

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 5-8

CONVERSATIONS

AFRICAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTWORKS IN DIALOGUE

EDUCATION PACKET FOR TEACHERS

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CONVERSATIONS

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.

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: ART WITH A MESSAGE--Writing an Artist Statement



Godfried Donkor, *From Slave to Champ*, 1992, oil on canvas (Ghana)

GOALS:

Students will be able to:

- c. Recognize that art can be used to convey a political message
- d. Understand that people may see the same piece of art differently
- e. Use art to express their own reactions to current events
- f. Create an artist statement to be displayed alongside his/her artwork

NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS- Visual Arts

VA:Re.7.2.5a	Identify and analyze cultural associations suggested by visual imagery.
VA:Re.7.2.6a	Analyze ways that visual components and cultural associations suggested by images influence ideas, emotions, and actions.
VA:Re.7.2.7a	Analyze multiple ways that images influence specific audiences.
VA:Cr3.1.5a	Reflect on and explain important information about personal artwork in an artist statement or another format.
VA:Cr3.1.7a	Create artist statements using art vocabulary to describe personal choices in art-making.

Artworks of Focus: Godfried Donkor, *From Slave to Champ*, 1992 (Ghana); Palmer Hayden, *When Tricky Sam Shot Father Lamb*, 1940 (USA); Bruce Onobrakpeya, *Have You Heard?*, 1970 (Nigeria); Johannes Phokela, *Cuts*, 1990 (South Africa)

Theme: Power and Politics

LEARN AND DISCUSS

Godfried Donkor, *From Slave to Champ*, 1992, oil on canvas (Ghana)

This is a well-known image of Jack Johnson, the first African American heavyweight champion, adopting the stance—feet wide apart, arms raised, fists clenched—of a boxer prepared to do battle in the ring. Johnson was a flamboyant and controversial boxer who defeated a series of white contenders seeking to achieve the title he held from 1908 to 1915.

This work examine issues of race and economic inequality as legacies of enslavement. In Donkor’s work, Johnson’s imposing size, golden halo, and dominant position over the depictions at his feet of the cramped hold of a slave ship are all visual devices that suggest moral victory over oppression and inequality—particularly poignant since Johnson was born in Texas to parents who were former slaves.

- What is in the background? Why?
- Who do you think the man is fighting?
- What might the gold circle (halo) symbolize?
- What might Jack Johnson think of this artwork?

Palmer Hayden, *When Tricky Sam Shot Father Lamb*, 1940, oil on canvas (USA)

Hayden often painted black genres scenes, focusing on family and community activities. *When Tricky Sam Shot Father Lamb* shows a large group of people congregated together on a summer evening, after the shooting of their beloved cleric. Individuals show a wide range of emotion in reaction to the course of events. Community solidarity and concern for the victim are clear themes of this work.

- If you were there, which individual would you be?
- How would you feel?
- What questions would you want to ask the police officer?
- How does looking at this painting make you feel?



Palmer Hayden, *When Tricky Sam Shot Father Lamb*, 1940, oil on canvas (USA)

Bruce Onobrakpeya, *Have You Heard?*, 1970, deep etching on paper (Nigeria)

Like a number of printmakers practicing throughout contemporary Africa, Onobrakpeya often uses his medium to give subtle commentary on socio-political events in his native Nigeria, in particular, and Africa in general. Beginning in 1967, a conflict arose from ethnic and religious rivalries and disputes over the new oil industry. It ended in 1970 after 100,000 military casualties and between 500,000 and 2 million civilians’ deaths. Onobrakpeya would depict the stunned--perhaps exhausted--people in the market in paintings and drawings. In *Have You Heard*, the artist recalls people’s reactions to the news of the abrupt end to the Nigerian Civil War.

- What might the women be saying to each other?
- If you were in the print *Have You Heard the News*, what would you say to your friend when you heard the war was over?
- With the war over, how would your life change?



Bruce Onobrakpeya, *Have You Heard?*, 1970, deep etching on paper (Nigeria)

Johannes Phokela, *Cuts*, 1990, acrylic and string on canvas (South Africa)

On a trip home to South Africa in 1989, Phokela was distressed to see the state of violence that existed as a result of political rivalry and unrest. Disturbed by the bandaged and scarred faces and bodies of his fellow citizens, and by the fact that everyone seemed to accept the situation as normal, the artist created a canvas of “cuts”. He slashed the canvas and stitched up the numerous gashes, and dripped them with red paint. He then overlaid gold frames over the “cuts” to distance himself from the violence.

- How do you deal with difficult and disturbing events?
- What might the gold frames represent?
- Look at his choice of media and technique. Do you think it makes

the work more powerful? How?



