

CONVERSATIONS



Smithsonian
National Museum of African Art

November 9, 2014 to January 24, 2016



AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTWORKS IN DIALOGUE

FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF THE SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
AFRICAN ART AND CAMILLE O. AND WILLIAM H. COSBY JR.

EDUCATION PACKET FOR TEACHERS
Grades 1-4

CONVERSATIONS

AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTWORKS IN DIALOGUE

EDUCATION PACKET FOR TEACHERS

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MUSEUM HOURS: 10 am-5:30 pm daily, except December 25
EXHIBITION DATES: November 9, 2014-January 24, 2016

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Information Desk: 202.357.4879
Tour Scheduling: 202.633.4633
Website: www.africa.si.edu
Address: 950 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC, 20560

SCHOOL TOURS:

Teachers and their students may explore the Museum's exhibitions either with a Museum guide or independently. Pre-registration is required for all school programs. Please make reservations as far in advance of the requested date and time as possible. Our February programs are especially popular during Black History month. All school programs are FREE of charge.

To book a tour, contact call 202.633.4633 or sign up on line:

Please visit www.africa.si.edu for more information

ADMISSION IS FREE.

NOTE:

The lesson plans in this educational packet are intended to be interdisciplinary. Look for the one or more of these icons on the front page of each individual lesson plan, indicating its connection to a particular subject.



English/Writing



History



Arts



Social Studies



Science



LESSON ONE: SITTING IN STYLE--Portraiture

A 3-day lesson plan



Joshua Johnston, *Lady on a Red Sofa*, c. 1825, oil on canvas (USA)



Joshua Johnston, *Mrs. Thomas Donovan and Elinor Donovan*, c. 1799, oil on canvas (USA)

GOALS:

Students will be able to

- Understand the role of symbols to convey identity and social status
- Use symbols in their own artwork to communicate specific messages

NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS- Visual Arts

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| VA:Re.7.2.1a | Compare images that represent the same subject. |
| VA:Re.7.2.3a | Determine messages communicated by an image. |
| A:Re.7.2.4a | Analyze components in visual imagery that convey messages. |

Artworks of Focus: Joshua Johnston, *Mrs. Thomas Donovan and Elinor Donovan*, c. 1799, oil on canvas (USA); Joshua Johnston, *Lady on a Red Sofa*, c. 1825, oil on canvas (USA); Nontsikelelo “Lolo” Veleko, *Kepi in Bree Street*, 2006, digital print with pigment dyes on cotton paper (South Africa)

Theme: Art and the Human Presence

LEARN AND DISCUSS

Johnston (1765-1830) painted *Mrs. Thomas Donovan and Elinor Donovan* and *Lady on a Red Sofa* as portraits more than 200 years ago. The artist was born a slave but records in Baltimore, Maryland confirm that he was freed on July 15, 1792 at the age of nineteen. Because of his extraordinary self-taught talent, he was commissioned by many patrons – local merchants, captains, seamen, and businessmen, mostly white – to paint individual portraits and family members.

Joshua Johnston, *Lady on a Red Sofa*, c. 1825, oil on canvas (USA)

Lady on a Red Sofa is an elegant portrait featuring a woman of style—her dress, fashionable jewels, and fine furnishings are all markers of status. Johnston’s painterly technique is simple and flat. The background is empty and lacks depth, unlike European portraits of the same period. Done in the style of American Federalist-era paintings, Johnston also includes several symbols that tell the viewer about the woman in the painting.

- If you saw a person on the street, holding a book, wearing a backpack, what might you assume about the person?
- What might the book in this painting symbolize? (education)
- What are other signs of her wealth? (fruit, jewelry, dress, furniture)
- If an artist were to paint a portrait of you, what symbols would you include?
- What would those things say about you?

SYMBOLISM

Artists often use symbols, or objects, to represent something else. Material objects are painted or depicted as part of the artwork to represent an additional idea or theme. We use symbols every day. Show students some symbols they may be familiar with:

Heart = love

Stop sign=stop

Peace sign=peace

- Why do we use symbols?
- Why might an artist use symbols?

