

# FOLK ART REVEALED

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*A Middle and High School Curriculum Guide*



AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

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## COVER IMAGES:

### **THE ASCENSION OF SIMÓN BOLÍVAR ON MOUNT JAMAICA (detail)**

Everald Brown (1917–2002)

Jamaica; 1983

Oil on canvas; 20 ½ × 37 ½"

Gift of Maurice C. and Patricia L. Thompson, 2003.20.8

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

### **BASEBALL PLAYER SHOW FIGURE (detail)**

Samuel Anderson Robb (1851–1928)

New York; 1888–1903

Paint on wood; 76 × 21 ¾ × 24"

Gift of Millie and Bill Gladstone, 2008.16.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

### **AT BATTLE OF DROSABELLAMAXIMILLAN. SEEING GLANDELINIANS RETREATING VIVIAN GIRLS GRASP CHRISTIAN BANNERS, AND LEAD CHARGE AGAINST FOE (detail)**

Henry Darger (1892–1973)

Chicago; mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper; 19 × 47 ¾"

Museum purchase, 2002.22.1b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz

### **J.B. SCHLEGELMILCH BLACKSMITH SHOP SIGN AND WEATHERVANE (detail)**

Artist unidentified

Southeastern Pennsylvania; mid-nineteenth century

Iron with traces of paint; 28 ⅜ × 42 × ¼"

Gift of Ralph Esmerian, 2005.8.61

Photo courtesy Sotheby's, New York

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Dear Educator,

I am delighted to introduce you to *Folk Art Revealed: A Middle and High School Curriculum Guide*, produced by the education department of the American Folk Art Museum. Folk art captures the heart of American culture. It speaks to our diversity of heritage and shared national experience, individual creativity, and community values.

Relevant to a broad range of cultural identities, folk art illuminates our nation's history in a unique way. *Folk Art Revealed: A Middle and High School Curriculum Guide* is an educational resource designed to enhance learning across the curriculum, nurture self-expression, and introduce young audiences to a lifelong appreciation of the arts.

The American Folk Art Museum is the premier institution devoted to the aesthetic appreciation of traditional folk art and creative expressions of contemporary self-taught artists from the United States and abroad. The museum preserves, conserves, and interprets a comprehensive collection of the highest quality, with objects dating from the eighteenth century to the present. Its collection includes more than five thousand artworks spanning three centuries of American visual expression, from compelling portraits and dazzling quilts to powerful works by contemporary self-taught artists in a variety of mediums. The museum serves as an important source of information and scholarship in the field and is committed to making the study of folk art a vital part of the curriculum for New York City schools. The resources presented in *Folk Art Revealed: A Middle and High School Curriculum Guide* provide a way of looking into America's past and future.

Welcome to folk art.

Sincerely,

Maria Ann Conelli

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM**

Dear Educator,

Thank you for your interest in the American Folk Art Museum and the “Folk Art Revealed” curriculum guide. *Folk Art Revealed: A Middle and High School Curriculum Guide* is a comprehensive resource for teachers wishing to enrich their students’ exploration of American history and culture. Developed collaboratively by museum educators and classroom teachers, this guide brings to life the relevance of American folk art to middle- and high school-age students.

Folk art is uniquely positioned to speak directly to adolescent and teenage viewers. While students are often intimidated by masterpieces in museums dedicated to exhibiting artwork that seems completely removed from their own lives, the collection of the American Folk Art Museum includes works by artists with no formal training—ordinary people who create *extraordinary* things. These objects simultaneously inspire awe and offer solid connections to students’ interests and experiences, offering engaging doorways to history and culture.

The American Folk Art Museum is available as a resource for teachers and students. Information about its changing special exhibitions and permanent collection installation, “Folk Art Revealed,” can be found in the school programs brochure or on the museum’s website, [www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org). To receive a copy of the current school programs brochure, please e-mail [grouptours@folkartmuseum.org](mailto:grouptours@folkartmuseum.org). We look forward to seeing you and your students in the museum!

Sincerely,

Sara Lasser

**ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM**





# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

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Featuring objects from the American Folk Art Museum that reflect American history and culture, this curriculum guide is designed to be readily adapted by educators. As we embarked on the development of the guide with the help of an advisory committee made up of four fantastic New York City middle and high school teachers, we quickly discovered that although all four teach similar content in their classrooms, each has a distinct approach to engaging students in the material. In response to this realization, we have created a guide that we hope you will adapt, borrow from, and build on to meet the needs of your specific classroom environment and individual teaching style.

We have a number of hopes and objectives for this curriculum guide. One aim is to empower educators to teach from images presented in these pages and to encourage the teaching of American history through an exploration of works of folk art. Another is to encourage students to ask critical questions when looking at visual art as a primary source. We hope that this material will support dynamic learning in your classroom and help your students draw parallels with subjects they are already studying.

Selected collaboratively by museum educators and our advisory committee, the images in this guide complement topics and subject areas relevant to middle and high school students. After the introductory lesson plan—**WHAT IS FOLK ART?**—the curriculum is divided into five main sections, each of which relates to themes students explore in grades 6–12: **NATIONAL IDENTITY, PERSONAL IDENTITY, ECONOMY, SPIRITUALITY, and RESPONSES AND REACTIONS**. Some artworks represented in the guide relate to more than one thematic section; we encourage educators to adapt lessons to take advantage of these overlaps.

For each work of art in the curriculum, you will find a color reproduction, background information on the object and its creator, and a list of resources that help illuminate the work. In addition, each lesson plan contains questions to spark discussion, separated into three categories:

- **QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING** ask students to observe each object in great detail and then work together to decode what they see.
- **QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION** tie in threads of background information on the object to further the looking process.
- **QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT** help students identify and understand the cultural climate in which the object was born. Unlike Questions for Careful Looking, they encourage students to consider their responses independent of the artwork. Depending on the contextual information your students already have about the originating time and place of the object, you might want to ask these questions before or after students discuss what they see in the image.

In addition to the questions we pose about each object, we have included suggestions for related activities and projects for students.

We hope that in conjunction with these lessons, you will bring your students to the museum to see the artworks in real life, as the first-person experience cannot be replicated.

But whether in the museum or in your classroom, we are certain that you will discover new and inspiring ways to integrate folk art into your teaching to make American history and culture come alive for your students.



# TEACHING FROM IMAGES AND OBJECTS

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Object-based learning, particularly from museum collections, activates students' powers of observation, interpretation, and analysis. At the American Folk Art Museum, our teaching methodology is inquiry-based and conversational. Through facilitated discussions about objects, students construct their own interpretations of the works, thus establishing ownership of their ideas and cultivating confidence and pride in learning. As students link their observations and interpretations to those of their peers and bring their prior knowledge into the conversation, the class develops a collective body of knowledge, while individuals hone their critical thinking skills.

We recommend a few techniques that will help you guide students through the meaning-making process as you facilitate discussions about works of art:

- **INVITE STUDENTS TO LOOK CAREFULLY.**  
Start by asking students to take a minute to look silently at the work of art. This process might at first be uncomfortable for students not accustomed to silent looking, but it will become easier with each new image. This invitation to look is essential; we are rarely encouraged to *slow down* to make observations. By spending a few moments together examining the image, students will start the lesson with a shared experience.
- **USE REPETITION IN YOUR QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING.**  
Repeat questions you have posed to your students with different objects so they can anticipate the questions and feel comfortable responding. Repetition will not only help students better understand questions they might not have understood the first time; it will also provide them with a series of useful starting-point questions for when they approach an image on their own.
- **ENGAGE STUDENTS THROUGH OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS.**  
Open-ended questions create space for multiple viewpoints and more than one “right” answer. In addition, open-ended questions encourage discussion as opposed to single-word answers. When asked to respond to an open-ended question, students are in effect invited to participate and share their ideas without fear of giving the “wrong” answer.
- **PARAPHRASE ALL STUDENTS' COMMENTS.**  
As students offer their ideas and interpretations, paraphrase their comments, thus ensuring that the whole group has heard each student's ideas. In addition, by voicing a student's comment in different words, you validate that comment and let the student know that not only have you heard the idea, you have understood it. Be sure to paraphrase all comments in a way that does not suggest that one comment is more valuable than another.
- **INTRODUCE NEW VOCABULARY IN AUTHENTIC WAYS.**  
As you paraphrase student comments, attempt to balance vocabulary that students already have with new words. Vocabulary is best acquired when presented in context, and a discussion about a work of art in which everyone is focused on a shared stationary image provides a perfect opportunity for this experience.

- **ASK STUDENTS TO SUPPORT ALL OBSERVATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS.**

Ask students to back up their inferences and ideas with evidence from the work of art, thus legitimizing their interpretations. Ask for visual evidence even when an interpretation seems obvious.

- **POINT TO ELEMENTS OF THE IMAGE TO WHICH STUDENTS REFER.**

If you have the opportunity to project an image of a work of art, point to areas of the picture that students address in their comments. This helps ground each comment and ensures that all students can see the element being discussed.

- **WEAVE BACKGROUND INFORMATION INTO THE DISCUSSION IN APPROPRIATE AND AUTHENTIC WAYS.**

As students develop their interpretations about the work of art, you might want to share threads of background information with the group. Information about the object should further the looking process, contextualize the artwork for students, or appropriately challenge the group to push the limits of their thinking.

At the beginning of each lesson, you will find Questions for Careful Looking. At times these questions relate specifically to details in the work of art, while in other instances they have a more general scope—and may appear in multiple lessons in this curriculum guide. Both types of questions are equally important in the discussion, but the latter—the more general question—is critical in order for all possible observations to be heard. However, if a general discussion seems to have tapered off, simply asking for further detailed observations can revitalize conversation and allow students who haven't yet shared ideas to find new layers and meaning in the object and lead the group in new directions.

By beginning your discussion of an artwork with concrete observations, you ensure that all students have the same starting point. As the discussion progresses, students will naturally apply a historical context to the work; with markedly increasing ease, they will piece together what they see with what they know. At the same time, they will gain confidence in asking questions about what they see and seeking the information to answer them. As a result, students will use what they have taken from the conversation and apply it to the ensuing project. In the process, students will also gain experience scrutinizing primary sources and works of art in general, while at the same time cultivating their visual literacy and critical thinking skills.

# NEW YORK STATE LEARNING STANDARDS

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The lessons in this curriculum guide address a variety of New York State Learning Standards and all strands of the New York City Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts. Because lesson plans are designed to be adapted and tailored by educators, they are not accompanied by individual lists of standards addressed. The standards listed below reflect those inherent in many of the lessons and programs in the museum.

## THE ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS

**STANDARD 1:** Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts and participate in various roles in the arts.

**STANDARD 2:** Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in arts in various roles.

**STANDARD 3:** Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.

**STANDARD 4:** Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

## SOCIAL STUDIES LEARNING STANDARDS

**STANDARD 1:** Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.

**STANDARD 2:** Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in world history and examine the broad sweep of history from a variety of perspectives.

**STANDARD 3:** Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the geography of the interdependent world in which we live—local, national, and global—including the distribution of people, places, and environments over the Earth’s surface.

**STANDARD 4:** Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of how the United States and other societies develop economic systems and associated institutions to allocate scarce resources; how major decision-making units function in the United States and other national economies; and how an economy solves the scarcity problem through market and nonmarket mechanisms.

**STANDARD 5:** Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the necessity for establishing governments; the governmental system of the United States and other nations; the U.S. Constitution; the basic civic values of American constitutional democracy; and the roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship, including avenues of participation.

## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS**

**STANDARD 1:** Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.

**STANDARD 2:** Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.

**STANDARD 3:** Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.

**STANDARD 4:** Students will read, write, listen, and speak for social interaction.

## **MATHEMATICS, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY LEARNING STANDARDS**

**STANDARD 1:** Students will use mathematical analysis, scientific inquiry, and engineering design, as appropriate, to pose questions, seek answers, and develop solutions.

**STANDARD 3:** Students will understand mathematics and become mathematically confident by communicating and reasoning mathematically; by applying mathematics in real-world settings; and by solving problems through the integrated study of number systems, geometry, algebra, data analysis, probability, and trigonometry.

## **NEW YORK CITY BLUEPRINT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE ARTS**

**STRAND 1:** Artmaking

**STRAND 2:** Literacy in the Arts

**STRAND 3:** Making Social, Cultural, and Historical Connections

**STRAND 4:** Community and Cultural Resources

**STRAND 5:** Careers and Life-Long Learning in Visual Arts



# **LESSON PLANS**

## **GRADES 6-12**

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# WHAT IS FOLK ART?

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Comprising more than five thousand works created by untrained artists from the 1700s to the present day, from furniture and pottery to drawings and paintings, the collection of the American Folk Art Museum celebrates the artistic achievements of “ordinary” people. By its very nature, folk art is at the heart of the cultural expression of all people and speaks directly to the diversity of our heritage and shared national experience. Because the objects in this curriculum guide were made, used, and appreciated by many different communities set apart in culture and time and place, they inspire awe yet feel familiar and connected to the immediate interests and daily experiences of a diverse range of viewers. In selecting artworks for discussion, we have tried to preserve that sense of both awe and familiarity.

Folk art lends itself to a variety of approaches. As rich primary sources, works of folk art provide a window into the lives of individuals and communities throughout history. Similarly, many of the objects have a narrative quality that invites exploration and discovery. In addition, the stories of the self-taught artists themselves fuel the imagination; students will learn how others have been compelled to create as they expand their understanding of artistic processes and materials.



**WHAT IS FOLK ART?:** Students will examine several examples of folk art created in different time periods with a variety of materials. By comparing and contrasting them and learning about their makers, students will begin to develop an understanding of the qualities associated with folk art. This lesson will likely require more than one class period.





## GOLD TOWER

Eugene Von Bruenchenhein (1910–1983)

Milwaukee; 1970s

Paint on chicken and turkey bones; 47 × 6 × 7"

Gift of Lewis B. Greenblatt, 1999.22.1

Photo by John Parnell, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Eugene Von Bruenchenhein and his wife, Marie, were rarely financially secure, often living on the economic edge in Wisconsin. They frequently ate takeout fried chicken and saved the remaining bones for Von Bruenchenhein's creative constructions. With the bones, the artist built miniature towers, spires, and chairs, gluing them together into impossible structures and painting them in pastel and metallic palettes, further strengthening them. Unfathomable and beautiful, they are some of the most singular works in twentieth-century American sculpture.

Von Bruenchenhein's creative output—which also includes paintings, ceramic and concrete sculptures, and photography—was not fully understood or appreciated until after his death, but not because the artist chose to remain unknown. He tried, unsuccessfully, to attract the attention of clients, galleries, and museums. He certainly valued his artwork and held himself in high esteem: in a hand-tinted photographic self-portrait, the shirt he wears bears the bold declaration "Time Produced None Better."

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Hollander, Stacy C., and Brooke Davis Anderson.

*American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

John Michael Kohler Arts Center. *Eugene Von*

*Bruenchenhein: Obsessive Visionary*. Sheboygan, Wis.:

John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 1988.

Longhauser, Elsa, and Harald Szeemann. *Self-Taught*

*Artists of the 20th Century: An American Anthology*. San

Francisco: Chronicle Books in association with

Museum of American Folk Art, 1998.





## CROSS RIVER ALBUM QUILT

Mrs. Eldad Miller (1805–1874) and others

Cross River, New York; 1861

Cotton and silk with wool embroidery; 90 × 75"

Gift of Dr. Stanley and Jacqueline Schneider, 1980.8.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Album quilts grew out of an earlier fad for autograph albums. By the 1840s, women were signing quilt blocks, rather than pages, and sewing them together for a variety of reasons: to raise money for a charitable cause, to honor a distinguished member of the community, or simply as an expression of friendship. The eleven women who signed this quilt were probably all related and lived within a mile or two of one another. They ranged in age from 15 to 55. This quilt is dated “November 1st 1861,” some six months after the Civil War began. One block features a flag that is embroidered with the word *union* and is appliquéd with stars. In June 1861, *Peterson's Magazine* printed a similar illustration in color for a red, white, and blue quilt, captioned “A Patriotic Quilt.” The magazine was trying to inspire readers to express their Union sympathies in quilts. The inclusion of this block points to patriotic feelings among the makers of the quilt, and perhaps a war-related purpose behind its production.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Hollander, Stacy C., and Brooke Davis Anderson.

*American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln: [www.quiltstudy.org](http://www.quiltstudy.org)

Lavery, Paula. “Many Hands: The Story of an Album Quilt.” *Folk Art* 18, no. 1 (spring 1993): 52–57.

National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C., “Quilts, Counterpanes & Throws: A Selection from the National Collection”:

[www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections/quilts](http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections/quilts)

The Quilt Index: [www.quiltindex.org](http://www.quiltindex.org)

Warren, Elizabeth V., and Sharon L. Eisenstat.

*Glorious American Quilts: The Quilt Collection of the Museum of American Folk Art*. New York: Penguin Studio in association with Museum of American Folk Art, 1996.





## MAN WITH A PLOW

Bill Traylor (1852/56–1949)

Montgomery, Alabama; c. 1939–1942

Poster paint and pencil on paperboard; 15 × 25 ¾"

Promised gift of Ralph Esmerian, P1.2001.267

Photo courtesy Sotheby's, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The renowned self-taught artist Bill Traylor made art only for three years, from 1939 to 1942, by which time he was in his 80s. He had spent almost his entire life at the George Traylor Plantation in Benton, Alabama, first as a slave, then—after emancipation—as a freed farm worker. After more than seventy years, Traylor eventually left the plantation and worked for a short time in a Montgomery factory. It wasn't until the age of 84, when he was no longer able to work, that he began to draw and paint. In the mere three years of his career as an artist, between 1939 and 1942, Traylor produced about fifteen hundred works on paper.