Johannes Phokela, *Cuts*, 1990, acrylic and string on canvas (South Africa)

ACTIVITY: Responding to Current Events Through Art and Artist Statements

Activity Setting: classroom

Materials/Preparation:

- Recent newspapers or access to online news
- Art-making materials of your choice (paints, pastels, pencils, etc.)

Duration: 60 minutes (or more depending on the needs and interest of the class)

Allow each student time to read the headlines of a recent newspaper (hardcopy or online). Have each student select a news story about a current issue that addresses an issue that is important to him/her (i.e. war, inequality) . Have the students get into partners and share the stories they've chosen. In addition to sharing the facts of the news story, invite students to also share his/her reaction to the news article. Each student will then create a piece of artwork that reflects his/her feeling on the issue.

When the artworks are finished, the students will then write an artist statement to be displayed with his/her work. Set-up a classroom gallery with the finished artists statements displayed next to each finished piece. Give the students time to stroll the "gallery." Invite students to share personal responses to the art and artist statements with the class.

Artist Statements:

An artist statement is an artist's written or verbal description of his/her artwork. Its purpose is to give the viewer a better understanding of the piece. They often include explanations and contextualization. Consider the following questions when writing your own artist statement:

- What emotions are you trying to convey?
- What does your art express?
- What makes it unique?
- Is it associated with a specific personal memory or experience?
- What does it mean to you?
- Where do you draw inspiration?
- What tools and materials did you use?
- Are there any symbols that you would like to explain?

For more information and examples of artist statements, please visit:

<http://artiststatement.com/category/samples>

<http://www.artbusiness.com/artstate.html>

<http://www.wikihow.com/Write-an-Artist-Statement>

Extension Activity: Visit a local museum or gallery, paying particular attention to artist statements. *How does having an artist statement affect the viewer's experience with the artwork?*

VOCABULARY

artist statement

ARTWORKS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Willie Bester, *The Notorious Green Car*, 1995, metal, paint, burlap, glass, plexiglass, bone, plastic, cloth, wood, rubber, paper, wire (South Africa)





LESSON TWO: POETIC NATURE--Poetry in Response to Art



Robert S. Duncanson, *Falls of Minnehaha*,
1862, oil on canvas (USA)

GOALS:

Students will be able to:

- Use contextual clues and visual elements to identify the ideas and mood conveyed through art
- Write a haiku poem to express his/her emotional response to an artwork

NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS- Visual Arts

- 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:Re8.1.6a Interpret art by distinguishing between relevant and non-relevant contextual information and analyzing subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.
- VA:Re8.1.7a Interpret art by analyzing art-making approaches, the characteristics of form and structure, relevant contextual information, subject matter, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed.
- VA:Re8.1.8a Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, art-making approaches, and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed.

Artworks of Focus: Robert S. Duncanson, *Falls of Minnehaha*, 1862, oil on canvas (USA)

Theme: Nature as Metaphor

LEARN AND DISCUSS

Robert S. Duncanson, *Falls of Minnehaha*, 1862, oil on canvas (USA)

Landscapes were the primary subject of the nineteenth-century African American artist Robert S. Duncanson. Duncanson worked in the tradition of the *Hudson River School* painters, who captured the dramatic grandeur of the American landscape along New York's Hudson River and beyond. Duncanson's *Falls of Minnehaha* depicts the majestic falls located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. A major tourist destination in the mid-nineteenth century, the waterfall was evoked in the popular epic poem "The Song of Hiawatha" (1855), by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In the poem the young Ojibwa warrior Hiawatha marries Minnehaha, a Dakota maiden whom Longfellow named after the falls. Duncanson depicts a diminutive figure, perhaps Minnehaha, standing on the riverbank, a witness to the beauty of the cascade. (Reading the poem in its entirety may be suited to older, more advanced students.)

- How do you think the artist felt about this place?
- What does he do to show you how he feels?
- Imagine sitting at the bottom of the falls? How would you feel?
- What sounds might you hear if you were there?
- What kinds of things might you think about if you were there?
- Where is the focus of the painting?
- Where do you like to go to be alone and think?

VOCABULARY

haiku

Hudson River School

EXPERIENCE AND CREATE: Responding to Art Through Poetry (Haikus)

Activity Setting: classroom

Materials/Preparation:

- writing paper
- pencils
- examples of haiku poems (optional)

Each student will respond to *Falls of Minnehaha* by writing a haiku poem.