IDENTITY

A person’s identity is made up of recognizable personality traits and characteristics by which that person is known. For centuries, people, especially wealthy patrons, paid artists to create portraits of themselves, especially before photography was invented. The artist’s responsibility would be to portray this sitter without using words.

- Why might a person want a portrait painting of him/herself?

Joshua Johnston, *Mrs. Thomas Donovan and Elinor Donovan*, c. 1799, oil on canvas (USA)

- Where are the individuals in the painting looking?
- What are they holding?
- What are they wearing? What does it say about their status? (wealth)
- What words would you use to describe the mother? What visual clues lead you to those conclusions?

SYMBOLISM AND IDENTITY

Nontsikelelo “Lolo” Veleko, *Kepi in Bree Street*, 2006, digital print with pigment dyes on cotton paper (South Africa)

Veleko is interested in photographing the younger generation of South Africa. Her work often looks at fashion and how it creates a person’s identity. Her photographs show Africa’s cities and urban youth as bright and cosmopolitan—a stark comparison from many contemporary photographers who emphasize the degradation and poverty of young South Africa.

- What is the subject wearing?
- How is he standing? What does it say about who he is (or thinks he is)?
- How do you think the subject feels?
- Do you like this photo? Why or why not?

VOCABULARY

- identity
- portrait social
- status
- symbolism
- American
- Federalist
- style

EXPERIENCE AND CREATE: Photographing Portraits

Activity Setting: classroom

Materials/Preparation:

- Day 1: Object(s) that represent you (the teacher)
- Day 2: Students bring objects to represent themselves
- pencils
- cameras or smart phones with camera capabilities

Duration: Day 1: 15 minutes; Day 2: 45 minutes; Day 3: 20 minutes

Note: This lesson could also serve as a get-to-know-you activity at the beginning of a new school year to help the students get to know each other better.

Day 1 (15 minutes)

Begin by showing the students the object(s) you brought to represent yourself. Explain how they are a symbol of who you are. Help the students think about what objects or symbols represent themselves by asking the following questions:

- If someone in the future only had a portrait of you to know who you were, what would you want them to know about you?
- How could you represent that using objects or symbols in your portrait?
- What would you want to wear in your portrait to best represent who you are?

Objects and symbols can represent something *tangible* like a favorite food or hobby, but they can also represent something *intangible* like a personality trait or virtue.

Pass out pencils and paper and have the students list a few items they feel best represent themselves. Ask the students to bring the objects and/or wear the clothing they would like in their portraits to class the following day.

Day 2 (45 minutes)

Divide the class into partners. Have each student pose with his/her objects. The partner will take a photo of the other student posing. Then have them switch roles. Encourage them to incorporate backgrounds and poses that they feel are also representative of who they are, where possible. Print out the photos.

Day 3 (about 20 minutes, depending on class size)

Hand back photos to each respective student partnership. Allow each partnership to take a turn in front of the class, explaining the symbols in the portrait he/she took of the other student.



Nontsikelelo "Lolo" Veleko, *Kepi in Bree Street*, 2006, digital print with pigment dyes on cotton paper (South Africa)

ARTWORKS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Aida Muluneh, *Spirit of Sisterhood*,
2000, cibachrome print (Ethiopia)



Alexander "Skunder" Boghossian,
Devil Descending, 1961,
oil on canvas (Ethiopia)





LESSON TWO: ART EVERYWHERE--Recognizing Patterns

GOAL:

Students will be able to

- Recognize patterns in everyday life, specifically in the classroom school building

NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS- Visual Arts

VA:Re.7.1.2a	Perceive and describe aesthetic characteristics of one's natural world and constructed environments.
VA:Cn10.1.3a	Develop a work of art based on observations of surroundings.



