

Google Arts & Culture

# Learn Together: Art As Activism



## Using the lesson plan and Google Arts & Culture resources

This lesson plan is designed to support you as you explore Google Arts & Culture stories and exhibits related to the lesson topic. The images you will see here are just a sample of the media—texts, images, audio, and video—available to you on the Google Arts & Culture website. A parent or teacher might be guiding you through the lesson, or you might choose to complete it on your own.

All you need to access the lesson is an internet connection and a web browser. You may want to take notes, whether you do that digitally or with paper and pen.

The lesson plan has an **introduction**, which will describe the topic and provide some background information that will help you understand what you are seeing, hearing, and reading. Then the lesson will take you on a journey from one **Story** or **Exhibit** to another, fill in some details along the way, and pose **questions** that will help you focus on important ideas. Some lesson plans include a **project** related to the lesson topic. All end with a **quiz** and some **ideas for exploring the topic further**.

The lesson plan includes **questions** about the main stories and exhibits, and there is also a **quiz**. You will want to write answers to the questions in a notebook or on a piece of paper. Then you can check all your answers when you've finished the lesson.

**Resources on the Google Arts & Culture** website include Themes, Stories, Museum Views, items, and images.

- ❖ **Themes** bring together stories, exhibits, collections, images, audio, and video files that relate to a topic.
- ❖ In a **Story**, clicking on the arrow on the right side of a slide will move you forward. The arrow on the left side takes you back. Sometimes, clicking on the right arrow will zoom you in on an image. Just keep clicking to keep moving forward. Audio and videos on slides will play automatically. Clicking on an image title will take you to a page with more information about it.
- ❖ In **Museum Views**, you move through a 3D space. Click to move forward. Click, hold, and move the cursor left or right to turn.
- ❖ An **item** will take you to an individual **image**, where you can zoom in and sometimes read more about the artefact.



[Mask, Sargent Claude Johnson, Adolf Born 1930/1935](#)  
Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM)

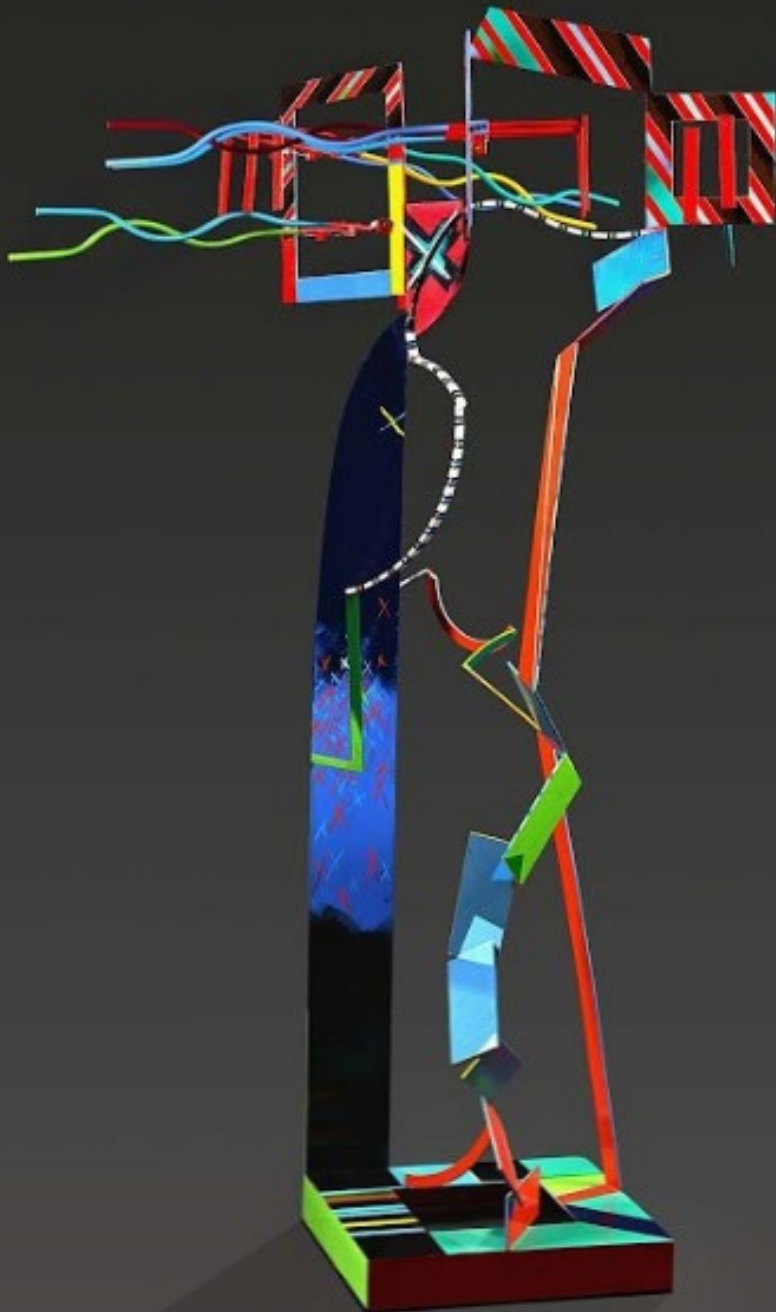
### **In this lesson, you will learn about:**

