

# 30 AMERICANS:

## Exploring Power, Race, and Identity Through Art

Created for the exhibition *30 Americans*, on view at Joslyn Art Museum from February 2 to May 5, 2019.

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**Courses / Grade:** Visual Art, English Language Arts, Social Studies / High School

**Notes to Teachers:** Determine if you will show students images of works from *30 Americans* before bringing your students for a visit. You may choose to use works by artists in the exhibition, but not the objects that will be on view at Joslyn, or you may choose to do a combination of both.

- This exhibition presents challenging themes that reflect the complexities of life in America.
- Mobile Tour. We encourage you to share this resource with your students. It is up to you whether they listen to them before, during, or after the visit.
- Joslyn asks that you wait to have your students do any in-gallery assignments until *after* the docent-guided tour so that the docents have students full attention.

### NEBRASKA CONTENT AREA STANDARDS

**K-12 Visual Arts: Students will develop and apply ideas, knowledge, and skills to create, present, respond to, and connect art with the human experience**

RESPOND FA 12.2.3 Students will use the critical process to develop and defend a logical argument supporting a contextual response to a work of art.

CONNECT FA 12.2.4 Students will synthesize understanding of contemporary, historical, and cultural context in art and life.

**LA 10.2, LA 12.2 Writing: Students will learn and apply writing skills and strategies to communicate.**

LA 10.2.2, LA 12.2.2 Writing Modes: Students will write in multiple modes for a variety of purposes and audiences across disciplines.

**LA 10.3, LA 12.3 Speaking and Listening: Students will develop and apply speaking and listening skills and strategies to communicate for a variety of purposes.**

LA 10.3.1, LA 12.3.1 Speaking: Students will develop, apply, and refine speaking skills and strategies to communicate key ideas in a variety of situations.

LA 10.3.2, LA 12.3.2 Listening: Students will develop and demonstrate active listening skills across a variety of situations.

LA 10.3.3, LA 12.3.3 Reciprocal Communication: Students will develop, apply, and adapt reciprocal communication skills.

**K-12 Civics: Students will develop and apply the skills of civic responsibility to make informed decisions based upon knowledge of government at local, state, national and international levels.**

SS 12.1.2 Students will address local, state, national or international issues and policies through meaningful civic participation.

**K-12 History: Students will develop and apply historical knowledge and skills to research, analyze, and understand key concepts of past, current, and potential issues and events at the local, state, national, and international levels.**

SS 12.4.1 (US) Students will analyze how major past and current US events are chronologically connected, and evaluate their impact(s) upon one another.

SS 12.4.2 (US) Students will analyze and evaluate the impact of people, events, ideas, and symbols upon US history using multiple types of sources.

SS 12.4.3 (US) Students will analyze and evaluate historical and current events from multiple perspectives.

SS 12.4.4 (US) Students will identify and evaluate the effects of past, current, and potential future events, issues, and problems.

## Resources:

- Book – “A Testament of Hope,” MLK Jr. 1969
- Images – [Rubell Family Collection: 30 Americans](#)
- Image – [Nick Cave Soundsuit silhouette inspiration.](#)
- Worksheet – *Art Criticism: Method for an educated discussion of a work of art* (below)
- Worksheet – *Comparing Texts: Pairing Art + Nonfiction* (below)
- Lesson Plan with Worksheet – *Exploring Juxtaposition in Two-Voice Poetry* (below)
- Article – [‘Blackish’ tackles ‘light-skinned privilege’ in an emotional episode about colorism](#), Washington Post
- Article – [Turning Discarded Items Into Art About Race in America, Randy Kennedy](#), The New York Times
- Resource – [30 Americans Mobile Tour](#), created by Joslyn
- Resource – [Absent Narratives Resource Collection](#), Minnesota Humanities Center
- Resource – [The Ballot or the Bullet, by Malcolm X](#), EdChange.org
- Resource – [Look Different \(learn more about identity-based bias\)](#), MTV
- Resource – [Blackface: The Birth of An American Stereotype](#), National Museum of African American History & Culture
- Resource – [Hairstory: A Brief History of Wigs, Nikki Mogar](#), Articulateshow
- Video – [A Live Performance of Nick Cave’s Soundsuits – Vogue](#), YouTube
- Video – [Kehinde Wiley Reimagines Classic Art | ABC News](#), YouTube
- Video – [Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic, Brooklyn Museum](#), YouTube
- Video – [The Future of Art According to Carrie Mae Weems, Artsy](#), YouTube
- Video – [Carrie Mae Weems on her series From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried, Getty Museum](#), YouTube
- Video – [Mickalene Thomas: ‘I Can’t See You Without Me,’ Broad and High](#), YouTube
- Video – [Interview with Mickalene Thomas, ICA Teens: Artist Interviews](#), YouTube
- Video – [Nina Chanel Abney | Easy to Swallow – Hard to Digest, Out of Sync - Art in Focus](#), YouTube
- Video – [Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush, Nasher Museum](#), YouTube
- Video – [Aerial America: How John Henry Became an American Folk Hero](#), Smithsonian Channel
- Video – [The Case For Nudity, The Art Assignment](#), YouTube
- Video – [Leonard Drew in “Investigation,” art21](#)
- Video – [Figuring History – “George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware,” Robert Colescott, Seattle Art Museum](#), YouTube
- Video – [Blackface: A cultural history of a racist art form, CBS Sunday Morning](#), YouTube
- Video – [Courageous Conversations: Histories, Detroit Institute of Arts](#), YouTube
- Video – [Race Riot of 1919 in Omaha-The Lynching of Will Brown, Waymaker Productions](#), YouTube
- Video – [Implicit vs. Explicit Attitudes, Erica Pernell](#), YouTube
- Site – [Malcolm X Memorial Foundation](#), 3448 Evans Street, Omaha, NE
- Preview all resources prior to sharing with students