Eldzier Cortor, *Homage to 466 Cherry Street*, 1987, oil on masonite (USA)

Artworks of Focus: Eldzier Cortor, *Homage to 466 Cherry Street*, 1987, oil on masonite (USA); Seydou Keita, *Untitled (Odalisque)*, 1956-57, printed 1999, gelatin silver print (Mali); Gilbert "Bobbo" Ahiagble, wrapper, Ewe artist, late 20th century, cotton, dyes (Ghana)

Theme: Memory, Family, and the Domestic Space

LEARN AND DISCUSS

Eldzier Cortor, *Homage to 466 Cherry Street*, 1987, oil on masonite (USA)

Homage to 466 Cherry Street presents the viewer with a life-like view of patterns in a large apartment building's foyer. Three rows of mailboxes, some overflowing with mail, are the focal point. The people who lived here, likely saw this row of mailboxes every day, without thinking much of it. Cortor encourages the viewer to slow down and recognize the details and patterns in our daily surroundings. His use of patterns, textures, and shadows transforms an otherwise common set of mailboxes into an interesting study of shapes and light. Curator Adrienne L. Childs says "Cortor's hyperrealistic interior takes an ordinary wall of mailboxes and transforms it into a haunting abstraction of patterns, textures and shadows."

- Where do you see patterns in this painting?
- Where are the shadows?
- How would the tiles feel if you could touch them? How would the wall feel?

This artist used an artistic technique called trompe l'oeil, meaning "deceives the eye" in French. This painting technique tricks the eye into thinking a painted detail is a 3-D object.

Two pieces of mail in the painting tell us about the artist, Cortor: The Pittsburgh Courier (a black newspaper before and during WWII, know of by very few whites) and a postcard from Haiti (a symbol of freedom and hope at this time).

- Why do you think the artist included these objects in his painting?

Look around your classroom.

- Where do you see patterns in your classroom?
- Where are there shadows?

The title *Homage to 466 Cherry Street* suggests the artist's attitude towards his subject. A homage is an act of honor or respect towards something or someone. *What place would you want to honor in a painting?*



Gilbert "Bobbo" Ahiagble, wrapper
Ewe artist, late 20th century,
cotton, dyes (Ghana)

Gilbert "Bobbo" Ahiagble, wrapper, Ewe artist, late 20th century, cotton, dyes (Ghana)

While steeped in a long history, African textiles today—in both urban and rural settings—are contemporary, global, and dynamic. As powerful communicators of status, gender and accomplishment in Africa, many textiles are connected to presentations of self. African textiles are far from static, despite their manner of presentation in most museum contexts. Rather, textiles are performed, kinetic and three-dimensional, worn on and manipulated by the body and thus moved through space in their contexts of use and display.

The pattern on this wrapper is quite complex.

- a. What shapes and symbols do you see?
- b. What patterns do you have on your clothing?
- c. What kinds of clothes do you wore for special occasions? (dance performances, sports, religious events, etc.)

Seydou Keita, *Untitled (Odalisque)*, 1956-57), printed 1999, gelatin silver print (Mali)

This photograph by Keita provides rich sense of geometric patterning characteristic of African textile traditions.

- What about the patterns in this piece are similar to the pattern the man's wrapper?
- What is different?



Seydou Keita, *Untitled (Odalisque)*, 1956-57), printed 1999, gelatin silver print (Mali)

Patterns are everywhere we look: on our clothes, in nature,

LEARN AND CREATE: Finding Patterns and Textures

Activity Setting: classroom, school hallways

Materials/Preparation:

- Paper divided into three sections
- Pencils
- Crayons with the paper wrappers torn off (for texture rubbings)

Instruct the students fold his/her paper into two sections: one section will be for patterns and the other one for textures. Label the sections “patterns” and “textures”.

As a class observe *Homage to 466 Cherry Street* again. Identify the border along the top of the tiled wall and the tiles wall itself. Using crayons, have each student copy each of the two patterns under the “patterns” section.