- ❖ the diverse styles of African American artists from the 1920s to the present.
- ❖ the ways in which Black artists document the lives of Black people.
- ❖ how Black artists use their art to honor their heritage, affirm their identity, and change their communities.

### **You will:**

- ❖ view some stories and exhibits about African American art and artists.
- ❖ answer some questions about what you have seen and read.

This lesson will take **30–45 minutes** to complete.



## Learn Together: Art and Activism

Succeeding as an artist can be challenging, even if you are genuinely talented. Many of the artists you'll encounter in this lesson kept roofs over their heads and put food on their table by working at menial jobs while struggling to develop their art and make their names in the art world. Even so, a notable number of Black artists have found the extra energy to become activists—people actively working to bring about changes in society.

Black artists have helped establish community art centers, led art workshops in schools, designed protest posters, and campaigned for civil rights. Through their work, Black artists record the details of Black lives, honor their Black heritage, highlight injustices past and present, and challenge the public to act. Creating art is a powerful form of activism for Black artists.

**As you view the exhibits and stories in this lesson, think about these questions:**

- ❖ What colors, shapes, lines, angles, and patterns do these Black artists use to create their art?
- ❖ What do Black artists communicate about Black identity, culture, and community?
- ❖ How do you think the artists wanted viewers to respond to their art?





Bar and Grill, Jacob Lawrence 1942  
Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM)

## African American Art: Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Era, and Beyond

The Black artists in this exhibit all reached a pinnacle of success. Their work is in the permanent collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC. The artists belonged to overlapping artistic circles. Several were part of New York's Harlem Renaissance. Some got career boosts from the WPA, a government program. Others were connected through schools, such as Howard University. Over the years, African American art has become more connected to fine arts institutions and entered global art markets. Nevertheless, the art in this show represents years of struggle for the artists.

Click [here](#) to learn about more than 80 years of African American art.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. During what years did the artists create the works of art in this exhibit?
2. What did the artists in the exhibit have in common? Choose at least two artists. Identify their shared experience, such as going to the same school, living in the same place, or painting similar subjects or in a similar style.
3. How did the artists' work reflect their experiences and viewpoints as African Americans? Describe and analyze at least two works of art from the exhibit.

To view a model of how to observe and analyze an individual painting, click [here](#).



Midsummer Night in Harlem, Palmer Hayden 1936  
The Museum of African American Art (MAAA)

## Palmer C. Hayden Collection

In many ways, Palmer Hayden (1890–1973) personified Black history. He was born in the rural South. During World War I he served in the 24th Infantry and 10th Cavalry regiments of the U.S. Army—two legendary Black units. After the war he joined the Great Migration, landing in New York City in time for the Harlem Renaissance.

As a young artist, Hayden worked extra hours to pay for art classes. This exhibit shows that he never lost that strong work ethic. Hayden never stopped trying to improve his art and to communicate his vision of Black life.

Click [here](#) to learn about the life and art of Palmer C. Hayden.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. What made it possible for Palmer Hayden to live and study in Paris?
2. What scenes from African American life did Hayden Palmer paint? Describe at least two paintings in detail, using either words or sketches.
3. How did Hayden’s scenes of Harlem compare to his scenes set in the South? Analyze how the urban and rural paintings were alike and different.