## Vocab: power, race, identity

Art – art criticism; artwork/object/work; media; symbol; elements and principles; communicate; identity; power; composition; representation; expression; instrumentalism; social justice; activism; subject; message; influence; mixed media; assemblage; performance art

ELA – thematic; symbol; artifact; identity; relevance; justify; analysis; composition; representation

SS – race, power, class, civil rights, second class citizens; propaganda poster; expression; social justice; resistance and peaceful protest; activism; political; influence; colorism

<p><b>ANTICIPATORY SET</b> Lesson begins by prompting students to think about how they learn, develops focused learning, is engaging, activates prior knowledge, and is relevant.</p>	<p>Teachers will introduce the relevant vocabulary listed above with emphasis on <b>power, race, and identity.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow students to brainstorm the definition of each vocabulary word in their own words.</li> <li>• Teach vocab words (note the crossovers among the three disciplines)</li> </ul>	
<p><b>OBJECTIVE</b> Written in <i>student-friendly terms</i> and <i>posted in the room.</i></p>	<p><b>I will know:</b></p>	<p>how to evaluate at least one artwork that thematically represents the idea that African Americans in the United States are regarded as “second-class citizens.”</p>
	<p><b>I will be able to:</b></p>	<p>analyze how an artist uses their skill and medium to empower themselves and their communities. (Connect to “A Testament of Hope,” MLK Jr. 1969)</p>
<p><b>GRADUAL RELEASE OF INSTRUCTION</b></p> <p><u>MODELED</u> Learning goals are discussed followed by demonstration/ direct instruction.</p> <p><u>SHARED</u> Checking for understanding occurs via engagement activities. Re-teaching may be needed prior to guided practice.</p> <p><u>GUIDED</u> Leveled performance groups, rotating stations or cooperative learning/group work occur with descriptive feedback.</p> <p><u>INDEPENDENT</u> Students working independently applying what they learned from the lesson.</p>	<p><b>Procedures</b> <i>Before the Visit Lesson Sketch:</i></p> <p>Share an overview of <i>30 Americans</i> explaining that there are overarching themes of creating space for black bodies and noting power imbalances which leads to the discussion of power, race, and identity. Share Mera and Donald Rubell’s quote about how they named the exhibition while sharing the photograph of some of the artists with Glenn Ligon’s <i>America</i>.</p> <p>Play a video of Soundsuits by Nick Cave and ask students to make connections between the words they reviewed with the images they see.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask: Which of these words relate most to your interpretation of this image?</li> <li>• Allow students to record their thoughts, share them with peers, or discuss as a class.</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Considering the themes of power, race, and identity, teachers should make connections to their classroom instruction through dialogue with their students. Questions to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What makes you feel powerful? Powerless?</li> <li>• How do you see yourself empowering others?</li> <li>• In what ways do you make others feel powerful? Powerless?</li> <li>• Why is it important to talk about race?</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Select one or more of the paired artworks and discussion questions that fit with your curriculum.</li> </ol> <p><u>Art to Consider–Pair A:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nick Cave’s Soundsuits, 2008</li> <li>• Kehinde Wiley’s <i>Sleeping</i>, 2008 (or a work not on view) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does each artist represent the black male body?</li> <li>• What message or meaning about the black body do you think is within each work?</li> <li>• How do you think power, race, and identity are reflected in these works?</li> <li>• Show another video of Cave’s Soundsuits activated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What is power in the performance?</li> <li>○ When do you feel anonymous?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

The gradual release cycle may be repeated and adjusted throughout the lesson to ensure mastery of content through multiple re-teaching opportunities.

Descriptive feedback, formative and summative assessments are embedded throughout the gradual release of instruction.

The amount of time varies depending upon the lesson.

\*Achievement will decrease if independent occurs directly after modeled without shared and guided.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How can anonymity be used to disguise identity? (i.e. Social Media)</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Art to Consider–Pair B (nudity in this pairing):</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carrie Mae Weems, <i>From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried</i> series 1995–1996</li> <li>• Mickalene Thomas, <i>Baby I Am Ready Now</i>, 2007 (or a work not on view)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does each artist represent the black female body?</li> <li>• What are these portraits’ similarities and differences?</li> <li>• How do you think power, race, and identity are reflected in these works?</li> <li>• Share the video <i>The Future of Art According to Carrie Mae Weems</i> to discover her thoughts on power.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Art to Consider–Pair C:</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nina Chanel Abney, <i>Class of 2007</i>, 2007</li> <li>• Henry Taylor, <i>Long Jump by Carl Lewis</i>, 2010             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you think power, race, and identity are reflected in these works?</li> <li>• How does each artist take on stereotyping African Americans?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Art to Consider–Pair D:</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lorna Simpson, <i>Wigs (Portfolio)</i>, 1994</li> <li>• David Hammons, <i>Esquire (or John Henry)</i>, 1990             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you think power, race, and identity are reflected in these works?</li> <li>• Is there power in a woman’s hairstyle? In hair expressions in general? Is there power in hiding one’s hair?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Art to Consider–Pair E (nudity in this pairing):</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leonard Drew, <i>Untitled #25</i>, 1992</li> <li>• Carrie Mae Weems, <i>From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried</i> series 1995–1996             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you think power, race, and identity are reflected in these works?</li> <li>• How is possible for these two works to be related?</li> <li>• What media did each artist choose to create their work?</li> <li>• How does that choice inform the meaning of these works?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>3. Select one or more artworks that confront challenges—some devastating—which the black community has faced in the last two centuries that fit with your curriculum. <i>These works will likely drive deeper conversations so you may choose to start these using the “After the Visit” prompts to prepare your students.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robert Colescott, <i>Passing</i>, 1982</li> <li>• Gary Simmons, <i>Duck, Duck, Moose</i>, 1992</li> <li>• Rodney McMillian, <i>Untitled</i>, 2005             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you think power, race, and identity are reflected in these works?</li> <li>• Is this art? Why or why not?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
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- McMillian may be difficult to understand simply from an image; Joslyn docents will work with students to discuss the absent narrative that the artist allows the viewer to consider with this work.