With your class, walk around your school halls identifying patterns from their everyday surroundings. When you find an interesting pattern, stop, allow the students to sit down, and sketch the pattern under the “patterns” section. Label where the pattern was. For example, if it was on a Mrs. White’s bulletin board, simply write “Mrs. White’s Bulletin” next to it. Similarly, when you see interesting textures around the school, stop and allow the students to create crayon rubbings of the texture under the “textures” section. Label accordingly.

Extension Activity: Each student can discover patterns and textures at home. Have them to draw the patterns and make texture rubbings throughout his/her house to bring to class.

VOCABULARY

collage
homage
realistic
trompe-l’oeil

ARTWORKS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Blanket, Bamana artist, mid-late 20th century, cotton, indigo dye, commercial dye (Mali)



Mask, Nuna artist, mid-20th century, wood, pigment, metal (Burkina Faso)





LESSON THREE: WHAT MAKES A COMMUNITY--Creating with Found Materials



Jacob Lawrence, *Street Scene, Harlem*, 1942, gouache on board oil on canvas (USA)



Jacob Lawrence, *Blind Musician*, 1942, gouache (USA)

GOALS:

Students will be able to:

- Look closely at paintings to recognize details
- Familiarize themselves with the work of Jacob Lawrence
- Collaborate with other students to use found materials in creating a model urban environment
- Recognize the role of music in a community

NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS- Visual Arts

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| VA:Cr1.1.1a | Engage collaboratively in exploration and imaginative play with materials. |
| VA:Cr1.1.2a | Brainstorm collaboratively multiple approaches to an art or design problem. |
| VA:Cr2.3.3a | Individually or collaboratively construct representations, diagrams, or maps of places that are part of everyday life. |
| VA:Cr1.1.4a | Brainstorm multiple approaches to a creative art or design problem. |

Artworks of Focus: Jacob Lawrence, *Street Scene, Harlem*, 1942, gouache on board (USA); Jacob Lawrence, *Blind Musician*, 1942, gouache (USA)

Theme: Music and Urban Culture

LEARN AND DISCUSS

Jacob Lawrence, *Street Scene, Harlem*, 1942, gouache on board

Jacob Lawrence’s bird’s-eye view of the busy urban environment where he was raised includes apartment buildings, hotels, a church, and more. While the composition is largely structured by the interplay of buildings in an almost abstract pattern, Lawrence includes humanizing details such as stained-glass church windows, clothes hanging from a rooftop clothesline, and children playing jump rope on the street. Lawrence’s bustling urban views reveal the public spaces where black identities are negotiated and shared.

- Where do people in your neighborhood spend time together? (parks, church, community centers, etc.)
- Is it important for a community to spend time together? Why or why not?

Jacob Lawrence, *Blind Musician*, 1942, gouache (USA)

The shared experience of music on a city street is the focus of Jacob Lawrence's *Blind Musician*. A crowd gathers outside a bar, enraptured by the spectacle of a blind musician playing a guitar with his food. The musician was perhaps one of the characters Lawrence encountered while working on his Harlem series (1942-43), thirty paintings devoted to everyday life in the neighborhood. Lawrence, with his particular brand of narrative abstraction, tells rich stories of Harlem life in bold colors and flat, simplified shapes.

- What is different about this musician's way of holding and playing a guitar?
- How is music a part of your community? (street musicians, church, local bands, student music recitals, school, sporting events)

"Even though Jacob Lawrence painted from personal experience and the experiences of those around him, his themes are universal. His stories of struggle, discrimination, and the quest for freedom, justice, and human dignity transcend racial lines and reveal truths that resonate with us today." –Jay Gates, Director of The Phillips Collection.

EXPERIENCE AND CREATE: Constructing a Cardboard Community

Activity Setting: classroom

Materials/Preparation:

- Recyclables (i.e. cereal and cracker boxes, oatmeal drums, plastic containers, egg cartons)
- Glue/tape
- Scissors
- Markers
- Large working space for each group
- Large piece of cardboard for each group to build their city on (optional)

Duration: 45 minutes

NOTE: If your students live in a rural area, encourage them to imagine what it might be like to live in a big city. What kind of buildings would they see? What would be different if they lived in a city? Have them create an urban environment based on *Street Scene, Harlem*.