Traylor recorded the images of his life sitting on a busy Montgomery sidewalk, across the street from a hotel. His inspirations were the memories he had of specific people or animals, as well as the people he saw every day in the city, such as the travelers carrying suitcases coming in and out of the hotel. Still other subjects were the inventions of his own imagination. Simplified forms, often built from geometric shapes, also characterize Traylor's artistic style. The figures were stripped of detail and thus made into bold graphic symbols.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Arnett, Paul, and William Arnett, eds. *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*. Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 1999.

Hollander, Stacy C. *American Radiance: The Ralph Esmerian Gift to the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

Hollander, Stacy C., and Brooke Davis Anderson. *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

The Library of Congress's American Memory website, "Voices from the Days of Slavery" online archive: [www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/vfssp.html](http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/vfssp.html)

Longhauser, Elsa, and Harald Szeemann. *Self-Taught Artists of the 20th Century: An American Anthology*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books in association with Museum of American Folk Art, 1998.

Maresca, Frank, and Roger Ricco. *Bill Traylor: His Art, His Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991.

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library, "The Abolition of the Slave Trade: The Forgotten Story": [abolition.nypl.org](http://abolition.nypl.org)





## MINIATURE DRESSING BUREAU

Attributed to Hanson B. Y[on]ungs (c. 1858–1878)

Conesville, New York; 1872–1878

Paint on cigar-box wood, cigar-box cardboard, and mirror; 15  $\frac{1}{8}$  × 7  $\frac{3}{4}$  × 4  $\frac{1}{2}$ "

Promised gift of Ralph Esmerian, P1.2001.88

Photo by Stephen Donelian, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Recycling has been an enduring aspect of folk art from the colonial period through the present. In its construction from discarded material, this miniature bureau beautifully exploits a by-product of the tobacco industry that linked growers and distributors. The bureau is fashioned from cigar boxes, a resource widely available as a result of the Revenue Act of 1865, which mandated that cigars be packaged in wooden boxes and that these boxes could not be reused. One of the boxes that make up the bureau bears an impressed identification mark from between 1872 and 1880.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Cerny, Charlene, and Suzanne Seriff, eds. *Recycled, Re-Seen: Folk Art from the Global Scrap Heap*. New York: Harry N. Abrams with Museum of International Folk Art, 1996.

Hollander, Stacy C. *American Radiance: The Ralph Esmerian Gift to the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.



E. BROWN '83



## THE ASCENSION OF SIMÓN BOLÍVAR ON MOUNT JAMAICA

Everald Brown (1917–2002)

Jamaica; 1983

Oil on canvas; 20 ½ × 37 ½"

Gift of Maurice C. and Patricia L. Thompson, 2003.20.8

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Venezuelan Simón Bolívar was one of South America's greatest leaders. Living a life dedicated to Latin American unity and independence from Spain, Bolívar (1783–1830) was known as “El Libertador” because of his military victories over the Spaniards in Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama.

The Jamaican artist Everald Brown paints this rich symbolic portrait of the freedom fighter perched atop a mountain on the lush island of Jamaica, which occupies the center of the composition. The fertile island is crested by two embracing birds framed by a white arm and a black arm, each hand holding a rose bouquet as an offering of hope for freedom, equality, and liberation. Bolívar was in exile in Jamaica in 1814–1815 after successfully defeating Spanish forces in Colombia. He straddles the small country and is surrounded by the natural riches of the island, holding a chili pepper in one hand and a coconut in the other. A cock is crowing into the general's ear; the message the rooster delivers (of liberation? of freedom?) travels through Bolívar's head to the right of the painting in the shape of a yellow cloudlike form that lands on another land mass, the west coast of Africa, then a region of colonization and oppression. Africa is anthropomorphized, depicted as a mass of people in huts, while Jamaica is full of lush foliage and native plants with a few figures hiding in the landscape.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Biblioteca Virtual de Simón Bolívar (Virtual Library of Simón Bolívar): [www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/7609/eng/toc/html](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/7609/eng/toc/html)



## HORSE AND RIDER WEATHERVANE

Artist unidentified

New England; c. 1870

Cast iron with traces of paint; 22 1/8 × 42 1/2 × 1"

Promised gift of Ralph Esmerian, P1.2001.328

Photo © 2000 John Bigelow Taylor, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Weathervanes are among the earliest sculptural forms produced in America. Historically, they have served two main purposes. As wind indicators and weather predictors, they were relied on by farmers, sailors, doctors, and others whose occupations were affected by outdoor conditions. As visual elements silhouetted against the sky, they achieved prominence as religious symbols, trade signs, and bold decorative gestures. The earliest weathervanes were usually handcrafted silhouettes or three-dimensional forms made of wood or metal.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Bishop, Robert. *American Folk Sculpture*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1974.

Bishop, Robert, Jean Lipman, and Elizabeth V. Warren. *Young America: A Folk-Art History*. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1986.

Hollander, Stacy C. *American Radiance: The Ralph Esmerian Gift to the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

Maresca, Frank, and Roger Ricco. *American Vernacular*. Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2002.

Ricco, Roger, and Frank Maresca, with Julia Weissman. *American Primitive: Discoveries in Folk Sculpture*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988.

# WHAT IS FOLK ART?

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## INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Have students discuss the word *art*. What is art? Where do you find it? What is its purpose? What makes something art? Generate a written list of agreed-upon criteria for *art*.
- Have students discuss the word *folk*. What does this word mean? Generate a written list of agreed-upon criteria for *folk*.
- What do you think of when you hear the words *folk* and *art* together? Based on these ideas, what might folk art be? How is it a unique term? Generate a written list of agreed-upon criteria for *folk art*.
- *Notice*: Where is the overlap in our two lists (*art/folk art*)? Are they different? What are some of the important similarities and differences that you can identify?
- *Consider*: The exact definition of folk art can be nebulous and is often contested; it is sometimes difficult to say whether or not a specific object is a work of folk art. However, by learning more about an artist's biography, we can often better determine if it falls into the folk art genre.

## ACTIVITY: ADOPT AN ARTWORK

1. Divide students into six small groups and distribute one of the six color reproductions to each group. Students will be responsible for challenging their assumptions by interpreting the work of art together, investigating the known information, and presenting the artwork to the class.
2. Ask students to look carefully at their group's image, without reading the background information, and discuss whether or not they think it is a work of folk art. Did a self-taught artist create this? What visual clues inform your opinion? For each image, remind students to consider the materials used, the story being told, and *how* the artist tells that story.
3. Have each group read the background information included with their reproduction. After learning background information about each artwork and its creator, has your opinion changed about whether or not it is folk art? Why or why not?
4. Have each group share their findings with the class. Does the group believe this image a work of folk art, or is it better classified as another genre? Ask students to defend their points of view, and open the conversation to a class-wide discussion about each object.
5. At the end of each group's presentation, reveal that *all* of the images they have explored are considered folk art; each was made by a self-taught artist. Ask the class to consider the great diversity in the works of art despite a singular definition of folk art.
6. Introduce the following ideas as common themes in the field of folk art, allowing students to consider which of the artworks viewed possess these qualities:
  - **COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY**: Many folk art objects are made collaboratively or as a cultural expression of a community. Some quilts, for example, are physically

constructed by multiple people working together, while Shaker rugs are created according to a prescribed cultural tradition.

- **INDIVIDUALITY:** Many works of folk art are made by a single, highly self-aware artist. Many are audience-savvy, and several have enjoyed recognition in their lifetime.
  - **UTILITY:** Many works of folk art are functional objects, such as pieces of furniture or quilts, that are unique and beautiful but intended for practical use.
  - **SYMBOLISM:** Regardless of the time period in which they are working, folk artists often imbue their work with rich symbolism that reveals cultural norms and trends.
  - **TRADITIONAL OR CONTEMPORARY:** Folk art transcends different time periods. The collection at the American Folk Art Museum, for example, contains works made in the 1700s all the way to the present.
  - **DOCUMENTATION:** Folk art is often created in order to record information, tell stories, or convey ideas about an individual, family, or community.
  - **ARTIST UNIDENTIFIED:** Many works of folk art are unsigned, leaving few clues as to the identities of their makers. In some cases, scholars are able to identify artists based on visual clues, genealogical records, and other factors.
7. Ask the class to find examples of these characteristics in each of the previously viewed works. Are there some artworks that embody more than one of the characteristics? How has the class definition of folk art been reshaped since the beginning of the discussion?
  8. Finally, have the class consider each object as a primary source that can tell us about the time and place in which it was made. What story does each object tell? Consider the materials the artist has used, what the object documents, and any narrative depicted in the object.



# NATIONAL IDENTITY

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In a country variously described as a “melting pot” and a “salad bowl,” works by self-taught artists chart the myriad notions of American national identity that have flourished in the United States since colonial days. National symbols, depictions of important historical events, and legacies of cultural heritage in folk art reveal a diverse and rich history.

The collection of images in this section reflects a sense of national community that has shifted and morphed as the culture has grown and changed. The idea of community, one of the major guiding principles of the museum collection, comes alive in this section.



**FREEDOM'S HANDMAIDEN:** Discover the rich connections between some ancient Greek symbols and the symbols used to express American beliefs and values. Explore cross-cultural connections and consider how some images and values that reflect popular culture, art history, and language are in constant flux, while others persist over centuries.



**FREEDOM'S GATE:** This decorative gate was the first object acquired for the museum's permanent collection. Constructed in 1876, it was probably created to celebrate our country's centennial. Consider what it has meant to be American since the country's founding in 1776.



**A MAP OF MANIFEST DESTINY:** Examine a map quilt that conveys messages of American expansionism during the 1800s. Discuss Manifest Destiny and explore potent symbolic systems to employ in an original interpretive map of a familiar place.



**AN EDITORIAL IN IMAGES:** Investigate an iconic painting in which self-taught artist and native New Yorker Ralph Fasanella illustrates his view of the political climate of 1960s America. Learn about important figures in the Civil Rights movement and explore the artist's editorial style.





## LIBERTY NEEDLEWORK

Lucina Hudson (1787–?)

South Hadley, Massachusetts; 1808

Watercolor and silk thread on silk with metallic thread and spangles; 18 × 16"

Museum purchase with funds from the Jean Lipman Fellows, 1996, 1996.9.1

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

After the War of Independence, symbolic elements played a meaningful role in creating a unified American identity. Americans were actively encouraged to bring these symbols into their homes through the decorative arts, thereby reinforcing a sense of participation in the formation of the new American nation. By the time the allegorical figure of Liberty was introduced as a needlework project under the tutelage of Abby Wright (1774–1842) in South Hadley, Massachusetts, she had undergone a series of transformations. Once represented as an American Indian queen, Liberty now appeared in the guise of a charming young woman with ringlets, fashionably garbed *à la grecque* (in the Greek style), and carrying a liberty pole topped by a *pileus*, a close-fitting cap symbolizing liberty that was worn in ancient Rome. This needlework was made by Lucina Hudson of Oxford, Massachusetts, whose father had fought in the Revolutionary War.

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# FREEDOM'S HANDMAIDEN

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is going on in this picture?
- What can we say about how it was made?
- What can we say about the setting in which this scene takes place?
- What can we say about the figure?
- What symbols can you find?

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Lady Liberty was a common motif in early American domestic decorative arts. Do you feel this image reflects patriotism? Why or why not?
- Though *Liberty Needlework* was created as a school exercise, like other works of folk art it reflects social and cultural norms of the larger society in which it was created. Referring to details in the image, describe what views on race, class, and gender you see in this American object from 1808.
- One can draw many parallels between American and ancient Greek political ideologies. How are these connections represented in this image?
- In early nineteenth-century America, Lady Liberty was a popular allegorical image of freedom and rebellion from colonial rule. Do you think this figure is an effective symbol? How does this depiction compare with others you have encountered, such as the Statue of Liberty?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- This work is laden with American symbols of prosperity: a cornucopia, a flourishing landscape, and a growing town in the background. In 1808 America, what recent events would have made these symbols particularly appropriate?
- What did “liberty” mean in America in 1808, when this work was created, and for whom was liberty intended? How have notions of liberty changed or been challenged since the creation of this needlework?
- Needlework pieces such as this one were often created by girls as part of their school curriculum. What educational opportunities were available to young women in 1808? How did these opportunities compare to those of young men?
- What symbols of liberty or freedom are common today? Where do we usually find these symbols? (Examples: bumper stickers, yellow ribbons to support troops in combat.)

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students draw, paint, or collage successive images that they feel represent what the United States has stood for throughout its history. How do these images compare with

*Liberty Needlework*? How does each of the images reflect the time period in which it was produced?

- Have students explore connections between ancient Greek and American ideologies. How are ancient Greek values and symbols reflected in *Liberty Needlework*? How has the meaning of the symbols changed from an ancient Greek context to a present-day American one? Where can we find Greek symbolism or values throughout art history, popular culture, or language today?
- Ask students to design their own “liberty flag,” making it appropriate for a contemporary context and incorporating three distinct symbols of their choosing. After students have developed their designs, ask them to discuss how the images they have chosen reflect nationality, politics, current events, and gender.





## FLAG GATE

Artist unidentified

Jefferson County, New York; c. 1876

Paint on wood with iron and brass; 39 ½ × 57 × 3 ¾"

Gift of Herbert Waide Hemphill Jr., 1962.1.1

Photo by John Parnell, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

*Flag Gate* evokes the American spirit and exemplifies the widespread expressions of patriotism at the time of the nation's centennial. It is thought to have been inspired by the centennial celebration and may have been made for installation on Robert Darling's farm on Pulpit Road in the town of Antwerp, Jefferson County, New York. The wooden flag has thirty-seven white stars on one side and thirty-eight on the other (the thirty-eighth state, Colorado, entered the Union in 1876). Its red and white stripes are wavy, as if the flag were rippling in a breeze.

*Flag Gate* illustrates the multiple layers of meaning that may be encoded into folk art. It is a utilitarian object, it demonstrates its maker's participation in a national experience, and it also expresses its maker's individual creativity.

### RESOURCES

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[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

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# FREEDOM'S GATE

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- How does this compare with the American flag we know today?
- What can we say about how this was made?
- What can we say about the way this was used?
- What more can we find?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- By placing this gate at the entrance to his farm, what ideas did its owner convey to those passing by?
- This gate features thirty-seven stars on one side and thirty-eight on the other, perhaps because Colorado entered the union in 1876, when the gate was made. In what other ways does *Flag Gate* represent how the flag and nation have changed over the years?
- Why is the American flag, in particular, highly recognizable around the world? What other flags evoke meaning, and what stereotypes or associations come along with national symbols such as this?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- What are the purposes of a gate?
- What message does this image carry in the United States? Abroad?
- Where else do we see this iconic image today?
- This gate was created in 1876. What was going on in the United States around this time? Abroad?
- How has the flag changed and evolved since 1776?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Brainstorm ideas of who was considered “American” in 1876. What did the people look like who could pass through the proverbial gate to freedom in America at this time?
- Ask students to research controversial issues surrounding the American flag, including flag burning and the United States government’s recent reluctance to broadcast images of soldiers’ coffins draped in flags.
- Have students develop a new flag for the United States. What symbols will it include?
- Examine the work of the multitude of contemporary artists who have incorporated the American flag into their work. Examples include Jasper Johns, Keith Haring, and Faith Ringgold. How do these different artists approach and depict the flag? How are their depictions different from or similar to *Flag Gate*?





## MAP QUILT

Artist unidentified

Possibly Virginia; 1886

Silk and cotton with silk embroidery; 78 ¾ × 82 ¼"

Gift of Dr. and Mrs. C. David McLaughlin, 1987.1.1

Photo by Schecter Lee, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1845, John O'Sullivan, editor of the *United States Magazine and Domestic Review*, wrote that it was "our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions."\* "Manifest Destiny" became a catchphrase for American expansionism, which was virtually completed by the time this quilt in the form of a map of the United States was made. By 1886, the date that is embroidered in Roman numerals along the border between Oregon and Washington, America stretched "from sea to shining sea," anticipating Katherine Lee Bate's 1895 anthem. The Missouri and Mississippi rivers are highlighted in blue fabric with embroidery, and Texas, which recently had been a separate independent nation, is distinguished from the rest of the country by the inclusion of a stitched yellow star. Additional embroidered elements appear on Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Iowa, and Illinois.

A high degree of embellishment with embroidery, paint, and other elements was typical of show quilts made during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This textile was made at the height of the Crazy quilt and show quilt era. Although the map is an unusual treatment in the show quilt idiom, there is a long precedent for depictions of maps on fabric—in the early nineteenth century, young women stitched sampler maps and three-dimensional fabric globes as part of their geography lessons. Few examples of pieced quilts in the form of maps exist today, however. Instructions for right-angle piecing—the Y-shaped

pattern that is used for the background for this quilt—were published in late-nineteenth-century English and American sources.

### RESOURCES

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[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

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\* Sean Wilentz, ed., *Major Problems in the Early Republic, 1787–1848* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1992), p. 525.