*During the Visit:*

Provide a graphic organizer for students to complete as they view. Do this after the docent-guided tour. They must pick 2-4 works and answer:

- What do you see?
- What does it look like?
- How do you respond to the art, positively or otherwise?
- How does it connect to the other things you have seen?

Optional: Critique a work that was not part of the tour – Describe, Analyze, Interpret, Evaluate. (use worksheet below)

*After the Visit:*

Return to the art in the classroom for deeper discussion. For a guided activity, you may want to use the worksheet *Comparing Texts: Pairing Art + Nonfiction* for any of the pairs of art with literature your students are currently reading.

Pair A

- Cave (Soundsuit with flowers) and Wiley
  - Review the 1992 Los Angeles riots and how Cave responded by creating Soundsuits.
  - Discuss how both artists used flowers—one as perhaps a symbol of peaceful resistance and the other to deconstruct the threat of black masculinity.
  - What do you think the role of flowers plays in each work?
  - Cave hides the body whereas Wiley brings it forward to note the absent narrative of the black experience. Discuss the idea of absent narratives.
  - Use the lesson plan with worksheet *Exploring Juxtaposition in Two-Voice Poetry*

Pair B

- Weems and Thomas
  - Review the scientific aspect of the original photographs of slaves that Weems used in this series. Talk about how it demonstrated the lack of power these humans had.
    - Listen to Stop #13 of the mobile tour
  - Connections can be made to Henrietta Lax.
  - Share quote by Mickalene Thomas and ask students to respond to it. “What’s happening in art and art history right now is the validation and agency of the Black female body. We do not need permission to be present.”
  - Share the *Interview with Mickalene Thomas* note her connection to Weems.

Pair C

- Abney and Taylor
  - Both works highlight the prison industrial complex.

- With Abney, she shows what happens white power imbalances go to the extreme.
- With Taylor, the viewer sees the version of the American Dream (indicated by the white picket fence) while prison looms. It's as if black males have a "choice" between athletics or prison.
- Take time to discuss racial stereotyping and its pernicious effects.
- Connect to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s letter from the Birmingham Jail.
- Then make connections to Omaha-born Civil Rights Leader, Malcolm X. Glenn Ligon's *Untitled (Malcolm X)*, 2008 is in the exhibition. Remind students of how this artist approached this work and how it is the result of giving children coloring books of civil rights leaders. Consider the idea that Ligon says each generation makes the hero they need.
  - Who is the hero of their generation?
  - Is there any respectful or disrespectful aspect of the way Malcolm X was painted? Explain.
  - Refer to Malcolm X's speech "The Ballot or the Bullet."

Pair D

- Simpson and Hammons
  - Take the opportunity to study hair throughout the ages from ancient Egypt's history of hair and shaving to Victorian wigs to today—taking note of its power.
    - Listen to Stop #5 of the mobile tour
    - How would your identity be impacted by wearing the wigs Simpson photographed?
  - Share the story of John Henry, who was a slave and competed against a machine building the railroad.

Pair E

- Drew and Weems
  - Review how the works are connected—how labor-intensive it was for Drew to transform the cotton harkened back to the "old days" of slaves picking cotton; connect to slaves in Weems portraits.
  - Discuss the different processes each artist employed to create the works in *30 Americans*.
  - Why was it important for Weems to add words to the portraits?

Now that students have seen these works in person, ask them again, is this art?

- Colescott's *Passing*—use this as an opportunity to discuss blackface. Talk about its history and connect it to headlines from today.
  - How do we confront stereotypes?
  - How does the artist?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simmons—listen to the mobile tour stop #11. Then use the opportunity to examine racism and make the connection to Omaha’s history with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the lynching of Will Brown this year.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why is it important to understand Omaha’s history?</li> <li>• Why is it important to acknowledge racism that happened in our past as well as today?</li> <li>• Consider showing <i>Courageous Conversations: Histories</i> from the Detroit Institute of Art to help students dialogue.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• McMillian—have students share the possible narratives they discussed while on the docent-guided tour. Consider that crafting someone else’s story is a tool of power.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does this rug tell us about who lived in the space? Consider your implicit vs. explicit attitudes.</li> <li>• How do your initial responses compare to ones after you’ve had time to consider more—like financial stability.</li> <li>• Why is it important to understand what implicit biases—especially our own—affect? Discuss how to take action to reduce these biases.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<p><b>SUMMARY</b> Teacher reviews learning goal and students are given time to summarize and reflect on their learning. Include a brief writing activity whenever possible.</p>		<p><i>Reflection:</i> Provide a method for students can use to fashion a Soundsuit for themselves in reflection. It could be an outline of a Soundsuit or perhaps they fold paper to create inside/outside paper sculpture where students write. Writing prompts: What were positive reactions? Negative reactions? Dig deeper—what bothered you and why. What challenged your preconceived notions about art, concepts, and themes in the exhibit.</p>	
<p><b>COURSE WORK</b> (complete outside of class, assignments recorded by students):</p>		<p>Labels – have students consider their own labels as well as ones they give others as they learn about colorism. Consider if labels categorize them as positive, negative or both.</p> <p>Give them <a href="#">Hank Willis Thomas’ <i>Beach and Glow 1975/2008</i></a>, 2008 Let them know it was an advertisement; ask them to consider for what product before revealing it was for skin lightening.</p> <p><a href="#">‘Blackish’ tackles ‘light-skinned privilege’ in an emotional episode about colorism</a> – read article in <i>Washington Post</i> and reflect on it or study colorism more. Connect to Bollywood actors. Have students write about labels... Are labels good or bad? What are some examples?</p>	
<p><b>ADDITIONAL LEARNING GOALS</b></p>		<p><i>Students will identify, in various objects, common symbols of race relations in the United States and analyze their historical origins and/or relevance.</i></p> <p><i>Students will analyze Cave’s soundsuits for thematic representation of historical events related to power struggles in the United States as they relate to race and class structures.</i></p> <p><i>Students will identify at least one object that thematically connects to each side of the Civil Rights Movement– non-violent and violent– and then justify their choice through analysis of the artwork.</i></p>	

