a calligram poem.
- Compare poetry and music by exploring poet Langston Hughes, who also created jazz and blues series.



Carl Van Vechten, Portrait of Romare Bearden, 1944.  
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

### Additional resources and links:

*Me and Uncle Romie*, a book by Claire Hartfield.  
A fictional telling of a boy's learning experiences with his uncle, Romare Bearden.

*The Art of Romare Bearden*, A Resource for Teachers, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

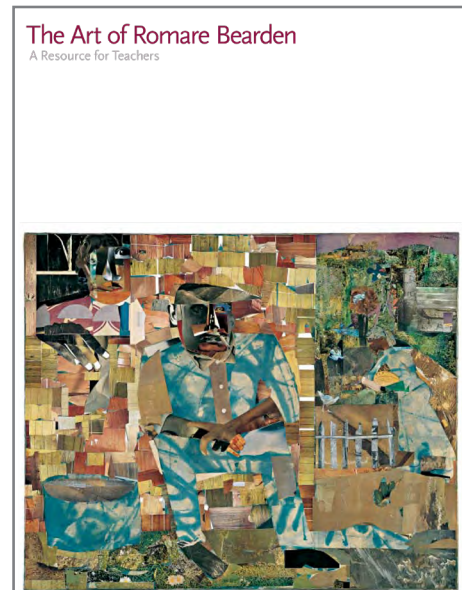
[beardenfoundation.org/learn/](http://beardenfoundation.org/learn/)

More on the artist, Romare Bearden:

[americanart.si.edu/artist/romare-bearden-296](http://americanart.si.edu/artist/romare-bearden-296)

See his other work in the exhibition, *African American Art in the 20th Century: Brass Section (Jamming at Minton's)*, from the *Jazz Series*:

[americanart.si.edu/artwork/brass-section-jamming-mintons-jazz-series-33817](http://americanart.si.edu/artwork/brass-section-jamming-mintons-jazz-series-33817)







Charles Searles, *Celebration* (detail), 1975. Acrylic on canvas, 27 1/2 x 81 3/4 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Transfer from the General Services Administration, Art-in-Architecture Program FULL IMAGE ON NEXT PAGE





## Celebration: Then and Now, Here and There

Secondary grade levels (9-12)

**Object** (pictured above; detail on page 20): Charles Searles, *Celebration*.

**Essential Question:** How are methods of memorializing important moments recognized across cultures and eras?

<b>STANDARDS</b>	
VA: Re7.2.Ia	Analyze how one's understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.
VA:Re8.1.Ia	Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts
VA:Re11.1.Ia	Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.
VA:Pr6.1.IIa	Make, explain, and justify connections between artists or artwork and social, cultural, and political history.
VA: Re7.2.IIa	Evaluate the effectiveness of an image or images to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of specific audiences.
VA:Re11.1.IIa	Compare uses of art in a variety of societal, cultural, and historical contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts.
VA: Re7.2.IIIa	Determine the commonalities within a group of artists or visual images attributed to a particular type of art, timeframe, or culture.
VA:Re8.1.IIIa	Analyze differing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works in order to select and defend a plausible critical analysis.

**It is often said that my work has a strong multicultural feeling and connects especially well with people of color—Caribbean, African, Hispanics, Indian and Asian. All people have a kinship with my work. Each piece is positive, energetic and is an affirmation or celebration of life. The language is clear and universal.**

**—Artist Charles Searles**

## CONNECT

Charles Searles (1937–2004) loved art. From the young age of four, he began painting with watercolors and preferred making art above other activities. While studying art in college, he received a travel scholarship to visit Africa. In Nigeria, he felt a strong connection to the culture and referred to the country as his “homeland.” He gained inspiration for his artwork through traveling to places like Morocco, Ghana, Japan, Korea, Mexico, and Cuba.

*Celebration* is a study for a public art mural for the William G. Green Federal Building in Philadelphia. The usage of color, pattern, and dynamic movement pay homage to American street festivals Searles attended and his memories of travels to Nigeria. One can gain a profound sense of celebration and activity—the rhythm and beat of the music, the dancers’ jubilant sway, and the colors’ vibrancy.

Questions for the student:

- ➔ What is going on in this image?
- ➔ What is the mood?
- ➔ What do you think they are celebrating? Why?
- ➔ What does it remind you of?
- ➔ How does the artist use elements of design (line, color, shape, form, value, space, texture) to convey a mood and meaning in his work?



Charles Searles painting a mural, about 1975. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

## CREATE

### A Side-by-Side Comparison of Scenes

Have students find another artwork that depicts a celebration scene, one that occurs at a different time or by another culture. Place the selected image beside the image of Charles Searles' *Celebration*.

Have the students compare the two images. Identify the artists, what inspires them, and how they incorporate that into their work. Also, look at how they portray the celebrations; what is similar or different? How is their culture reflected in their portrayal? Why did they choose the medium or technique they used? They can make their own interpretations as well as look at what others have said about each artwork. This can be a written assignment or something they present to the class.

## EXPAND

► Have students create a soundtrack for the painting by researching contemporary and traditional music they “hear” in this scene and annotate the selections.

### Additional resources and links:

More on the artist, Charles Searles:

[kathleenspicer.com/charles-searles](http://kathleenspicer.com/charles-searles)

[americanart.si.edu/artist/charles-searles-4352](http://americanart.si.edu/artist/charles-searles-4352)

More on the artwork, *Celebration*:

[americanart.si.edu/artwork/celebration-22099](http://americanart.si.edu/artwork/celebration-22099)

This is a good place to search for images for the activity: *Double Exposure: Through the African American Lens* by the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Photographic images from NMAAHC's collection from Pre-Civil War to 21st century can be found here:

[nmaahc.si.edu/explore/collection](http://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/collection)