As a class, make a list of the different kinds of buildings in your own city or town. Consider places of learning, worship, government/service buildings, and stores. Divide the classroom into groups of four. Each group will decide which buildings they want in their city. Students will be in charge of building two structures out of the recycled materials. Have a team leader write down the group members' names and which buildings he/she will be building. Each group will create their own version of the city where they live. When they are finished with the buildings, encourage details that tell us more about the community (i.e. people playing outside, cars, benches, laundry hanging). Look to *Street Scene, Harlem* for inspiration.

Extension Activity: Have the students visually represent the cultural importance of music in their cardboard cities. *Are there street performers? A church choir? A local concert?* Invite the students to use recycled materials to add these details to their cardboard neighborhoods.

Looking with Your Little Eye

Encourage the students to look closely at *Street Scene, Harlem*, by playing a game of "I Spy." Ask the students to raise a hand when they spot what you spy. For example, encourage close observation by saying sentences like, "I spy with my little eye 2 cats" or, "I spy with my little eye a wagon full of fruit."

VOCABULARY

community

culture

bird's-eye view

urban

ARTWORKS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Malick Sidibé, *Nuit de Noel* (Happy Club), 1963 printed 2008, gelatin silver print (Mali)



Iba N'Diaye, *Hommage á Bessie Smith*, 1987, oil on canvas (Senegal)



Adebisi Fabunmi, *Benin City*, 1970, linocut (Nigeria)





LESSON FOUR: CONNECTING WITH NATURE--Mask-Making



Nuna artist, mask, mid-20th century,
wood, pigment, metal (Burkina Faso)

GOALS:

Students will be able to:

- identify ways works of art reflect and engage the natural environment;
- analyze the relationship between the human and natural worlds in their community;
- understand the multiple components of masquerades and their performance outside of a museum setting

NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS- Visual Arts

VA:Cn11.1.1a	Understand that people from different places and times have made art for a variety of reasons.
VA:Cn11.1.2a	Compare and contrast cultural uses of artwork from different times and places.
VA:Cn11.1.3a	Recognize that responses to art change depending on knowledge of the time and place in which it was made.

Artworks of Focus: Nuna artist, mask, mid-20th century, wood, pigment, metal (Burkina Faso)

Theme: Nature as Metaphor

LEARN AND DISCUSS

NOTE TO TEACHERS: Do the Looking Exercise before giving the students information about the artwork.

LOOKING EXERCISE

Materials/Preparation:

- shape of the butterfly mask cut out of thin cardboard (approx. 24" x 68" x 6")
(optional)

Duration: 45 minutes

Show the students the image of the butterfly mask. Make 3 columns on the board labeled: What I Know, What I Want to Know, and What I've Learned. Looking at the image of the mask, fill-in the first two categories on the board, as a class.

Example:

What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I've Learned
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are shapes on it. • It's black, red, and white. • It's made out of wood. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is it used for? • When was it made? • Where is it from? • Who made it? 	

To help the students look more critically ask:

- What do you see on this mask?
- How is this different from other masks you've seen?

RITUALS AND MASQUERADES

Unlike masks that we may be more familiar with, this mask doesn't have eyeholes. Rather, it is intended to be worn on top of the masquerader's head. This mask would have been used as part of an elaborate costume in a masquerade. A masquerade is a celebration that typically includes dancing and making music. Members of this community host ceremonies designed to maintain a balance between the human, animal, and spirit-world featuring performances by costumed dancers.

Invite a student to come up to help you demonstrate how this mask would have been worn, using the mock-up of the butterfly mask you created earlier. (Place the butterfly on the crown of the student's head.) Show image of mask being worn.

- When do you wear masks and costumes?
- How are the masks you wear at Halloween different? How are they the same?

A masquerade is part of a ritual, or series of events performed in a certain way, at certain times. At the beginning of the farming season in Burkina Faso, this mask is used as part of an elaborate costume. You might have special rituals, too. For example, your family could have a Friday night ritual of ordering pizza and watching a movie.