# A MAP OF MANIFEST DESTINY

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What strikes you about this image?
- What comparisons can we make between this map and a modern-day map of the United States?
- What can we say about the way this object was made?
- What more can we find?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- This quilt was created from many different types of fabric. Where might these textiles have come from? What does the inclusion of these fabrics reveal about the artist's life or culture?
- What geographical and physical features figure prominently in the quilt?
- How does the anonymous quiltmaker comment on the nation's expansion and recent history? How does the quilt speak to the state of mind of former Confederates?
- Several states on the *Map Quilt* include an embroidered element, such as the star in Texas. Because embroidery was highly popular in 1886, when it was made, and because these elements appear sporadically, scholars believe this quilt was likely a "work in progress," and unfinished. Consider carefully the embroidered elements that appear on Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Texas, Iowa, and Illinois. How do these symbols relate to the states on which they are depicted, if at all? What symbols could the artist have included on other states?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- How are the functions of a quilt similar to the functions of a nation?
- In recent maps of the United States, how have colors been used to illustrate political features?
- This map quilt features three major American rivers. What role have these rivers played in the history of the United States?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students create a map of a familiar space or community, considering ways to highlight special features in the area, such as political leanings, cultural groups, disease incidence, temperature range, etc.
- Invite a quiltmaker to visit the class to demonstrate quilting techniques. Following the presentation, students can create their own collaborative quilt.
- Ask students to "map" an American state of mind—say, by choosing a decade to illustrate. Use the United States political boundaries as a "frame" for images that represent the state of mind, then use images from magazines and other popular media to fill in those boundaries.









## AMERICAN HERITAGE

Ralph Fasanella (1914–1997)

New York; 1974

Oil on canvas; 50 × 80"

Gift of Eva Fasanella and her children, Gina Mostrando and Marc Fasanella, 2005.5.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ralph Fasanella developed a reputation for his large-scale paintings of the city at work or at play—colorful, richly detailed depictions of city streets, baseball games, political campaigns, strikes, factories, and union halls.

This painting by Fasanella expresses the artist's anger over the assassination of John F. Kennedy and other notable figures in American history, as well as the executions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. The artist once said, "We'll destroy anything, anybody to keep the system moving. Now they got two more people to destroy; throw them in the Goddam grave. Next! That's the American way."\* Rich in symbols and searing with rage, this painting operates as a history lesson about some of America's most dramatic events and enduring struggles. Images of Washington, D.C., landmarks, mourners, and peace activists complete the narrative of the painting.

### RESOURCES

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[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

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\* Quoted in Patrick Watson, *Fasanella's City: The Paintings of Ralph Fasanella with the Story of His Life and Art* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), pp. 114–115.

# AN EDITORIAL IN IMAGES

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What story or stories can we find in this image?
- What strikes you about these figures?
- What would you title this piece?
- If you could cut the scene into different pieces, where would the divides be?
- What can we say about the overall mood?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- The title of this painting is *American Heritage*. How does the title affect your interpretation of the painting? Does this image match your idea of American heritage?
- The artist Ralph Fasanella is known for the social conscience and political messages present in his paintings. How do you interpret the artist's sentiments about the 1960s? Do you think this is a patriotic image?
- Are the ideas in this painting applicable to today's political climate? Which elements are still relevant? How would you update this painting for a modern-day audience?
- Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the last Americans found guilty of and executed for treason, appear prominently in the center of the composition. Why would the artist have placed the couple centrally in the painting?
- Fasanella was accused of being unpatriotic during the McCarthy era for his leftist associations. How might a McCarthy supporter interpret this image?
- The artist condensed several important Washington, D.C., landmarks into his composition. How does this device impact the narrative?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- Who are the people whose names appear at the bottom of the painting? How did they contribute to the cultural climate of the 1960s?
- Which Washington, D.C., landmarks appear in this painting? What is the function of each of these buildings, or whom do they memorialize?
- How did the intense anti-Communist feeling of McCarthyism impact American culture in the middle of the twentieth century? Are the effects still felt today?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students create a class painting reflecting the style of Ralph Fasanella. Rather than addressing the 1960s, consider another decade in American history. What will you include? What will you exclude?
- Have students write an obituary for each of the individuals whose names appear at the bottom of the painting. Alternatively, ask students to write newspaper articles chronicling the work of these individuals.
- Research the life and work of Fasanella. What patterns do you find in his paintings? How does knowledge of his biography affect your interpretations of his work?



# PERSONAL IDENTITY

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Works of folk art mirror the belief systems, social roles, passions, plights, worldviews, and biographies of the individuals and communities that create them. By examining works of folk art critically, one has a unique opportunity to explore the changing social conventions that have pervaded American culture since colonial days. At the same time that this process reveals cultural trends in different time periods, careful contemplation of these objects also offers insight into the individual self-expression of their makers. The collection of images in this section illuminates the individuality of the artists, one of the four guiding themes of the museum's permanent collection.



**NEW WORLD ARISTOCRATS:** A comparison of two eighteenth-century portraits informs students' ideas about gender, class, and social norms in the 1700s. What information about an individual or a community can be revealed through portraiture, and what information might be effectively concealed or left out?



**THE MISSING BRIDEGROOM:** Explore a Civil War-era quilt top and the social norms and ideals it depicts. Compare these ideals with modern-day values, and create an original appliqué work reflecting messages relevant in today's world.



**CATACLYSM AND VICTORY IN A REALM APART:** Consider notions of good and evil, hero and villain, and male and female by exploring the graphic and imaginative work of Henry Darger, whose fantastical images illustrate his 15,000-page novel that chronicles a child-slave rebellion. Develop an original work of art employing some of Darger's methods, incorporating images from popular culture.



**HOME LEAVE:** A family portrait by Puerto Rican artist Nick Quijano Torres asks viewers to contemplate presence and absence, familial relationships, and the blending of cultures. Students consider portraiture conventions and effective strategies for symbolizing individuals' personalities by creating their own family portraits.





## PORTRAIT OF A MAN (POSSIBLY CAPTAIN FITZHUGH GREENE) and PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN (POSSIBLY MRS. FITZHUGH GREENE)

Attributed to John Durand (act. 1765–1782)

New York, Connecticut, or Virginia; c. 1768–1770

Oil on canvas; 29  $\frac{5}{16}$  × 24  $\frac{5}{16}$ " each

Promised gifts of Ralph Esmerian, P1.2001.1, 2

Photos © 2000 John Bigelow Taylor, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

These portraits are thought to depict Captain and Mrs. Fitzhugh Greene of Newport, Rhode Island. Mrs. Greene's aristocratic bearing, rich jewels, and beautiful silk dress suggest a level of wealth that is explained by the merchant vessel seen through the window of her husband's companion portrait. At the time her portrait was painted, the American colonies imported more English woven silk than all other export markets combined, and Newport was a major port of entry and distribution for the luxurious fabric. After the use of indigo was legalized in Europe in the 1730s, blue became one of the most commonly worn colors in England, France, and Germany. Light blues, once the colors of peasant work clothing, rose to the ranks of European court society.

The pale blue of Mrs. Greene's gown conveys several important attributes appropriate for a marriage portrait. Blue is the color of purity, and since the Middle Ages it has been used to enrobe the Virgin Mary. It is also a long-accepted symbol of fidelity. And through its relatively recent association with European aristocracy, blue confers status on both the subject and her husband.

### RESOURCES

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# NEW WORLD ARISTOCRATS

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is happening in these pictures?
- What clues do we have about when they were painted?
- What can we say about these individuals' places in society?
- What are some visual elements that reflect each sitter's individuality?
- What comparisons can we make between these two portraits?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- How do these portraits communicate information about the sitters? Can we learn about their achievements, personalities, and morals through the paintings?
- From these two portraits, what can we learn about social norms for upper-class men and women in the late eighteenth century? What gender differences are evident in the two paintings? What is missing in these paintings? What can we *not* tell by looking?
- The artist John Durand is known today as a painter of wealthy families in the second half of the eighteenth century. How does the artist communicate the wealth of these sitters?
- In many of Durand's paintings, women appear holding a single flower, petals turned toward the viewer. In the painting of Mrs. Fitzhugh Greene, what is the role of the flower?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- What was happening in American history when these paintings were created?
- At the time these portraits were made, what gender roles did men and women play in America?
- Why were painted portraits so important in the eighteenth century? What are the functions of portraits today?
- How would you like to be depicted in a portrait?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Before discussing the portraits, ask students to search through their belongings (bags, pockets, keys, notebook, etc.) to find an object that hints at an element of their identities or personalities. Collect all objects and redistribute them to students so that all participants have an object that is not their own. What can they learn about the object's owner? Is there truth in the inferences we make from a person's "telling" objects?
- Using collage, drawing, or photographic techniques, have students create self-portraits in response to the prompt "You wouldn't know just by looking at me that I . . ."
- Ask students to photograph their communities, focusing particularly on social norms. To extend the project, have students also photograph another community that supports different social norms.





## BIRD OF PARADISE QUILT TOP

Artist unidentified

Vicinity of Albany, New York; 1858–1863

Cotton, wool, and silk with ink and silk embroidery; 84 ½ × 69 ⅝"

Gift of the Trustees of the American Folk Art Museum, 1979.7.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Some of the most decorative American quilts are those appliquéd with motifs that are cut from one fabric and then stitched to another. Motifs for the earliest appliqué quilts were cut from block-printed chintzes and applied to another fabric to form new designs, a technique that has been called *broderie perse*, or cutout chintz appliqué. The appliqués in *Bird of Paradise Quilt Top* include a doll-like girl, paired animals, famous racehorses of the day, and the bird with extravagant tail feathers after which the quilt top is named.

The appliquéd elements were made using templates cut from newsprint that were handed down with the bedcover. The collection of patterns, also in the museum's collection, includes the figure of a man who does not appear on the block next to the woman on the quilt top, suggesting that the bedcover may have been begun in anticipation of a wedding. Because the newspapers used in the templates date from between 1858 and 1863—a span that overlapped the Civil War—it has been speculated that the wedding never took place, and for that reason the top was never quilted and completed.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

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# THE MISSING BRIDEGROOM

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is going on in this image?
- What can we say about the figures in this quilt?
- What themes and patterns do you notice?
- What does this quilt tell us about life in mid-nineteenth-century America? What visual clues lead to your conclusions?
- What more can we find?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Who do you think might have created this quilt? What can we learn about the maker or makers through careful looking?
- Because the templates for the figures in this quilt survive, we know that a male figure was originally intended to accompany the female figure near the top of the quilt. Why do you think he was omitted from the final design?
- What symbols appear in this quilt? Are these symbols still relevant today?
- The idea of paradise is often depicted in works of art. Do you think the imagery in this quilt evokes paradise? What would you add to emphasize this idea?
- Some quilts are meant to be functional, while others are created strictly for display. Which type of quilt do you think this is? What do you see that leads you to this conclusion?
- Scholars have dated this quilt 1858–1863 because the surviving templates cut from newspaper date from these years. But even if we did not have information from the newspapers to indicate the date of the quilt, what visual clues hint at its time of production?
- Animals are featured prominently in this quilt top: birds with impressive plumage, famous racehorses of the day (Ivory Black and Black Hawk, featured near the center), creatures found in nature, and everyday farm animals. What does their prominent inclusion suggest about the role of animals in the 1800s? Have our uses for them or attitudes toward them changed since the creation of this work?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- What are the functions of a quilt?
- How is a quilt constructed?
- How do we commemorate special events, such as weddings, today?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- The creator of this quilt top drew on the world around her and the decorative motifs of the day. Using paper or fabric, have students create a similar quilt that reflects the modern world. Students can incorporate images from magazines or other media in the creation of their quilt.

- Have students think of ways that we commemorate special events such as weddings, births, and graduations today. Based on these ideas, ask students to develop either a quilt or another creation to serve this commemorative function.
- Divide the class into three or four groups and charge each with creating a quilt using a set collection of materials. Provide each group with different kits of supplies: one group receives ample fabric and high-quality quilt-making materials, while another receives small scraps of fabric and other materials not well-suited to quilting. For other groups, provide materials that fall somewhere on the spectrum between these two extremes. Upon completion of the activity, ask students to reflect on their experience, highlighting challenges and rewards. How does socioeconomic status play into the creation of objects like *Bird of Paradise Quilt Top*?











**AT BATTLE OF DROSABELLAMAXI-MILLAN. SEEING GLANDELINIANS RETREATING VIVIAN GIRLS GRASP CHRISTIAN BANNERS, AND LEAD CHARGE AGAINST FOE**

Henry Darger (1892–1973)

Chicago; mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, carbon tracing, and collage on pieced paper; 19 × 47 ¾"

Museum purchase, 2002.22.1b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by James Prinz

**UNTITLED (BATTLE SCENE DURING LIGHTNING STORM. NAKED CHILDREN WITH RIFLES)**

Henry Darger (1892–1973)

Chicago; mid-twentieth century

Watercolor, pencil, and carbon tracing on pieced paper; 24 × 74 ¾"

Gift of Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner, 1995.23.1b

© Kiyoko Lerner

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Henry Darger created and inhabited a vast imaginary world through his writing and painting. Darger's work was discovered in 1972 by his Chicago neighbor and landlord, photographer Nathan Lerner, and was made public upon the artist's death. What Lerner found was a room full of unpublished manuscripts and bound piles of paintings. The magnitude of Darger's writing project is mind-boggling: his texts include a six-part weather journal kept daily for nearly ten years (from 1958 to 1967); several diaries; an autobiography, *History of My Life*, comprising more than five thousand pages; *Further Adventures in Chicago: Crazy House*, numbering more than ten thousand pages; and his masterful epic, the 15,000-page *Story of the Vivian Girls, in what is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glando-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*. Darger created an astonishing body of artwork to accompany this manuscript, and it is these fantastic mural-size watercolors, executed in lyrical seductive hues, that are celebrated today.

*In the Realms of the Unreal* was begun when Darger was 19 years old. Written first in longhand and later typed, it is a fictional narrative of war and peace, good against evil. The story follows the heroic efforts of a band of young sisters, the Vivian Girls, to free enslaved children held captive by an army of adults, the Glandelinians. In the world of fiction, good

usually triumphs over evil—but not without challenges along the way. *In the Realms of the Unreal*, however, has two endings: in one, concluding a series of harrowing trials and complex adventures, the heroic Vivian Girls emerge triumphant, while in the other, they are defeated by the evil Glandelinians.

**RESOURCES**

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# CATACLYSM AND VICTORY IN A REALM APART

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is happening in these pictures?
- What surprises you in them?
- What can we say about the relationships between the figures in the paintings?
- What can we say about where this is taking place?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Henry Darger had an intense interest in the American Civil War and included many references to it in his epic novel and accompanying paintings. Are there clear heroes, villains, and victims in these images? How do you identify these different types of characters in the paintings?
- Darger's paintings are often noted for their careful depiction of gender roles. How does Darger disrupt notions of traditional gender roles?
- Darger's paintings, many of which are more than 6 feet long, were originally bound into a book and were intended to serve as illustrations for his 15,000-page novel. What stories do you find in these paintings, and what do you imagine happens before and after these moments in the narrative? What visual clues does Darger include that give you this idea?
- With little confidence in his abilities as a draftsman, Darger developed his own techniques to realize his paintings. An avid collector of images from newspapers, advertisements, coloring books, comic books, and other sources, he used carbon paper to trace and combine disparate images into entirely new compositions. At times, the artist repeats images or completely transforms them—plants become the wings of mythical creatures, for example. In these paintings, which elements do you think the artist drew directly from source material, and which elements do you think he has recombined? How does this piecing together affect your overall perception of the image?
- Knowing that Darger's figures originate from popular-culture source materials such as advertisements and comic books, what can we learn through careful looking about the time and place in which Darger worked?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- Henry Darger created his compositions by combining various images from popular media. What other artists have employed this technique? Why might an artist appropriate, or borrow, from popular culture like this?
- How have perceptions of gender identity shifted in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries?
- Many twentieth- and twenty-first-century artists borrow or appropriate images from other sources, sometimes combining them with their own drawing or painting, sometimes re-creating the borrowed image from scratch. Why do you think this has

become a common mode for artmaking? Do you think this practice changes the value or appeal of a work of art?

### **SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES**

- Ask students to collect images from newspapers, magazines, and other popular media. Using these images, experiment with a combination of collage and tracing techniques to create a narrative image with new relationships and situations.
- Darger bound his large-scale watercolors into books. Have students explore different bookbinding techniques. A good resource for this project is *Creating Handmade Books* by Alisa Golden (Sterling Publishing, 2000).
- In many respects, the Vivian girls who populate Darger's works are unlikely heroes. Ask students to consider "unsung heroes" in their own lives. After examining the ways in which Darger visually empowers his heroines, have students create a painted, drawn, or collaged work of art depicting their chosen hero, paying careful attention to those traits or attributes they consider to be heroic.





## MEMORIES OF THE VETERAN

Nick Quijano Torres (b. 1953)

Old San Juan, Puerto Rico; 1984

Lacquered gouache on paper; 12 ¼ × 12 ¼"

Gift of Dorothy and Leo Rabkin, 1984.2.1

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The mixing of patterns and the blending of cultures come together in this domestic scene illustrating Nick Quijano Torres's personal experience of Puerto Rico. The rhythm and sensuality of Torres's homeland—diverse, vibrant, and creolized—is illuminated in this small, innocent rendering of a family portrait. Painted with gouache, it shows the artist's grandmother sitting in between the artist as a young boy and his sister. Above them and looking down over them is a symbolic rendering of Uncle Juan, an army veteran. The three sitters look out at the viewer from a highly baroque decorated interior.