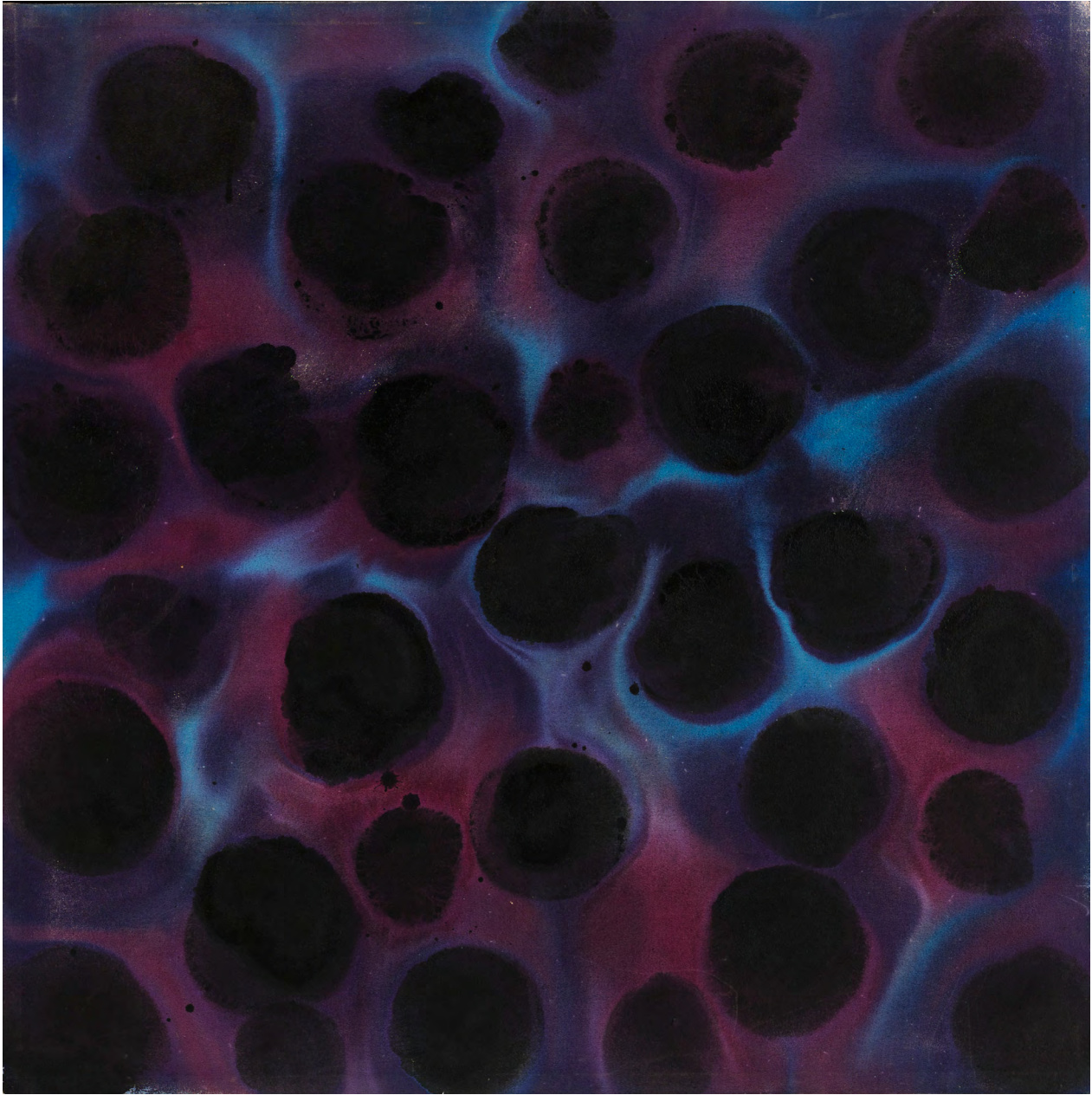
Flyer Advertising an Evening with Angela Davis, 1972, ink on paper. Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture





# Identity





Kenneth Victor Young, *Untitled*, 1973. Acrylic on canvas, 37 5/8 x 37 5/8 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Gift of Mr. Val E. Lewton

I kind of stumbled into this way of painting by finding a tool that would give me this result. The painting technique was painting wet-in-wet. Painting wet-in-wet produced haloes around these objects, which looked like outer space or inner space. I've always been interested in...outer space, inner space, and the development of what occurs—force, magnetism, and that kind of thing.

—Artist Kenneth Victor Young

## Science and Art Converge

Elementary grade levels (K-5)

**Object** (pictured on page 25): Kenneth Victor Young, *Untitled*.

**Essential Question:** How can experimenting with different processes help an artist discover an artistic and personal identity?

STANDARDS	
VA:Cr1.1.PKa	Engage in exploration and imaginative play with materials.
VA:Cr2.1.PKa	Through experimentation, build skills in various media and approaches to art making.
VA:Cr2.1.1a	Explore uses of materials and tools to create works of art or design.
VA: Cr1.2.2a	Make art or design with various materials and tools to explore personal interests, questions, and curiosity.
VA:Re8.1.2a	Interpret art by identifying the mood suggested by a work of art and describing relevant subject matter and characteristics of form.
VA:Cr2.1.3a	Create personally satisfying artwork using a variety of artistic processes and materials.
VA:Re7.1.3a	Speculate about processes an artist uses to create a work of art.
VA:Cr2.1.4a	Explore and invent artmaking techniques and approaches.
VA:Cr1.1.5a	Combine ideas to generate an innovative idea for artmaking.
VA:Cr2.1.5a	Experiment and develop skills in multiple artmaking techniques and approaches through practice.



## CONNECT

Kenneth Young (1933–2017) began his career as a physicist. In the early 1960s, Young made the switch to visual art. He later worked as an exhibition installation designer at the Smithsonian. Young was one of the first Black employees to work in that role. He also taught classes in art.

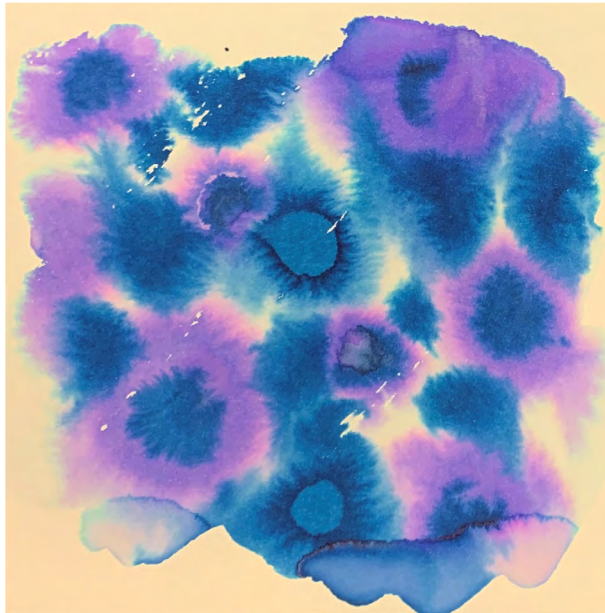
Young perceived the process of making art as a way of bringing order to the chaos of life. He experimented with staining canvas, rather than painting. He was known for using unprimed canvas to absorb the colors. The result created orb-like colors that mimic cells under a microscope or even energy in the universe.

