

Reflections:

African American Life from the Myrna Colley-Lee Collection

A Resource Guide For Educators



Detail of Season of the New Bride, Romare Bearden, 1982, collage

Use this Educator's Guide To:

- Familiarize students with the content and themes of the exhibit before attending.
- Incorporate background information, suggested activities and resources into a lesson plan that corresponds with curriculum benchmarks.
- Give copies to chaperones for use during the visit.



KALAMAZOO INSTITUTE OF ARTS

Reflections: African American Life

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Keep in mind...

- Observing, discussing, and interpreting works of art instructs our understanding of our society and culture as well as the society that created them .
- Common human experiences and ideas, conflicts and themes can be explored in visual, written, and oral texts.
- Looking at art objects increases visual literacy and the ability to articulate meaning.

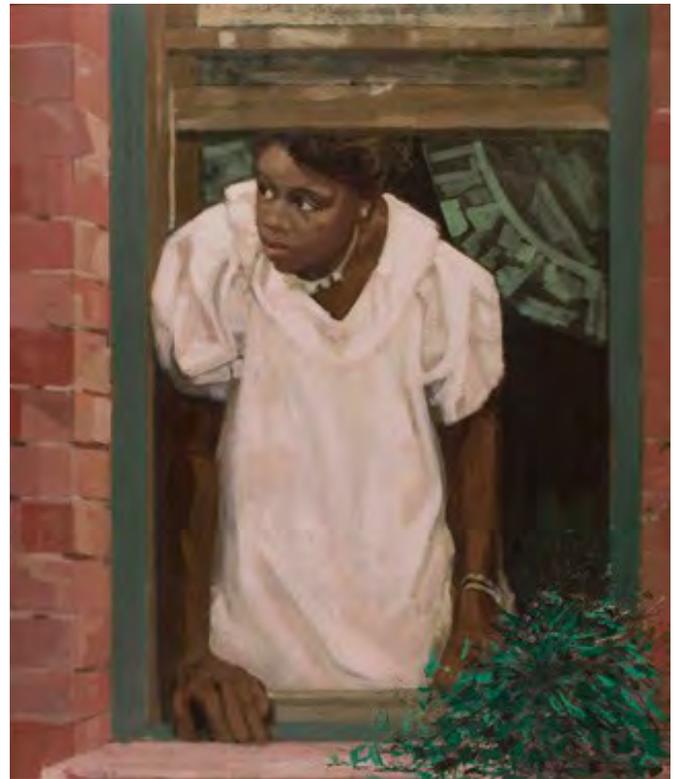
Acknowledgements

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All images were provided by International Arts & Artists unless otherwise noted.

Reflections: African American Life from the Myrna Colley-Lee Collection was organized by International Arts & Artists.



Ernest Crichlow, *Window*, 1987, oil on canvas

Reflections: Content and Context

Reflections: African American Life from the Myrna Colley-Lee Collection features fifty works from various artists and media including: painting, photography, collage, and fabric work. The following information will help students gain an understanding of the concepts and themes used throughout this exhibition.

Exhibition Content

The works of art in this exhibition create a glimpse into the lives, traditions, and unique experiences of African Americans in the twentieth century. The term "African American art" encompasses all forms of art (painting, sculpture, photograph, etc.) created by Americans of African descent and it can also represent the art works of anyone (not just African Americans) that has been influenced stylistically and/or thematically by black African art, culture, and history. The two definitions are not mutually exclusive.

The majority of the works in *Reflections* are either genre paintings, portraits, or landscape paintings of the American South.



Ernest Crichlow, *Underground III*, 1990, oil on canvas

Genre paintings depict scenes from everyday life and usually provide a narrative or story-line. These genre paintings demonstrate the tradition of storytelling that is prevalent in African American art and culture. Many of the portraits directly confront racism and African American stereotypes by elevating the self-worth of the person depicted and/or ignoring the stereotypes, as seen in James Van Der Zee's elegant portraits, or Eudora Welty's photograph *Window Shopping* (at left). Landscapes of the American South are common, both in the exhibition and African American Art in general, because the South was and still is profoundly influential to the culture and history of many African Americans. Combining these subjects in one exhibition allows the visitor to experience the strong connection between the human stories and the innate sense of place, themes that are so important in African American culture.