Torres aims in his artwork to depict the story of the mixed-race culture of Puerto Rico. Inspired to do this after seeing a Puerto Rican art exhibition that expressly celebrated, in his words, "high society, the Anglo experience," Torres decided to "paint what he knew" and what was not typically portrayed in works at other art venues. The confluence of cultures is echoed in the interaction of designs; flowery wallpaper, a patterned carpet, and a doily-rich couch seem to symbolize the interface between cultures.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

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# HOME LEAVE

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is going on in this picture?
- What can we say about the figures?
- What can we say about the family dynamics in this painting?
- What can we say about this time and place?
- What more can we find?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- How would you characterize the mood of the painting? What do you see that suggests this mood?
- The artist Nick Quijano Torres sought to depict the multicultural aspect of Puerto Rico in this painting. How does he communicate a blending of American and Caribbean cultures?
- Torres has discussed his desire to paint themes with which he is intimately familiar. In this painting, one of his subjects is Puerto Rico, the artist's homeland. What does he reveal about his social class, value systems, and cultural background in this painting?
- This painting is a self-portrait of the artist, who sits on the sofa with his sister and grandmother. How does the artist address ideas of presence and absence?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- What is the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States?
- How do different cultures memorialize absent loved ones?
- In what wars has the United States participated in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? How have Puerto Rican citizens been affected by these wars?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students create their own family portraits, depicting each individual holding an object that reveals an aspect of his or her personality. Ask students to present their works to the class, illuminating the significance behind each object. How do the objects give us insight into these individuals and their family as a unit?
- Ask students to interview a family member or close friend about a time that a loved one was absent. How do families cope with separation?
- Have students contact a local veterans' association to ask about support systems for veterans and their families. How does military service affect those serving? How does it affect their families?



# ECONOMY

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Many artworks in the American Folk Art Museum's collection reflect the economic evolution of the United States and highlight the effects that commerce has had on shaping the nation's history. At times championing technological and economic progress, and at other times critiquing social inequalities, folk artists provide a firsthand account of the country's constantly unfolding economic structures in a concrete, accessible way.



**SAILOR'S FANCY:** Explore the social and economic contexts of nineteenth-century New England's whaling industry by carefully examining works of scrimshaw and exploring the cultural climate whaling promoted.



**OPEN FOR BUSINESS:** Research nineteenth-century trade signs and compare their characteristics with modern-day advertising strategies. Interviews with local shopkeepers and a neighborhood documentation project anchor students' thinking about the nature of symbols and the psychological aspect of advertising.



**A CHRONICLE OF PLANTATION LIFE:** Decode a painting by prolific African American artist Clementine Hunter, linking the subject matter to plantation life after the Emancipation Proclamation. Create a compelling piece of historical fiction describing the experiences of former plantation laborers.



**BUSTLE AND HUSTLE:** Compare two paintings that address industrialization, urban development, and complex social strata. Investigate ways in which activists advocate for a "living wage" throughout the country, taking into account how the working poor make ends meet, and under what circumstances.





## SEA HORSE JAGGING WHEEL

Artist unidentified  
New England; c. 1870  
Whale ivory and ebony with silver pins;  $2\frac{3}{4} \times 6 \times 1\frac{1}{2}$ "  
Promised gift of Ralph Esmerian, P1.2001.306

## CANE WITH FEMALE LEG HANDLE

Artist unidentified  
Probably eastern United States; c. 1860  
Whale ivory and whale skeletal bone with horn, ink,  
and nail;  $29\frac{3}{4} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ "  
Promised gift of Ralph Esmerian, P1.2001.320

## BUSK WITH SHIP AND ANGEL

Attributed to A.V. Booth (dates unknown)  
Probably eastern United States; c. 1840  
Ink on whale skeletal bone;  $12\frac{5}{8} \times 1\frac{11}{16} \times \frac{1}{16}$ "  
Promised gift of Ralph Esmerian, P1.2001.312

Photos © 2000 John Bigelow Taylor, New York

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The art of scrimshaw—embellished keepsakes made from organic materials taken from whales and other marine mammals—is largely a by-product of the American whaling industry. Whaling flourished from about 1830 through the early twentieth century. Voyages often lasted years and required multiple crews to track and slaughter their prey, then render its remains into useable form. As a result, far more seamen were carried aboard a whaling ship than were needed to sail and maintain the vessel itself. As a pastime, the making of scrimshaw helped to diffuse the boredom, persistent hunger, and complex emotional dynamics that characterized months and even years spent in confinement on a ship.

Because of their simple shapes, busks, canes, pointers, and riding crops were often a whaleman's first scrimshaw project. In the all-male environment of the whaling ship, the decorative handles and shafts sometimes took suggestive forms. Aggressive, sexual, or bawdy symbols such as snakes, fists, and ladies' legs were not uncommon.

The *Busk with Ship and Angel* combines the patriotic with the romantic. Tender inscriptions, indicating the maker was on a voyage far from his sweetheart, appear alongside the classic American motifs of an eagle and draped flags in addition to what appears to be a warship.

Many whalers preferred the jaggling wheel—or pie crimper—as a showcase for their originality. A common kitchen device with a crenellated wheel to trim and perforate piecrusts, it may have been made by scrimshanders in response to a longing for home and decent food. The glorious sea horse transcends its utilitarian purpose and exemplifies the art of scrimshaw at its most elegant and refined.

## RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:  
[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Brouwer, Norman, and Nina Hellman. *A Mariner's Fancy*. New York: South Street Seaport Museum in association with Balsam Press, 1992.

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McManus, Michael. *A Treasury of American Scrimshaw: A Collection of the Useful and Decorative*. New York: Penguin Studio, 1997.



# SAILOR'S FANCY

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What strikes you about these images?
- What can we say about the way these were made?
- What can we say about the way these objects were used?
- What comparisons can we make between these objects?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Aspiring scrimshaw artists, or scrimshanders, usually started with simple projects and eventually developed more complicated pieces as their skill increased. What degree of difficulty do you imagine each of these pieces presented to the maker? What do you see that leads you to your conclusion?
- Many examples of scrimshaw were born from a dire sense of homesickness. How do the scrimshanders communicate this sentiment in their works?
- What do these objects reveal about life on whaling ships? What do these objects reveal about life in nineteenth-century America?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- Men on years-long whaling expeditions carved these pieces in an attempt to stave off boredom. What are some other creative responses to boredom? What do you do when you are bored?
- What products emerged from the whaling industry? What materials do we use today in lieu of whale materials?
- What was the social context for the whaling industry? Whom did the industry most benefit? Who worked on the ships?
- What were the consequences of widespread whaling? Do we still feel the effects today?
- Are there jobs today that are comparable to those of the whalers? What similarities do you see?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students assume the identity of a nineteenth-century whaler and design a decorative card using printmaking, drawing, or collage techniques to send overseas to a loved one. In the card, write a letter addressing the conditions and emotions of daily life on the ship.
- Find passages in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* that illustrate daily life aboard whaling ships to gain perspective on whalers' day-to-day lives.
- If your school is near a seacoast, schedule a trip to visit a sailing ship or go on a whale watch to contextualize the experience of the whalers.





## TOOTH TRADE SIGN

Artist unidentified  
Probably New England; c. 1850–1880  
Paint on wood with metal;  $26 \times 12 \frac{1}{4} \times 11 \frac{1}{4}$ "  
Gift of Kristina Barbara Johnson, 1983.8.1  
Photo by John Parnell, New York

## J.B. SCHLEGELMILCH BLACKSMITH SHOP SIGN AND WEATHERVANE

Artist unidentified  
Southeastern Pennsylvania; mid-nineteenth century  
Iron with traces of paint;  $28 \frac{3}{8} \times 42 \times \frac{1}{4}$ "  
Gift of Ralph Esmerian, 2005.8.61  
Photo courtesy Sotheby's, New York

## BASEBALL PLAYER SHOW FIGURE

Samuel Anderson Robb (1851–1928)  
New York; 1888–1903  
Paint on wood;  $76 \times 21 \frac{3}{4} \times 24$ "  
Gift of Millie and Bill Gladstone, 2008.16.1  
Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The most successful early trade sign left little confusion as to its meaning, with or without the use of words. Symbols that were immediately recognizable relied upon a shared system of emblematic meaning, and this interaction between trade sign and viewer still lingers as a traditional method of advertising a business. Some of the earliest signs were flat and painted on both sides, but increasingly through the nineteenth century they were three-dimensional carvings hung off the façade of a building to catch the eyes of passersby. These carved signs were often oversize versions of everyday objects immediately associated with the trade they advertised. Their size helped to draw attention, especially as towns became congested with competing businesses. Many of the early signs established symbols that remain with us to the present time, such as the tooth that was used to advertise the services of a dentist, or the baseball figure that advertised an establishment that sold tobacco. Other signs reveal trades less prevalent today, such as the pictograph weathervane that graphically describes Mr. J.B. Schlegelmilch as a blacksmith "& horse-shoe-er."

## RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:  
[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

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# OPEN FOR BUSINESS

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What strikes you about these objects?
- What can we say about how these objects might have been used? What visual clues lead you to that conclusion?
- Through careful looking, what can we learn about the time in which these signs were made and displayed?
- What comparisons can we make between these objects?
- What more can we learn by looking carefully at these objects?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Like advertisers today, the makers of these signs likely considered their target audiences carefully before executing their design. Who do you think the intended audiences were for these objects? What clues give you this idea?
- One reason advertisers have used graphic images in their work is to communicate their idea even across language barriers. This was particularly true for the immigrant populations that grew in nineteenth-century America. What do each of these trade signs communicate, and how do they accomplish their purpose?
- What story do these signs tell us about American life in the nineteenth century? How do the trades these signs advertise compare with modern-day businesses?
- How is today's advertising similar to these examples of nineteenth-century advertising?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- What were literacy rates in nineteenth-century America? What factors led to these low rates?
- How many advertisements do you think the average American encounters on a daily basis today? In the nineteenth century?
- Why have imagery and symbols remained an important element of advertising today, even though the population is predominantly literate? What examples can you think of?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Ask students to choose a business or trade and to design two separate signs or advertisements for it—one in the graphic style of the nineteenth century and one that we might expect to see today.
- Ask students to develop an image or sign without any words to represent their school. What visual elements will best communicate ideas about the school to people from another time or place?
- Have students photograph modern-day shop and trade signs. Display the photographs together and look for patterns among the signs. How do these signs tell the story of what

you can expect to find in the shop? How do these signs tell a story about life in America in the twenty-first century?

- Have students collect printed advertisements for modern-day businesses, trades, and products similar to those represented in the nineteenth-century trade signs. How do the examples compare to each other?





## THE APPLE PARING

Clementine Hunter (1886/87–1988)

Natchitoches, Louisiana; c. 1945

Oil on paper; 12 ½ × 16"

Gift of Mildred Hart Bailey and the Clementine Hunter Art Trust, 1996.1.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

“Clementine Hunter, Artist, 50 cents a look” announced a sign on the artist’s studio door. Inspired by her experiences, Clementine Hunter began her artmaking career late in life with memory paintings, documenting her community at work, at play, and at church. Simple forms and shapes crafted with dynamic, punchy color combinations characterize the artist’s canvases.

Hunter was born on Hidden Hill Plantation near Cloutierville, Louisiana, in late 1886 or early 1887. Her family moved to Melrose Plantation in Natchitoches when she was a teenager, and she began work as a field hand soon after.

Melrose Plantation, where Hunter lived for most of her life, was a haven for artists. Encouraged by the plantation librarian, Hunter began to paint using oils discarded by an artist-in-residence. Hunter’s several thousand paintings chronicle work and recreational activities on the plantation as well as the spiritual beliefs and religious practices of her community.

This work scene is presented on a flattened plane close to the picture surface. A comfortably seated woman is paring apples; she is almost as tall as the tree that protects her from the sun as she performs the common kitchen task. A child, seated on a stool and shaded by an umbrella on a post, hands apples to the parer from a basket. The single chimney and veranda-like porch of the plantation building on the left are common to African American vernacular architecture. The signature, “Clemence,” was typical for the artist between 1945 and 1950; another set of personal initials was added to the painting around 1970.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:  
[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

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Gilley, Shelby R. *Painting By Heart: The Life and Art of Clementine Hunter, Louisiana Folk Artist*. Baton Rouge, La.: St. Emma Press, 2000.

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The Library of Congress’s American Memory website, “Voices from the Days of Slavery” online archive:  
[www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/vfssp.html](http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/vfssp.html)

Wilson, James L. *Clementine Hunter: American Folk Artist*. Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing, 1988.

# A CHRONICLE OF PLANTATION LIFE

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is the story depicted in this image?
- What can we say about these figures? What is their relationship?
- What clues do you see that give you that idea?
- What can we say about the time and place where this is happening?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Clementine Hunter worked as a farm laborer at Melrose Plantation in Louisiana for many years before becoming a domestic worker in the house. It was not until she was in her 50s that she started painting, encouraged by the plantation librarian. Having lived at Melrose Plantation since she was a teenager, the majority of her paintings are set there. By looking carefully at *The Apple Paring*, consider how she portrays the plantation; does she project any particular sentiment about it?
- *The Apple Paring* is typical of Hunter's style, with a flattened plane and unconventional use of perspective. How do these stylistic elements affect your interpretation of the image?
- Hunter, who was the granddaughter of slaves, painted several thousand works chronicling daily life on the plantation where she lived and worked. Though she could not read or write, the sheer multitude of her paintings tells the story of the artist's day-to-day activities almost like a storybook. Considering *The Apple Paring* is a moment in a longer narrative, what do you imagine might have happened before this scene, and what will happen next?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- After the Emancipation Proclamation, how did life change for formerly enslaved people in the South? What exactly changed, and what remained the same?
- How did the Freedmen's Bureau affect Reconstruction in the South?
- Clementine Hunter's life extended from the late 1800s through the late 1900s. Think about what you already know about the Jim Crow laws and life for African Americans in the 1960s. What similarities exist between the Black Codes and Jim Crow laws?
- Why are paintings of plantation life particularly important for us to preserve?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students choose a scene from their own lives to represent in a painting, drawing, collage, or photograph. When these images are displayed together, ask students what they think future viewers will be able to glean about life in the twenty-first century based on them.
- Have students research written and oral accounts of plantation residents from 1860 through 1900. Ask each student, playing the role of a plantation resident, to write a letter

from that resident's perspective to a relative in the North, addressing daily customs, work, discrimination, independence, or recreation.

- Ask students to research the life and work of Clementine Hunter. By looking carefully at her paintings, write an account of the life she depicts.



## SITUATION OF AMERICA, 1848.

Artist unidentified

New York; 1848

Oil on wood panel; 34 × 57 × 1 3⁄8"

Promised gift of Ralph Esmerian, P1.2001.58

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In their letters home, some nineteenth-century visitors to America described how they were struck by the brightness of the climate and the freshness of the paint on colorful houses that lined the streets of cities like New York. The overmantel *Situation of America, 1848* captures an optimistic and robust picture of the United States as epitomized by New York's success in mid-century. It celebrates the strong economic ties between consumers and producers, and the means of connecting those markets. Economic growth was greatly spurred by the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 and subsequent improvements in overland rail transport and shipping facilities. A wide variety of goods flooded into and out of New York City along these arteries. The architectural muscularity of the skyline as viewed across the East River from Brooklyn is juxtaposed with billows of smoke from the paddle wheeler *Sun* (built in 1836, with New York as its home port) and the freight train on the wharf. The dome of City Hall looms disproportionately large behind the prominent warehouse situated on the Brooklyn dock.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:  
[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Harding, Deborah, and Laura Fisher. *Home Sweet Home: The House in American Folk Art*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2001.

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## ICEMAN CRUCIFIED #3

Ralph Fasanella (1914–1997)

New York; 1956

Oil on canvas; 48  $\frac{3}{4}$  × 37  $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Gift of Patricia L. and Maurice C. Thompson Jr., 1991.11.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ralph Fasanella was born in New York City, the son of Italian immigrants. His early years were troubled, in no small part because of the severe economic pressures on his family. His embittered father worked under crushing burdens as an iceman, his mother as a garment worker. As a result of this upbringing, Fasanella developed an enduring and passionate commitment to the struggles of working people.

*Iceman Crucified #3*, one of several paintings that the artist devoted to the subject, portrays his father—"Joe the iceman"—on the cross. Fasanella "began to see his father as the Christ; the cursing and bitterness were not, in the end, demeaning—they were the sweat and the protest of the stations of the cross. And the blind, inescapable, unrelieved, mind-clouding daily agony with the ice was the Calvary."<sup>\*</sup> The subject of the painting may be the artist's father, but the painting is no less a reflection of Fasanella's social conscience than are his mural-size depictions of striking workers.

### RESOURCES

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[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

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*American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

Watson, Patrick. *Fasanella's City: The Paintings of Ralph Fasanella with the Story of His Life and Art*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973.

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<sup>\*</sup> Patrick Watson, *Fasanella's City: The Paintings of Ralph Fasanella with the Story of His Life and Art* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 140.

