



Artful Connections

Teacher Guide:

African American Artists

Grades 4+



Videoconference programs at the Smithsonian American Art Museum are supported by the Smithsonian Women's Committee.



Tips for a Successful Videoconference

Before the Videoconference

- ❑ Check with your technology coordinator to ensure your school has compatible videoconferencing equipment (H.323 protocol).
- ❑ **At least four weeks prior** to your preferred dates, schedule your videoconference with the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration (CILC): <http://www.cilc.org>. Search the list of content providers for Smithsonian American Art Museum to view a list of our programs. All requests made on CILC will be routed to the museum and our staff will contact you to set up a test call.

Please note: We recommend you book early due to high demand for limited time slots.

- ❑ **At least one week prior** to your program date:
 - Staff will contact you with the assigned videoconference presenter's name and e-mail. Contact the presenter to discuss your plans for integrating this topic with your curriculum. Your videoconference presenter may suggest ways to customize the content of the videoconference to your needs.
 - Complete a successful test call at the scheduled time with the American Art Museum staff. This is a good time to practice turning the equipment on and off and locating the volume and other functions of your videoconference equipment.
 - Identify a space where all your students will be able to sit comfortably within your camera's view, see a projected PowerPoint, and hear the videoconference presenter.
 - Review videoconference rules and expectations with your students. Students should speak loudly and clearly to the presenter, one at a time. It's helpful to have students raise their hands and for you to call on them before they speak.
 - Review the pre-visit material (available to download at <http://AmericanArt.si.edu/Education/Video>). Encourage your students to write down questions for the videoconference presenter elicited by the pre-visit activities. Questions about the content, artwork, museum, and (within reason) the presenter are welcome!

During the Videoconference

- ❑ Make sure students are comfortably seated within view of the camera and can readily see the videoconference screen and projected PowerPoint presentation.
- ❑ Classroom-appropriate behavior is essential to a successful videoconference program. Students should listen to the presenter as well as each other and should behave respectfully.
- ❑ Encourage your students to ask and answer questions and give their opinions and ideas. Remind students to speak loudly and clearly for the presenter.
- ❑ Encourage your students to exercise the observation and interpretation skills you introduced with the pre-visit materials.



- ❑ Help the videoconference presenter maintain classroom management. Call on students to prompt them to ask and answer questions. Consider rephrasing or restating a question if you know your students have something to say but are shy or may not understand the question. If the presenter cannot hear students, repeat their answers for the presenter.

After the Videoconference

- ❑ Incorporate the appropriate videoconference post-lesson into your classroom curriculum (available to download at <http://AmericanArt.si.edu/Education/Video>).
- ❑ Contact the videoconference presenter with any follow-up questions from your students.
- ❑ Contact American Art staff (AmericanArtEducation@si.edu) with your comments and suggestions. Evaluation and program improvement are a priority and we welcome your comments.
- ❑ Follow the link to CILC below and complete a brief survey about your videoconference experience.
 - African American Artists <http://cilc.org/evaluation.aspx?pass=fOVqSy2n49>



African American Artists (Grades 4 +)

Overview

The lives of African American artists lend insight into the historical, social, and cultural context of their works. After an introduction to African American artists through a pre-visit activity, participation in the videoconference, and a post-visit lesson to cement concepts, your students will be better able to:

- Understand Reconstruction, the Harlem Renaissance, and the civil rights movement in the twentieth century
- Understand the influence of African American traditions, civil rights, and cultural advocacy on the work of African American artists
- Reflect upon artworks created by African American artists that reflect American history and culture
- Use visual vocabulary to articulate observations and interpretations of artworks

National Standards

Visual Arts

K-12.3 Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas;

K-12.4 Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures;

K-12.6 Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines.

US History

5-12.5 Era 5 Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877);

5-12.7 Era 7 The emergence of modern America (1890-1930);

5-12.8 Era 8 The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945).

Civics

K-12.1 Civic life, politics, and government;

5-12.3 Roles of the citizen.

Music

K-12.9 Understanding music in relation to history and culture.