Eudora Welty, *Window Shopping*, c. 1930, gelatin silver print



Exhibition Themes

The themes seen in *Reflections* represent many that can be seen throughout the canon of African American art. While exploring the African American experience, much of the art exhibited also confronts the ideas of identity, racial stereotypes, socio-economic conflicts, justice for marginalized people, and geographical diaspora. It is important to note that these themes while prevalent in African American art are not exclusive to it and many of them touch on the universal human experience.

Styles and Techniques

Much of the work in this exhibition is figurative or representational, meaning that many of these pieces are representations of real objects and/or people. There are various techniques used throughout this exhibition, including collage, mixed-media, photography, and linocuts.



James Denmark, *Gardenia*, collage

Collage is a technique that uses the combination of premade items like newspaper clippings, magazine ads and things like string, ribbon, and paint to create a new image. Collages have been around for hundreds of years but they rose in popularity in the twentieth century with the increase in mass media like glossy magazines. James Denmark and Romare Bearden are well-known for their collage work both in and out of the African American art world. Many of Bearden's collages are photomontages; a photomontage is a collage that uses photographs to create an image.

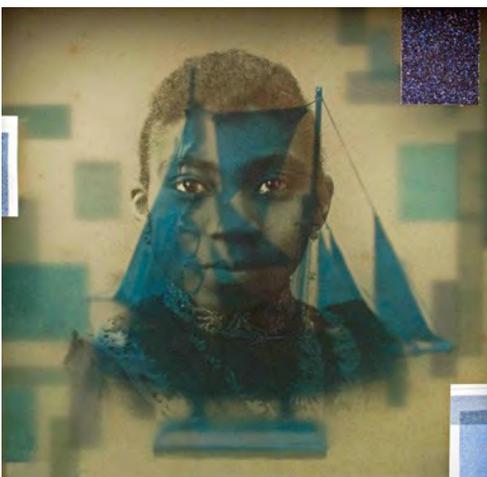
Mixed-media works are also seen throughout the exhibition. Mixed-media is a term that describes art that is

created is when the artist uses multiple media in one work, for example using paint, ink, and collage all in one piece of art. Carol Ann Carter began working heavily with the mixed media, specifically incorporating textiles with canvas, paint and thread, after a trip to Nigeria in the 1980s where she observed weavers creating traditional pieces.



Carol Ann Carter, *Cover Your Tracks Home*

Influenced by the collage work of Romare Bearden, Radcliffe Bailey also incorporates several media in his art.



In the work, *Voyage of No Return*, he uses superimposed images and mixed media to create an image that directly references the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the African diaspora.

Radcliffe Bailey, *Voyage of No Return*, 2008, mixed media

There are several **linocuts** by various artists in the exhibition. To create a linocut

an image is carved into a piece of linoleum creating a mirror image of the final product. The linoleum is then rolled with ink (the ink will stay on the surface and not sink into the areas that have been carved) and press onto paper, fabric, or canvas. All of the linocuts in *Reflections* are black and white but the pattern could either be washed to be used again with another color or separate linoleum pieces could be used for each color.

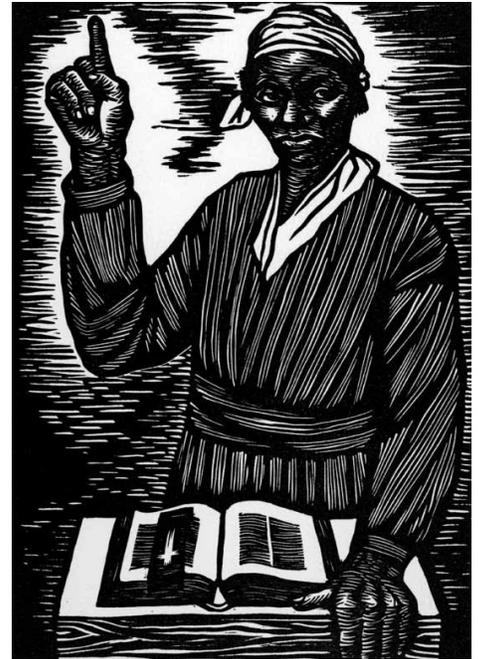


Elizabeth Catlett, *Phyllis Wheatley*, 1947, linocut

Artist Highlights

Elizabeth Catlett (1915-2012) – When Catlett was a young girl in the early decades of the twentieth century art museums in the South were closed to African Americans. Despite this fact, Catlett pursued her dream of becoming an artist. While earning her M.F.A. in sculpture from the University of Iowa she was encouraged to create art using familiar subjects. Therefore, Catlett began focusing on creating art that depicted African Americans, especially women. Catlett was an influential person in the Black Arts and Civil Rights movements. Catlett’s work is politically charged and focuses on the social issues and struggles of African American women. While the works in this exhibition are two-dimensional, Catlett is most well-known for her sculptural work.