Questions for the students:

- ➔ What colors do you see?
- ➔ What shapes do you see?
- ➔ What is the first thing that catches your eye and why?
- ➔ What is going on in this image?
- ➔ Does it remind you of anything?
- ➔ How does the image make you feel?



The artist at work, photo courtesy of Kenneth Young's family. [washingtoncitypaper.com](http://washingtoncitypaper.com), *Late Artist Kenneth Young is Finally Getting His Due* by Kriston Capps, June 1, 2017.



METHOD 1



METHOD 2

## CREATE

### Experimental Watercolor Paintings

#### MATERIALS

Liquid watercolors	Paint brushes
Salt	Pipettes
Water	Watercolor paper
Baking soda	Mixing containers
Vinegar	

**Method 1:** Dissolve 1 teaspoon of salt into 1/2 cup water. Brush the saltwater mixture onto your watercolor paper, covering it completely. Then, fill a pipette with liquid watercolor to add drops of watercolor onto the paper. Add or layer colors as desired.

**Method 2:** Mix 1 teaspoon of baking soda with 1 teaspoon of liquid watercolor. Brush the pigmented solution onto your watercolor paper, covering it completely. Next, fill a pipette with vinegar. Drop the vinegar onto the paper. Add drops as desired.

Ask students to observe what is happening in both methods' chemical reactions and observe the outcomes when the paintings have dried. Encourage students to experiment with different techniques, materials, and ways to reach a visually pleasing work of art. Have them select their best work and explain their reasoning.

## EXPAND

- Research the Washington Color School and other artists associated with this style of painting—such as Sam Gilliam whose art is also featured in the *African American Art in the 20th Century* exhibition.
- Research the science behind this activity. What are the chemical changes and reactions? Use the scientific method in conjunction with artmaking.

### Additional resources and links:

Read an online article in the *Washington City Paper* about Kenneth Victor Young:  
[washingtoncitypaper.com/article/190708/late-artist-kenneth-young-is-finally-getting-his-due](http://washingtoncitypaper.com/article/190708/late-artist-kenneth-young-is-finally-getting-his-due)

Watch “3 Simple Unique Watercolor Techniques” on YouTube:  
[youtube.com/watch?v=4ewfn5Y8\\_Xs](https://youtube.com/watch?v=4ewfn5Y8_Xs)

More on the artwork, *Untitled*:  
[americanart.si.edu/artwork/untitled-28318](http://americanart.si.edu/artwork/untitled-28318)







Lois Mailou Jones, *Moon Masque*, 1971. Oil and collage on canvas, 41 x 30 1/8 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Bequest of the artist

## Visualizing Heritage

Intermediate grade levels (6–8)

**Object** (pictured on page 30): Loïs Mailou Jones, *Moon Masque*.

**Essential Questions:** How can clothing patterns be translated into art? How does clothing reflect someone’s identity?

### STANDARDS

VA: Cr1.2.6a	Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.
VA: Re7.2.6a	Analyze ways that visual components and cultural associations suggested by images influence ideas, emotion, and actions.
VA: Cr2.3.7a	Apply visual organizational strategies to design and produce a work of art, design, or media that clearly communicates information or ideas.
VA: Re7.2.7a	Analyze multiple ways that images influence specific audiences.
VA:Re7.1.8a	Explain how a person’s aesthetic choices are influenced by culture and environment and impact the visual image that one conveys to others.
VA: Re7.2.8a	Compare and contrast context and media in which viewers encounter images that influence ideas, emotions, and actions.



Loïs Mailou Jones, artist and teacher, about 1936–1937. U. S. National Archives and Records Administration.

## CONNECT

Loïs Mailou Jones (1905–1998) was an artist and teacher. She started in textile design before moving to paint. Much of her work focuses on women’s rights and African motifs, stemming from her personal experiences of gender and racial discrimination. She began researching African masks in the 1920s, combining them with her artwork to connect her art to her ancestors. She was also greatly influenced by African designs, eventually moving to full abstraction in her works.

In *Moon Masque*, she combines several different African influences. Ethiopian textiles inspire the designs. The mask featured is a paper mâché replica of a heart-shaped white Kwele mask from Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). The Kwele people believe that unexplained deaths and epidemics are the work of witchcraft and that witches inhabit people during the day and come out at night. To rid people of these witches, they perform a *beete* ritual that includes a performance where they wear masks like the one in this artwork.

Questions for the students:

- ➔ What colors, shapes, and patterns do you see in this artwork?
- ➔ What is the mood of this artwork? How does this artwork make you feel?
- ➔ What do you notice about the faces you see?
- ➔ Does this artwork remind you of anything?

## CREATE

Ancestral artwork

Have the students research their family heritage (have them ask their family if they do not already know). Many people have roots in multiple cultures; have the students select one to explore in this artwork. They should research the traditional dress, art, or ceramics of their cultural heritage, looking for specific images, patterns, colors, or common symbols. Once they have compiled their research, the students will create a two-dimensional artwork that incorporates these designs using any medium of choice.

When the artwork is complete, have the students present their finished product to the class, pointing out what design choices were used to represent their heritage.

## EXPAND

- Have students put together a slide-show presentation with images showing the patterns or symbols they incorporated into their artwork.



**Additional resources and links:**

More on the artist, Loïs Mailou Jones:

[americanart.si.edu/artist/lo%C3%AFs-mailou-jones-5658](http://americanart.si.edu/artist/lo%C3%AFs-mailou-jones-5658)

More on the artwork, *Moon Masque*:

[americanart.si.edu/artwork/moon-masque-76334](http://americanart.si.edu/artwork/moon-masque-76334)

See her other artwork featured in the show, *Initiation Liberia*:

[americanart.si.edu/artwork/initiation-liberia-76336](http://americanart.si.edu/artwork/initiation-liberia-76336)



Kwele mask. Wood, pigments. Republic of Congo. Museum of Natural History of La Rochelle, France.