Untitled, Harlem, New York, Gordon Parks 1967  
The Gordon Parks Foundation

## Gordon Parks: A Harlem Family 1967

Gordon Parks was born in 1912 and grew up poor in segregated Kansas. He discovered photography from looking at magazine pictures. “I saw that the camera could be a weapon against poverty, against racism, against all sorts of social wrongs,” he later recalled. “I knew at that point I had to have a camera.” Parks became one of America’s finest photographers, especially known for his moving photo documentaries of African American life.

Click [here](#) to look at a powerful documentary photo essay by Gordon Parks.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. When and where did Parks shoot these photos, and when and where were the photos first published?
2. What feelings and ideas did Parks communicate with these photos? Support your analysis of the artist’s purpose with details from the photos.
3. How did Parks use the elements of photography, such as light, shadow, and shooting angles, to make his message more powerful? For extra clues about Parks’s vision, go back to the pages of stills (trial pictures printed from film), and note which pictures Parks chose for publication.

To learn about Gordon Parks, his art, and his activism, click [here](#). 7



**Echoes of Harlem, Faith Ringgold 1980, The Studio Museum in Harlem**

## A Constellation

The Studio Museum in Harlem was founded in 1968, after intense community activism made it happen. The museum describes itself as “the nexus for artists of African descent locally, nationally and internationally and for work that has been inspired and influenced by black culture.” This exhibit combines works from the museum’s permanent collection with works by new artists. The artists differ in their media and their approach, but they share a common commitment to communicating their Black identity and inspiring social change.

Click [here](#) to learn about connections between established Black artists and upcoming young stars.

Then come back to answer these questions:

1. When was this online exhibit on display at The Studio Museum in Harlem?
2. What artists painted abstract pictures composed of large, boldly colored geometric shapes? Describe the work of at least one of these artists using words or sketches.
3. What work of art do you think conveyed the most powerful message? Support your analysis and opinions with details from the art and text.

To learn about the Studio Museum in Harlem, click [here](#).



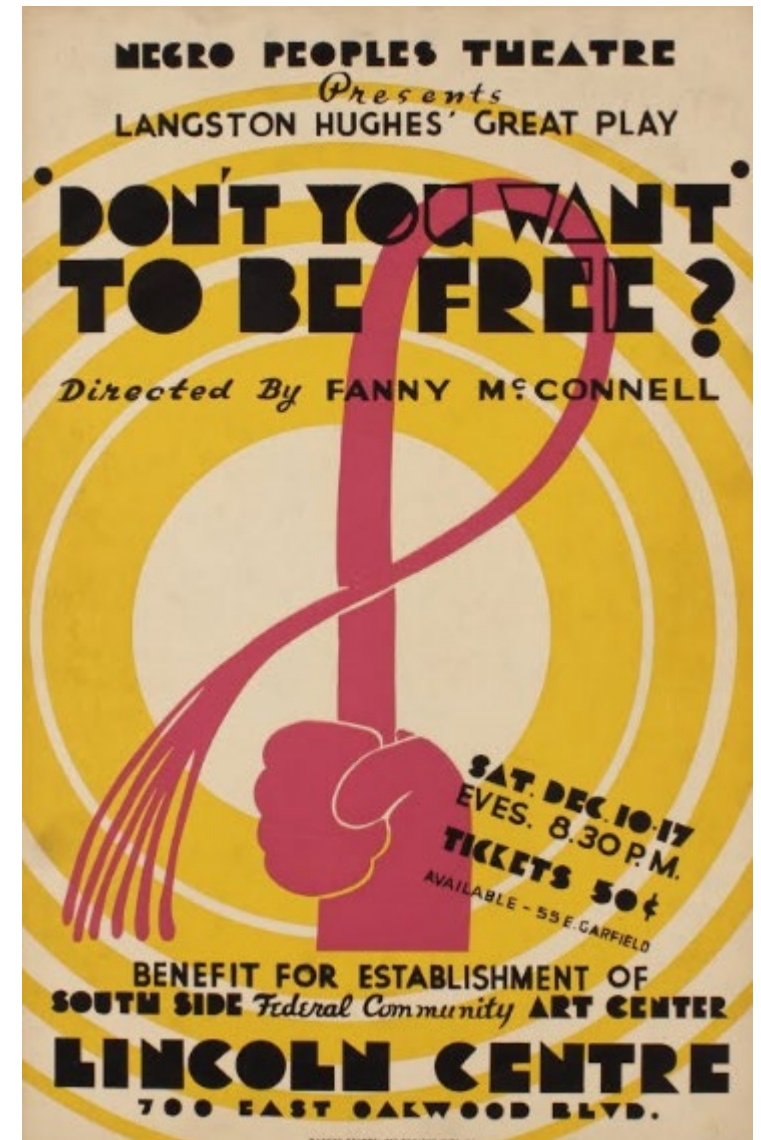
## Quiz

Read the questions and write your answer in your notebook or on a piece of paper.