Elizabeth Catlett, *Sojourner Truth*, 1947, linocut, 2nd edition, 1989

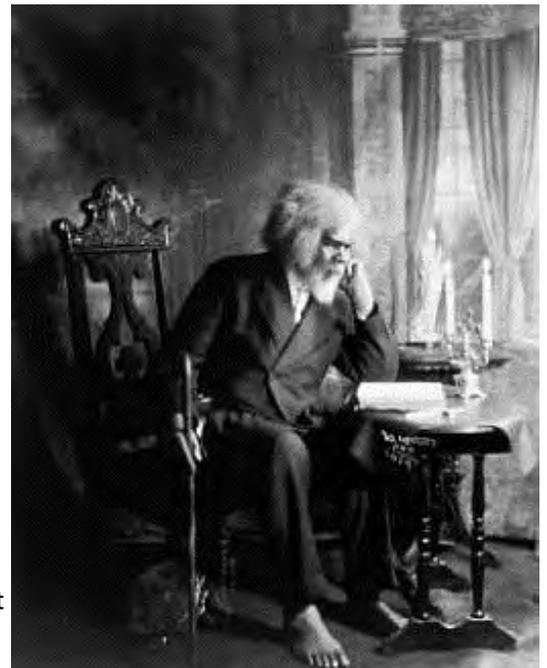


Romare Bearden, *Three Women in a Garden*, acrylic on collage

Romare Bearden (1911-1988) - In the 1960s Bearden began creating collages, combining magazine clippings, fabric and paint. It was during this time of the Civil Rights Movement that Bearden’s work also became more socially conscious, portraying life from the African American point of view. The imagery of his art came from contrasting the lives of African Americans in the rural south to African American urban life in the north. These portrayals were combined with other themes like religion, myths, literature, and music to create visual metaphors.

James Van Der Zee (1886-1983) – Self-taught photographer James Van Der Zee is renowned for the photographic portraits he took in Harlem for decades. His main subject was working class African Americans, but he also managed to capture images of some of the most influential people of the Harlem Renaissance movement. Van Der Zee’s photographs were highly sought after because of the experimental altering he did to the negatives to create double exposures and idealized images. These idealized photographs celebrated a raised status level of the subjects that worked against the negative stereotypes that had been formed about African Americans.

James Van Der Zee, *Barefoot Prophet*, 1929, gelatin silver print



Collecting

The Collector:

Each of the works in this exhibition came from the private collection of Myrna Colley-Lee. Colley-Lee is a well-known costume designer in the Black Theater Movement with an M.F.A. in Scenic and Costume Design from Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her passion for the promotion of the artists, especially in the Mississippi delta region, led her to not only acquire so many exceptional representations of African American art but also to found the SonEdna Organization, which promotes the literary arts. In addition to other posts, Colley-Lee is currently a Commissioner for the Mississippi Arts Commission.



Photo by Starla Fortu-

Frans Fracken II, *Chamber of Art and Curiosities*, image from Bilddatenbank



Collecting:

Myrna Colley-Lee's private collection of art is part of a long tradition of art and artifact collecting that has occurred both publically and privately around the world. Art collecting has taken place for centuries and began when precious objects were stored by kings and

leaders as the spoils of conquered civilizations. Many of the museums that we have today began from the private collections of rulers and wealthy citizens. Before the introduction of the modern museums these collections existed in "cabinets of curiosities" or "curiosity cabinets." While not actually cabinets, but rooms, these "cabinets of curiosities" or "wunderkammers" (German for wonder room) as they were sometimes called, housed the varied collections of rulers, aristocrats, merchants, scholars, and scientists. Shown above is a 1636 painting of a curiosity cabinet. Eventually what we now know as museums with categorized collections (art, science, natural history, etc) replaced these hodgepodge collections.