Haiku are short poems, originating from Japan, that are often used to capture the essence or feeling of a place in nature. They summarize the essence of the scene. Haikus are written in three lines, with five syllables in the first line, seven syllables in the second line, and five syllables in the third line.

_____ 5 syllables _____
_ 7 syllables _
_____ 5 syllables _____

Typically, haikus have:

1. An emphasis on nature
2. A word describing the season (i.e. leaves, snow)
3. A clear shift in emphasis from one thing to another

To help your students get started, have them answer the following additional questions:

- d. What is the painting about?
- e. What details do you notice?
- f. What season is it? What clues do you have?
- g. What colors and textures, and do you see?
- h. How would the scene sound? How would it smell or taste?
- i. How would it feel to be there?

EXAMPLES OF TRADITION HAIKU POEMS FROM JAPAN:

Winter seclusion--Listening, that evening, To the rain in the mountain. --Issa

An old silent pond...A frog jumps into the pond, splash! Silence again. --Basho

No one travels Along this way but I, This autumn evening. --Basho

In the twilight rain these brillian-hued hibiscus--A lovely sunset. --Basho

Over the wintry forest, winds howl in rage with no leaves to blow. --Soseki

ARTWORKS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Christine Dixie, *Unravel*, 2001, linocut and etching on paper (South Africa)



Georgia Papageorge, *Maasai Steppe Ascending--Convective Displacement*, 1997, oil stick and graphite on canvas with volcanic rock and cloth (South Africa)





LESSON THREE: CONSIDERING SPIRITUAL WORKS--Painting

A 2-day lesson plan



Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Thankful Poor*, 1984,
oil on canvas (USA)

GOALS:

Students will be able to:

- j. Identify artistic methods and symbols that convey a spiritual presence
- k. Consider how artists create works to secure a relationship with unknown forces
- l. Create a piece of artwork that shows reverence for a subject of his/her choice

NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS- Visual Arts

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 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:Re8.1.6a | Interpret art by distinguishing between relevant and non-relevant contextual information and analyzing subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed. |
| VA:Re8.1.7a | Interpret art by analyzing art-making approaches, the characteristics of form and structure, relevant contextual information, subject matter, and use of media to identify ideas and mood conveyed. |
| VA:Re8.1.8a | Interpret art by analyzing how the interaction of subject matter, characteristics of form and structure, use of media, art-making approaches, and relevant contextual information contributes to understanding messages or ideas and mood conveyed. |

Artworks of Focus: Gerard Sekoto, *Boy and the Candle*, 1943, oil on canvas (South Africa);
Aaron Douglas, *Crucifixion*, 1934, oil on masonite (USA)

Theme: Spiritualities

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND QUESTIONS FOR VIEWING

Duration: Day 1: 30 minutes

Henry Ossawa Tanner, *The Thankful Poor*, 1984, oil on canvas (United States)

Henry Ossawa Tanner was raised in a religious household where his father was a devout African Methodist Episcopal Bishop. As a student, he sailed to Paris France at age 31 where he would spend most of his career, focusing on biblical themes. He was the first African American artist to gain international acclaim for his realism and expressive technique. Tanner was also one of the earliest artists to offer a counter-narrative to the prevailing stereotypes of African Americans. *The Thankful Poor* offers a dignified view of African American spiritual practice in a direct response to the degrading image of black peoples that dominated turn-of-the-century visual culture.

The painting focuses on a man and a boy sitting in prayer at a humble dinner table. Bathed in soft, glowing light, this view of an intimate moment between black family members practicing the ritual of prayer and thankfulness is a milestone in the history of African American art. The work depicts black religious practice in the most human terms. It revolves around the intergenerational bonds between an older black man and a younger boy, and it speaks to the importance of familial relationships and the transmission and preservation of black Christian culture.

- What are the boy and the man doing? Why aren't they looking at the viewer?
- What time of day do you think it is? What might the soft light represent?
- What words describe how you feel when looking at this scene?

Connecting with History

The Thankful Poor was done in 1894, only one year after Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. The Emancipation Proclamation granted freedom to slaves living in the 10 states still involved in the Civil War—applying to three million, out of 4 million slaves. The Proclamation also declared that ex-slaves, or “freedmen”, could enter the paid forces of the United States.

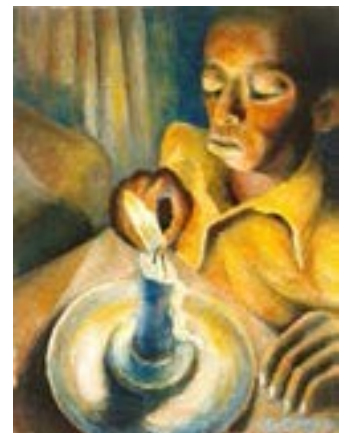
- What might the old man be thankful for?
- How do you think the man's life has changed in the last year?
- How do you think the little boy's life has changed in the last year?