## Additional Information about the Artists and Artworks from Exhibition Text

### 30 AMERICANS

*As the show evolved, we decided to call it 30 Americans “‘Americans,’ rather than ‘African Americans’ or ‘Black Americans,’ because nationality is a statement of fact, while racial identity is a question each artist answers in his or her own way, or not at all. And the number 30 because we acknowledge...that this show does not include everyone who could be in it.”*

-Mera and Donald Rubell

*30 Americans* is the first major exhibition at Joslyn to survey the work of contemporary African American artists. Drawn from the Miami-based Rubell Family Collection, this exhibition features paintings, works on paper, sculptures, installations, and videos created over the past three decades. Since 1964, Mera and Donald Rubell have built one of the world’s largest privately-owned, yet publicly-accessible collections of contemporary art. *30 Americans* was first staged in 2008 at the Rubell’s warehouse in Miami and has traveled to museums throughout the United States, with each venue given the opportunity to curate a unique exhibition from the collection’s extensive holdings.

This exhibition explores the evolving roles of black subjects in art since the 1970s. Calling attention to some of the most pressing social and political issues facing our country today through painting, the thirty featured artists interrogate historical and current narratives of racial inequality; the construction of racial, gender, and sexual identity; and the pernicious underpinnings and effects of stereotyping. Central to each of these themes is a broader consideration of the power dynamics and imbalances that perpetuate racially-motivated discrimination and oppression. Many of the artists in this exhibition interrogate how African Americans are represented, politicized, and contested in the arts, media, and popular culture.

Rather than making a defining statement about what “African American Art” is, this exhibition serves as a point of departure for exploring the array of experiences and realities that shape what it means to be black. *30 Americans* offers a challenging—and at times disconcerting—account of race in our country, and explores how our shared history as Americans continues to shape the ways we interact with and engage our fellow citizens today.

### Nina Chanel Abney

**b. 1982, Chicago, IL**

***Class of 2007, 2007***

Nina Chanel Abney’s paintings delve into uncomfortable narratives surrounding race and discrimination. The final work Abney completed as a graduate student, *Class of 2007* explores two seemingly unrelated issues: the disproportionately low number of students of color in art schools versus incarceration rates in America, where blacks are five times more likely to be imprisoned than whites. In response to her classmates’ claim that they had trouble engaging with her work, Abney “filtered them through [her] vision,” switching their races, putting them in prison jumpsuits, and recasting herself in a position of power as a correctional officer. The painting received mixed responses when it was unveiled—shock, anger, and amusement—leading Abney to assert that she had, for the first time, successfully achieved what she calls the “perfect balance: work that is conceptual, humorous, and visually pleasing,” yet also challenging to her viewers.

### Glenn Ligon

**b. 1960, Brooklyn, NY**

***Untitled (Malcolm X), 2008***

*“Each generation makes the Malcolm X [it] needs.” -Glenn Ligon*

*“Any depiction of a black person...was a little revolution because it meant that our histories, stories, images, and heroes mattered.”*

-Glenn Ligon

This portrait of Omaha-born Civil Rights leader Malcolm X belongs to a series Glenn Ligon completed in 2008 using illustrations from Civil Rights-era coloring books that honor notable black figures. Reflecting on that historical moment, Ligon has mused that “any depiction of a black person...was a little revolution because it meant that our histories, stories, images, and heroes mattered.”

To make this body of work, Ligon “collaborated” with a racially-diverse group of school children, whose pictures the artist faithfully translated into large paintings. Ligon was fascinated with this process, noting that the children approached their task without concern for the subjects’ identities or roles in American history. While the framework for this project may be playful, Ligon’s message is sobering: we must reimagine the heroes of the past to address the demands of today.



## GALLERY PANEL

Until the post-World War II era, black subjects were almost entirely absent from the history of art, a byproduct of enduring racism and economic factors in both Europe and America. Many of the artists in this exhibition have dedicated their careers to countering this injustice. Kerry James Marshall, whose work is on view in the adjoining gallery, has cited the difficulty of creating a space for black bodies in art, explaining: “We could not refer to our role in art history, because we did not play a role in that history.”

While much of the work in *30 Americans* was made during the last twenty years, the show also includes a selection of historical objects created by individuals who helped forge a path for a younger generation of African American artists. This influence is evident in the work of Robert Colescott, Barkley L. Hendricks, and Jean-Michel Basquiat, who prioritized black subjects and directly addressed issues that impact communities of color.