Curriculum Connections for Educational Activities

The educational activities on the following pages satisfy Grade Level Content Expectations, content standards and benchmarks for the state of Michigan as outlined below:

Pre-Visit: Looking Critically at Art—pg 10

Elementary and Middle School Visual Arts Content Standard 3 (ART.III.VA.EL.2-3 and ART.III.VA.M.1-3) -All students will analyze, describe and evaluate works of art

Pre-Visit: Crossword Puzzle—pg 11 &12

English Language Arts Grade Level Content Expectations:

Reading-R.WS.06.05 and R.WS.07.05-Acquire and apply strategies to identify unknown words and construct meaning

Reading-R.WS.06.07 and R.WS.07.07-In context, determine the meaning of words and phrases including regional idioms, literary and technical terms, and content vocabulary using strategies including connotation, denotation, and authentic content-related resources

Visiting the Reflections exhibition

Elementary and Middle School Visual Arts Content Standard 3 (ART.III.VA.EL.2-3 and ART.III.VA.M.1-3) -All students will analyze, describe and evaluate works of art

Post Visit: Create a Collage—pg 13

Elementary and Middle School Visual Arts Content Standard 2 (ART.II.VA.EL.1-6 and ART.II.VA.M.1, 3, and 4) All students will apply skills and knowledge to create in the arts.

Post Visit: Reading/Writing Activities—pg 14 & 15

English Language Arts Grade Level Content Expectations:

Reading-R.NT.06.01 and R.NT.07.01-Describing and analyzing aspects of classical, multicultural, and contemporary literature recognized for quality and literary merit

Writing-W.GN.06.01 and W.GN.07.01-Write a cohesive narrative piece that includes appropriate conventions to the genre

Social Studies Grade Level Content Expectations:

Looking Critically at Art

Use this activity before visiting the KIA to help students practice looking critically as art. Use the questions below to guide your students through a discussion of art themes and techniques.



Romare Bearden, *Tomorrow I May Be Far Away*.

TIP: Use a SmartBoard and follow this link: <http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/bearden/scrutact.htm> You will be able to zoom in on portions of

What is going on in this work of art? What is the first thing that catches your eye, and why do you think that is?

Describe the setting. The three people are probably on a farm. How can you tell that they are in the country and not the city?