Renée Stout, *The Colonel's Cabinet*, 1991–1994. Mixed media, 67 1/2 x 60 x 50 1/2 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Museum purchase made possible by Ralph Cross Johnson

**I see each one of my pieces as a fragment or installment in an ongoing narrative that's my contribution to telling the story of who we are as a society at this point in time.**  
**–Artist Renée Stout**

## Identity Through Materiality

Secondary grade levels (9–12)

**Object** (pictured on page 34): Renée Stout, *The Colonel's Cabinet*

**Essential Question:** How can art represent a person's identity?

STANDARDS	
VA:Cr2.1.Ia	Engage in making a work of art or design without having a preconceived plan.
VA:Pr4.1.Ia	Analyze, select, and curate artifacts and/or artworks for presentation and preservation.
VA:Pr6.1.Ia	Analyze and describe the impact that an exhibition or collection has on personal awareness of social, cultural, or political beliefs and understandings.
VA:Re7.1.Ia	Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences.
VA:Re8.1.Ia	Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.
VA: Re7.2.IIa	Evaluate the effectiveness of an image or images to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of specific audiences.
VA:Re8.1.IIa	Identify types of contextual information useful in the process of constructing interpretations of an artwork or collection of works.
VA:Cn10.1.IIa	Synthesize knowledge of social, cultural, historical, and personal life with artmaking approaches to create meaningful works of art or design.



## CONNECT

Renée Stout (born 1958 in Junction City, Kansas) is a contemporary artist who explores identity and spirituality, often blending ideas from different cultures from around the world. She works in a wide range of media—including photography, painting, printmaking, drawing, and sculpture. Stout uses found items she often discovers in vintage stores, flea markets, and botanic shops that supply consumers with medicinal herbs and spiritual goods. Her sculptures often give private and personal glimpses into the characters she invents, giving the viewer clues to their story.

*The Colonel's Cabinet* mimics a sort of “cabinet of curiosity” and tells of the world travels of a fictional character, Colonel Frank. The work features an assemblage of objects that Stout collected and altered. The chair was made from an old ironing board. The photos were aged using staining and distressing techniques, in some cases with actual dirt mixed with latex paint. The charms in the cabinet contain the artist’s own hair. The maps on the cabinet door are imaginary islands to which the artist envisioned the Colonel traveling. One is the continent of Africa placed upside down.

Questions for the students:

- ➔ What objects do you see? Are any unusual or unfamiliar?
- ➔ What is the focal point?
- ➔ Does it remind you of anything?
- ➔ Based on these objects, what can you infer about the owner?
- ➔ Where in a house do you think you would find these objects?



Renée Stout, courtesy of the artist.  
Photo: Grace Roselli



## CREATE

### A Mixed Media Assemblage

Gather repurposed materials to have students rummage through. These found objects could be scraps of wood, old photographs, trinkets, office supplies, and more. Tell the students that they will be creating an assemblage to describe a fictional character they will invent, like Stout. Have them explore the objects available for inspiration. They may alter these found objects in any way they want and arrange and affix them to a board or box. The items they select should act as identifying characteristics of their fictitious person. Have them write a brief biography of this person and why they chose the objects they assembled. Optionally, have them present this to the class.



## EXPAND

- Have students research the history of the “cabinet of curiosity” or “freak shows.”
- Much of her work also deals with mysticism and spiritualism, which could also be a great research topic.

[newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/playing-hoodoo-renee-stout-and-the-rootworkers-table](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/playing-hoodoo-renee-stout-and-the-rootworkers-table)

More on the artist, Renée Stout:

[americanart.si.edu/artist/ren%C3%A9e-stout-6586](https://americanart.si.edu/artist/ren%C3%A9e-stout-6586)

“Meet the Artist: Renée Stout” at the Museum of Glass

[youtube.com/watch?v=HmxBs9T9PBU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmxBs9T9PBU)

African Art and the Contemporary Lens: Renée Stout

[youtube.com/watch?v=H7sFe8BWqu8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7sFe8BWqu8)

More on the artwork, *The Colonel’s Cabinet*:

[americanart.si.edu/artwork/colonels-cabinet-33939](https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/colonels-cabinet-33939)

Also check out the Ulrich Museum of Art’s exhibition *Renée Stout/Ghosts* on view from January 21–May 8, 2021:

[ulrich.wichita.edu/ulrich\\_exhibition/renee-stout-ghosts](https://www.ulrich.wichita.edu/ulrich_exhibition/renee-stout-ghosts)



# Adversity





Thornton Dial Sr., *Top of the Line (Steel)*, 1992. Mixed media, 65 x 71 x 7 7/8 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Gift from the collection of Ron and June Shelp



**It ain't about paint.  
It ain't about canvas.  
It's about ideas  
—Artist Thornton Dial Sr.**

## Where Does Art Come From?

### Elementary Grade Levels (2-5)

**Object** (pictured on page 39): Thornton Dial Sr., *Top of the Line (Steel)*.

**Essential questions:** Where does art come from? Who makes art? Is there a right or a wrong way to make art? What can you use to make art?

STANDARDS	
VA: Cr2.3.2a	Repurpose objects to make something new.
VA: Cr1.2.3a	Apply knowledge of available resources, tools, and technologies to investigate personal ideas through the artmaking process.
VA:Re7.1.3a	Speculate about processes an artist uses to create a work of art
VA:Pr6.1.4a	Compare and contrast purposes of art museums, art galleries, and other venues, as well as the types of personal experiences they provide.
VA: Re7.2.4a	Analyze components in visual imagery that convey messages.
VA: Cr2.3.5a	Identify, describe, and visually document places and/or objects of personal significance
VA:Re8.1.5a	Interpret art by analyzing characteristics of form and structure, contextual information, subject matter, visual elements, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.



Thornton Dial's home studio in McCalla, Alabama, 2007. Indianapolis Museum of Art, [flickr.com/photos/imaitsmyart/2115219328/in/photostream](https://www.flickr.com/photos/imaitsmyart/2115219328/in/photostream)

## CONNECT

Self-taught art, also known as folk/untrained/outsider/intuitive/naïve art, refers to artworks created by artists who have no formal training. These artists are unaware of the artistic trends or techniques taught in schools. Despite this absence of training, these artists can create dynamic and visually appealing works that can be widely enjoyed. Now more museums and art critics are seeing the value of these artists' work.

One such artist is Thornton Dial Sr. (1928–2016) who created art in a shed in Bessemer, Alabama. He worked in the steel mills for most of his life, so he learned how to manipulate many materials that he utilized in his artmaking. He worked with paint, but he also used materials like rope, scraps of wood, broken kitchen appliances, or abandoned cars. His artworks often address social or political issues, like racism or climate change.

Questions for the students:

- ➔ How many faces do you see?
- ➔ What do you think is going on in this image?
- ➔ Can you find other materials on the canvas other than paint?
- ➔ Why do you think Thornton Dial used other things besides paint?