# BUSTLE AND HUSTLE

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is happening in these pictures?
- What can we say about these places?
- What clues do we have about the time in which these take place?
- What symbolism can you find?
- What is the effect of incorporating text into the images?
- What similarities and differences can we find between these two images and the scenes they portray?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Compare these two paintings and consider how they highlight the ways in which commerce has changed over the past two centuries. Do you think these changes have improved our quality of life?
- The unidentified painter of *Situation of America, 1848*. and Ralph Fasanella depict vastly different views of New York City. Which elements of each do you identify with? Which do you prefer? Why?
- Do these images portray your idea of the “American Dream”? What do you see in each image that informs your opinion?
- Though we see evidence of human presence in *Situation of America, 1848*. through the steamship, railroad, and architecture, no people appear in the painting. Fasanella’s *Iceman Crucified #3*, however, is teeming with many different people. How do these contrasting depictions of humans’ roles in economic systems relate to the attitude toward industry in the time each was painted?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- What is an iceman? When did the profession become obsolete?
- What is martyrdom? In the American social strata, what kinds of people are most often martyred? How so?
- The national U.S. minimum wage was established in 1938. Though the iceman depicted here was likely self-employed and therefore not a recipient of an hourly wage, the plight of the blue-collar worker was the impetus for changing labor laws at that time. Chart the progression of the minimum wage on both state and federal levels from 1938 to the present. What is the federal minimum hourly wage today? What is the minimum wage in your state? And what were they in 1956, when *Iceman Crucified #3* was created?
- What is globalization? What effects has it had here in the United States or abroad?
- What other developments, other than the Erie Canal, have led to diversifying economic growth in the United States? Abroad?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- In different ways, each painting depicts part of the process of distribution—by railroad in *Situation of America*, 1848, and through manual labor in *Iceman Crucified* #3. Ask students to track the pathways these products take as they are transported around the globe, then develop a written piece in the voice of one of the products. For example, what journey does a banana take from its place of origin to our kitchen table?
- Research various “living wage” campaigns being staged locally and nationally. Does the minimum federal wage, as it currently stands, meet people’s needs? Or the state minimum wage where you live? Ask students to simulate being the head of their household, then translate sample hourly wages into weekly and monthly totals. Based on real-life research, have students create a monthly budget for a family of four. Have students share their discoveries as a class.
- Have students examine archival photographs of their community, then photograph that same community as it stands today—when possible at the same locations pictured in the archival photos. What has changed? What remains the same?

# SPIRITUALITY

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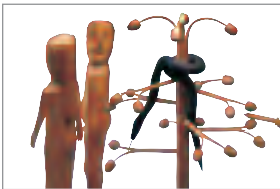
Founded in part on the principle of freedom to practice any religion one chooses, the American cultural landscape has long been shaped by expressions of spirituality. Traditional and contemporary folk artists have woven personal and communal spiritual expressions into their work. Some folk artists illuminate an individualistic sense of spirituality, while others reflect the perspectives and values held by entire communities or the followers of a particular faith.



**METAMORPHOSIS:** Consider the moral codes and religious precepts that pervaded early New England life, and the ways in which these precepts were promoted in clever books intended to instruct children through play.



**A SECRET WORLD OF SYMBOLS:** Examine a tracing board from the Freemason community. One of its aims was to have members learn and eventually memorize the fraternal order's coded language. Consider the power and meaning of a coded language by developing an original work of art laden with secret symbols.



**PARADISE LOST:** Explore self-taught artist Edgar Tolson's minimalist sculpture portraying the moment of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Consider this story as a metaphor for modern-day circumstances and develop a persuasive essay describing how society can reclaim the idea of Eden.



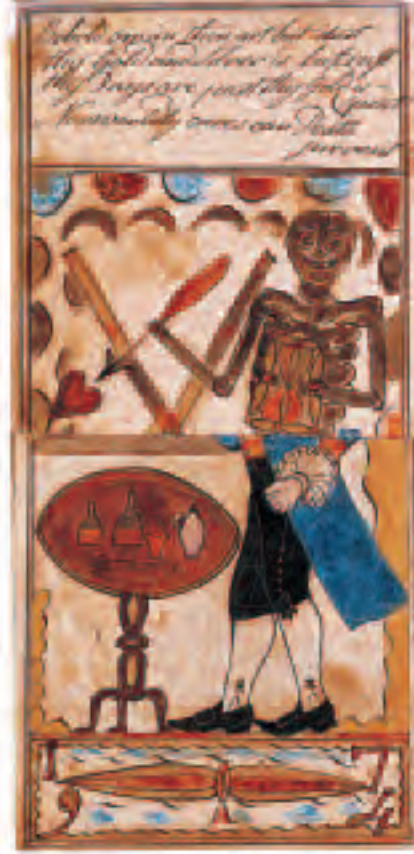
**EARTHLY TRANSFORMATION:** Investigate a mixed-media sculpture by prolific self-taught artist Bessie Harvey, focusing particularly on her choice of materials and notions of animism.













## METAMORPHOSIS: ADAM

Artist unidentified

Probably New England; 1794

Watercolor and ink on paper; 6 1/8 x 3 1/16" (folded)

Promised gift of Ralph Esmerian, P1.2001.253a

Photos © 2000 John Bigelow Taylor, New York

## METAMORPHOSIS: GOLD AND SILVER

Artist unidentified

Probably New England; 1794

Watercolor and ink on paper; 6 1/8 x 2 15/16" (folded)

Promised gift of Ralph Esmerian, P1.2001.253e

Photos © 2000 John Bigelow Taylor, New York

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### INSCRIPTIONS:

**ADAM**, panel one: *Adam comes first upon the Stage / And Eve out of his Side / Was given him in Marriage / Turn and see the Bride;* panel two: *Here Eve in shape you do Behold / One Body sheweth twain / Do but the Lower leaf unfold / And its as Strange again;* panel three: *Eyes look not on the Mermaid face / Nor ears attend her Song / her face hath an alluring grace / More charming is her Tongue*

**GOLD AND SILVER**, panel one: *Now I have Gold and Silver store / Bribd from the Rich pawnd of the Poor / No worldly cares can trouble me / Turn Down the Leaf & you Shall See / 17 / 94;* panel two: *Behold o man thou art but dust / thy Gold and Silver is but ruft / thy Days are past thy Gold is spent / No worldly cares can Death prevent;* panel three: *Sicknefs is come and Death draws nigh / help Gold and Silver or I die / It will not do all is but drofs / Turn up and See a greater crofs*

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Mystery plays were episodic religious stories enacted by members of trade and crafts guilds during the European Middle Ages. At a holy day celebration or a festival, each guild took responsibility for one presentation in a cycle that might include several chapters from the Old and New Testaments.

Capitalizing on the strength of dramatic or comedic performance as a way of disseminating basic truths, vernacular dramas conveyed religious and moral lessons in a way that could be understood and appreciated by a broad segment of society.

Eighteenth-century puzzle books functioned in a similar manner, amusing young children while at the same time offering instruction.

The initial verse of this puzzle book calls "Adam . . . first upon the stage," harking back to its roots in religious performance. Handmade in both

German- and English-speaking communities in America, these books featured religious and moral verses in rhyme. Similar to today's flip books, in the early nineteenth century they were called "turn-ups"; they are also known as metamorphosis books because the pictures transform as the leaves are turned up or down. The mythological and biblical references in rhymed verse reinforced the religious precepts of life in early America: from original sin to the inevitability of death, the only real reward was not material wealth on earth, but salvation through Christ in death.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:  
[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

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McDonough, Yona Zeldis. *Eve and Her Sisters: Women of the Old Testament*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1994.

Opie, Robert Iona, and Brian Alderson. *The Treasures of Childhood*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1989.

# METAMORPHOSIS

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is happening in these pictures?
- What can we say about the figures?
- What changes do you notice as these objects transform?
- What can we say about the way these objects were used?
- What can we say about the time and place depicted in these images? About the time and place in which they were made?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Read the inscription on each image carefully. How does the text change your perception of the images?
- The title of this collection of images is *Metamorphosis*. In what ways do these objects represent a metamorphosis?
- The first book of *Metamorphosis* depicts Eve's creation from Adam's body and eventual transformation into a mermaid. Other examples of puzzle books portray the same progression. How do you think the mermaid fits into the story? What might she represent?
- The creation of puzzle books seems to relate to the medieval tradition of morality plays. How does the artist create a sense of theatricality in the *Metamorphosis* books?
- These two books are the first and last examples from a series of five that illustrate a narrative from man's creation to his death. What other scenes could be depicted in the other three books that come between these two?
- These "turn-up" books were intended to instill in children basic moral codes and religious precepts. What messages do these books communicate? Do you think they are successful instructional tools?
- How is the center panel of each puzzle book related to the panels that precede and follow it? How does the artist use the device of transforming images?
- What do you think would have been particularly appealing about these puzzle books to children in the eighteenth century? Do you think they would be appealing to children today?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- Puzzle books or "turn-ups," created in both German- and English-speaking American communities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were intended to serve the dual purposes of entertaining and instructing children. Why might religious folklore have been a common way to occupy children's time and minds?
- These puzzle books employ a sense of play as a means to teach important moral lessons to children. How have educational toys grown and evolved since *Metamorphosis* was created in 1794?

- How does *Metamorphosis* compare with contemporary flip books? Do you think the two types of books serve similar purposes?
- Stories from the Old Testament have provided content for artists for thousands of years. Why do you think they continue to be an important point of reference for artists?
- Mermaids have appeared in art and literature for thousands of years. What symbolic meanings have they represented?

### **SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES**

- Ask students to consider socially relevant messages or stories they would like to convey to their peers in the form of a contemporary puzzle book. What will they choose to hide or make visible in each panel? To create a turn-up book structure, begin with a strip of paper. Holding the strip vertically, mark the center of the paper and fold the top and bottom to that center mark.
- Have students research myths or legends that illustrate traditional male and female gender roles and conventions. How do these tales, passed on through generations, still affect society today? Do they fuel stereotypes or gender inequities?
- Have students compare notions of creation, life, and death in different religions. Is the finality of life a belief held in many global traditions? For example, how do the worldviews of those in the Shinto faith differ from those of Quakers, or ancient Egyptians? Students can culminate their project with a visual representation of the particular life cycle they have researched.





## MASONIC PLAQUE IN THE FORM OF A ROYAL ARCH TRACING BOARD

Artist unidentified

Probably Natick, Massachusetts; 1899

Wood with printed and painted paper; 18  $\frac{3}{4}$  × 31  $\frac{5}{8}$  × 1 $\frac{5}{16}$ "

Gift of the Hirschhorn Foundation, 1997.6.4

Photo by David Stansbury, Springfield, Massachusetts

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Masons trace the roots of their secret society to the building of Solomon's Temple, though it is more likely that the organization arose out of practices of medieval stonemasons' guilds. Modern Freemasonry dates back to seventeenth-century England, and its presence in America was well established by the time of the American Revolution. Freemasonry developed a complex symbolic language intended to be understood only by its initiates. Many Americans were suspicious of secret societies such as the Masons, which they considered anti-egalitarian and threatening.

This plaque is in the form of a Master's chart, also called a carpet or tracing board, and employs a system of symbols to illustrate Masonic precepts. It includes several references to Solomon's Temple and Royal Arch Masonry, such as the triangle and circle enclosing a Tau Cross composed of three Ts. Also visible, in a series of letters surrounding the compass in the arch's keystone, is a mnemonic device associated with Royal Arch Masonry's Mark Master degree. The ascending letters on the ladder stand for "faith," "hope," and "charity." This type of chart was probably made for display in a member's home as a token of pride and prestige.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Beresniak, Daniel. *Symbols of Freemasonry*. New York, St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Hamilton, John D. *Material Culture of the American Freemasons*. Lexington, Mass.: Museum of Our National Heritage in association with University Press of New England, 1994.

Hollander, Stacy C., and Brooke Davis Anderson. *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

Mühlberger, Richard. *American Folk Marquetry: Masterpieces in Wood*. New York: Museum of American Folk Art, 1998.

Tabbert, Mark A. *American Freemasons: Three Centuries of Building Communities*. New York: National Heritage Museum in association with New York University Press, 2005.

# A SECRET WORLD OF SYMBOLS

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is going on in this picture?
- What symbols can we find?
- What patterns do you notice?
- What can we say about the way this was made?
- Do you get a sense of space or depth? How is this sense created?
- What can we say about the place depicted in this object?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- What purpose do you think this object was meant to serve? Who do you think it was made for, and what function do you think it served?
- The arch and columns in the center of the image are likely references to Solomon's Temple, to which many Freemasons claim to trace their roots. How does the architecture in the plaque help define its composition?
- The *Masonic Plaque* incorporates myriad symbols, some of which are readily recognizable. Other symbols, though, have more obscure meanings. Which symbolic elements are familiar to you? Which are unfamiliar? What do you think the unfamiliar ones might represent? Why would the fraternal order develop a secret system of symbols?
- Many Masonic symbols are derived from the tools and practices of stonemasonry. How might these tools have been used originally, and how do you think the meanings given to these tools has been transformed or elevated in this object?
- Scholars have noted the striking geometry in the *Masonic Plaque*. What role does the careful geometry play in the composition of this piece, and what impact does it have on your overall interpretation of the object?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- Who are the Freemasons, and what cultural influence have they had in American history? Where do we encounter Masonic symbols in everyday life?
- How can symbolic visual languages be embedded in a work of art? What symbolism do you find in the *Masonic Plaque*?
- Are there other fraternal or secret societies that have had a significant impact on American culture? How have these organizations affected different areas of the culture, and how are they depicted in popular media?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students research the Freemasons in the United States and the society's cultural and political influences. Questions to consider include: Why have the Freemasons created a

symbolic language? What is happening with the Freemasons today? How has the organization changed?

- Ask students to create a plaque in geometric code that reflects their culture or community.
- Have students reinterpret a story they have read, using the *Masonic Plaque* and its coded language as inspiration to create a visual narrative using painting, drawing, or paper collage techniques. Ask students to incorporate their own symbolism and geometry into their designs, developing a symbol key to accompany the piece.



## EXPULSION

Edgar Tolson (1904–1984)

Campton, Kentucky; 1969–1970

Carved wood with paint and pencil; 14 ½ × 18 × 7"

Gift of Elizabeth Ross Johnson, 1985.35.17

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Edgar Tolson was born in eastern Kentucky, deep in the Appalachian heartland. Woodcarving, a byproduct of the skills needed to survive in a region known as much for its grinding poverty as for its natural beauty, came to the artist naturally. Growing up in a family of subsistence farmers, Tolson worked at a variety of jobs during the course of his life. Following in the footsteps of his fundamentalist father, James Perry Tolson, the artist also served as a lay preacher.

Tolson began woodcarving in earnest following a stroke in 1957. Although his repertoire was varied, he is best known for a series of sequential narrative carvings depicting the Fall of Man as described in Chapter 3 of the book of Genesis. One of the most frequently quoted chapters of the Bible among evangelical Christians, Genesis tells the story of the temptation of Eve, the loss of innocence, the entry into the world of sin and suffering, and hence—according to Christian understanding—the need for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In approaching this theme, Tolson was fully aware both of the centrality of its theological message and its vivid theatricality.

Here the artist depicts Adam and Eve being driven out of the Garden of Eden. Only the serpent, hovering sinuously in the tree, is painted, heightening the drama of the narrative. The angel, slightly elevated on a platform, is one of the cherubim who, along with the flaming sword, were placed by God at the east of Eden at the time of the expulsion (Gen. 3:24).

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Ardery, Julia S. *The Temptation: Edgar Tolson and the Genesis of Twentieth Century Folk Art*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Crown, Carol. *Coming Home! Self-Taught Artists, the Bible and the American South*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.

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Longhauser, Elsa, and Harald Szeemann. *Self-Taught Artists of the 20th Century: An American Anthology*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books in association with Museum of American Folk Art, 1998.

Monroe, Michael W., and Suzanne Ramljak. *Turning Wood into Art*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000.

# PARADISE LOST

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is happening here?
- What surprises you about this object?
- What can we say about these figures?
- What relationship do the figures have to each other?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- *Expulsion* is one in a series of carvings by Edgar Tolson depicting Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the oft-quoted story of the Fall of Man in Chapter 3 of the Book of Genesis. How does this image compare with your notion of the Garden of Eden or paradise? What does the artist accomplish by depicting the scene as sparsely as he does?
- What scenes do you imagine the other carvings in the series depict?
- Tolson's carvings are known for their theatricality. How does the artist create a sense of drama?
- Tolson enjoyed recognition in his lifetime for the modernity and simplicity of his carvings. Consider the colors and shapes the artist employs. Why is the simplicity effective in telling the story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from paradise?
- How is Tolson's sculpture an indictment of the twentieth-century United States? The world? What norms have individuals and countries violated?
- Compare Tolson's depiction of Adam and Eve to that pictured in the first *Metamorphosis* puzzle book on page 93. How are the two portrayals similar to and different from each other? How does each artist communicate the narrative of Adam and Eve?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- How are stories, lore, and mythology important to religion?
- How did religion affect cultural and moral norms in the American South, where Edgar Tolson lived, in the second half of the twentieth century?
- What current events might Tolson have had in mind when he created *Expulsion* in 1969–1970?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students research different spiritual communities in the South during different time periods.
- Select a story that the class has examined together and ask students to identify pivotal moments in the narrative. Have each student select one of these moments to represent visually in a drawing, painting, sculpture, or collage. Once the students' narrative in imagery is completed, display all the depictions together to outline the story.
- Ask students to write a persuasive essay describing how people in the twenty-first century can "regain" Eden.