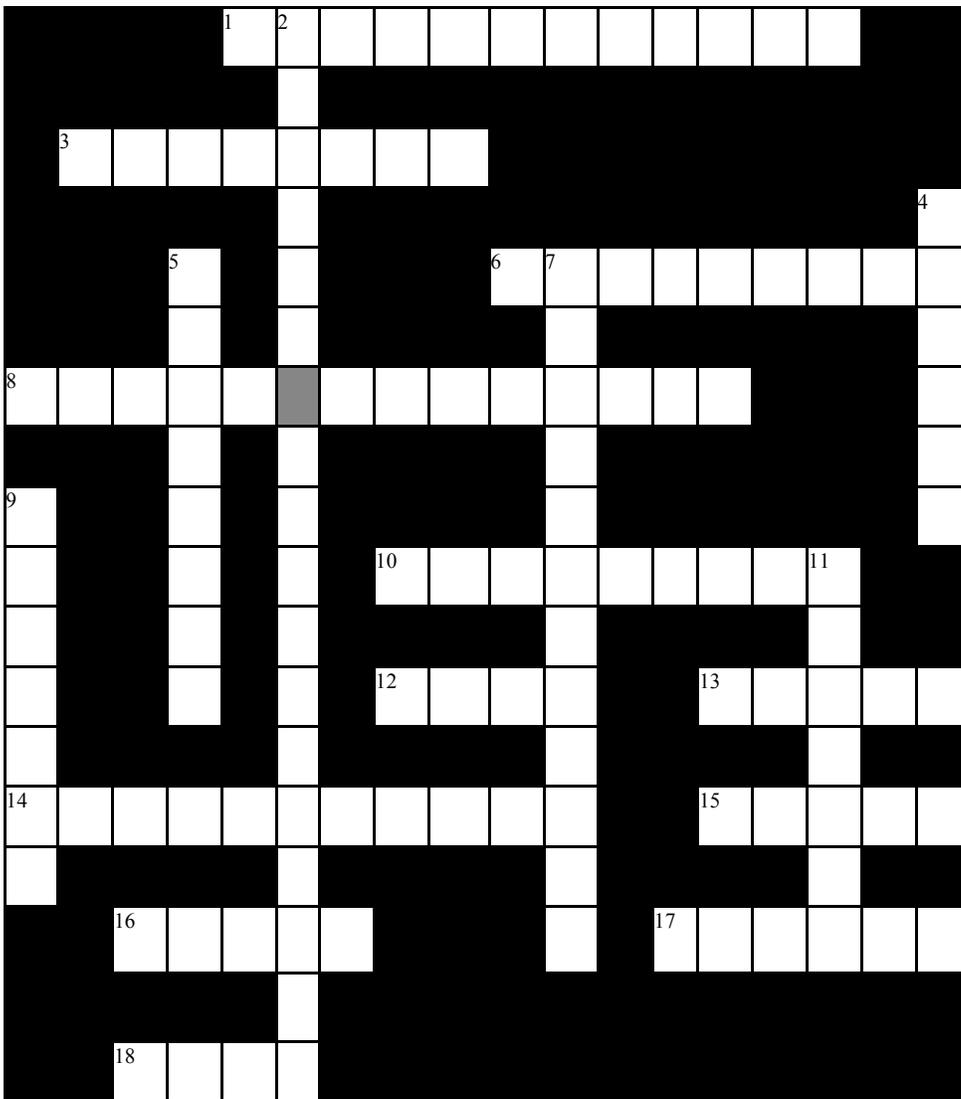
What might the man in the center be thinking? What do you think happened right before he sat down? What do you think will happen next? How would you describe the mood of this collage (quiet, still, thoughtful, expectant)?

If you could ask the artist one question about this work, what would it be?

Bearden used many different collage materials in his works, including cuttings from newspapers, magazines, sample catalogues, painted papers, colored paper, foil, wallpaper, wrapping paper, and art reproductions.

Adapted from The Art of Romare Bearden: A Resource for Teachers <http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/bearden/scrutact.htm>

Art Vocabulary Crossword



Review the Glossary of Terms (pg 16) and complete this puzzle.

Down

2. A social movement that started in Harlem, NY in the early decades of the twentieth century that worked to use the arts produced by and featuring African Americans to combat racism and stereotypes of African Americans

4. The materials used to create a work of art.

5. A likeness made of a person created by an artist, such as a painter or photographer.

7. The basic components used by the artist when producing works of art—color, value, line, shape, form, texture, and space. These elements are found in any artwork.

9. A sense of stability, sometimes symmetry, established by the way forms, lines and colors are placed within a painting.

11. An assemblage of items like newspaper clippings, magazine

Across

- 1.** A collage that use photographs
- 3.** This style of art does not show objects realistically.
- 6.** Depicts a scene from nature in which the place or the land itself becomes the main subject.
- 8.** Scenes of everyday life
- 10.** The artist tries to depict objects as they are seen
- 12.** Shape with three dimensions—height, width, and depth.
- 13.** What the eye sees when light is reflected from it.
- 14.** The way shapes, color, line, space, mass and objects are arranged and organized in a work of art
- 15.** Actual (open air around sculpture or architecture) or implied (represented by control of size, color, overlapping).
- 16.** A design or picture transferred from an engraved plate, wood block, lithographic stone, or other medium or a photographic image transferred to paper or a similar surface, usually from a negative.
- 17.** From the Latin word docere, meaning to teach.
- 18.** The path of a moving point. It can be vertical, horizontal, diagonal, curved, angular, zigzag, bent, straight, interrupted, thick, thin.

Construct a Collage

The collages on display in the *Reflections* exhibition have a strong visual impact because they combine specific elements from the artists personal experience with the larger experience of their culture. Completing this activity will help students make a connection with the ideas and themes learned in the *Reflections* exhibition and the art

Step One: Reflect on the collages seen in the *Reflections* exhibition. Next, decide on a subject for a collage project that touches on one aspect of American life during the past decade. The class can create a

Step Two: Gather materials. Cut from magazines, newspapers, computer printouts, cards, posters, and other reproductions. Look for colors, textures, forms, symbolic images, and visual evocations of space, mood, time, or tempo important to your theme and your

Step Three: Work on your collage with the goal of combining both the specific (you) and general (your culture—the chosen aspect of

Remember: Collages that combine the visual, emotional and cultural memories will have the strongest impact

Step Four: Analyze the collage.