Gerard Sekoto, *Boy and the Candle*, 1943, oil on canvas (South Africa)

Gerard Sekoto was pioneer of African modernism and among the first black South Africans to work with oil paints. In this delicately hued work, the artist reveals his command of light and shadow to illuminate the subject in a soft, warm glow. The boy's face, however seems prematurely aged, rendered with taut skin over prominent cheekbones, deep eye sockets, heavy eyes, and a pensive expression on the pursed lips.

Although the painting depicts a quiet, contemplative moment, it is hard to shake the feeling that this peaceful scene is informed by a weary suffering. The artist enjoyed a measure of recognition and patronage, but he suffered under South Africa's system of racial segregation and eventually relocated in 1947 to Paris, where he lived out his days in self-exile. Something of that lifetime of struggle is intimated in *Boy and the Candle*.

- What do you think this boy is thinking about?
- Imagine that you are standing next to the boy. What would you ask him?
- Why might he be tired?
- Why do you think he is lighting a candle?
- Why might the boy's eyes be closed?
- What time of day is it?
- What words describe how you feel when looking at this scene?



Gerard Sekoto, *Boy and the Candle*, 1943, oil on canvas (South Africa)

VOCABULARY

palette perspective
reverence

TALKING LIKE AN ARTIST

This painting, with its flattened perspective, limited palette and command of light and shadow, is one of the most recognized works of its time. Look closely at the table. The flattened perspective makes it look like the candle is going to slide right off and gives the viewer an uneasy feeling. The artist used only a few different colors to make the painting unified. This is called using a limited palette. (A palette is the plate-like object an artist uses to hold and mix paints while painting.)

- What colors do you see? (yellows, brown, and a few blues)
- How do those colors make you feel?
- This painting has very clear patches of light and shadow that makes this work more dramatic.
- Where is the most light shining?
- Where are the shadows?

Aaron Douglas, *Crucifixion*, 1934, oil on masonite

In this unique depiction of the crucifixion, Douglas paints a dominant black figure, Simon of Cyrene, who carries Christ's cross to Golgotha. Rarely before had an artist so blatantly broken the "rules" of white religious art by making a black figure dominant in comparison to the smaller Christ figure.

- What is going on in this painting?
- Who might the figures be?
- Where does your eye go first?
- How does this painting make you feel?
- How does the artist indicate which figure is Christ?
- How does the artist use light?
- Why do you think he painted the black figure so big?



Aaron Douglas, *Crucifixion*, 1934, oil on masonite (USA)

General Discussion:

What techniques do each of these three artists (Tanner, Sekoto, and Douglass) use to create feelings of reverence? You may wish to write these techniques on the board for reference during the art-making activity.

Artistic techniques that can help create a feeling of reverence:

Light is used to highlight important objects/people

Size is used to draw attention to important objects/people

Placement of viewer in relationship to the subject

Colors convey warmth (reds, oranges, yellows) or coldness (blues, purples, green)

Direction of subjects' gaze

ACTIVITY: Painting Reverence

Activity Setting: classroom

Materials/Preparation:

- notebook paper
- pencils
- paints of your choice
- brushes
- paper/canvas for painting

Duration: Day 2: 45 minutes

Give the students 5 minutes to write a list of things that are special to them. The list may include beliefs, family members, objects, or distinct memories. Have each student select one or two things from the list that they would like to use in his/her piece of art.

When the students have chosen their subjects, have each student list 2-3 specific ways that he/she is going to create a sense of reverence for the subject. Encourage them to refer to the list you created as a class in the General Discussion portion above. Possible questions to ask your students may include:

- How will you use light in your work?
- What will the biggest, most prominent object/person in your painting?
- What colors will you use? Why?
- Where will the subject be looking?

Students will then create a painting of something special to them, using artistic techniques to create a sense of reverence. Invite students to share and discuss their finished artworks with the class.

