

Educator Packet

Common Ground

African American Art from the Flint Institute of Arts,
Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, and the Muskegon Museum of Art



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**MILLER
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Kalamazoo Institute of Arts

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For Educators and Administrators: The *Common Ground* exhibition will provide students with a greater understanding of African American history and an appreciation for African American art and artists. The exhibition supports a wide variety of educational standards in both English and Art. Listed below are some of the possible English standards. The Learning Features in this packet will connect specific works of art with the supporting National Visual Art Standards. Please use this information when planning your visit.

English-State Standards

St. 2.1/3.1/4.1- Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2/3/4 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

- a. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
- b. Build on others' talk in conversation by linking their comments to the remarks of others.
- c. Ask for clarification and further explanation as needed about the topics and texts under discussion.

St. 2.2/3.2/4.2- Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media (art).

St.2.3/3.3/4.3- Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.

Introduction: About the Exhibition

Common Ground: African American Art from the Flint Institute of Arts, the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, and the Muskegon Museum of Art calls attention to some of the most important African American artists from the 1800s to the present day. The exhibition surveys the history of African American art with over 60 works of art in various mediums, including painting, sculpture, and works on paper. It is divided into five thematic areas to give a broad overview of the history of African American art that show diversity as well as commonality.

Section One: Gaining Access. This section spans the 1800s to the early 1900s century. After slavery was abolished in the mid-1800s, poverty plus the prevailing racism made it extremely difficult for African Americans to pursue creative professions. Over time, African Americans gradually gained formal access to the world of fine arts through acceptance into prestigious schools, but much of their known work did not indicate their racial heritage. These artists instead specialized in subjects favored by European and American clientele: portraiture, landscape, still life, and biblical scenes. Artists such as Joshua Johnson and Henry Ossawa Tanner are included in this section.

Section Two: New Self-Awareness. This section focuses on the 20th century. During this time period, many African American artists began to form their own artistic identity. During the Harlem Renaissance (1920s and 30s), these artists began to portray themselves, demonstrating the awakening of a black consciousness. Well-educated artists, such as Jacob Lawrence, Benny Andrews, and Hughie Lee-Smith, created new and modern images of African Americans, telling stories about African American history and experiences in their art.

Section Three: Political and Social Expressions. Artists address overcoming injustices and gaining equality in the late 20th century. Responding to the struggle for Civil Rights, African American artists created art about a myriad of subjects including racism, poverty, segregation, and social injustice. Questions explored include what it meant to be an African American in today's society. Artists such as Elizabeth Catlett, Romare Bearden, and Vincent Smith, are included in this section.

Section Four: Examining Identities. African American artists working today, such as Kehinde Wiley and Whitfield Lovell, use an interest in previous generations to examine issues related to being black in contemporary American society. These artists present perspectives that are diverse and, at times, distinctly personal and self-critical. Some artists raise topics that earlier artists considered too painful or too treacherous to explore.

Section Five: Towards Abstraction. This section highlights African American artists, such as Chakaia Booker, Willie Cole, and Richard Hunt, who explore abstraction as artistic expression. Many themes, such as the concept of home and belonging, are repeated from earlier sections, but developed through an abstract lens.

Art Keywords: Metaphor, Improvisation, Abstract, Impressionism, Landscape, Portrait, Bust, Subject, Trompe-l'oeil, Appropriation

African American History Keywords: Harlem Renaissance, Identity, Global, Inspiration, Segregation, Preconceptions, Underground Railroad

Key Concepts: Influence of African Art, Barriers to Education for African Americans, Blues/Jazz, Pride, Efforts to bring more African American Art into Museums, Adherence to Stylistic Norms of the Time

**Check out these additional resources from the
Kalamazoo Institute of Arts Library!**

Books:

<i>A History of African-American Artists: from 1792 to the Present</i>	N 6538.N5 B38 1993
<i>African American Art</i> , Art Institute of Chicago	N6538.N5 A782 1998
<i>African American Art: 200 Years</i>	N 6538.N5 A6 2008
<i>An Eye for Art: Focusing on Great Artists and Their Work</i>	N7477.N38 2013
<i>Children of Promise: African-American Literature and Art for Young People</i>	
<i>Embracing the Muse: Africa and African American Art</i>	PZ 5 .C43546 1991 N6538.N5 2004

Books on Artists:

<i>San Francisco Lithographer: African American Artist Grafton Tyler Brown</i>	N6537. B77 C48 2014
<i>Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold's French Collection and Other Story Quilts</i>	NK 9198.R56 A4 1998
<i>Talking to Faith Ringgold</i>	N 6537.R55 A2 1995
<i>We Flew Over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold</i>	N 6537.R55 A2 1995
<i>The James Van Der Zee Studio</i> , 2004.	TR 680.W48 2004
<i>Pattern ID</i> , 2010 (Kehinde Wiley and other artists)	NK 8900.A4 2010

Videos:

<i>Art 21: Art in the 21st Century</i> , Season 3, 2005	N 6512.7 A708 2005
<i>Colored Frames</i> , 2007	ND 6538.N5 C56 2007
<i>Half Past Autumn: The Life and Works of Gordon Parks</i> , 2006	PS 3566.A73 Z46 2006
<i>I Can Fly: Kids and Creativity (Faith Ringgold)</i> , 2000	BF 408.I3 2000
<i>Jacob Lawrence: The Glory of Expression</i> , 1993	ND 1839.L36 1993
<i>Kehinde Wiley: An Economy of Grace</i> , 2014.	ND 1329.W545 A4 2014

Learning Feature

Trout

Gaining Access

Initial Questions:

- 1) What do you like about this image?
- 2) What materials did the artist use?
- 3) Why would the artist choose to paint an everyday object with such detail?

Trout displays great skill and consideration. The details in the fish's flesh are carefully painted. The style is sleek and trendy for the time in which it was made. *Trompe-l'oeil* (meaning "fool of the eye" in French) is a category of still life painting that was popular in America between 1800 and 1900. The way objects seemed to pop off a surface fascinated the 19th century audience.

Brown used this popular style to display something of particular interest to him – the beauty of nature. Besides the painted wood background, the fish is the only object on the canvas. This allows us to focus and reflect on its beauty.

Additional Questions:

- 1) Does the artist provide any clues to his racial/cultural background in the painting? Why might that be important?
- 2) Why might an African American artist make this choice in 1886? Would an African American artist today make the same choice? Why or why not?



Grafton Tyler Brown.
Trout, 1886
Oil on Canvas, KIA Collection

Visual Arts-National Standards

Cn11.1.4a: Through observation, infer information about time, place, and culture in which a work of art was created.

Learning Feature

Couple, Harlem

New Self-Awareness

Initial Questions:

- 1) What is going on in this photograph?
- 2) What does the artist want you to know about this couple? How did the artist convey that information?

For over twenty years, James Van Der Zee was the most sought after photographer in New York City's Harlem neighborhood. He opened his first studio in 1917. He was fortunate that this coincided with the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance—when Harlem defined itself as a community that celebrated a distinctive African American culture. There was an explosion of work from African American artists, writers, poets, musicians and scholars. Van Der Zee secured his position as an important photographer in Harlem by making portraits that reflected his subjects' self-assertion and self-determination. This photograph was very successful in communicating ideals of the time. This confident couple has a beautiful car and expensive clothes. Van Der Zee crafted this combination of elements in order to change the perception of African Americans. He helped bring focus to a well-to-do and sophisticated African American identity.

Additional Questions:

- 1) Why might African Americans of the Harlem Renaissance want a photograph like this? What does it signify to them? What might it mean to their children and grandchildren?
- 2) Write a story about this couple.



Visual Arts-National Standards

Re.7.2.4a: Analyze components in visual imagery that convey messages.
Re7.2.3a: Determine message communicated by an image

James Van Der Zee
Couple, Harlem, 1932
Gelatin Silver Print, KIA collection

Learning Feature

Under a Blood Red Sky

New Self-Awareness

Initial Questions:

- 1) What is going on in this image?
- 2) Why do you think the artist included text with the image? What is the text about?

Under a Blood Red Sky is part of Ringgold's *Coming to Jones Road* series. This screenprint is based on a story quilt Ringgold originally made for a children's book. The story is about twenty-eight slaves escaping from slavery in the middle of the night, and their journey to freedom and the white house on Jones Road in New Jersey. Inside the yellow border is a quote from the book.

Faith Ringgold was born in Harlem in 1930 and this book was inspired after Ringgold's move from Harlem to a house on Jones Road in New Jersey. She moved there to create an art studio, but was only met with resistance from racist neighbors. She struggled for six years to obtain the permits needed before finally building her studio. Ringgold stated that "In *Coming to Jones Road*, I have tried to couple the beauty of the place and the harsh realities of its racist history to create a freedom series that turns all the ugliness of spirit, past, and present, into something livable." She has written seventeen books and painted many figural images of African American's escaping slavery and fleeing north.