***“What’s happening in art and art history right now is the validation and agency of the Black female body. We do not need permission to be present.”***

—Mickalene Thomas

The underrepresentation of female voices in the arts is well documented, and black women have been subjected to particular silencing. Author Toni Morrison has noted, in the greater battle for equality, the black woman has had “nothing to fall back on; not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality, she may very well have invented herself.” The female artists included in *30 Americans* embody this spirit of self-definition by addressing concerns specific to black women and by depicting subjects who are not ashamed of their femininity or the color of their skin.

Mickalene Thomas and Lorna Simpson mine the tension between Eurocentric beauty standards and African Americans’ desire to shape their own identities. Hair is an especially contentious aspect of this enduring friction. During the Civil Rights movement, natural hair became a symbol of African American freedom and has remained central to black women’s pursuit of self-determination. Sporting a full afro, the woman lounging in Thomas’ *Hotter than July, 2005*, exudes confidence and invites the viewer to behold her. Taking a more conceptual approach, Simpson turns a critical eye toward the impact of the multi-billion dollar beauty industry on how women perceive and present themselves to the world.

## Nick Cave

**b. 1959, Jefferson City, MO**

### Soundsuits

Nick Cave began creating his Soundsuits during the 1992 Los Angeles riots that erupted following the acquittal of the four police officers who had savagely beaten Rodney King during an arrest the previous year. Composed of found materials and scaled to the artist’s body, this early work initially represented Cave’s attempt to protect black bodies, however he soon embraced the suits’ ability to obscure race, gender, and class, and encourage unbiased interactions.

Regal and imposing, the sequined suit references objects associated with power, such as religious headdresses, Ku Klux Klan hoods, and missiles. The extravagant floral armature of the second suit is paired with patterned leggings that recall the hippie subculture of the 1960s, when the flower became a symbol of peaceful resistance. A recurring theme in Cave’s work, the power of protest is central to the performances he has staged that bring the Soundsuits to life.

## Kehinde Wiley

**b. 1977, Los Angeles, CA**

### *Sleeping, 2008*

Kehinde Wiley is known for his grand, Baroque-inspired canvases that celebrate and glorify black subjects. *Sleeping* finds splendor in its monumental scale and elaborate floral backdrop. A recurring motif in Wiley’s work, flowers suspend his sitters in time and space and counter the stereotype that black masculinity is threatening. The latter concern has been especially pressing for Wiley, who has noted that when he began painting, his only model for portraits of black men were mug shots. The artist has reflected on the difference between those images and traditional European portraiture, explaining:

***“I noticed the difference between the two: how one is positioned in a way that is totally outside their control, shut down and related to those in power, whereas those in the other were positioning themselves in states of stately grace and self-possession.”***

Inspired by [The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb, 1520-1522, by German artist Hans Holbein the Younger](#) this painting is one of several canvases featuring prone bodies that Wiley created to elevate his subjects into a realm of stately grace.

## Lorna Simpson

**b. 1960, Brooklyn, NY**

***Wigs (Portfolio), 1994***

Lorna Simpson interrogates many facets of womanhood, with a particular focus on forces that impact notions of beauty and femininity. *Wigs (Portfolio)* builds on the recurring theme in Simpson's oeuvre of hair and its role in identity construction. Depicting wigs the artist purchased at a shopping mall, this installation calls attention to how hair is manipulated to conform to normalized views of beauty. Simpson printed on felt to emphasize this point—produced from sheep's wool, the felt, like the wigs, has been processed to serve another purpose, masking its original form. Presenting the wigs from behind, Simpson involves her viewers by placing them in the position of wearing the hairpieces. She further encourages the audience to reflect on their personal experiences by intermingling the wig prints with text panels that recount stories about the obstacles and challenges associated with cultivating physical appearance.

## GALLERY PANEL

The use of found materials in painting and sculpture has been common practice since the early 1900s. By repurposing objects that once served entirely different functions, artists draw on their own lived experiences while reframing how we perceive things that have been discarded, overlooked, and forgotten. David Hammons and Mark Bradford employ this approach to reflect on the often harsh realities of living in an urban environment. Gathering materials from city streets, such as shredded billboard paper, rocks, and alcohol bottles, Hammons and Bradford play the roles of ethnographers, studying society through the lens of its detritus. Shinique Smith applies the same principle to consumer goods, explaining that she is fascinated by the “really basic stuff” that shapes our everyday lives. Scouring laundromats, charity bins, and thrift stores, Smith conceives new stories for objects that have been cast aside.

Purvis Young was inspired by his upbringing in a poor, urban community to employ discarded materials in his work, although he was driven as much by necessity as by aesthetic concerns. Unable to afford either canvas or other traditional materials, the artist painted on objects he discovered on the streets or scavenged from abandoned buildings, such as wooden doors. During his life, Young installed these paintings throughout his neighborhood, providing local residents the opportunity to see their underrecognized stories and struggles reflected in art.

## Henry Taylor

**b. 1958, Oxnard, CA**

***The Long Jump by Carl Lewis, 2010***

Henry Taylor's paintings reflect a democratic worldview. Featuring the artist's signature expressive handling of paint, Taylor describes the musculature of a lifted arm, a warm smile, and the contour of a manicured afro in a few quick brushstrokes. This loose approach to image-making lends itself to the collage aesthetic of a painting such as *Miss Leah*, which reads as a snapshot of Taylor's experiences with the title character, patched together from the artist's memories, found images, and lore. In focusing on *Miss Leah's* portrait while leaving the other subjects anonymous, Taylor expresses his particular affection for a longtime friend following her death.