Vocabulary

US History/Civics

acceptance – (n.) quality or state of being generally approved or welcomed¹

Civil Rights – (n.) rights and political freedoms that protect people from oppression and discrimination, the American Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and '60s sought to assure that the civil rights of African Americans were upheld and that African Americans achieved equity

discrimination - (n.) the practice of denying equal treatment or opportunity to individuals based on race, gender, religion, or other trait or affiliation

Emancipation Proclamation – (n.) executive orders issued by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862 and 1863 that declared slaves free in most of the Confederate states

equality – (n.) the condition in which all people in a society have equal status and access to opportunity

the Great Migration – (n.) the movement of over one million African Americans out of the South between 1910 and 1930 to escape racism and gain employment

Harlem Renaissance – (n.) the period from 1919 to the 1930s during which African American intellectual and artistic pursuits (theater, writing, jazz music, and artwork) flourished, especially in Harlem

identity – (n.) a sense of self and personality traits that do not change from situation to situation

Reconstruction – (n.) the period after the Civil War from roughly 1865 to 1877 that re-established the Southern states as part of the United States of America under the supervision of federal troops

rejection – (n.) refusal to accept or submit to something

stereotype – (n.) a commonly held belief about an entire racial group, often based on oversimplification

urbanization – (n.) the growth of urban environments resulting from the migration of people into city centers

jazz – (n.) an American musical style developed by African Americans in the early twentieth century from a blending of African and European traditions

Visual Arts

abstract – (n.) artwork that contains the simplified shapes in order to emphasize form over subject matter²

composition – (adj.) the arrangement of elements such as shape, line, value, and form within an artwork

interpret – (v.) to derive meaning from observed features or traits

landscape – (n.) a picture representing natural scenery

¹ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. 11th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc. 2004. [adapted]

² Ragans, Rosalind. *ArtTalk*. IL: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill. 1988. [Glossary, adapted]



museum – (n.) an organization traditionally concerned with acquiring, conserving, studying, and exhibiting objects

medium – (n.) the materials used to create an artwork

mood – (n.) a characteristic that describes the feeling or emotion in an artwork

observe – (v.) to note the visible features or traits of an artwork

perspective – (n.) artistic technique that displays spatial relationships between objects on a flat surface

portrait – (n.) a pictorial representation of a person, usually showing the face

process – (n.) a combination of methods and techniques used to create an artwork

sculpture – (n.) three dimensional artwork that has height, width, and length

subject – (n.) the principal idea conveyed by a work of art


symbol – (n.) something that stands for something else due to a relationship, association, or accidental resemblance³

³ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. [adapted]




Topic Related Artworks

A representative sample of the artworks in our collection that support the videoconference topic appears below. These are suggested for use during pre-videoconference activities. Images used during your videoconference may vary.

<p>TITLE: Landscape with Rainbow DATE: 1859 ARTIST: Robert S. Duncanson MEDIUM: oil on canvas DIMENSIONS: 30 x 52 1/4 in. (76.3 x 132.7 cm.) CREDIT LINE: Smithsonian American Art Museum Gift of Leonard and Paula Granoff ACC. NUMBER: 1983.95.160 WEB LINK: http://www.americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=7601</p>	
<p>TITLE: Going to Church DATE: ca. 1940-1941 ARTIST: William H. Johnson MEDIUM: oil on burlap DIMENSIONS: 38 1/8 x 45 3/8 in. (96.8 x 115.4 cm) CREDIT LINE: Gift of the Harmon Foundation ACC. NUMBER: 1967.59.1003 WEB LINK: http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=11718</p>	
<p>TITLE: Sunlight and Shadow DATE: 1941 ARTIST: Allan Rohan Crite MEDIUM: oil on board DIMENSIONS: 25 1/4 x 39 in. (64.2 x 99.1 cm) CREDIT LINE: Smithsonian American Art Museum Museum purchase ACC. NUMBER: 1977.45 WEB LINK: http://www.americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=5966</p>	



<p>TITLE: The Library DATE: 1960 ARTIST: Jacob Lawrence MEDIUM: tempera on fiberboard DIMENSIONS: 24 x 29 7/8 in. (60.9 x 75.8 cm.) CREDIT LINE: Gift of S.C. Johnson & Son, Inc. ACC. NUMBER: 1969.47.24 WEB LINK: http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=14376</p>	
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Additional Resources

African American Masters

<http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/highlights/main.cfm?id=AA>

This slideshow highlights the black artists whose efforts in the twentieth century demonstrate their command of mainstream traditions as well as the open assertion and exploration of their dual heritage.

My People, Our People

http://AmericanArt.si.edu/education/pdf/affirmation_today.pdf

This teacher resource combines activity and discussion exercises with sculpture, painting, poetry, and music of African American artists.