Additional Questions:

- 1) Why make the sky red? Do you think this work of art would have the same message if the sky was a different color?
- 2) What do you think the artist is trying to say with this image? How does the artist use colors to convey that message?



Faith Ringgold
Under a Blood Red Sky 2000
Screenprint, KIA collection

Visual Arts-National Standards

- Re8.1.2a: Interpret art by identifying the mood suggested by a work of art and describing relevant subject matter and characteristics of form.
Re8.1.4a: Interpret art by referring to contextual information and analyzing relevant subject matter, characteristics of form, and use of media.
Re 8.1.5a: 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

Learning Feature

Bust of St. Francis of Adelaide

Examining Identities

Initial Questions:

- 1) What makes this bust (a sculpture of a head/torso) different from others you may have seen?
- 2) What might the objects symbolize? What if he were holding different objects?
- 3) What might this young man be thinking about?

Kehinde Wiley is a contemporary artist who wants to change how African Americans are pictured in art museums. Influenced by classical art and traditional portraits, he explores the pride and power that art brings to its subjects. Wiley finds inspiration for his own artworks in famous art. He then borrows, or “appropriates” these images, replacing the white subjects with contemporary African Americans. Wiley wants to break down preconceptions about the black community and hip-hop culture. He hopes that the public imagines a positive identity for his subjects because of the way he depicts them.



Additional Questions:

- 1) How would you feel if someone made a bust of you? What would you want it to say about you? What objects would you choose to represent you?
- 2) Why would the artist choose to make a sculptural bust instead of painting a portrait?

Visual Arts-National Standards

Re8.1.3a: Interpret art by analyzing use of media to create subject matter, characteristics of form, and mood.

Cn11.1.5a: Identify how art is used to inform or change beliefs, values, or behaviors of an individual or society.

Kehinde Wiley

Bust of St. Francis of Adelaide, 2006

Cast Marble Dust and Resin, Flint Institute of Art

Learning Feature

Magna Tji Wara

Toward Abstraction/Abstraction

Initial Questions:

- 1) What do bicycles represent to you? Do you ride your bike to school? Do you ride bikes with your friends or family?
- 2) How do your experiences with bicycles affect your interpretation/understanding of the sculpture?

In this artwork, Cole creates an antlered mask-like sculpture from bicycle parts.

The term “Tji Wara” comes from the Bamana people of southern and western Mali in Africa who made their Tji or Tyi (work) Wara (animal) masks to honor the mythical antelope who taught them how to grow crops. In Africa, the mask is worn with costumes. Then the costumed figures perform dances.

Cole’s Tji Wara pieces take inspiration from both the African tribal myth and the global unity of bicycles. Bicycles are elegant and speedy in races like the Tour de France, but for many of the world’s citizens, they are also one of the most practical means of transport.



Willie Cole
Magna Tji Wara, 2006
Bicycle Parts, Flint Institute of Arts

Additional Questions:

- 1) Why do you think Willie Cole made this sculpture?
- 2) Compare and contrast the Tji Wara mask (bottom) with Coles piece (top). What message is he trying to convey?

Visual Arts-National Standards

Re.7.1.3a: Speculate about process an artist uses to create a work of art.





Gallery Hours

T-W-Sa:11-5, Th-F: 11-8, Su: 11-5
Park free in our South or Lovell St. lots
(269) 349-7775

Art Classes

For kids, teens, and adults
Scholarships available for Winter 2016
Scholarship Deadline: December 8

Interactive Gallery

Lower level

Art Library

Programs for all ages

Public Tours

Free School Tours

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Planning a School Visit?

Why Visit the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts?

- Tours are free for school groups.
- Tour themes address the needs of different ages and interests.
- Educator Packets provide information and classroom connections.
- Museum tours help teachers meet GLCEs for Visual Arts, English, and more.
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Tour Times

- Tuesday-Friday, 10 am to 5 pm. Closed on Mondays.
- K-12 Tours with Hands-on project: Tuesday-Friday, 9:30-11:30 am.

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- Call **(269) 349-7775 ext. 3162**, or email michelles@kiarts.org, to schedule or for more information.
- Please schedule 4 weeks in advance.
- The KIA is handicapped accessible. Wheelchairs available upon request.
- Minimum group size is 10; maximum group size is 60.

Inspire learning, have fun, and help meet Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCE) at the KIA. Add a visit to our Interactive Gallery or a hands-on art project for even more fun.

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