*The Long Jump by Carl Lewis* superimposes the likeness of the decorated track and field Olympian over an unsettling backdrop. In the lower third of the canvas, Taylor offers a version of the “American Dream”—a yard, white picket fence, and sidewalk reserved for hopscotch—while looming beyond is another reality that is all too common for minority youth. While this painting celebrates Lewis' accomplishments, it also points to the “choice” that many young African American men make between athletics and prison, both systems that exploit black bodies.

## David Hammons

**b. 1943, Springfield, IL**

***Esquire (or John Henry), 1990***

Upon moving to New York City in the mid-1970s, David Hammons began creating sculptures from the detritus of urban African American life, including chicken bones, basketball hoops, and alcohol bottles. In repurposing these objects, the artist examines the roots of racial prejudice and attempts to upend stereotypes surrounding black culture. *Esquire* pays homage to mid-nineteenth century African American folk legend John Henry, a slave who competed against a steam-powered hammer designed to build railroads. Henry is said to have defeated the hammer, but died afterward from exhaustion.

Hammons gathered the hair clippings for this unassuming sculpture from a barbershop in Harlem, a historically African American neighborhood in New York. After affixing the hair to a head-shaped stone he had found on the street, Hammons returned to the barber and asked him to give the sculpture a haircut, a performative act that illuminates the artist's assertion that “*magical things happen when you mess around with a symbol.*” In titling this work with a term of respect once reserved for high society Anglo men in the United Kingdom, Hammons honors Henry's ascendance from an oppressed laborer to a hero.

## GALLERY PANEL

For generations, the scarcity of black artists meant that narratives about black experiences were either shaped by others or simply left untold. Recognizing that crafting someone else's story is a tool of power, contemporary African American artists call attention to issues that impact communities of color and give voices to those who have been silenced by racism. For Carrie Mae Weems, this means not just foregrounding the black body, but also bestowing her subjects with humanity and dignity. Her photographic series appropriates images of slaves to underscore the power inherent in using a camera to articulate a particular worldview. Xaviera Simmons also exploits the perceived relationship between photography and authority, yet in turning the camera on herself, she asserts her ability to write her own story. Like Robert Colescott, she uses extreme blackface in an effort to divest it of its power to fuel negative perceptions about people of color. Kara Walker, whose installation occupies the opposite wall, similarly references entrenched stereotypes about the appearance and behavior of African Americans. By fostering responses of discomfort—and even shock—these artists encourage viewers to seek out the roots of their own explicit and implicit biases.

### Carrie Mae Weems

**b. 1953, Portland, OR**

***You Became a Scientific Profile/An Anthropological Debate/A Negroid Type/& A Photographic Subject, 1995–96***  
**from the series *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried***

Known for her work in photography and video, Carrie Mae Weems mines historical and contemporary black American experiences. These works part of the series *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried, 1995-1996*, are comprised of images of slaves from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that the artist found in university and museum archives, this body of work examines how photography has been used to perpetuate racial prejudice and social injustice. After photographing and enlarging her source materials, Weems printed the images through colored filters, framed them in circular mats—a nod to the camera lens—and inscribed each work with a phrase that imagines how society would have perceived the depicted individuals. Weems explains:

***“When we’re looking at these images, we’re looking at the ways in which Anglo America—white America—saw itself in relation to the black subject. I wanted to intervene in that by giving a voice to a subject that historically has had no voice.”***

### Leonardo Drew

**b. 1961, Tallahassee, FL**

***Untitled #25, 1992***

Leonardo Drew's abstract, sculptural installations reconfigure simple materials, such as wood, iron, paper, and mud, using processes typically associated with decay or destruction, including oxidation, burning, and cutting. Drew made *Untitled #25* while living in Manhattan in the early 1990s. Having no car or driver's license, the artist used a dolly to transport cotton bales—each weighing close to five hundred pounds—along city streets to his studio, where he learned that the only way to break down the bales was with scissors. The irony of engaging in intense labor to transform raw cotton into a usable material did not escape Drew, who noted that making this sculpture “brought the toil and the sweat of the old days.” The architectural quality of *Untitled #25* is common to Drew's work, a vestige of the blocky apartment buildings in the housing project where he was raised.

### Robert Colescott

**b. 1925, Oakland, CA; d. 2009, Tucson, AZ**

***Passing, 1982***

An influential figure for many younger artists, Robert Colescott employed satire and parody to create discomfiting paintings and drawings that baldly confront racial discrimination, sexuality, and societal norms. Colescott's rebuttal of political correctness is most evident in his liberal use of blackface, a performative trope dating to the mid-nineteenth century that reinforces negative stereotypes about communities of color. More than simply provoking his viewers, however, Colescott sought to reclaim and highlight the absurdity of those stereotypes, famously stating,

***“We’ve already come to understand that it’s about white perceptions of black people. And they may not be pretty. And they may be stupid. We didn’t make up these images. So why should we take the heat? But it’s...the satire that kills the serpent, you know.”***

In these drawings, the artist irreverently toys with skin color, using charcoal to illustrate extreme examples of blackface and shading other figures to suggest that race is a nebulous designation, a poignant assertion for Colescott given his Creole heritage.