See For Yourself

http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/see_for_yourself.pdf

This children's guide to the Smithsonian American Art Museum's *Free Within Ourselves* exhibition, featuring artwork from the museum's collection by African American artists, helps to facilitate looking at and interpreting artwork.

Interview: Sam Gilliam

<http://americanart.si.edu/luce/media.cfm?key=372&artistmedia=0&object=161595&subkey=455>

Artist Sam Gilliam discusses his use of color and his evolution as a painter/sculptor.

Cleopatra, Lost and Found

<http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/lewis/index.html>

Tour an Edmonia Lewis exhibition that highlights historical, biblical, and literary figures in sculpture.

Online Exhibit: William H. Johnson's World on Paper

http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/johnson/slideshow_index.html

William H. Johnson's World on Paper thoroughly examines, for the first time, the artist's printmaking. These never-before-exhibited prints reveal Johnson's work in graphic media to be as powerful as that in oils and tempera. Here the artist's distinctive bold compositions and bright colors are evident.

The NAACP: A Century in the Fight for Freedom

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/naACP/>

The story of America's oldest and largest civil rights organization, told through letters, photographs, maps, and more from the Library of Congress.

From Slavery to Civil Rights

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/civil-rights/>

Use this interactive activity to introduce African-American history through primary sources from the Library of Congress.



African American Masters: Highlights from the Smithsonian American Art Museum by Gwen Everett (Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum: 2003).

African American Masters focuses on black artists whose efforts in the twentieth century demonstrate their command of mainstream traditions as well as the open assertion and exploration of their dual heritage.

Li'l Sis and Uncle Willie by Gwen Everett (Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum: 1991).

Through the eyes of almost-six-year-old Li'l Sis, the colorful story of Uncle Willie unfolds – a story that changes forever a little girl's perceptions of art and the world around her. The book is based on the life of African American artist William H. Johnson (1901–1970) and illustrated with his paintings.

Dropping in on Romare Bearden by Pam Stephens and Jim McNeill (Glenview, IL: Crystal Productions: 2007).

The interviewer Puffer the penguin, will take your students to visit Romare Bearden's studio to learn about his art. Whimsical, full-color illustrations help Puffer introduce the artist and his work along the way.

Story Painter: The Life of Jacob Lawrence by John Duggleby (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books: 1998).

The paintings of Jacob Lawrence tell stories of enslavement and freedom, of human migration and renaissance, of struggle and triumph. A collection of his work provides the background for an exceptional story of his life. Over twenty-five full-color reproductions and a glossary make this an excellent starting point for discussions about American history.



Learning to Look: Pre-Visit Lesson

Grades 1 – 4

Overview

After completing these activities, students will have strengthened their visual vocabulary by making observations of and expressing their interpretations of artwork.

Discussion

Define “observation” with students. Observations are statements of fact relating to what students see, not what they think might be happening.

Define “interpretation” with students. Interpretations are statements that ascribe meaning to the artwork based on observations.

Present students with one artwork that relates to your scheduled videoconference topic. (A selection of artworks related to each tour is included in the “Tour Information” document available to download at <http://AmericanArt.si.edu/Education/Video>). Have students begin by sharing only their observations. When students offer interpretations, or ideas about what they think is happening in the artwork, ask: “What do you see that makes you say that?”

Questions that prompt observations:

- *Who or what do you see in this artwork?*
- *What is the largest thing you see in this picture?*
- *What is the smallest thing you see in this picture?*
- *What colors do you see in the artwork?*
- *Is the scene outside? Inside?*
- *If there are people, are their clothes similar to or different from what you are wearing? How?*
- *Is the scenery similar to or different from where you are? How?*
- *What can you tell me about the colors in this artwork? What color do you see the most?*

Next, invite students to share their interpretations about what is happening in the artwork if they haven’t already done so. It is acceptable for students to have different interpretations of the same object. Make sure students support their interpretations with direct observations about the artwork. You may notice that some observation-focused questions lead directly to interpretation-focused questions. All interpretations should be founded on answers to observation questions.