ARTWORKS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Crucifix, Kongo artist, 17th century,
copper alloy (Democratic Republic of
Congo)



Figure of St. Anthony, 18th-19th cen-
tury (possibly earlier), wood
(Democratic Republic of Congo)





LESSON FOUR: HONORING HEROES--Sculpture

A 2-day lesson plan

GOALS:

Students will be able to

- Recognize that sculpture can be used to commemorate important leaders/heroes by conveying power and leadership
- Consider characteristics that make a hero
- Identify a hero in his/her own life
- Create a sculpture conveying power/heroism in a work of art

NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS- Visual Arts

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| VA:Cr2.1.5a | Experiment and develop skills in multiple art-making techniques and approaches through practice. |
| VA:Cr2.1.6a | Demonstrate openness in trying new ideas, materials, methods, and approaches in making works of art and design. |
| VA:Cr2.1.7a | Demonstrate persistence in developing skills with various materials, methods, and approaches in creating works of art or design. |
| VA:Cr2.1.8a | Demonstrate willingness to experiment, innovate, and take risks to pursue ideas, forms, and meanings that emerge in the process of art-making or designing. |



Ousmane Sow, *Toussaint Louverture et la Vieille Esclave*, 1989, mixed media (Senegal)

Artworks of Focus: Ousmane Sow, *Toussaint Louverture et la vieille esclave (Toussaint L'Ouverture et la Vieille Esclave and the Elderly Slave)*, 1989

Theme: Power and Politics

LEARN AND DISCUSS

Duration: Day 1, 30 minutes

Ousmane Sow, *Toussaint L'Ouverture et la vieille esclave (Toussaint Louverture and the Elderly Slave)*, 1989, mixed media (Senegal)

The sculpture *Toussaint Louverture et la vieille esclave* is a work by the sculptor Ousmane Sow that portrays the great liberator of Haiti. In this work, Sow created an impassioned hero. He emphasized Louverture's compassion and his determination to end slavery. Sow's Louverture appears in a military uniform as a symbol of strength, but his great heroism is conveyed through his relationship with the slave. With his feet on the ground, Louverture lifts the fallen woman and looks toward his fate and the challenges of embracing his destiny.

- What words would you use to describe the type of person you think L’ouverture was?
- Stand like L’ouverture. How do you feel? Sit like the woman. How do you feel now?
- What would you like to ask the woman seated at his feet?
- What do you imagine Toussaint L’ouverture is thinking?
- Why do you think the artist chose to make this sculpture larger than real life?
- What makes L’ouverture a hero?

Current Connections:
What powerful figures do you see in politics today?
How does the media portray them?

EXPERIENCE AND CREATE: Sculpting a Hero Using Mixed Media

Activity Setting: classroom

Materials/Preparation:

- Clay
- Straw/leaves
- Small bits of paper and cloth

Duration: Day 2: 45 minutes

Ask the students to think of a hero in his/her life. On a piece of paper, have them answer the following questions:

- Who is your hero?
- Why do you respect him/her?
- What words would you use to describe him/her?

Discuss the students’ answers as a class.

VOCABULARY

mixed media

A UNIQUE ARTISTIC PROCESS

Sow’s work process for this artwork is unique. He gradually built the figure of Louverture using a mixture of glue, soil and other recycled or found substances. With his hands, he applied this sticky, homemade mixture onto a framework of metal, straw and jute sacking. This outer mixture hardens and becomes the solid exterior of the figure. Sow mixes pigment into his sculptural brew as he works, allowing colors to become part of the form itself. He never fully drains the containers in which he stores his sculptural mixture but instead adds more materials over time. As a result, he does not know the exact composition of his medium. He consistently resists casting his figures in bronze or otherwise standardizing their production. He never works from a model and each work is one of a kind.

Students will create sculptures of their heroes using clay and other materials (see Materials). Like Sow, the students’ sculptures can be made up of mixed media. The small found objects can be pressed into the clay or attached anyway the student sees fit, looking to Sow’s sculpture for inspiration. Encourage creativity. The sculptured heroes should convey a sense of power and leadership.

Suggest that students make their sculptures more powerful by considering the following:

- Size (make the sculpture larger)
- Action (make the figure do something important/impressive or have them stand a certain way)
- Objects (include symbols of power or heroism—flags, capes, signs, etc.)

Extension Activity:

How can you be a hero to someone else? Plan a way to serve or help someone in your class without him/her knowing.

ARTWORKS IN THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION RELATED TO THIS LESSON

Man riding a buffalo, Pende artist,
early 20th century, wood, pigment,
brass tacks (Democratic Republic of
the Congo)



Godfried Donkor, *From Slave to
Champ I*, 1992, mixed media on
paper (Ghana)



VOCABULARY

Grades 5-8

artist statement: an artist's written description of his/her artwork

haiku: a Japanese form of poetry with seventeen syllables (in three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables), typically about nature

Hudson River School: American art movement (mid-19th century) known for its romantic treatment of landscapes

palette: the range of tones/colors in an artwork

perspective: the angle from which an artwork is drawn, the impression of position

prominent: important, popular, most noticeable, easiest to see