## FACES OF AFRICA II

Bessie Harvey (1929–1994)

Alcoa, Tennessee; 1994

Paint on wood with wood putty, glitter, found objects, marbles, and beads; 31 × 34 × 12"

Gift from the Mendelsohn Collection, 2002.20.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

With *Faces of Africa II*, Bessie Harvey proved herself a master of sculptural economy. Simply by tipping a segment of a tree on its side so that the branches evoke limbs and then spray-painting the entirety black, the artist imbued the timber with a human presence. Then, again with great restraint, Harvey added minimal wood putty for facial features, bringing the creature closer to life.

*Faces of Africa II* is one of a suite of three sculptures created in the last year of the artist's life. Truly at the height of her ability and clearly quite skilled with indigenous materials, Harvey demonstrates the refinement of her artistry. "I have a feeling for Africa. I see African people in the trees and in the roots. I talk to the trees. There's souls in the branches and roots. I frees them," Harvey once said, declaring her primary motivation, which was to free the spirits and souls she felt were captured in trees.

Working with trees connects her to other African American artists—there were many who used roots, branches, and trees as their primary artistic medium—and to her African heritage. Roots have a transformational purpose and meaning in many African cultures, in which they figure prominently in healing, medicine, and related lore. It seems not too great a leap to observe that African American self-taught artists also use roots in an effort to heal and to transform.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Arnett, Paul, and William Arnett, eds. *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*. Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 1999.

Cerny, Charlene, and Suzanne Seriff, eds. *Recycled, Re-Seen: Folk Art from the Global Scrap Heap*. New York: Harry N. Abrams with Museum of International Folk Art, 1996.

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Wood, Kathleen Sinclair. *Clues to American Sculpture*. Washington, D.C.: Starhill Press, 1990.

# EARTHLY TRANSFORMATION

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is happening here?
- What can we say about this object?
- What can we say about the way this was made?
- What more can we find?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- How does Bessie Harvey's use of materials impact your interpretation of this work?
- Harvey considered her work additive rather than subtractive. Based on what you see, what do you think "additive" sculpture is? What is subtractive sculpture? What other additive sculptors can you think of?
- Harvey has been noted as a sculptural economist. What does "economy" mean? Look carefully at the sculpture and think about the meaning of "sculptural economy." In what ways is the artist particularly restrained?
- Harvey collected pieces of trees in which she sensed a spirit thriving. How would you describe the spiritual qualities embodied in this sculpture?
- *Faces of Africa II* is one of a series of three sculptures that Harvey completed in the last year of her life. Based on what you see, what do you imagine the other two sculptures look like? What elements do you think she would carry over all three?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- How have different cultures viewed the importance of trees and roots?
- What is a talisman?
- At times, Bessie Harvey would create and complete multiple pieces in a single afternoon. Do you think that the amount of time it takes to create a work affects the artistic value of the object?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students bring in an object of personal value from home, then ask them to use their found materials, along with glue, string, tape, and paint, to transform their personal objects into something new.
- Ask students to give voice to Harvey's sculpture, writing a detailed account of what the sculpture has witnessed in its lifetime. What year is it? What day-to-day activities do you witness?
- Have students explore animism in different cultures. What are students' misconceptions, and how do they differ from actual practices?



## RESPONSES AND REACTIONS

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Throughout American history, folk artists have responded to watershed events, social and cultural circumstances, and mass movements in their works of art. As a result, folk art often offers a snapshot of the cultural climate in a particular moment of time and can act as a springboard for discussion of complex, controversial topics in American history, such as racism, classism, sexism, mass media, popular culture, and the perpetuation of stereotypes. Because folk artists operate outside of the academy and the established world of art, their works document human perspectives like no other artistic genre can.



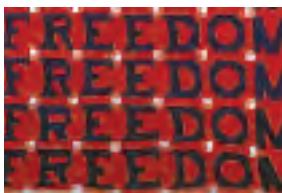
**REVOLUTIONARY PRINTING:** Learn about colonial textile printer John Hewson's unconventional method of protest in rebellion against the English Crown. Replicate Hewson's printmaking processes with ink or paint and printing foam or a potato.



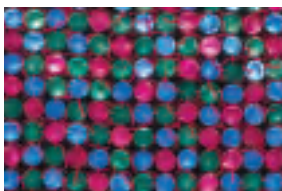
**GAME OF CHANCE:** Examine the ambiguous and emotionally charged *Game of Chance: Slaves and Auctioneer* and speculate whether the sculpture was intended to glorify the institution of slavery or expose its injustice.



**WHAT'S IN THE NEWS:** Discuss Ralph Fasanella's complex painting *Blind Newsdealer* and contemplate the role of the news media in our everyday lives.



**ART AS PROTEST:** Compare Jessie Telfair's subversive *Freedom Quilt* with Purvis Young's energy-filled *Assemblage of Crowd Scenes*. Explore the social commentary each artist proffers and discuss the efficacy of works of art as vehicles for protest.



**BABY BLANKET:** Discuss New York artist Drunell Levinson's unorthodox quilt *Baby Blanket*, constructed with inventive and surprising materials. Consider how art has served many as an effective platform for voicing concerns about social issues.







## HEWSON-CENTER QUILT WITH MULTIPLE BORDERS

Artist unidentified; center block printed by John Hewson (1744–1821)

United States; 1790–1810

Cotton and possibly linen; 85 ½ × 76"

Gift of Jerry and Susan Lauren, 2006.5.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During the Revolutionary War period, John Hewson, an English textile printer, challenged the authority of the British Empire over colonial America through the simple act of printing on fabric. In defiance of the British ban on the importation of printing equipment and technology, Hewson, highly trained in textile work, crossed the ocean with his family, his own proficiency in the textile printing trades, and contraband printing equipment. He established a successful manufacturing operation in the Philadelphia area, which was destroyed during the War of Independence. During the war, he was active in the Philadelphia militia. Hewson was honored for his service and for introducing advanced printing technology and expertise by representing the industry in the Grand Procession of 1788 in celebration of the ratification of the Constitution.

Hewson is best known for block-printed squares featuring an elaborate vase overflowing with flowers and sheaves of wheat and surrounded by motifs of butterflies and birds. These squares were used as the center medallions of quilts—as seen in this example—pieced together from a variety of eighteenth-century block-printed linens and cottons, some or all of which may have been printed in Hewson’s shop as well. It has a typical early quilt construction of a center medallion surrounded by multiple borders or frames. The highly complex appearance is deceiving, as the left side of the quilt is a virtual mirror image of the right.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

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International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln: [www.quiltstudy.org](http://www.quiltstudy.org)

National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C., “Quilts, Counterpanes & Throws: A Selection from the National Collection”: [www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections/quilts](http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections/quilts)

The Quilt Index: [www.quiltindex.org](http://www.quiltindex.org)

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# REVOLUTIONARY PRINTING

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is happening in this image?
- What can we say about the way this object was made?
- What patterns emerge in the image?
- What visual clues indicate when the object was created?
- What symbols can we find?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Though the advertisements John Hewson placed in newspapers survive, no ledgers or sample books of his business have been found. As a result, scholars rely on careful visual observations to identify his printed textiles. Based on the center-panel design, what elements do you think characterize Hewson's work? Which elements would you expect to see on other examples of his work?
- Other than the center panel, none of the other fabrics in this quilt can be attributed to Hewson with certainty. Examine the different pieces of the quilt carefully. Based on what you see, do you surmise that the different pieces were printed by the same hand? What do you see that gives you that idea?
- Hewson's textiles were available for purchase, and women bought his wares and incorporated them into their quilts. Hewson's designs of flowers emerging from an urn, birds, and butterflies were highly popular; similar motifs are common in quilting to this day. Why do you think these images have had lasting appeal? Do Hewson's motifs appeal to you?
- Invited to the colonies by Benjamin Franklin, Hewson established his textile-printing business in defiance of a British ban on the importation of printing technology to the colonies, set in place so Britain could maintain its stronghold over the textile industry. Thus, Hewson put himself in direct competition with British printers. Are you surprised by the resulting design? Why would Hewson's designs sell well in the eighteenth century? Do you think that the design would take on a more overtly patriotic theme today? Why or why not?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- What were some bans placed on the colonies by England in the 1700s? What were some examples of resistance to these laws?
- Where was the center of textile trade for colonial Americans?
- How common was quilting during the colonial era? Was quilting associated with a particular social class? Is this true today?
- What was the process of printing on fabric in the eighteenth century? How has it changed over the centuries?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Students can learn about the different processes of printmaking by exploring block-printing methods using printing foam or a potato. After sketching and etching or carving their designs—with pencil on foam plates or using a small knife on a potato—they can approximate John Hewson’s process by printing their images with ink or paint.
- Hewson was active in the Philadelphia militia during the War of Independence. Divide students into small groups to research and discuss groups or individuals from around the world who have fought for independence from colonial rule. What is the nature of the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer? Who are some artists or activists who have rebelled against colonial relationships?
- After students have learned about Hewson and his art form, political ideology, and journey to the colonies, have them pen their own letters as part of an imagined correspondence between Benjamin Franklin and Hewson in 1773, when Franklin extended the invitation to Hewson to leave England and settle in Philadelphia.







## GAME OF CHANCE: SLAVES AND AUCTIONEER

Artist unidentified

Possibly Maine; mid-nineteenth century

Paint on wood with metal, cotton, and paper; 27 × 24 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 22 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>"

Promised bequest of Dorothea and Leo Rabkin, P2.1981.2

Photo by John Parnell, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

*Game of Chance: Slaves and Auctioneer* is a significant document of its time and a provocative and painful reminder of the horrible consequences of the institution of slavery in American history. Although the transportation of slaves on British ships was officially banned in 1807, the changes brought forth with new legislation did not modify deeply ingrained attitudes. Reflecting commonly held views of the mid-nineteenth century, the creator of this one-of-a-kind game presents a scene that, at worst, represented and perpetuated pervasive racism and, at best, depicted the reality of social conditions experienced by African Americans prior to the Civil War.

With sober expressions and distorted physiognomy, ten carved black men, each with a numbered sign on his chest, stand in a row of cramped pens reminiscent of the cargo spaces of slave ships. A large, nattily dressed white auctioneer conducts the sale from above. Though the rules of the game and exact mechanism remain unclear, judging by the apparatus in the back it seems that when a round, marblelike object was dropped down a chute it arbitrarily slid into one of the ten channels, triggering a bell in the auctioneer's hand and sending the corresponding figure forward for appraisal.

Whether this game was for public or private use can only be surmised. Handles on either side of the contraption indicate that it was portable. It is possible that the artist was an abolitionist and that the game was created to dramatize the horrors of slavery.

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[www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/vfssp.html](http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/vfssp.html)

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library, "The Abolition of the Slave Trade: The Forgotten Story": [abolition.nypl.org](http://abolition.nypl.org)

# GAME OF CHANCE

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is happening here?
- What can we say about the figures?
- What can we say about the place where this is happening?
- What can we say about the time when this takes place?
- What more can we find?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Though this object's last known provenance is in Maine, there is no conclusive proof that it was made in New England; it could have originated almost anywhere. Although New England became known for its vehement condemnation of slavery, Boston was a center of the slave trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Based on this knowledge and your careful observations, do you think this game was created to celebrate slavery, or to expose its ugliness? What visual clues lead you to this conclusion?
- Handles on either side of the contraption indicate that it was intended to be a portable object. Why do you imagine it was meant to be a mobile piece? What purpose do you think the object was originally meant to serve?
- Though printed instructions for this object have not emerged, it seems the contraption works by dropping a marble-like object down a chute in the back, which would then roll at random into one of ten channels that triggered the auctioneer's bell on top and brought forth one of the slaves from behind the doors. What are the bigger implications of "chance" in this object and the experience it illustrates?
- Like many works of folk art, this object is unsigned, and the artist is unidentified. Who do you imagine might have created this object?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- The so-called Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787 mandated that only three fifths of the slave population would be counted in each state's census. How did this legislation contribute to the development of the two-party system?
- How did slavery influence the economic and social systems of Southern society? How did slavery influence the economic and social systems in the North?
- As slaves contributed to the economic development of the United States, how did the transmission of African cultural heritage spread throughout the country?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students create a board game that highlights a particular social issue, outlining key players and events associated with the issue. For an example, see the game Civilization, which puts the player at the head of a developing society.

- Ask students to create dioramas that reflect a modern-day social issue. Students can use shoeboxes, action figures, and other found materials in the construction of their pieces.
- Have students research the slave trade, focusing on the experiences of those sold or traded into slavery. How can we best preserve their stories?



## BLIND NEWSDEALER

Ralph Fasanella (1914–1997)

New York; 1947

Oil on canvas; 39 × 39"

Gift of Eva Fasanella and her children, Gina Mostrando and Marc Fasanella, 2004.27.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ralph Fasanella was born in New York City, the son of Italian immigrants. Early in life, Fasanella developed an intense feeling for the struggles of working people and, at the age of 24, in 1938, he took a job as a union organizer. As early as the 1940s, however, Fasanella experienced an urge to draw. By the 1950s, he was painting every evening. His subjects reflect his strong ideological commitment to organized labor and those who he believed were economically exploited. Just as important, besides providing the artist with a forum for his social and political views, painting opened up an outlet for his creativity.

*Blind Newsdealer* is a subject that Fasanella painted several times, and the scene is typical in the Manhattan cityscape. The newsdealer is depicted in the center of the painting wearing dark glasses, and he is surrounded by newspapers organized in neat, sorted stacks—the *Times*, the *Herald Tribune*, the *Sun*, and the *News*.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

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# WHAT'S IN THE NEWS

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is happening in this picture?
- What can we say about this place?
- How does the composition lead our eye through the work?
- What more can we find?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Look closely at the words on the newspapers in the painting. How do these headlines compare with ones we see today on newsstands?
- Ralph Fasanella tells us in the title that the newsdealer in the painting is blind. To what is he blind? What do we see that he does not? How does the artist use the metaphor of blindness?
- The newsstand in Fasanella's painting is plastered with images of women. How are the women depicted? What messages about gender does the artist communicate?
- The words *beauty* and *love* are featured prominently in the newsstand. What are the roles of these two concepts in the painting?
- Do you think the newsstand acts as a confining element for the newsdealer, or is it a sanctuary? What visual clues lead you to this conclusion?
- Fasanella is known for his sympathetic treatment of labor issues and as a champion of working people. How does this painting relate to these themes? What, if any, commentary does the artist inject into the image?
- Do you think this painting is still relevant today?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- What were some of the major stories one might have been able to read about at this newsstand in 1947, when the painting was made?
- How has the recent emergence of online news sources affected the print media we might find at a newsstand today?
- Do you think there is there a kind of "blindness" in today's news media? If so, where do you perceive it?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students collect headlines from various news publications in their area and develop a written response to what they discover in this process. What are some critical modern-day social issues, and how are headlines indications of these?
- Have an in-class journalism competition. Ask students to research underreported issues relevant to their community. What important stories are not being told? Have students submit their activist articles to their school or local community newspaper.



- Have students investigate the depiction of both men and women in the media. How do these portrayals compare with each other?
- Ask students to visit a local newsstand and survey the publications available at each. Interview the vendor to learn about how publications are selected for sale, and which are most popular with buyers.



## FREEDOM QUILT

Jessie B. Telfair (1913–1986)

Parrott, Georgia; 1983

Cotton with muslin backing and pencil inscription; 74 × 68"

Gift of Judith Alexander in loving memory of her sister, Rebecca Alexander, 2004.9.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The concept of a freedom quilt can be traced at least as far back as the Civil War, when women were urged to subvert the slave-owners' beliefs by embroidering antislavery slogans and images into their needlework. Although the existence of Underground Railroad quilts has not been documented except through oral tradition, the idea that quilts were used to encode paths to freedom has persisted into the present. This is one of several freedom quilts that Jessie Telfair made as a response to losing her job after she attempted to register to vote during the 1960s. It evokes the Civil Rights era through the powerful invocation of one word, *freedom*, formed from bold block letters along a horizontal axis. Mimicking the stripes of the American flag, it is unclear whether the use of red, white, and blue is ironic or patriotic—or both.

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## ASSEMBLAGE OF CROWD SCENES

Purvis Young (b. 1943)

Miami, Florida; late 1970s

Paint on found wood; 98 ½ × 58 × 2 ½"

Gift of T. Marshall Hahn Jr., 1995.22.2

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Many small elements make a whole in *Assemblage of Crowd Scenes*, a huge work tied together by similarly colored, rough-hewn frames. The various squares of images are turned at different angles, though the entire assemblage is weighted by the large, green, rectangular painting at the base, which anchors the otherwise quiet palette. The activity within the painting, however, stands in stark contrast to the muted colors. A crowd of figures gathers with upraised arms, hips thrust, in a stance that is simultaneously celebratory and urgent. Some scenes include vehicles, and in one composition the all-seeing eye, a motif commonly employed by the artist, is apparent. According to Young, when painted blue the eye represents oppression by the white man upon people of color. *Assemblage of Crowd Scenes* presents a tremendous visual cacophony that underscores the often fast, loud, and crowded life of its maker's urban environs.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

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# ART AS PROTEST

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is happening in these images?
- What can we say about how each of these works was made?
- What patterns can we find?
- What similarities and differences can we find between the two objects?
- What moods emerge for you from these works?
- What more can we find?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- How does artist Jessie Telfair communicate her message in *Freedom Quilt*? Consider her tools for communication. How does repetition affect the visual impact of the piece, as well as its message? How does the color influence your interpretation?
- Telfair was an African American woman who was fired from her job in the 1960s after she had attempted to register to vote. This experience prompted her to create a series of “freedom” quilts, of which this is one, to express her feelings about the event. What is the primary feeling you perceive in the quilt? What do you see that gives you this feeling?
- Do you think the *Freedom Quilt* is an effective means for Telfair to communicate her message? How else might she have expressed these feelings, artistically or otherwise?
- At first glance, Purvis Young’s *Assemblage of Crowd Scenes* might seem unrelated to *Freedom Quilt*. But on closer examination, how does the construction of *Assemblage of Crowd Scenes* relate to the construction of *Freedom Quilt*?
- Look carefully at the figures in *Assemblage of Crowd Scenes*. What feeling do you get from them? How does Young communicate this mood? How does this mood relate to the mood in Telfair’s *Freedom Quilt*?
- These works by Young and Telfair have both been discussed as protest pieces. What do you think each is protesting? What do you see that gives you this idea? Do you think one piece is more effective as a protest piece than the other? What do you see that gives you that idea?