**Questions that prompt interpretations:**

- *What is going on in this picture?*
- *Where do you think this scene is taking place?*
- *What season is it? What time of day is it?*
- *When was this artwork made?*
- *What do the scenery and the clothing or objects tell us about when this artwork was made?*
- *Does this scene look like it could be taking place today? Why or why not?*
- *Indicate a figure in the artwork:*
 - *Who is this person?*
 - *Is s/he similar to or different from you? In what ways?*
 - *What is s/he doing?*
 - *What do you think s/he does for a living?*
 - *How does s/he feel?*
 - *Where do you think s/he is?*
 - *What do you think it sounds like where s/he is?*
 - *What do you think it smells like where s/he is?*
 - *What kind of weather is this person experiencing?*
- *How do you think the artist feels about this person or thing in the painting?*
- *How does this artwork make you feel?*
- *How do you think this artist made this artwork?*
- *What types of materials do you think the artist used? Paint? Clay? Wood?*
- *How long do you think it took to make?*
- *What kind of mood or feelings do the colors give the artwork?*
- *Do you like the colors that are in the artwork? If you were the artist, would you have used different colors?*
- *Why do you think this artist made this artwork?*
- *What do you think the artist is trying to say?*

Activity

Either working in groups or independently, have students select a person or object in the artwork and complete the included worksheet, "Give this artwork a voice!" Have students refer back to their observations to support their interpretations of the person or object they chose. To take this activity further, have students create their own artwork based on the worksheet writing prompts "I wish..." or "Tomorrow, I am going to..."

Questions to ask students:

- Who or what did you choose to write about and why did you choose them?
- What in the artwork helped you make decisions about what the subject is thinking or feeling?
- Did you use the title or date of the artwork to inform your decisions? If so, how did they influence what you wrote? If not, do they contradict or reinforce your interpretation?



If your students want to know more about the artwork or learn about other interpretations from scholars, art historians or curators, visit <http://AmericanArt.si.edu>, <http://AmericanArt.si.edu/Luce/>, and your school library to research more about the artwork. If you have specific questions about an artwork, you can ask Joan of Art at <http://AmericanArt.si.edu/Research/Tools/Ask>.



Give this artwork a voice!

Choose an artwork and pretend you are one of the people or things in it. How would you finish these phrases?

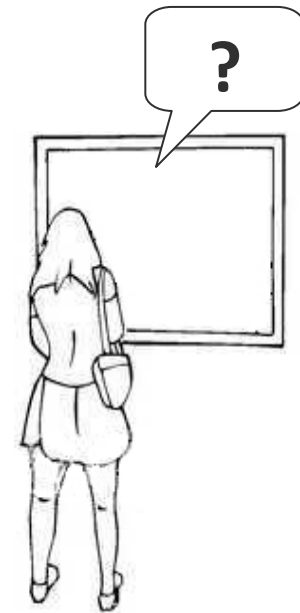
Here I am...

Boy, am I...

I wish...

I think I might...

Tomorrow I'm going to...





Learning to Look: Pre-Visit Lesson

Grades 5 – 12

Overview

After completing these activities, students will have strengthened their visual vocabulary by making observations of and expressing their interpretations of artwork.

Discussion

Define “observation” with students. Observations are statements of fact relating to what students see, not what they think might be happening.

Define “interpretation” with students. Interpretations are statements that ascribe meaning to the artwork based on observations.

Present students with one artwork that relates to your scheduled videoconference topic. (A selection of artworks related to each tour is included in the “Tour Information” document available to download at <http://AmericanArt.si.edu/Education/Video>). Have students begin by sharing only their observations. When students offer interpretations, or ideas about what they think is happening in the artwork, ask: “What do you see that makes you say that?”

Questions that prompt observations:

- *Who or what do you see in this artwork?*
- *What is the largest thing you see in this picture?*
- *What is the smallest thing you see in this picture?*
- *What colors do you see in the artwork?*
- *Is the scene outside? Inside?*
- *If there are people, are their clothes similar to or different from what you are wearing? How?*
- *Is the scenery similar to or different from where you are? How?*
- *What can you tell me about the colors in this artwork? What color do you see the most?*

Next, invite students to share their interpretations about what is happening in the artwork if they haven’t already done so. It is acceptable for students to have different interpretations of the same object. Make sure students support their interpretations with direct observations about the artwork. You may notice that some observation-focused questions lead directly to interpretation-focused questions. All interpretations should be founded on answers to observation questions.