## CREATE

### A Found-Object Collage

#### MATERIALS

Glue

Wood board or canvas

Paint (optional)

To encourage students to be creative in unfamiliar ways, try limiting the assemblage supplies. Suggest students collect materials from a defined space in their home like a kitchen drawer, closet, or garage. For example, students could scavenge for supplies in the kitchen and incorporate aluminum foil and toothpicks. Have them spend some time assembling their objects before adhering their final composition onto their wood board or canvas. Their work can be flat or three-dimensional. Painting the assemblage is optional if available. Encourage them to choose objects to portray an idea important to them.

## EXPAND

- Compare some 3D assemblages in the exhibition, *African American Art in the 20th Century*: Melvin Edwards, *Tambo*, 1993 and Renée Stout, *The Colonel's Cabinet*, 1991-1994.
- Also compare another self-taught artist in the exhibition, *African American Art in the 20th Century*: Purvis Young. Other self-taught artists who have gained recognition include Leonard Knight, Grandma Moses, Martín Ramírez, and Nellie Mae Roe.

More on the artist, Thornton Dial Sr.:

[soulsgrounddeep.org/artist/thornton-dial](http://soulsgrounddeep.org/artist/thornton-dial)

Katherine Jentleson's TEDx Talk, the High Museum's Curator of Folk and Self-Taught Art  
[high.org/resource/where-does-great-art-come-from](http://high.org/resource/where-does-great-art-come-from)

More on the artwork, *Top of the Line (Steel)*:

[americanart.si.edu/education/oh-freedom/thornton-dial-sr](http://americanart.si.edu/education/oh-freedom/thornton-dial-sr)





Beauford Delaney, *Can Fire in the Park*, 1946. Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Museum purchase

## Understanding Viewpoints Through Art

### Intermediate grade levels (6-8)

**Object** (pictured on page 43): Beauford Delaney, *Can Fire in the Park*.

**Essential Question:** How can artists and writers allow us to look through their own eyes and learn from their experiences? What messages can they tell us about overcoming adversity?

STANDARDS	
VA: Cr1.2.6a	Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.
VA:Re7.1.6a	Identify and interpret works of art or design that reveal how people live around the world and what they value.
VA: Re7.2.6a	Analyze ways that visual components and cultural associations suggested by images influence ideas, emotion, and actions.
VA: Re7.2.7	Analyze multiple ways that images influence specific audiences.
VA:Re8.1.7a	Interpret art by analyzing artmaking approaches, the characteristics of form and structure, relevant contextual information, subject matter, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.
VA: Cr2.3.8a	Select, organize, and design images and words to make visually clear and compelling presentations.
VA:Re7.1.8a	Explain how a person's aesthetic choices are influenced by culture and environment and impact the visual image that one conveys to others.
VA:Re8.1.8a	Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, artmaking approaches, and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.

## CONNECT

Understanding works of art (visual or written) takes time and effort. Using an analytical process—pulling a work apart by our eyes or line by line, we can begin to understand other people’s views and gain insights into what the artist’s or writer’s intentions might have been.

During the post-war and Depression era, poverty among most Black Americans did not improve as it did for most white Americans. They faced segregation, racism in the workplace, had less access to assets and opportunities. Beauford Delaney (1901–1979) painted images about the ongoing realities for many African Americans in the years after World War II and the Great Depression, such as joblessness, homelessness, and poverty.

After moving to New York City, Delaney was unfairly kicked out of a boarding house and spent the night on a park bench. “He became sort of included with the other people in that park. That says something about the fundamental humanity [of] people, no matter who they are or what their situation is,” says Smithsonian American Art Museum Chief Curator Virginia Mecklenburg. The painting *Can Fire in the Park* depicts what he must have experienced on that bench.



Carl Van Vechten, Portrait of Beauford Delaney, 1953.  
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division



## **We Alone**

by Alice Walker

We alone can devalue gold  
by not caring  
if it falls or rises  
in the marketplace.  
Wherever there is gold  
there is a chain, you know,  
and if your chain  
is gold  
so much the worse  
for you.

Feathers, shells  
and sea-shaped stones  
are all as rare.

This could be our revolution:  
To love what is plentiful  
as much as  
what's scarce.



Alice Walker, 2012. The American Library Association, [flickr.com/photos/ala\\_members/8676288874](https://www.flickr.com/photos/ala_members/8676288874)



Alice Walker is a renowned writer and recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the National Book Award. She has devoted her life to working for human rights. Despite living in a racially divided South, Walker graduated from her segregated high school as class valedictorian. She attended college on a scholarship in Atlanta, worked as a social worker after graduation, and later became a prize-winning author. Her poem, *We Alone*, speaks to humanity and of the common notions of love and wealth. Though she has experienced poverty and wealth, *We Alone* reveals that she does not find her enjoyment in fame, money, or power. She invites the reader to find value in nature and the simple joys of life.

Questions for the students on the artwork:

- What is going on in this image?
- Describe the setting. Where are the figures? What time of day is it? What is the weather like?
- What do you suppose the figures are doing, and why?

Questions for the students on the poem:

- What is Alice Walker’s message?
- How is her message similar to Delaney’s? How is it different?

## CREATE

### A Personal Perspective Lyrical Poem

A poet can express their emotions vividly through writing a lyrical poem. Despite not using “I,” “me,” or “my,” poets can articulate what they see, feel, or know. All artists—poets or painters—allow us to look directly at the world through their viewpoint.

Ask the students to think about a time they encountered something difficult in their life. Have them compile a list of answers to these questions:

1. What do you remember seeing at that moment?
2. How did you feel then? How do you feel about it now?
3. What did you know then as opposed to now?

Ask them to review this list and reorganize the thoughts on a new sheet of paper in an interesting way to create their lyrical poem.

## EXPAND

Students can create an artwork to go along with their poem.

Research other artists and poets from the Harlem Renaissance and/or civil rights era: such as Hayden Palmer, William H. Johnson (artists) and Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou (poets).

**Additional resources and links:**



*Black History for Beginners*  
by Denise Dennis  
(Reading level 6-8)  
A graphic novel presenting the historical account of Black Americans and the struggles they have faced.



*Words with Wings, A Treasury of African American Poetry and Art*  
selected by Belinda Rochelle  
(Reading level 2-5)  
A collection of African American artists and poets, combining together to highlight a human shared experience of work, pain, love, anger, regret, and more.