1. What kind of art did James VanDerZee create?
2. What government program helped Black artists during the Great Depression?
3. What artist created twelve paintings in honor of John Henry, the legendary African American railroad man?
4. During what years did the artist paint the John Henry series?
5. What photographer described his camera as “a weapon of protest”?
6. For what national magazine did that photographer produce many of his photo essays?
7. What kind of art did Elizabeth Catlett create?
8. List at least three media in which contemporary Black artists express themselves.

## Explore Further

This lesson has given you some vocabulary to talk about Black Art in the United States. It has also introduced you to some basic ideas that are relevant to this topic. To learn more about Black history and culture, click [here](#).



[Negro Peoples Theatre Presents: Langston Hughes' Great Play, "Don't You Want to be Free?" Unknown 1938](#)  
New-York Historical Society





Can Fire in the Park, Beauford Delaney 1946, Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM)

## It's Your Turn!

In this lesson, you learned how some Black artists worked hard to develop their skills and establish their careers. Now it's your turn to start turning *yourself* into an artist. Here are two projects that will help you develop an artist's vision.

- ❖ **Flip, Quarter, and Copy.** An artist sees the world in terms of lines, angles, shapes, colors, and patterns. Copying a piece of art can help you focus on those elements. Print a picture of the art you want to copy. Then turn the picture upside down. Use a pencil and ruler to divide the picture into quarters. Then, on a piece of drawing paper, copy the art in each quarter. Use the grid lines to help you copy accurately.
- ❖ **Solve a Picture Puzzle.** [Google Arts & Culture's Puzzle Party game](#) contains dozens of puzzles that you can assemble into works of art. To solve the puzzles, you must notice shapes, lines, colors, and patterns. You can have fun while you train your artist's eye!

## Answers

### African American Art: Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Era, and Beyond

1. The exhibit contains work from the early 1920s into the 2000s. The earliest work dates from 1922 and the latest from 2002.
2. Artists shared connections to Howard University, the Harlem Renaissance, the rural South, and to art studies in Paris, Haiti, and Cuba.
3. Answers will vary. Analysis and opinions should be supported by details from the art or text.

### Palmer C. Hayden Collection

1. Hayden received prizes and other support from the Harmon Foundation.
2. Answers will vary. Descriptions should include details from the art.
3. Hayden's urban scenes show people in clubs or apartments or outside surrounded by buildings. In the scenes from the South, the people are surrounded by nature. The urban scenes are funnier, and the southern scenes are more sentimental. Both groups of paintings show the everyday lives of Black people.

### Gordon Parks: A Harlem Family 1967

1. Parks shot the photos in the summer of 1967. They appeared in the March 8, 1968, issue of *Life* magazine.
2. Parks communicates feelings of sadness and despair and hoped that viewers would respond with outrage over racism and poverty and compassion toward their victims.
3. Answers will vary but should be supported with details from the photos.

### A Constellation

1. The exhibit was on display at The Studio Museum in Harlem from November 12, 2015, to March 6, 2016.
2. Al Loving, Hugo McCloud, Torkwase Dyson, Jack Whitten. Descriptions will vary.
3. Answers will vary but should be supported with details from the art and text.

### Quiz

1. James VanDerZee was a photographer.
2. The WPA (Works Progress Administration) hired and supported Black artists during the Great Depression.
3. Palmer Hayden created twelve paintings in honor of John Henry.
4. Palmer Hayden painted the John Henry series between 1944 and 1947.
5. Gordon Parks described his camera as "a weapon of protest."
6. Gordon Parks produced many of his photo essays for *Life* magazine.
7. Elizabeth Catlett made sculptures in stone, wood, and metal.
8. Contemporary Black artists express themselves through painting, sculpture, collage, photography, dance, quilting, ceramics, and performance art.