**Questions that prompt interpretations:**

- *What is going on in this picture?*
- *Where do you think this scene is taking place?*
- *What season is it? What time of day is it?*
- *When was this artwork made?*
- *What do the scenery and the clothing or objects tell us about when this artwork was made?*
- *Does this scene look like it could be taking place today? Why or why not?*
- *Indicate a figure in the artwork:*
 - *Who is this person?*
 - *Is s/he similar to or different from you? In what ways?*
 - *What is s/he doing?*
 - *What do you think s/he does for a living?*
 - *How does s/he feel?*
 - *Where do you think s/he is?*
 - *What do you think it sounds like where s/he is?*
 - *What do you think it smells like where s/he is?*
 - *What kind of weather is this person experiencing?*
- *How do you think the artist feels about this person or thing in the painting?*
- *How does this artwork make you feel?*
- *How do you think this artist made this artwork?*
- *What types of materials do you think the artist used? Paint? Clay? Wood?*
- *How long do you think it took to make?*
- *What kind of mood or feelings do the colors give the artwork?*
- *Do you like the colors that are in the artwork? If you were the artist, would you have used different colors?*
- *Why do you think this artist made this artwork?*
- *What do you think the artist is trying to say?*

Activity

Have students select a different artwork and complete the included Observation/Interpretation worksheet. To take the activity further, have students refer to it as they write about the work of art. Students can choose words or phrases that they think best describe the artwork and use them as material in a poem, story or podcast.

Questions to ask students:

- *Why did you choose that artwork?*
- *Who did you choose to write about and why did you choose them?*
- *What in the artwork helped you make decisions about what the subject is thinking or feeling?*
- *Did you use the title or date of the artwork to inform your decisions? If so, how did they influence what you wrote? If not, do they contradict or reinforce your interpretation?*



Student: _____

Artwork Title: _____

Artist: _____ Date: _____

Observation	Interpretation
<i>Definition: What you see?</i> <i>Example: Dark grey sky, no rain, dry ground</i>	<i>Definition: What you think based on what you see?</i> <i>Example: A storm is approaching</i>
What is the main idea of the artwork?	



Imagine yourself inside this work of art.

What do you hear?	What do you smell?
What do you taste?	What do you feel?

Imagine that the artwork is one part of a larger story.

What happened right before this moment?
What will happen next?



Post-Visit Lesson: African American Artists

Grades 4 – 12

Overview

After completing this lesson, students will have a better understand techniques useful in the visual representation of music including repetition and rhythm and the history of blues in the 1920s and 1930s.

Background

In a club, swaying musicians back up the soloist in *Empress of the Blues*, a reference to legendary singer and songwriter Bessie Smith. She was one of the biggest stars of the 1920s and was popular with both black and white audiences. The statuesque, six-foot Smith transfixed audiences with her fabulous voice and imposing presence.

Smith was born in Tennessee in 1894 and orphaned as a young child. A tough businesswoman, she made her first known recording in 1923. A Columbia Records representative said of Smith's voice: "I had never heard anything like the torture and torment she put into the music of her people. It was the blues and she meant it⁴."

Discussion

Have students look at Romare Bearden's *Empress of the Blues*. Explain to students that this artwork is the artist's imaginative portrait of blues legend Bessie Smith. Encourage discussion by asking the following questions:

- What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Describe where Bessie Smith is singing.
- Describe Bessie Smith, the singer.

Share a recording of Bessie Smith while students look closely at the artwork. Suggested songs include *St. Louis Blues*, *Muddy Water (A Mississippi Moan)*, and *Trombone Cholly*.

- What has the artist included in the artwork to convey information about the singer and what the music might sound like?
- What elements do you see repeated in this artwork?
- What elements of the song are repeated?
- Clap out the rhythm. What of the song's rhythm can you see in the artwork? What other similarities can you find between the song you heard and *Empress of the Blues*?
- What do you think is the mood of Bearden's artwork?
- Describe how Bearden has used the elements of art (line, value, shape, form, space, color and texture) to convey that mood in *Empress of the Blues*.
- Romare Bearden often created mixed-media collages by incorporating pieces of paper to paintings. How is a collaged artwork similar to jazz music?

⁴ Albertson, Chris. *Bessie*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.



Activity

Have students choose a jazz or blues singer or musician from the 1920s or 1930s to research as inspiration for creating an artwork. Students should select one song recorded by their singer or musician and use it to create a visual representation of their chosen person. Encourage students to include collage elements in their work and to address the following questions:

- What emotions does the music express? If the song includes lyrics, what emotions do the words express? How can color give viewers a sense of the emotions being expressed in the music?
- Tap out the rhythm of your selected song. How can you use lines, shapes, space, and repetition to give viewers a sense of the rhythm of your selected song?
- Is the singer's voice or an instrument the main feature of your selected song? How can the composition give viewers a sense of the strongest/loudest elements of your selected song?



Romare Bearden *Empress of the Blues* 1974 1996.71