More on the artwork, *Can Fire in the Park*:

[americanart.si.edu/education/oh-freedom/beauford-delaney](http://americanart.si.edu/education/oh-freedom/beauford-delaney)

More on the artist:

Beauford Delaney:

[americanart.si.edu/artist/beauford-delaney-1186](http://americanart.si.edu/artist/beauford-delaney-1186)

Alice Walker:

[alicewalkersgarden.com](http://alicewalkersgarden.com)





Norman Lewis, *Evening Rendezvous*, 1962. Oil on linen. 50 1/4 x 60 1/4 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Museum purchase.

## More than Meets the Eye— How can abstracted art portray a real adversity?

Secondary grade levels (9-12)

**Object** (pictured on page 49): Norman Lewis, *Evening Rendezvous*.

**Essential questions:** What is abstract art? How do we as an audience relate to abstract art? How can art help further a social justice movement?

<b>STANDARDS</b>	
VA: Cr1.2.Ia	Investigate an aspect of daily life using art or design.
VA:Re7.1.Ia	Brainstorm ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences.
VA: Re7.2.Ia	Analyze how one’s understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.
VA:Re11.1.Ia	Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.
VA:Pr6.1.IIa	Make, explain, and justify connections between artists or artwork and social, cultural, and political history.
VA: Re7.2.IIa	Evaluate the effectiveness of an image or images to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of specific audiences.
VA:Cr1.1.IIIa	Visualize and brainstorm ideas for creating art and design that can affect social change.
VA: Cr2.3.IIIa	Demonstrate in works of art or design how visual and material culture defines, shapes, enhances, inhibits, and/or empowers people’s lives.

## CONNECT

What is abstract art?

Abstract art is an art that does not attempt to portray real-life or life-like images. Some art is entirely abstract, featuring only gestural lines and colors. Other art is abstracted, a blend of the real and the unreal. Abstract art began at the beginning of the 20th century. European styles like cubism and fauvism are examples.

In the United States, abstract art soared in popularity around the 1950s with the abstract expressionist movement. These artists emphasized their canvas's flatness, trying to find ways to eliminate the optical illusion of depth. The artist Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) caused a stir in the media with his dripping paint method onto a canvas set on the floor (see image: page from *Life* magazine, August 1949). Many artists of the time were influenced by this movement toward abstraction.

One such artist was Norman Lewis (1909–1979), who began his career as a social realist painter or someone who makes realistic artworks that draw attention to the day's social or political hardships. Lewis became an abstract artist in the 1950s, one of the few Black artists in the abstract expressionist movement. In his later career, he moved away from total abstraction to combine more elements from his social realist days, like in *Evening Rendezvous*. In this work, Lewis shows a group of hooded Klansmen gathered around a bonfire. Lewis was a lifelong political activist who found a way to combine this passion with his abstract art.

Questions for the students:

- ➔ What is going on in this image?
- ➔ Is this artwork entirely abstract? Can you discern any figures or objects?
- ➔ What is the setting?
- ➔ How does this work make you feel?
- ➔ Can you glean any political or social opinions from the artwork alone? How explicit is it?



## JACKSON POLLOCK

Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?



"NUMBER TWELVE" reveals Pollock's liking for aluminum paint, which he applies freely straight out of the can. He feels that by using it with ordinary oil paint he gets an exciting textural contrast.

Recently a formidably high-brow New York critic hailed the brooding, puzzled-looking man shown above as a major artist of our time and a fine candidate to become "the greatest American painter of the 20th Century." Others believe that Jackson Pollock produces nothing more than interesting, if inexplicable, decorations. Still others condemn his pictures as degenerate and find them as unpalatable as yesterday's macaroni. Even so, Pollock, at the age of 37, has burst forth as the shining new phenomenon of American art.

Pollock was virtually unknown in 1944. Now his paintings hang in five U.S. museums and 40 private collections. Exhibiting in New York last winter, he sold 12 out of 18 pictures. Moreover his work has stirred up a fuss in Italy, and this autumn he is slated for a one-man show in avant-garde Paris, where he is fast becoming the most talked-of and controversial U.S. painter. He has also won a following among his own neighbors in the village of Springs, N.Y., who amuse themselves by trying to decide what his paintings are about. His grocer bought one which he identifies for bewildered visiting salesmen as an aerial view of Siberia. For Pollock's own explanation of why he paints as he does, turn the page.

Copyright material



## CREATE

### Abstract Artwork with a Social Message

Ask students to think of a social issue that is important to them: it could be climate change, racial inequality, gender discrimination, LGBTQ+ rights, bullying/cyberbullying, or more. Once a topic has been chosen, have them brainstorm what images, words, and emotions come to mind. They could set up a Pinterest board or print off their various photos to look at them all together. Have them examine their findings and think about the overall message or emotion. How could this message or emotion be pared down to its essential parts? Have them create an artwork that conveys this message or feeling more abstractly. Maybe they choose to make a collage, focus on a color, or zoom into one instance or image.

Once these artworks are complete, split the students into small groups. Have each student present their artwork to the group. Giving the artwork a title would allow classmates to make connections more easily. The group should discuss the work and how it makes them feel. Students should look closely for details in the work that suggest what social issue the artist is representing. How do these details convey meaning?

## EXPAND

More on the artwork, *Evening Rendezvous*:

[americanart.si.edu/artwork/evening-rendezvous-33910](http://americanart.si.edu/artwork/evening-rendezvous-33910)

More on the artist, Norman Lewis:

[americanart.si.edu/artist/norman-lewis-2921](http://americanart.si.edu/artist/norman-lewis-2921)

More on abstract art:

[tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/abstract-art](http://tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/abstract-art)

[tate.org.uk/art/brief-history-abstract-art-turner-mondrian-and-more](http://tate.org.uk/art/brief-history-abstract-art-turner-mondrian-and-more)

Check out other abstracted works in the exhibition,

*African American Art in the 20th Century*:

Thornton Dial Sr.'s *Top of the Line (Steel)* and

Emilio Cruz's *Angola's Dreams Grasp Finger Tips*.

## Additional Resources

### Books

*Uptown* by Bryan Collier (grades preK–2)

■ Experience New York’s vibrant Harlem neighborhood through the eyes of a little boy.

*Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat* by Javaka Steptoe (preK–2 grade)

■ A story detailing famous painter Jean-Michel Basquiat as a young boy finding art in everything as he explores New York City.

*Charlie Parker Played Be Bop* by Chris Raschka (grades preK–3)

■ A picture-book story of Charlie Parker and his jazz music through scat singing.

*I, too, am America* by Langston Hughes (grades preK–3)

■ A visual accompaniment to Langston Hughes’ famous poem, *I, too, am America*.