## GALLERY PANEL

***“Sometimes people say “You don’t act black.” “You don’t talk black.” What is that? What does that mean? Is there a way to be a “black man?”***

—Hank Willis Thomas

Stereotyping has long been used as a tool to oppress minority groups. During colonialism and slavery, violence against black bodies was often justified by framing people of African descent as uneducated and unsophisticated. These narratives have continued to fuel prejudice against black and brown communities worldwide, robbing people of their human and civil rights. In the United States, stereotypes targeting African Americans have often been overt, such as those found in minstrelsy, blackface, and other entertainment that mocked and belittled people of color. Hank Willis Thomas, Renée Green, and Pope.L address the more pernicious nature of generalizations regarding race, gender, and sexuality found in contemporary media and popular culture. Working with a combination of image and text to unearth how stereotypes are shaped, perpetuated, and wielded to assert power over specific groups of people, they reveal how deeply embedded these tropes are in our collective conscious and unconscious behaviors.

### **Gary Simmons**

**b. 1964, New York, NY**

***Duck, Duck, Noose, 1992***

Gary Simmons considers the history of racial hierarchies in the United States, often through the lens of popular culture, including cartoons, film, and music. In his early work, Simmons recast symbols associated with oppression, as in this seminal installation from 1992. *Duck, Duck, Noose* is a jolting reminder of the terrorism that the Ku Klux Klan enacted against communities of color from the late 1880s through the 1960s, during which time an estimated 3,500 African Americans were lynched. By referencing the childhood game “Duck, Duck, Goose,” Simmons questions whether racism is learned or innate and suggests that racism can fall on its victims swiftly. This proposition resonates sharply today, as a young generation of White Nationalists have thrust their views into the mainstream political dialogue.

### **Rodney McMillian**

**b. 1969, Columbia, SC**

***Untitled, 2005***

Working across media, Rodney McMillian embraces the stories of people who “hover outside the mythology of the American Dream.” Drawn to discarded materials, McMillian repurposes objects that are easily overlooked, such as the rug in this untitled installation. Mottled with stains and fraying at the edges, the carpet appears unremarkable—even repulsive—yet for McMillian its value resides in its ability to speak to a specific lived experience. The artist explains:

***“[my materials] bear the traces of their owners, which suggests that the objects were used beyond the condition that a more financially secure individual would choose to endure.”***

In elevating these post-consumer goods to the status of art objects, McMillian creates a space for those whose narratives are often left untold.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**ART CRITICISM***Method for an educated discussion of a work of art*

Selected Artwork/Artist: \_\_\_\_\_

**DESCRIBE****Inventory the artwork**

List everything you see – even if you don't know what it is. Facts only.

**ANALYZE****Study the composition** (arrangement of the elements in a work of art)Describe the elements of art in your work:

Shapes/Forms

Lines

Color

Value (lightness or darkness)

Texture

Space (foreground, middle ground, background)

Questions:

What is the most important art element?

What draws your eye into the artwork?

Did the artist provide variety? Explain.

## INTERPRET

### Identify the meaning

Use your description and analysis to determine what it tells you about the human experience (life).

#### Questions:

What is the mood of the artwork?

What clues does the artist give you for the artwork's meaning?

What does the artwork mean to you?

## EVALUATE

### Judge the success

Using the previous steps—describe, analyze, and interpret—determine what you think about this artwork. How does the information affect your initial thoughts about this artwork?

#### Questions:

Do you like this artwork? Explain

Does this artwork inspire you or spark your imagination? Explain.

What will you remember about this artwork?

### Comparing Texts: Pairing Art + Nonfiction

Text #1:	Text #2:
Describe/sketch the piece of art you selected.	Summarize the nonfiction text you selected:
What themes do you identify in this text? What questions are raised by the text?	What themes do you identify in this text? What questions are raised by the text?
How are these texts related, connected or similar? Consider tone, audience, purpose, theme, subject matter, etc.	
How are these texts different? Where do they “disagree”?	
What is gained from reading these texts together? What do you understand or discover by viewing these texts together that you wouldn’t be able to if you looked at these texts separately?	

## Lesson Plan: Exploring Juxtaposition in Two-Voice Poetry

Age: 5<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup>

Duration: 1-3 class periods, depending on implementation

Created by Holly Murphy

### Learning Goals:

I can create a product that represents my understanding of a given theme.

I can demonstrate an understanding of juxtaposition and tone by writing from two different voices.

I can utilize the writing process to craft a poem I'm proud to share with others.

**Materials:** Colored pencils, markers, unlined white paper, *Optional:* Mixed media materials, glue

### Procedure:

1. After viewing Nick Cave's *Soundsuits* exhibit, conduct a class discussion to identify prominent themes, such as the contrast between our inner identities, which we aim to protect/guard, and social performance, which we share with others. Feel free to have students brainstorm in groups or journal about ways people typically mask vulnerabilities in an effort to protect themselves.
2. Share with students the definition of the term juxtaposition. If desired, show students several examples, such as a child chasing a butterfly in a nuclear war zone. Connect juxtaposition to the avant-garde display in Cave's *Soundsuits*.
3. Ask students to consider their inner conflict and create a visual representation of it, inspired by Cave's *Soundsuits*, on the student handout, which contains two concentric circles. Provide student work time.
  - a. Extension Activity: Have students create a larger representation on poster paper and provide mixed media supplies.
  - b. Extension Activity: Conduct a gallery walk once visual representations are complete.
4. Present two-voice poetry to students. Read a model or example if desired. Explain the structure of two voice poems: the outer columns focus on writing from a perspective in a way that highlights differences while the inner column speaks from both perspectives. If desired, model the organization by writing an example as a class which compares and contrasts the perspective of a student with that of a teacher.
5. Allow students to write their own two-voice poem inspired by the visual representation they created earlier. Use the table provided on the student handout to aid in organization if desired.
  - a. Extension Activity: Have students write a series of two-voice poems.
  - b. Extension Activity: Conduct a mini-lesson on tone and voice prior to writing so that students can implement their understanding of tone when writing from multiple perspectives.
  - c. Extension Activity: Have students present their poem and visual representation product to their peers.
  - d. Extension Activity: Have students write an author's note which reflects on the construction of their products and provides relevant context for interpreting the work.