- What rituals do you have? (i.e. holiday traditions, family vacations, daily routines)

ANIMAL SYMBOLISM

Cultures all over the world use animals as symbols. What does it mean if someone says, "You run like a cheetah"? Many animals are known for specific characteristics that we often use to describe people or things. For example, sports teams commonly use animals as mascots. As a class, brainstorm sports teams that have animal mascots (i.e. Chicago Bulls, Baltimore Ravens, Denver Broncos, Charlotte Hornets).

- Why would a team want to be associated with Bulls? Ravens? Broncos? Hornets?

For people in Burkina Faso, the butterfly signals the coming of rain—an important factor for a successful harvest. It is one mask in a cast of masquerade characters, and represents a bush spirit, a spirit associated with an ancestor. The plank mask's broad, richly patterned wings and the small birds and chameleons inserted into the upper edge are characteristic of Nuna masks.

- What words or characteristics do you associate with butterflies? (soft, fragile, flying)
- What might chameleons represent? (change, invisibility, transformation)

What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I've Learned
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •There are shapes on it. •It's black, red, and white. •It's made out of wood. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What is it used for? •When was it made? •Where is it from? •Who made it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •It is worn on top of the head. •It's a butterfly. •It's made by people in Burkina Faso.

EXPERIENCE AND CREATE: Making an Animal Mask

Activity Setting: classroom

Materials/Preparation:

- Word strips with adjectives written on them
- Thin cardboard (recycled from cereal or cracker boxes)
- Construction paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Various craft material (i.e. raffia, beads, foam shapes, paints), staples, string or thin elastic
- African drumming music
- Drums/instruments for students to use during the “masquerade” (optional)

Duration: 30 minutes

NOTE: For more animal-related activities and information on the symbolism of specific African animals, visit <http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/animals.html>.

Animal Adjectives—What Animal Are You?

Are you fast? Smart? Nice? Shy? Think of an animal that has those same characteristics are you. Pull one adjective at a time out of a bag and tape it to the board. As a class come up with an animal associated with that adjective and write it next to the word strip. When all of the word strips are on the board, have students decide which animal (or animals) best describe him or her.

VOCABULARY

masquerade
ritual symbol

Example of adjectives and associated animals:

Fast	Cheetah
Wise	Owl
Nice	Bunny
Friendly	Dog
Shy	Mouse
Busy	Bee
Talkative	Parrot

Each student will begin the activity by deciding what kind of animal they feel best represents him/her. This animal will be the inspiration for his/her mask. (Composite animals are common in many African masks, so students may use more than one animal if they wish.) Have each student cut-out the general shape of his/her mask from the thin cardboard. The students will then decorate their masks with paper, paints, foam shapes, and other art supplies to represent the animal(s) of his/her choice. Use staples to attach string or thin elastic to each mask to hold it in place on the student's head (like the butterfly mask) or over the face (like a traditional mask).

When everyone is done with their masks, put on some African drumming music and dance the masks around the classroom as part of a "masquerade." Use classroom drums and instruments, if available.

ARTWORKS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Drum, Osei Bonsu, Asante artist,
ca. 1935, wood, hide, paint, metal
(Ghana)

Helmet mask, Bobo artist, early-mid
20th century, wood, pigment (Burkina
Faso)

Face mask, Chokwe artist, early 20th
century, wood, plant fiber, pigment,
copper alloy (Democratic Republic of
Congo)

VOCABULARY WITH DEFINITIONS

Grades 1-4

collage: a piece of art made by gluing pieces of paper, photographs, fabric, or other found objects onto paper or other backing

identity: who a person is, specific characteristics attributed to a person

homage: public respect or acknowledgment

portrait: piece of art depicting a person

realistic: representing things in a way that is true to life

social status: important, popular, most noticeable, easiest to see

symbol: an object or idea that represents something else

trompe l'oeil: a painting technique that gives the illusion of being 3-D, French for "deceives the eye"