*Child of the Civil Rights Movement* by Paula Young Shelton and Raul Colón (grades preK–3)

■ Learn about prominent civil rights leaders and events through the eyes of a little girl.

*Parker Looks Up: An Extraordinary Moment* by Parker Curry and Jessica Curry (grades PreK–3)

■ A story of a little girl’s visit to an art museum and being awe struck by the portrait of First Lady Michelle Obama.

*Between the Lines: How Ernie Barnes Went from the Football Field to the Art Gallery* by Sandra Neil Wallace (preK–3 grade)

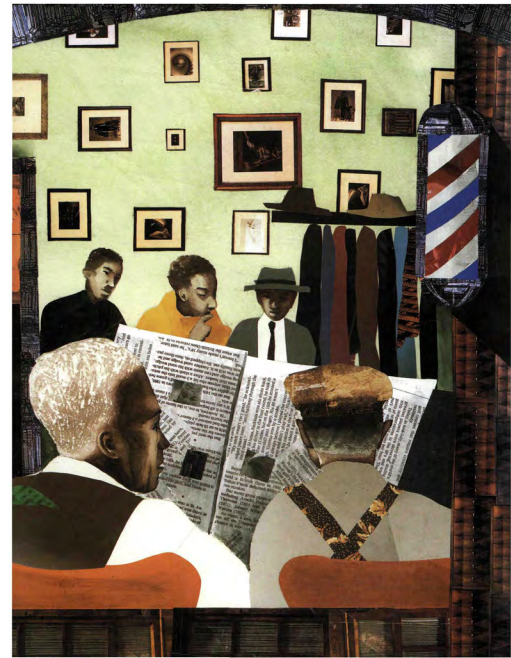
■ Ernie grew up in the segregated South in the 1940s and believed that he could not make a living doing what he loved. The story of how he went from playing football to making art.

*There is a Flower at the Tip of My Nose Smelling Me* by Alice Walker (grades K–3)

■ See the world with new eyes—through a celebration of nature, beauty, and inspiration from the award-winning author Alice Walker.

*My Dream of Martin Luther King* by Faith Ringgold (grades K–3)

■ A story told from the “dream” of one child about Martin Luther King’s life and the history of the civil rights movement, written and illustrated by artist Faith Ringgold.



Coretta Scott King Award-winning Bryan Collier illustrates Harlem as seen through the eyes of a little boy in *Uptown*.

*Shake It to the One that You Love the Best: Play Songs and Lullabies from Black Musical Traditions* collected and adapted by Cheryl Warren Mattox (grades K-6)

■ A collection of songs and rhythms from African American customs designed to sing and dance to.

*Dinner at Aunt Connie's House* by Faith Ringgold (grades K-6)

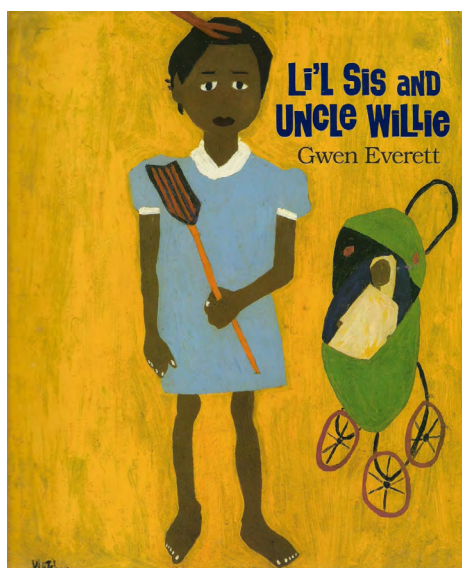
■ Learn about important African American women in history through Faith Ringgold's art and storytelling about two children who find a surprise in Aunt Connie's attic.

*Opening the Road: Victor Hugo Green and His Green Book* by Keila V. Dawson (grades 1-3)

■ A picture book about Victor Hugo Green who compiled a list of safe places for African Americans in New York City and beyond during segregation.

*What Do You Do with a Voice Like That? The Story of Extraordinary Congresswoman Barbara Jordan* by Chris Barton (grades 1-3)

■ An illustrated biography of Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, detailing her career as a civil rights leader, lawyer, and educator.



*Li'L Sis and Uncle Willie A Story Based on the Life and Paintings of William H. Johnson* by Gwen Everett (grades 1-4)

■ A story based on the life and work of William H. Johnson through the eyes of Li'L Sis, who is the subject of one of his paintings featured in this exhibition.

*Exquisite: The Poetry and Life of Gwendolyn Brooks* by Suzanne Slade (grades 1-4)

■ A biography of the poet Gwendolyn Brooks, the first Black writer to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1950, inspiring young readers to create poetry about their own lives.

*Words with Wings: A Treasury of African American Poetry in Art* selected by Belinda Rochelle (grades 3-5)

■ A collection of African American artists and poets, compiled to highlight a human shared experience of work, pain, love, anger, regret, and more.

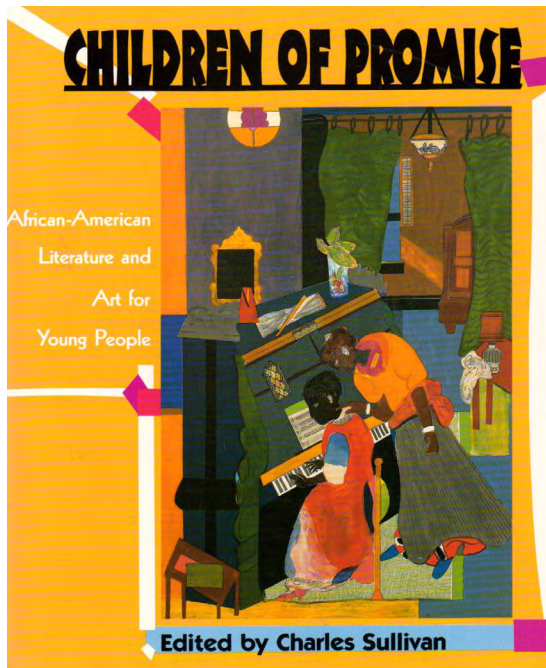
*Class Act* by Jerry Craft (grades 3-7)

■ A graphic novel detailing a Black boy's journey in a mostly white middle school.

*Not My Idea: A Book about Whiteness* by Anastasia Higginbotham (grades 3-7)

■ When a white child is confused by his mother stating, "I don't see color," he finds out the truth about white supremacy and racism—a must read for promoting anti-racism for today's youth.