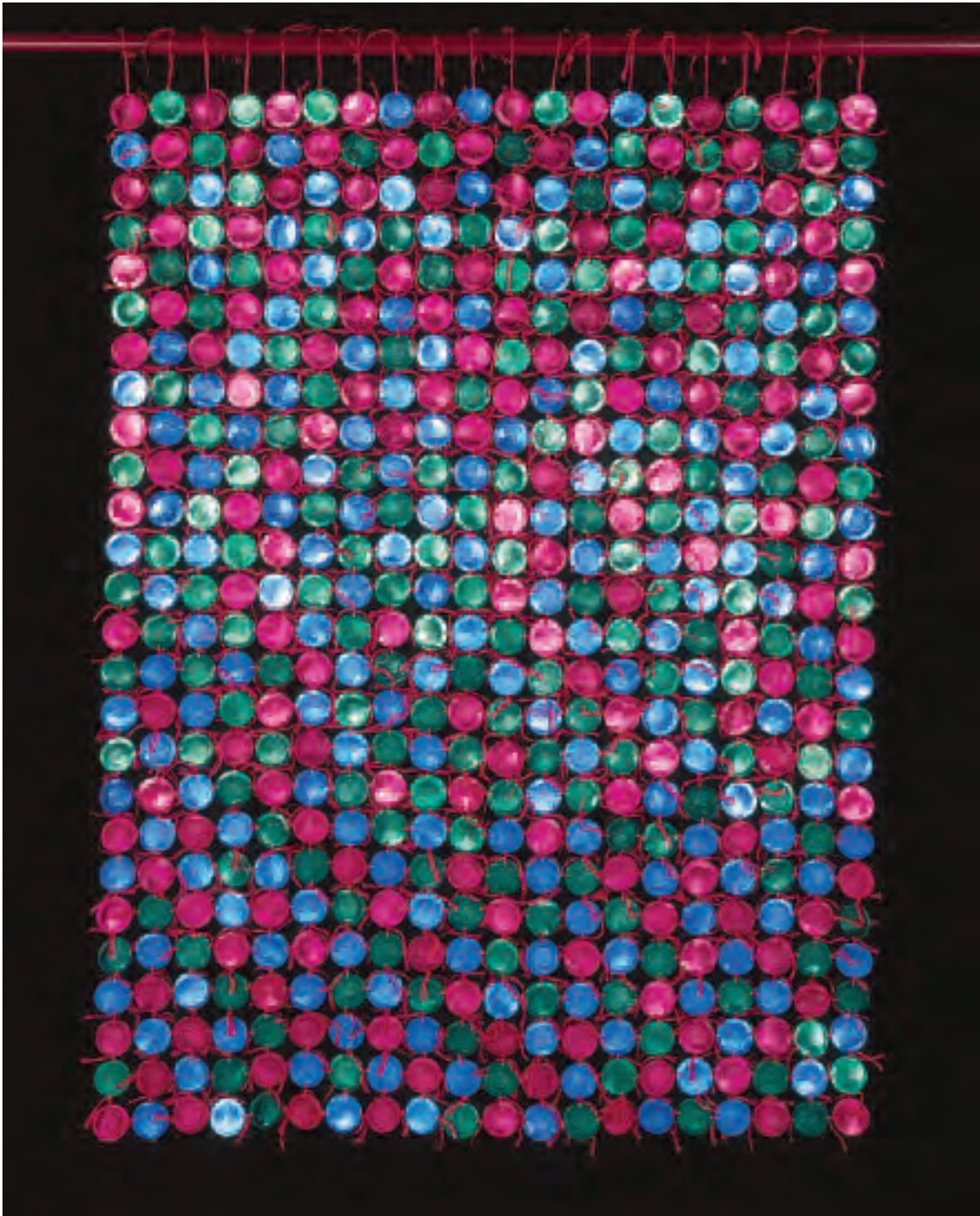
## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- What are some implications of the word *freedom*? How has the meaning of this word changed or taken on new implications in different periods of American history?
- What is disenfranchisement? In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who suffered disenfranchisement and who fought it? In what ways is disenfranchisement an issue today?
- Do you think that creating works of art is an effective mode of protest? Why or why not?



## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Ask students to create an “homage” piece to someone who has fought for a local or national cause, using painting, drawing, or collage techniques. How can you employ either ordered repetition and patterning or assemblage to make a potent statement that relates to the subject’s plight?
- Have students attend a local protest of either small or large scale. Did they notice any mobile protest art? Using photographic documentation of the event, ask students to recreate the scene they witnessed, using both collage and text.
- Purvis Young’s first creation was a mural in his neighborhood in Miami. Take a walking tour of murals in your school’s area. Have students note the themes they discover in the murals. Do any of the murals portray ideas of struggle or resistance?
- Have students select an issue about which they have strong opinions, then ask them to create a work of art expressing their opinions using painting, drawing, photographic, or collage techniques.



## BABY BLANKET

Drunell Levinson (b. 1951)

New York; 1996

Aluminum-wrapped condoms with embroidery thread; 44 × 33"

Gift of the artist, 1998.3.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

"I began using condoms in my quilts because quilts are seen as feminine objects, and I was seeking a method whereby I might degender quilts. I selected the Gold Coin brand of condoms because of the shape and color," says the artist Drunell Levinson about her textile, *Baby Blanket*.

Interested in updating the art of quilting, Levinson uses idiosyncratic materials for her artworks. She has other motives as well: in this case, she wanted to honor the technique in quilting of using three layers (a packaged condom does this). The artist also wanted to explore unusual material in response to the then-current dialogue about material in contemporary art, made especially vibrant with the exhibition "Sensation" presented by the Brooklyn Museum of Art, which included a work using elephant dung by the British artist Chris Ofili.

By the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, condoms became a mainstay in contemporary sexual practices, not only as a birth-control device but to protect against the AIDS virus. This quilt is loaded with the symbolism of the cycle of life (birth, life, death) that condoms represent to us today.

### RESOURCES

American Folk Art Museum:

[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

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# BABY BLANKET

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## QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is happening here?
- What can we say about the way this object was made?
- How does this quilt compare with other quilts you have encountered?

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Artist Drunell Levinson has said that she began using condoms in her work as a way to degender quilts. In doing so, how does she challenge notions of traditional gender roles?
- Levinson chose condoms as her material in part to mirror traditional quilt construction. How do these condoms relate to traditional quilting techniques? What other conceptual relationships do the object and the materials used to construct it have to each other?
- What roles do the themes of birth, life, and death play in *Baby Blanket*?
- Do you think that a baby blanket is a strong or appropriate symbol for the AIDS epidemic? Does this piece symbolize any other issues?

## QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- How are traditional quilts constructed?
- Can you think of other artistic responses to the AIDS epidemic? What do you know about these projects?
- What can you say about how the issue of AIDS is treated in different countries? Who has access to treatment and who does not?

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Have students choose social topics about which they feel strongly, and ask them to create posters or video-based Public Service Announcements stating their positions on their chosen issues.
- Ask students to explore the idea of metaphor by creating their own “quilts” or sculptures, combining found objects to make something with new or unexpected meanings.
- Ask students to explore the effect AIDS has had on the arts, considering works that address the crisis and artists who have lived with the illness.



# GLOSSARY

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## **Activism**

The practice of taking action, especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue.

## **Activist**

A person who takes action to achieve a goal that is often political or social in nature.

## **Animism**

The belief that a spirit is ever-present in all objects. A basic tenet of animism is that a material object is governed by, or has a connection to, the soul that inhabits it. The unification of matter and spirit is an underlying principle of this philosophy.

## **Appliqué**

A decorative quiltmaking technique in which shapes or pieces of one material are cut out and sewn onto a larger piece of fabric.

## **Assemblage**

A sculptural composition assembled or constructed from an arrangement of objects and materials. May refer to both the process of creating a work and the finished construction.

## **Black Codes**

Laws passed at both state and local levels in the United States in 1865 that restricted the civil rights and civil liberties of former slaves in former Confederate states. By 1866, federal officials suspended the Black Codes when they enacted the Reconstruction Amendments, which secured the rights of former slaves in law if not in fact.

## **Busk**

A rigid element placed at the front of a corset, often made of bone, wood, or ivory, to keep the corset front straight and upright.

## **Community**

A group of people with common interests living in a particular area, or a group of people with a common characteristic, interest, or belief within a larger society.

## **Composition**

The plan, placement, or arrangement of elements such as colors, forms, shapes, and space in an artwork.

## **Folk art**

Art created by people with no formal or academic training in the arts, though they may have received training through apprenticeships or family tradition. Folk art is not a single art form but includes a diverse range of visual expression, such as painting, drawing, sculpting, textiles, and pottery. Folk art is often → *utilitarian*, religious, handmade, rooted in a crafts tradition, and/or stemming from a communal tradition. It encompasses the highly personalized expression of → *self-taught* creators.



**Found object**

Common objects (natural materials as well as man-made items) that are not normally considered art materials but which are incorporated into an artwork.

**Freedmen's Bureau**

A federal agency established by Congress during Reconstruction to aid former slaves displaced by the American Civil War. The Freedmen's Bureau helped provide food, housing, and medical aid to refugees, helping free blacks adjust to new conditions.

**Freemasons/Freemasonry**

A fraternal organization that traces its roots to Solomon's Temple but that more likely arose from practices associated with medieval stonemason's guilds. Its members are joined together by a system of shared ideals, morals, and beliefs. Masonic teachings are intended only for initiates into the society.

**Ideology**

An organized constellation of ideas, or a comprehensive vision, based on having a certain way of looking at things. Ideologies may be based on both individual philosophy and collective social thought.

**Jim Crow laws**

State and local laws enforced in the Southern states between 1876 and 1965. Jim Crow laws mandated "separate but equal" status for African Americans and consequently led to inferior treatment. Under these laws, all public spheres and facilities remained segregated by race.

**Masonic**

Relating to → *Freemasons/Freemasonry*.

**Motif**

A recurring theme or pattern in a creative work.

**Overmantel**

A painted panel set over the parlor fireplace. Overmantels provided an ornamental focus on the fireplace, one of the most important features of the early American home.

**Popular media**

Images or visual messages commonly found in mass culture that may be incorporated into works of art.

**Portrait**

A painting, drawing, sculpture, or other work of visual art that captures the likeness of a person, usually focusing on the face. A portrait can be figural or abstract, and may capture the essence of a person, not just his or her physicality.



**Primary source**

A record or document of the past created by a witness to or participant in an event. Primary sources can include written documents, photographs, and works of art, among other media.

**Quilt**

A bedcover consisting of three layers—a decorated textile top layer, an inner layer of padding, and a bottom fabric layer—that are stitched together, often decoratively, to hold the three layers in place.

**Religion**

A system of beliefs and practices generally held by a community, usually involving adherence to codified rituals, worship of a god or spiritual truth, and adherence to rules of behavior and thought. Religion often involves studying, interpreting, and honoring cultural traditions and writings. It may refer to both personal practices and shared conviction of a greater religious community.

**Self-taught artist**

An artist who has received no formal or academic training in the arts, and usually has not been trained or mentored by a community in a traditional art form, but has developed artistic processes, styles, and/or techniques independently.

**Show figures**

Three-dimensional lifelike and life-size figures, often carved from wood, designed to advertise tobacco and other businesses in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**Symbol**

The visual or graphic representation of something beyond itself, often an abstract concept.

**Symbolism**

The representation of concepts or ideas through the use of → *symbols*, particularly in the arts.

**Trade signs**

Iconic objects that advertise trades, services, or products. Often carved, oversize versions of everyday items associated with the trades they advertise, they were usually hung off the façades or placed standing in front of businesses.

**Utilitarian**

Something serving primarily for → *utility*, rather than being solely an object of beauty.

**Utility**

Something useful or designed to fulfill a specific practical purpose.

**Whaling**

The industry and practice of harvesting whales from the oceans; it dates back to at least 6000 BC.



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Full-color catalog of the American Folk Art Museum's Darger collection that offers an introduction to the controversial self-taught artist.

Ardery, Julia S. *The Temptation: Edgar Tolson and the Genesis of Twentieth Century Folk Art*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

A highly detailed account of Tolson's life and work, including interviews with the artist, a thorough biography, and an explanation of how Tolson took woodcarving from hobby to divine skill. Discusses his manifold influences, including biblical themes. Offers information on the arts of Appalachia, and how woodcarving was considered "folk art" during the 1960s. Some color and black-and-white images included.

Arnett, Paul, and William Arnett, eds. *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*. Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 1999.

The definitive book on African American folk artists of the South. Volume 1 explores artists working in the years following World War II; Volume 2 focuses on artists working in the 1980s and '90s.

Bank, Mirra. *Anonymous Was a Woman*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979.

Offers insight on popular virtues, school life, and "girlhood training" in the 1800s, and the consequent effect on American art. Filled with poems and diary entries from the 1800s, as well as images of needlework, theorem paintings, and quilts.

Bassett, Lynne Z., and Jack Larkin. *Northern Comfort: New England's Early Quilts, 1780–1850*. Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998.

Focuses on pieced work, patchwork, and appliqué quilts from the New England quilting tradition and its roots in the English textile arts. Methods of printing on fabric and popular tastes of the day are also highlighted.

Benberry, Cuesta. *A Piece of My Soul: Quilts by Black Arkansans*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000.

The late master quiltmaker Cuesta Benberry explores the intergenerational tradition of quilting in Arkansas. Examples of pattern design and color reproductions of different types of quilts are offered.

Beresniak, Daniel. *Symbols of Freemasonry*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Demystifies the historical background and symbolism of this exclusive and secretive society. Explanation of rites, rituals, organization, and origins of this "community of brothers." Sheds light on symbolic meaning and common metaphors used in the organization's philosophy and initiation practices.

Biesenbach, Klaus. *Henry Darger: Disasters of War*. Berlin: Kunst-WerkeInstitute for Contemporary Art, 2004.

Primarily comprising beautifully saturated color images from the *magnum opus*. Also includes a transcribed conversation with Kyoko Lerner, the widow of Henry Darger's landlord who had discovered Darger's works, and her firsthand accounts of interactions with the prolific recluse.

Bishop, Robert. *American Folk Sculpture*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1974.

An encyclopedic account of all things sculptural in the American folk art tradition, revealing rich diversity within the field, from the early expression of funerary art to chalkware of the 1800s, whimsical carousel creatures, and compelling three-dimensional portraits of everyday citizens of the

early twentieth century. Includes color and black-and-white images.

Bishop, Robert, Jean Lipman, and Elizabeth V. Warren. *Young America: A Folk-Art History*. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1986.

Glimpses into the life-cycle events of African American, Native American, and European-descent communities in the 1800s and 1900s come alive in the color reproductions and photos of this rich collection. Themes of family, war, work, home, and school life are focuses of this treasury, with a variety of art forms represented.

Bradstreet Richter, Paula. *Painted with Thread: The Art of American Embroidery*. The Peabody Essex Museum Collection 136. Salem, Mass.: Peabody Essex Museum, 2004.

Exhibition catalog featuring images of samplers and pastoral landscapes; highlights the artistry of this traditional American, typically female, medium.

Brilliant, Richard. *Portraiture*. London: Reaktion Books, 1991.

History of portraiture in both art history and popular culture. Addresses the conventions and innovations artists employ, and how portrait artists have worked over time.

Brouwer, Norman, and Nina Hellman. *A Mariner's Fancy*. New York: South Street Seaport Museum in association with Balsam Press, 1992.

An overview of the whaling industry, with a specific focus on New York's role as one of America's foremost seaports. Gives information on materials and popular motifs used most frequently in scrimshaw production. Many image examples include scrimshaw incorporating teeth and tusks.

Callahan, Nancy. *The Freedom Quilting Bee: Folk Art and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987.

Tells the story of African American women's

quiltmaking cooperatives as a culturally significant force that emerged from the Civil Rights movement in Alabama. Touches on the celebrated community of the quiltmakers in Gee's Bend and the commercialization of the art form.

Cerny, Charlene, and Suzanne Seriff, eds. *Recycled, Re-Seen: Folk Art from the Global Scrap Heap*. New York: Harry N. Abrams with Museum of International Folk Art, 1996.

Documents an extensive assortment of art created from discarded objects. Relates economy and mass-production to the creation of global folk art, repurposing waste into beautiful and useful things.

Chambers, Tim. *The Art of the Game: A Collection of Vintage Game Boards from the Collection of Shelby Shaver*. Sikeston, Mo.: privately printed, 2001.

