

PICTURING AMERICA LESSON

African American Journeys

The African American experience is a complex story populated with heroes and dramatic journeys. This lesson explores three stories from history: the artistic contributions of the potter David Drake; the rich and interesting life of Yarrow Mamout; the heroism and bravery of the Fifty-fourth Regiment from Massachusetts and their commander Colonel Robert Gould Shaw; and the individuals who participated in the Selma-to-Montgomery march for voting rights in 1965. Students will see how artistic works offer insights into the people and events of history.



Portrait of Yarrow Mamout (Muhammad Yaro), 1819
Charles Willson Peale, American
Oil on canvas
24 x 20 inches (61 x 50.8 cm)
Purchased with the gifts (by exchange) of R. Wistar Harvey, Mrs. T. Charlton Henry, R. Nelson Buckley, the estate of Rictavia Schiff, the Edith H. Bell fund, the McNeil Acquisition Fund for American Art and Material Culture, the Edward and Althea Budd Fund, and with funds from the proceeds of the sale of deaccessioned works of art, 2011
2011-87-1

Grade Level

For grades 6–12

Common Core Academic Standards

SOCIAL STUDIES (AMERICAN HISTORY), LANGUAGE ARTS

- Reading Informational Text: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media #7
- Writing: Research to build and present knowledge; conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation #7; Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism #8
- Listening and Speaking and Comprehension and Collaboration: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively #1; Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally #2
- Text Types and Purposes: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content #2

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

Art Images Required

Click on the Museum object titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the Philadelphia Museum of Art website. Click on the Picturing America object titles to view those resources on the National Endowment for the Humanities website. Images that are also available in the ARTstor Digital Library are indicated by an ID number or search phrase. Entering that number or phrase into the ARTstor search bar will direct you to the corresponding image in that database.

RELATED PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART OBJECTS:

- [Storage Jar](#), 1859, by David Drake (Dave the Potter)
ARTstor search: PMA_.1997-35-1
- [Portrait of Yarrow Mamout \(Muhammad Yaro\)](#), 1819, by Charles Willson Peale
ARTstor search: 2502

RELATED PICTURING AMERICA OBJECTS:

- [Robert Shaw and the Fifty-fourth Regiment Memorial](#), 1884–97, by Augustus Saint-Gaudens
ARTstor search: saint-gaudens, 54th
- [Selma-to-Montgomery March for Voting Rights in 1965](#), 1965, by James Karales
ARTstor search: karales selma

Lesson Process

1. Take some time, either as a class or in small groups, to look closely at each work, reading the background information provided online. (Be sure to review the “Teacher Resources” on the Museum website.) Discuss what you have discovered, including any questions you may still have about the paintings.
2. Examine and read about David Drake’s *Storage Jar* (1859). Who was David Drake, and what was the intended purpose of this large storage jar? Similarly, examine and read about Augustus Saint-Gaudens’s memorial to Robert Shaw (1884–97). What was the intended purpose of this memorial? How can you connect these two works of art? How have their functions changed since their creation?
3. Why do we study these two works? What is so important about the Fifty-fourth Regiment? What is so important about a storage jar? What stories do they have to tell?
4. Examine *Portrait of Yarrow Mamout (Muhammad Yaro)* (1819) by Charles Willson Peale. (Be sure to read from the Museum’s “Teacher Resources” about Mamout’s life.) What can you tell about Mamout’s personality from this portrait? What details persuaded you to come to your conclusions? Similarly, can you tell anything about David Drake’s personality from a close examination of his storage jar? What details exist and what conclusions can you draw from those details?
5. Look closely at James Karales’s photograph, *Selma-to-Montgomery March for Voting Rights in 1965* (1965). Notice the camera’s angle and the details the artist chose to include. What can you tell about the story Karales was trying to tell? Read about this photograph to enhance and support your ideas.
6. Look at all four images, and arrange them in chronological order. What do these works of art tell us about the African American experience? How do these images reflect the society in which they were created? What struggles and triumphs does each work reflect?

For more information, please contact Division of Education and Public Programs: School and Teacher Programs by phone at 215-684-7580, by fax at 215-236-4063, or by e-mail at educate@philamuseum.org.

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

Assessment

1. Select one of the artworks from this lesson. Pretend you have “stepped into” the work. Write of your experiences or reactions. Be sure to write in the first person point of view.
2. Create a ceramic vessel using the pinch pot technique of construction. If you do not have access to ceramics equipment, use the same steps below with modeling clay as a substitute:
 - Roll a small amount of pottery clay into a ball.
 - Press your thumb into the center of the clay ball without breaking through the bottom.
 - At this point, you have a basic cup form with a thin bottom and thick sides.
 - Using a gentle pinching motion, move around the circumference of the vessel from the base, gradually moving vertically up the piece.
 - As you progress, your vessel’s walls will gradually get taller as you pinch the extra material upward.
 - When your vessel is complete, let it dry and fire in a kiln.

Enrichment

1. In small groups, choose one of the images from this lesson plan and research what society was like for African Americans contemporary to the date of when that work was created. Gather your information and present it in a brief oral presentation to your classmates.
2. Select a work of art from an African American artist. Research the life of the artist and the issues that engaged African Americans at the time of the work’s creation. See if you can connect the issues of the time with details from the artwork. (Of course, every work of art by every African American artist does not connect to social issues of the day. In fact, you may find that most of your selections do not have a clear social focus.)