### Collections Connection:

Have students create a visual representation of the internal conflict faced by an individual from a text in their current *Collections* unit. An accompanying author's note can provide textual evidence to support their evaluation of the character. For example, after reading "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," students may want to create a representation of MLK's personal struggle with the contrast between his goals for progress and how he was viewed by those in power; after creating a representation, students could explain how King responded to these external pressures using textual evidence from the reading.

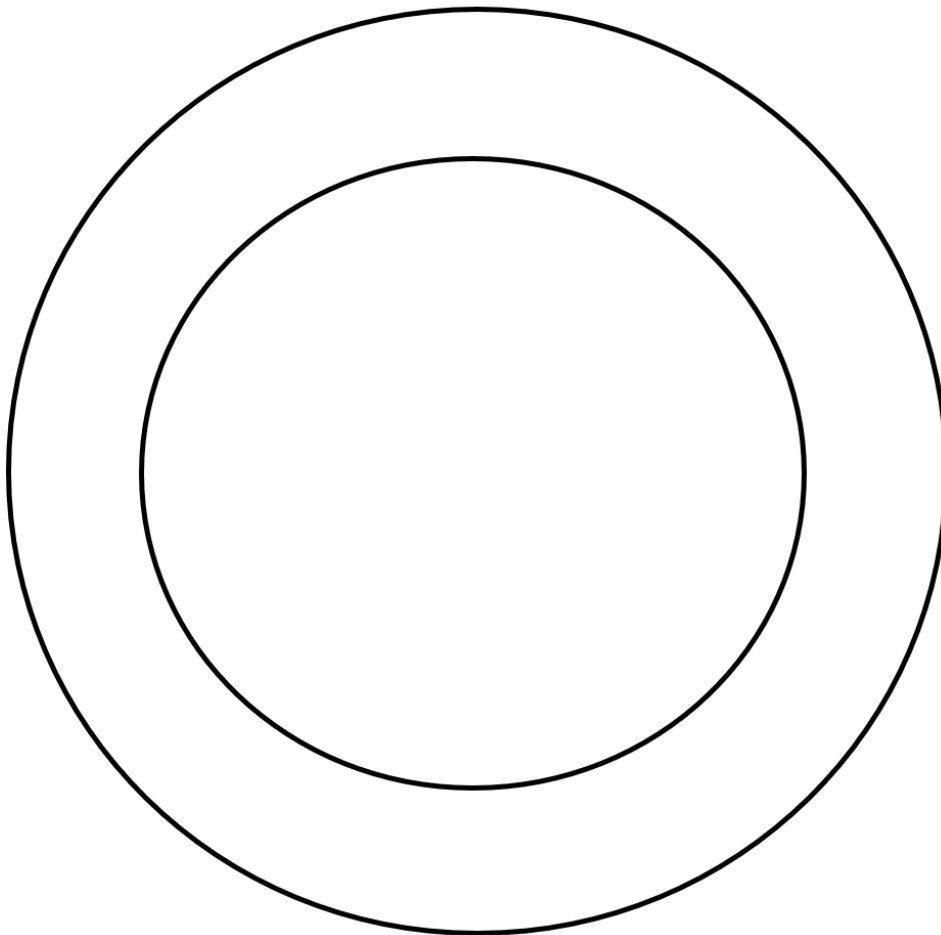


## Exploring Juxtaposition in Two-Voice Poetry

The conflict between our inner selves and our social identities is not a new one. From worrying about our what we're wearing to preparing for a job interview, internal struggle is a universal experience.

**Can you brainstorm some ways in which a person can struggle with showing people their true identities by guarding their inner thoughts and feelings?**

For this writing activity, you will be inspired by Nick Cave's *Soundsuits* exhibit. **Juxtaposition** describes the effect of placing two highly contrasting ideas or items closely together, which highlights their differences. Notice the **juxtaposition** presented when comparing the Soundsuits (the exterior) with the people who wear them (the interior). To prepare for writing, you are tasked with creating an image of **juxtaposition** to represent your personal conflict with your interior and exterior identities.



**Directions:** Use the two concentric circles here to complete this task.

- Use the outermost circle to represent your exterior. How are you seen by other people? What do you want other people to think when they interact with you? This section can include ideas related to your physical appearance.
- Use the innermost circle to represent your interior. What about yourself do you keep hidden from others until you know them well? What do you not share easily with others? What do you want to protect? This section can include ideas about your guiding beliefs, values, hopes, and fears.
- Express your ideas related to the questions above **however you choose**. They are no rules other than a commitment to creating a product that truly represents your identities in a way that **juxtaposes** them. If you would like to create a

bigger representation on another piece of paper, feel free to use the circles here as a place to sketch and brainstorm before moving on to a larger piece of paper. *If you would like to make the representation without the circle image to guide you, feel free to craft your representation in a different way.*

- When you have completed your visual representation of your personal Soundsuit, think about these two identities. If they could speak to one another, what would they say? Write a two-voice poem to represent this exchange. Use the backside of this sheet to write your rough draft.

Use this column to write from the <b>Exterior Perspective:</b>	Use this column to write from <b>Both Perspectives:</b>	Use this column to write from the <b>Interior Perspective:</b>

**When you are finished** writing your two-voice poem, consider how your visual representation of your Soundsuit and your poetry relate to one another. Reflect on how this activity impacted your understanding of your identity, as well as your understanding of **tone, voice, and juxtaposition**.