Color images chronicle the evolution of game boards throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Descriptions of the function and history of each game appear, as does a consideration of each piece as a work of art or significant historical artifact.

Chase, Pattie, with Mimi Dolbier. *The Contemporary Quilt: New American Quilts and Fabric Art*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978.

Documents unorthodox quilts from a variety of quiltmakers of the 1970s, some playful, others political, abstract, and narrative. Includes excerpts of interviews with the quiltmakers.

Crown, Carol. *Coming Home! Self-Taught Artists, the Bible and the American South*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.

Gives excellent interpretations of intersections of secularism, theology, and visual art, and charts how the predominance of religion in the South has informed the work of many self-taught artists.

D'Ambrosio, Paul S. *Ralph Fasanella's America*. Cooperstown: New York State Historical Association, 2001.

A chronological account of the artist's life and career; includes color examples of his work. Excerpted interviews with family and fellow union organizers reveal how this realist painter was a champion of the working class, and how he expertly incorporated themes of national and civic politics, social issues, and American culture into his paintings.

Driskell, David C., ed. *African American Visual Aesthetics: A Post-Modernist View*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995.

Attempts to offer a fair representation of the often dangerously narrow definition of "black art." Challenges the notion that there is one fixed meaning of black culture and allows space for pluralism in the artistic expression of a diverse population. Color reproductions of works by African American artists are included. Though works by Bessie Harvey are not included, the text and images provide a context for her work.

Eaton, Linda. *Quilts in a Material World: Selections from the Winterthur Collection*. New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with Winterthur Museum & Country Estate, 2007.

Presents Winterthur's renowned quilt collection through color photographs—many reproduced for the first time—that showcase rich fabrics and skillful needlework techniques. Includes quilts that express religious faith or commemorate marriages and other family connections; quilts in support of political candidates, made by women who could not vote; and quilted bedspreads with matching quilted valances and dressing-table covers pictured in room settings.

Foreman, Skot, ed. *Purvis Young: Possession*. Dania Beach, Fla.: Skot Foreman Fine Art, 2001.

Excellent color reproductions of assemblages and books made by the artist. Brief interpretations of each work are featured. Includes explanations of his artmaking methods, style, and recurring themes.

Fox, Sandi. *Wrapped in Glory: Figurative Quilts and Bedcovers, 1700–1900*. New York: Thames and Hudson in association with Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1990.

Produced to accompany an exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Includes examples of 36 figurative quilts and bedcovers.

Gilley, Shelby R. *Painting By Heart: The Life and Art of Clementine Hunter, Louisiana Folk Artist*. Baton Rouge, La.: St. Emma Press, 2000.

Rich biographical information relates Hunter's upbringing, influences, and life on Melrose Plantation, with firsthand accounts from interviews of her.

Hamilton, John D. *Material Culture of the American Freemasons*. Lexington, Mass.: Museum of Our National Heritage in association with University Press of New England, 1994.

Features black-and-white images of objects with great functional and symbolic value to Freemasons. Divided into object categories including regalia, furniture, decorative arms/weaponry, and documents.

Harding, Deborah. *Stars and Stripes: Patriotic Motifs in American Folk Art*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2002.

From the textile arts to woodcarving, this book includes all things patriotic created in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Artists whose works are imbued with themes of national pride and allegory are featured, complete with beautiful color reproductions and contextual explanations for each.

Harding, Deborah, and Laura Fisher. *Home Sweet Home: The House in American Folk Art*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2001.

Explores the idea of "house and home" as one of the most popular motifs in American folk art, with examples from the textile arts, painting, and sculpture. Explanations of the utilitarian purpose



and aesthetic/cultural significance of each object are included.

Hinrichs, Kit. *Long May She Wave: A Graphic History of the American Flag*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books in association with American Institute of Graphic Arts, 1987.

Ninety-six graphic artists contributed to this book to honor the 100th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty. These artists play with and reinterpret evocative American iconography, each artifact showcasing the “stars and stripes” in some way. All were exhibited at the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

Hoffberger, Rebecca, et al. *Tree of Life*. Baltimore: American Visionary Art Museum, 1996.

Exhibition catalog that focuses on artists who work with wood either as an artmaking material or as a theme in their creations.

Hollander, Stacy C. *American Radiance: The Ralph Esmerian Gift to the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

Catalog of this once-private renowned collection of American folk art comprising hundreds of pieces of furniture, signs, ceramics, textiles, weathervanes, walking sticks, and other objects.

Hollander, Stacy C., and Brooke Davis Anderson. *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

An exploration of American folk art from the colonial period through the present as seen through highlights from the American Folk Art Museum’s collection.

John Michael Kohler Arts Center. *Eugene Von Bruenchenhein: Obsessive Visionary*. Sheboygan, Wis.:

John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 1988.

Catalog of works by self-taught visionary artist Eugene Von Bruenchenhein in the permanent

collection of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. Documents Von Bruenchenhein’s life and work, which includes not only chicken-bone sculptures such as *Gold Tower* but hundreds of oil paintings, pinup-style photographs of his wife, Marie, as well as a variety of other objects. The book also presents a selection of poetry and theoretical writings by the artist.

Kaufman, Stuart B. “Labor’s Heritage.” *Quarterly of The George Meany Memorial Archives* 1, no. 4 (1989). Offers an overview of American labor history in the early twentieth century. Includes information about artist Ralph Fasanella’s involvement in the union movement, as well as color reproductions of select paintings that relate to unionism and the working class of New York City.

Kuyk, Betty M. *African Voices in the African American Heritage*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003. Focuses on how certain African belief systems have carried over from the pre-slavery world and ultimately influenced cultural and artistic production in the United States.

Laverty, Paula. “Many Hands: The Story of an Album Quilt.” *Folk Art* 18, no. 1 (spring 1993): 52–57. Chronicles the artist’s work to uncover information about the *Cross River Album Quilt* (page 21) and its makers, eleven women whose signatures were the most valuable clues to their identities. Investigates the provenance of the work and the community from which it was so lovingly created through exhaustive genealogical research, unearthing much of the quilt’s formerly untold story.

Lippard, Lucy. *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1990.

Explores the work of contemporary artists whose work reflects their mixed ethnic, cultural, and national identities. The examples in this book challenge the assumption of homogeneity in art created by people with diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Longhauser, Elsa, and Harald Szeemann. *Self-Taught Artists of the 20th Century: An American Anthology*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books in association with Museum of American Folk Art, 1998.

A thorough compilation of influential contemporary self-taught artists and their works. Includes a timeline of art/artists, history, literature, and popular culture from the early 1800s to the present day.

MacGregor, John M. *Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal*. New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2002.

A thorough compilation of selected images and writings from the largest known work of illustrated fiction. Biographical information unfolds throughout. Also explored is Darger's artistic methodology—from collection to collage, experimentation to refining his skills.

Maresca, Frank, and Roger Ricco. *American Vernacular*. Boston: Bulfinch Press, 2002.

Articulates important distinctions between folk art, fine art, and outsider art. Numerous reproductions of three-dimensional objects are included. Features objects often associated with folk art including weathervanes, sculptural figures, and trade signs.

———. *Bill Traylor: His Art, His Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991.

Reproductions of Traylor's drawings and paintings, accompanied by an interview with Charles Shannon, the artist who preserved and promoted Traylor's work after having befriended him in Montgomery, Ala.

Martinez, Elizabeth (Betita). "Looking for Color in the Anti-War Movement." *Z Magazine* (November 2003): [www.zmag.org/ZMagSite/Nov2003/martinez1103.html](http://www.zmag.org/ZMagSite/Nov2003/martinez1103.html).

Examines the peace movement, from the Vietnam War to present, and how it has both involved and omitted people of color. Martinez also discusses wars

at home that are waged in communities of color and largely unaddressed.

McDonough, Yona Zeldis. *Eve and Her Sisters: Women of the Old Testament*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1994. Gives synopses, in a series of brief vignettes, of each biblical story featuring a female character. Bold color illustrations and simple overviews make this an excellent introductory book to pique students' interest in female representation in the Bible.

McManus, Michael. *A Treasury of American Scrimshaw: A Collection of the Useful and Decorative*. New York: Penguin Studio, 1997.

Offers an overview of the European origins of the art of scrimshaw, from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Excellent color reproductions with highly detailed images. Many images of hand tools used on ships and popular games of the day.

McMorris, Penny. *Crazy Quilts*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984.

Chronicles one of the most popular styles in quilting—the Crazy quilt—from the period of the mid-1800s up to the end of the 1900s. Full of color reproductions, it includes numerous contemporary examples from the late twentieth century, when there was a resurgence in the style. Though none of the objects in the curriculum guide features this particular method of quilting, the book provides ways to contrast different approaches to the art form.

Meadows, Cecil A. *Trade Signs and Their Origin*. London: Reading and Fakenham, 1957.

Provides a history of various international trades and their accompanying signs, from the 1600s through the 1800s. Categories include both common and unusual trades. Descriptions are complemented by small-scale, black-and-white drawings of the signs themselves.

Monroe, Michael W., and Suzanne Ramljak. *Turning Wood into Art*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000.

A catalog of the Jane and Arthur Mason Collection from the Mint Museum of Craft + Design, Charlotte, N.C. Includes color reproductions showing the impressive sculptural qualities of wood. Though works by Edgar Tolson are not included, the text and images provide context for his works.

Mühlberger, Richard. *American Folk Marquetry: Masterpieces in Wood*. New York: Museum of American Folk Art, 1998.

A fascinating look at the tradition of marquetry, or “painting in wood,” from its origins in ancient Egypt and later proliferation in fifteenth-century Europe to the development of the form in America. Handsome color reproductions of these largely utilitarian artworks illustrate process, exacting technique, and historical significance.

Opie, Robert Iona, and Brian Alderson. *The Treasures of Childhood*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1989.

A comprehensive survey of select objects from the Opie Collection of Children’s Literature. Includes popular children’s books and toys used in the 1700s and 1800s devised to transform academic tasks and moral lessons into entertaining diversions. Includes many color reproductions of panoramas, turn-ups, and chapbooks, among other treasures.

Ricco, Roger, and Frank Maresca, with Julia Weissman. *American Primitive: Discoveries in Folk Sculpture*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988.

A resource representing sculpture by American self-taught artists from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Replete with gorgeous color images, it offers abundant information about artists’ approaches to construction and design, as well as social-historical motivations for particular works to be created. Features 400-plus objects, including wire figures, tramp art, and narrative carvings with limitless stories to tell.

Ring, Betty. *Girlhood Embroidery: American Samplers & Pictorial Needlework, 1650–1850*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

An impressive two-volume record expertly telling the story of needlework’s significant presence throughout the long history of women’s education. Tracing the art from the European Renaissance through its modification as it traveled to colonial America, Ring examines, through text and images, needleworks’ motifs, instructional uses, designation as a technical skill, role as a creative endeavor, and record of family and society and takes a close look at the work generated by specific schools and school-girls in New England and the greater Northeast.

Sessions, Ralph. “The Image Business: Shop and Cigar Store Figures in America.” *Folk Art* 21, no. 4 (winter 1996/97): 54–60. Also available at Antiques and The Arts Online, [www.antiquesandthearts.com/archive/image.htm](http://www.antiquesandthearts.com/archive/image.htm).

Article written on the occasion of a traveling exhibition of the same name organized for the American Folk Art Museum by curator Ralph Sessions.

———. *The Shipcarver’s Art: Figureheads and Cigar-Store Indians in Nineteenth-Century America*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Explores in great detail the ways in which show figures reflect cultural values and events in America from the eighteenth century through the early twentieth. Also addresses the processes of the art form and the many messages transmitted through show figures.

Simons, D. Brenton, and Peter Benes. *The Art of Family: Genealogical Artifacts in New England*. Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society in association with Northeastern University Press, 2002.

Chronicles family portraiture, gravestone carvings, and illustrated family registers from eighteenth-century New England.

Sinaiko, Eve. *Vietnam: Reflexes and Reflections*. New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with National Vietnam Veteran's Art Museum, 1998.

Offers a unique firsthand perspective of the Vietnam War from veterans who are also artists. Includes works reflecting the artists' experiences at war as well as excerpts from poems, diaries, and letters to loved ones back home.

Sloat, Caroline F. *Meet Your Neighbors: New England Portraits, Painters and Society, 1790–1850*. Sturbridge, Mass.: Old Sturbridge Village, 1992.

Explores the role of portraiture in early America with equal parts reproductions and text. Discusses the role of patrons, the work of itinerant artists, and the effects of the advent of photography.

Tabbert, Mark A. *American Freemasons: Three Centuries of Building Communities*. New York: National Heritage Museum in association with New York University Press, 2005.

A comprehensive guide to understanding Freemasonry through the 1990s. Begins with a brief overview of its European origins but focuses on its role in colonial and revolutionary America. Traces the Freemasons' organizational changes, adaptations, and varying popularity since the country's inception. Includes wonderful color images of Masonic decorative arts, documents, and objects.

Warren, Elizabeth V., and Sharon L. Eisenstat. *Glorious American Quilts: The Quilt Collection of the Museum of American Folk Art*. New York: Penguin Studio in association with Museum of American Folk Art, 1996. Describes the American Folk Art Museum's quilt collection with chapters on whole-cloth, chintz, signature, appliqué, pieced, log-cabin, show, revival, Amish, African American, and contemporary quilts.

Watson, Patrick. *Fasanella's City: The Paintings of Ralph Fasanella with the Story of His Life and Art*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973.

Examples of Fasanella's sketches and paintings serve to illustrate the inspiration the artist drew from New York City and the range with which he portrays architecture, mass transit, popular sports, civic institutions, and public events.

Wilson, James L. *Clementine Hunter: American Folk Artist*. Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing, 1988.

Features color reproductions of paintings representing Hunter's personal life, community, and spirituality.

Wood, Kathleen Sinclair. *Clues to American Sculpture*. Washington, D.C.: Starhill Press, 1990.

Small-format primer on all types of sculpture within different genres and art-historical periods—from artisan and abstract works to the dramatic storytelling of heroic realism in sculpture.

Wulfert, Kimberly. "The Man of Many Vases: John Hewson, Calico Printer." *Folk Art* 32, no. 3 (fall 2007): 58–69.

Article chronicling the life and work of the Philadelphia woodblock printer who emigrated from England just before the Revolutionary War. Explores the artist's motifs, his involvement in the war effort, his loyalty to the art form, and the English ban on the importation of textile printing technology.

## RECOMMENDED ONLINE RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

American Folk Art Museum:  
[www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org)

Contains information about the museum's exhibitions, collections, programs, and events, as well as an online catalog of the museum's non-circulating research library.

Biblioteca Virtual de Simón Bolívar (Virtual Library of Simón Bolívar): [www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/7609/eng/toc/html](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/7609/eng/toc/html)  
An informational website in English and Spanish

for adults featuring selected writings on and by Simón Bolívar.

Community Learning Network, Advertising in the Media Theme Page:

[www.cln.org/themes/media\\_advert.html](http://www.cln.org/themes/media_advert.html)

An educational resource site that provides links to online materials and websites relating to media awareness and critical thinking. Each has been reviewed and selected by K–12 educators. Topics and lesson plans cover subjects from dissecting an advertisement to freedom of the press.

The Flag of the United States of America:

[www.usflag.org](http://www.usflag.org)

Includes images of the complete history of official United States flags, from the first thirteen-star version to today's fifty-star flag.

International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln: [www.quiltstudy.org](http://www.quiltstudy.org)

Database of images and information regarding traditional and contemporary American and international quilts.

The Library of Congress's American Memory website, "Voices from the Days of Slavery" online archive:

[www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/vfssp.html](http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/vfssp.html)

Transcripts and audio recordings of the narratives of former slaves.

National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C., "Quilts, Counterpanes & Throws: A Selection from the National Collection":

[www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections/quilts](http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections/quilts)

A selection of images of quilts, including those categorized as patriotic quilts, album quilts, pictorial quilts, and more.

Public Broadcasting Service Online, "P.O.V.: In the Realms of the Unreal": [www.pbs.org/pov/intherealms](http://www.pbs.org/pov/intherealms)  
Includes an audio tour of Henry Darger's work with

Brooke Davis Anderson, director and curator of The Contemporary Center and the Henry Darger Study Center at the American Folk Art Museum; excerpts of the artist's 15,000-page manuscript; an interview with Jessica Yu, director of the documentary *In the Realms of the Unreal*; and high school-level curriculum materials produced by the American Folk Art Museum.

The Quilt Index: [www.quiltindex.org](http://www.quiltindex.org)

An online research and reference tool with contextual information and images of quilts held in private and public collections. Browse by category: collection, time period, style/techniques, purpose/function, or location.

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library, "The Abolition of the Slave Trade: The Forgotten Story": [abolition.nypl.org](http://abolition.nypl.org)  
Comprehensive guide to the history of the slave trade in the United States, complete with documents, photographs, maps, and essays that illuminate the topic.

## RECOMMENDED FOR VIEWING

Conrad, Shaun, and David Raccuglia. *Purvis of Overtown*. DVD. New York: 77 Films, 2006.

Interviews with the artist, his friends, and collectors recount the artist's biography. Includes footage of the artist working.

Yu, Jessica. *In the Realms of the Unreal: The Mystery of Henry Darger*. DVD. New York: Wellspring Media, 2005.

Documentary featuring dreamlike animation of Henry Darger's art and narration taken from his 15,000-page opus; traces the artist's life and gives an insight into the stories he imaged in his drawings, paintings, and writings.