Did your Collage:

- imagine
- personalize
- capture
- integrate
- transform
- release
- symbolize

“What better way than collage to express the accumulation of memories?” - an art critic referencing Romare Bearden’s collage work.

Material Options:

- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Photographs
- Postcards
- Cardboard
- Greeting Cards
- Construction Paper
- Wall paper
- Wrapping Paper
- Ribbon
- String
- Wood
- Fabric
- Wire
- Paper



Reading/Writing Activities: African American Art and History

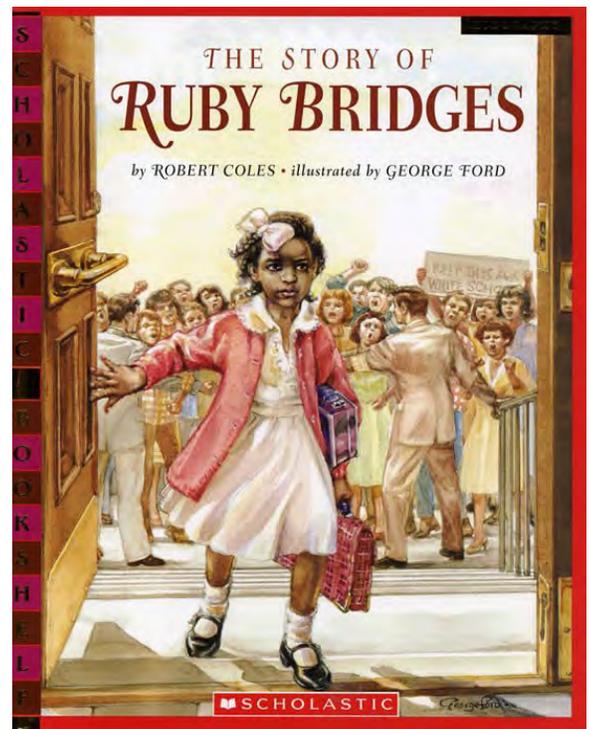


Synopsis: In *Drawing in the Sand: A Story of African American Art*, Jerry Butler tells the story of his journey as an African American artist. Butler explains how different elements of society, for example segregation in the South, have shaped and impacted his artistic work. The book also highlights the lives and careers of some of the African American artists that came before Butler like Elizabeth Catlett and Romare Bearden and how their

Activity: Read *Drawing in the Sand: A Story of African American Art* as a group or individually. Pay special attention to the ways the world around these artists has influenced their lives and art. Write a brief biography about your life. Highlight one of your talents and/or interests like Jerry Butler did with his art. How has the world around you and your unique background affected your talents and interests? Have you ever had to overcome obstacles or difficulties to succeed? Next, inspired by an image and/or artist from the story. Make

Synopsis: Ruby Bridges was the sole African American child to attend a New Orleans elementary school after court-ordered desegregation in 1960. Noted research psychiatrist Robert Coles tells how federal marshals escorted the intrepid six-year-old past angry crowds of white protestors thronging the school. Parents of the white students kept them home, and so Ruby began

Activity: Show students the cover of *The Story of Ruby Bridges*. Ask students, "What do you think is happening in this picture?" Have students complete the "before reading" sentences on the following page. Read *The Story of Ruby Bridges* together or individually then, complete the "after reading" sentences. How do they compare? Lead a class discussion using the following questions as a guide: How do you think Ruby felt as she walked through the angry mob every day? Do you think Ruby's parents were afraid for her safety? How do you think Ruby felt in the classroom all by herself? Why? Why do you think Miss Hurley accepted Ruby? What kind of student was Ruby? How do you know? Would our schools be different if the Supreme Court had not decided that racially separate schools were not



Name: _____ Date: _____

POSSIBLE SENTENCES FOR *THE STORY OF RUBY BRIDGES*

BEFORE READING:

I think the little girl. _____

AFTER READING:

I think the little girl _____

BEFORE READING:

The adults in the background _____

AFTER READING:

The adults in the background _____

BEFORE READING:

The story takes place _____

AFTER READING:

The story takes place _____

BEFORE READING:

The problem in the story is _____

AFTER READING:

The problem in the story is _____

Glossary of Terms

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Art Elements | The basic components used by the artist when producing works of art—color, value, line, shape, form, texture, and space. |
| Abstract | This style of art does not show objects realistically. Abstract artists sometimes simplify or exaggerate shapes and colors. If the art work is totally abstract—doesn't resemble anything in the natural world—it is called nonrepresentational or nonobjective. |
| Balance | A sense of stability, sometimes symmetry, established by the way forms, lines and colors are placed within a painting. |
| Collage | An assemblage of items like newspaper clippings, magazine photos and ads, ribbons, printed, photographs and other found objects, glued to a surface to create a new image. |
| Color | What the eye sees when light is reflected from it. Hue is the color in its most intense form. Value refers to the differences in hue ranging from the lightest to darkest. Primary colors (red, blue, yellow) cannot be produced by mixing other colors together. Secondary colors (orange, violet, green) are created by mixing primary colors. |
| Composition | The way shapes, color, line, space, mass and objects are arranged and organized in a work of art. |
| Docent | From the Latin word <i>docere</i> , meaning to teach. Docents are specially trained volunteer museum guides. |
| Form | Shape with three dimensions—height, width, and depth. |
| Genre Painting | Scenes of everyday life |
| Harlem Renaissance | A social movement that started in Harlem, NY in the early decades of the twentieth century that worked to use the arts produced by and featuring African Americans to combat racism and stereotypes of African Americans |
| Landscape | Painting that depicts a scene from nature in which the place or the land itself becomes the main subject. |
| Line | The path of a moving point. It can be vertical, horizontal, diagonal, curved, angular, zigzag, bent, straight, interrupted, thick, thin. |
| Medium (media) | The materials used to create a work of art. |
| Photomontage | A collage that uses photographs |
| Portrait | A likeness made of a person created by an artist, such as a painter or photographer. |
| Print | 1) A design or picture transferred from an engraved plate, wood block, lithographic stone, or other medium. 2) A photographic image transferred to paper or a similar surface, usually from a negative. |
| Realistic | The artist tries to depict objects as they are seen. |
| Space | Actual (open air around sculpture or architecture) or implied (represented by |

Additional Resources

Books and Articles for Research:

Amaki, Amalia K. (ed.) *A Century of African American Art: The Paul R. Jones Collection*. New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2004. [KPL 759.1 C397](#), [WMU N6538.N5 C45 2004](#)

Franklin, John Hope. *Collecting African American Art: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. [WMU N6538.N5 F73 2009](#)

Lewis, Samella S. *African American Art and Artists*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003 [KPL 709.73 L676.2](#) [WMU N6538.N5 L38 2003](#)

Taha, Halima. *Collecting African American Art: Works on Paper and Canvas*, Burlington: Verve. 2005. [MelCat](#) <http://elibrary.mel.org/record=b15938009~S15>

Books for Children:

Butler, Jerry. *Drawing in the Sand: A story of African American Art*. Madison: Zino Press, 1998. [KPL J 709.2 B](#)

Cole, Robert. *The Story of Ruby Bridges*. New York: Scholastic, 2010. [KPL J 921 BRIDGES](#)

Hartfield, Claire. *Me and Uncle Romie: A Story Inspire by the Life and Art of Romare Bearden*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 2002. [KPL JE H](#)

Rolling, James Haywood. *Discovering African American Art for Children*. New York: Lickle Publishing, 2005 [MelCat](#) <http://elibrary.mel.org/record=b19551408~S15>

Activity Guides:

The Art of Romare Bearden: A Resource Guide for Teachers. <http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/bearden/>

Websites:

Smithsonian Education—*African American Portraits: k-12 Lesson Plans* http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/let_your_motto/index.html

Metropolitan Museum of Art—*Let's Walk The Block: Romare Bearden* <http://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/interactives/art-trek/romare-bearden-lets-walk-the-block>

Kennedy Center—*Drop Me Off In Harlem: Discovering Themes in the Harlem Renaissance* <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/interactives/harlem/>