*I See the Rhythm* by Michele Wood and Toyomi Igus (grades 3-8)

- A musical journey through time featuring work songs, jazz, swing, and gospel.

*Children of Promise: African American Literature and Art for Young People* edited by Charles Sullivan (grades 4-7)

- A collection of poems, folk songs, and literary excerpts paired with photographs, paintings, and sculptures to give readers a glimpse into the African American experience.

*Rebound* by Kwame Alexander (grades 5-7)

- Follows Chuck Bell during a summer visit to his grandparents in 1988, where he discovers basketball and jazz.

*March Forward Girl: From Young Warrior to the Little Rock Nine* by Melba Pattillo Beals (grades 5-7)

- A memoir of the author's childhood, growing up under Jim Crow laws, and her journey to becoming an activist, journalist, and author.

*Black History for Beginners* by Denise Dennis (grades 6-8)

- A graphic novel presenting the historical account of Black Americans and struggles they have faced.

*Double Exposure: Through the African American Lens* by the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (grades 6-12)

- A showcase of the Smithsonian's collection of photographs spanning pre-Civil War to the 21st century.

*The Angel of Greenwood* by Randi Pink (grades 7-12)

- A historical fiction about how two teenagers, despite their differences, bond together to find common ground about social issues in the 1920s.

*March: Book One* by John Lewis and Andrew Aydin (grades 7-12)

- The first of a graphic novel trilogy about Congressman John Lewis that explores his experience in the civil rights movement.

*Attucks! Oscar Robertson and the Basketball Team that Awakened a City* by Phillip Hoose (grades 7-12)

- The true story of an all-black high school basketball team to win a championship in the racially segregated 1950s.

*Black Enough: Stories of Being Young and Black in America* by Ibi Zobio (grades 8-12)

- A collection of writers sharing their experiences and what it means to be a Black American in modern times.

*The Black Friend: On Being a Better White Person* by Fredrick Joseph (grades 9-12)

- A memoir of the writer discussing his personal experiences with race-related issues and talking with artists and activists on how to be a better advocate. Each chapter features different voices, including writer Angie Thomas and sports journalist Jemele Hill.

*Somebody Give This Heart a Pen* by Sophia Thakur (grades 9-12)

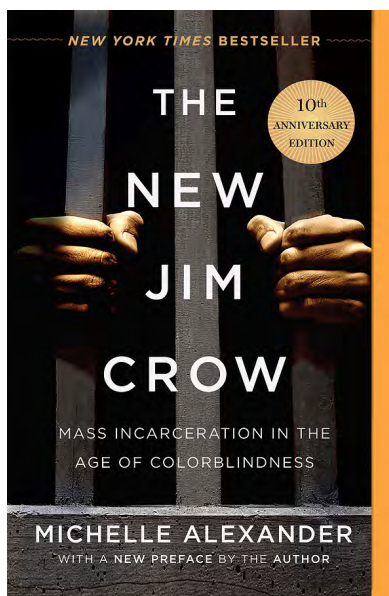
- Performance poet, Sophia Thakur, writes about all the shared coming-of-age experiences—joy and sadness, relationships, dreams for the future, finding your identity and more.

*Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, And You: A Remix of the National Book Award-Winning Stamped from the Beginning* by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi (grades 9-12)

- A re-imagined version of Ibram X. Kendi's *Stamped from the Beginning*, this book weaves history to current issues and informs readers on how we can build a racism-free future.

*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander (grades 9-12)

- This book explores the racial discrimination embedded within the U.S. criminal justice system, arguing that the prison industrial complex is a new Jim Crow.

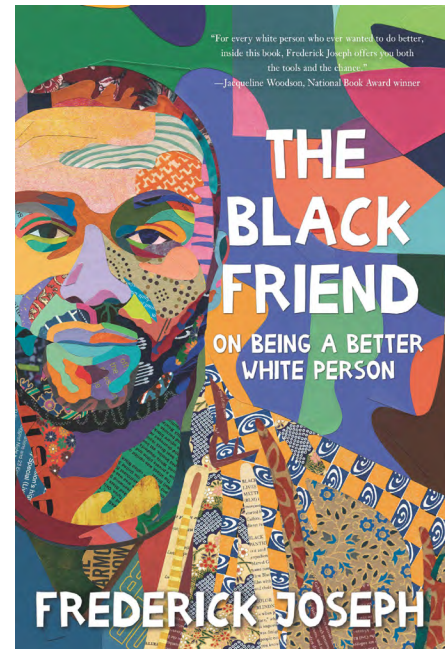


*The Nickel Boys: A Novel* by Colson Whitehead (grades 9-12)

- A fictional story about two boys in the 1960s sent to a juvenile reform facility called the Nickel Academy, based on a real reform school called the Dozier School known for brutalizing and murdering their students.

*Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America* by Mary Schmidt Campbell, David Driskell, David Levering Lewis, and Deborah Willis Ryan (grades 10-12)

- In the 1920s, Harlem was “the capital of Black America” and home to an epoch of African-American cultural flowering called the Harlem Renaissance. This book presents the work of the most important visual artists of the day, including Meta Warrick Fuller, Aaron Douglas and Palmer Hayden.



## Online

### Art By African Americans

■ This resource from the Smithsonian American Art Museum highlights several important works from their collection. SAAM is home to one of the most significant collections of African American art in the world, with more than 2,000 works by more than 200 African American artists.

[americanart.si.edu/art/highlights/african-american?mc\\_cid=0c1ef867d2&mc\\_eid=53069333b3](https://americanart.si.edu/art/highlights/african-american?mc_cid=0c1ef867d2&mc_eid=53069333b3)

Click here to view the image:

<https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/portrait-mnonja-80011>

Mickalene Thomas, *Portrait of Mnonja*, 2010, rhinestones, acrylic, and enamel on wood panel, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment © 2010 Mickalene Thomas / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY



## Acknowledgments

This online educator’s guide was created with help and guidance from the Wichita Art Museum’s Teacher Advisory Committee—a group comprised of educators from the Wichita metro area.

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### **Wichita Art Museum**

1400 West Museum Boulevard  
Wichita, Kansas 67203

[wichitaartmuseum.org/learn](http://wichitaartmuseum.org/learn)

For more information or questions,  
email [education@wichitaartmuseum.org](mailto:education@wichitaartmuseum.org).

### MUSEUM HOURS

Closed on Monday

Tuesday–Saturday: 10 am–5 pm

Sunday: Noon–5 pm