

Soul of a Nation

Art in the Age of Black Power 1963–1983

Educator Resources

**de Young **
\ Legion of Honor
fine arts museums
of san francisco

“This movement is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. In order to perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic.” —Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” 1968

Overview

Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power 1963–1983 celebrates the works that Black artists created during two pivotal decades of the Civil Rights era in American history and examines the very purpose of art and the role of artists in society.

Black artists were inspired to take action against racism and prejudice that pervaded the nation as a part of the struggle for equality and justice. These artists contributed to the Black Power movement by promoting personal pride, collective solidarity, political and social activism, and pan-African nationalism.

The exhibition features the work of more than 60 influential artists and includes vibrant paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, collages, assemblages, and custom clothing. This landmark exhibition is a rare opportunity to see era-defining pieces that changed the face of art in America.

These pre-visit resources explore the content of the exhibition through the collaborative interpretation of artworks, preparing students to continue the discussion at the museum.

The central questions:

What questions do the artworks in this exhibition ask about America?

What questions do these artworks help answer about America?

The Resource Guide includes a lesson outline for an introductory or pre-visit activity; graphic organizers for grades 4–6 and grades 7–12;

context cards for grades 4–6 and 7–12; five posters; a map of the exhibition; and gallery chat panels.

Materials prepared by Ariana Bayer, Senior Teaching Artist, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Glossary

agency: a person or thing through which power is exerted or an end is achieved

annotated drawing: a drawing that has details called out with arrows and written names, descriptions, or comments. A practice used in science notebooks and design and engineering processes

assemblage: a type of artwork, often constructed with various, unconventional materials that are glued, fastened, or otherwise brought together. Some of the materials can be everyday objects and discarded items that an artist finds and decides to use in a different way.

Black Power: a revolutionary movement that grew to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s. During this era there was a rise in demand for Black history courses, a greater national embrace of African culture, and a spread of raw artistic expressions displaying the realities of Black lives. The Black Power movement emphasizes racial pride, economic empowerment, and the creation of political and cultural institutions such as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense and, today, the Black Lives Matter movement.

community: a group of people with a common characteristic or interest, living together within a larger society

nation: a community of people composed of one or more nationalities and possessing a more or less defined territory and government

photograph: an image produced by the action of light on a light-sensitive material. Most photographs are created using a camera, which uses a lens to focus an object's light reflected or emitted from it into a reproduction on a light-sensitive surface.

revolution: a fundamental change in political organization

screen print: a variety of stencil printing, using a screen made from fabric (silk or synthetic) stretched tightly over a frame. The nonprinting areas on the fabric are blocked out by a stencil. Ink or paint is then forced through the (non-blocked areas of) open fabric with a rubber blade, known as a squeegee, onto the paper.

social movement: loosely organized but sustained campaign in support of a social goal, typically either the implementation or the prevention of a change in society's structure or values

society: a voluntary association of individuals for common ends; an organized group working together or periodically meeting because of common interests, beliefs, or profession

Source: Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Pre-Visit Activity

Looking to Learn

Note to the Educator: The following lesson plan provides a framework for students in grades 4–12 to explore and discuss the content of Soul of a Nation. To provide grade-level differentiation, the “Look and Discuss” component uses two strategies: the first aligns with the developmental abilities of grades 4–6 and the second may provide students in grades 7–12 more complexity. We encourage you to review both and make the instructional determination that best supports your students.

Materials

image posters
graphic organizer: grades 4–6 or 7–12,
one photocopy per student
context cards: grades 4–6 or 7–12,
one per student, photocopied and cut
pencils
glue sticks or tape

Objective

In this activity, students will use visual analysis and inquiry individually and cooperatively, and consider how context affects their interpretations. Students will closely observe artworks and cite visual evidence for their own interpretations; practice empathy through listening (to other classmates) and perspective taking (considering the artist's voice/ perspective); foster curiosity about the exhibition and art through developing their own questions; and consider the role of art in society.

Getting Started (15 minutes)

Introduce exhibition subject and field-trip goals

Discuss a definition: **nation**

- What images come to mind when you think of the word “nation”?

Discuss a definition: **community**

- Do you think this class is a group? Why or why not?
- Do you think this class is a community? Why or why not?
- What is the difference between a group and a community? What makes a group a community?

Share **community** definition from Glossary.

- Does this definition leave anything out? What would you add or change?

Share the description of the **Black Power** movement from the glossary.

- How might individual artists contribute to a revolution and social movement?

Gallery Walk

Place each of the five posters of artworks at table groups or on the wall in different parts of the classroom. Ask students to take a quiet “Gallery Walk” to observe each poster, not unlike what they will do at the museum. (5–10 minutes)

To frame the Gallery Walk, invite students to return to the central questions, which the students will return to after looking:

- What questions do these artworks ask about America?
- What questions do these artworks help answer about America?

Optional Modeling

Project an image of *Blackboard* (1969) by Cliff Joseph on the board and go through the steps of the graphic organizer as a group, modeling through large-group discussion. (15 minutes)

Assign or ask students to select an artwork and a partner to work with. Invite students to take a seat with their artwork (2–3 pairs per poster). Pass out a graphic organizer and pencil to each student.

Review the steps in the graphic organizer.

Look and Discuss (grades 4–6)

Individual Observation (5 minutes)

Ask students: What do you notice first? Create a list. Describe the work for someone who can’t see it. Create a sketch or an annotated drawing.

Creative Questions (10 minutes)

Have students partner up and brainstorm a list of at least 12 questions about the artwork. (If students work independently instead, you may prefer to instruct them to generate a list of six questions.)

Post these question-starters to help develop a range of questions.

- Why?
- What are the reasons . . . ?
- What if . . . ?
- What is the purpose of . . . ?
- How would it be different if . . . ?
- Suppose that . . . ?
- What if we knew . . . ?
- What would change if . . . ?

If students created questions independently, have them share questions with a partner. They can circle shared questions and add questions from their partner that were new to them.

Context

Context cards (10 minutes): Pass out context cards to each pair and have them glue or tape their card to their graphic organizers.

Have pairs read context and discuss: how did this information change what you see in the artwork? Ask students to write what questions they would ask the artist.

Graphic Organizer (grades 4–6)

<p>What do you notice?</p>	<p>12 questions:</p>
<p>Context Card</p>	<p>How did this information change what you see in the artwork? What questions would you ask the artist?</p>

Context Cards (grades 4–6)

Copy and cut one context card per student according to their poster.

"So in my art I must reflect the attitude of my people, the colors, the style, the hip, the rhythm . . . To produce an Art which is as warm and awesome as the songs and prayers of Sunday Morning Baptist meeting. Art that's getting into the color and sound of those songs and prayers . . . The vibrant lines and colors of African art are duplicated in African music and African music is duplicated in Afro-American brothers and sisters . . . I'm painting the colors, the sounds, and the messages of this music." —**Wadsworth A. Jarrell**



Source: the exhibition catalogue AFRI-COBRA III, University Art Gallery, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 1973
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/items/detail/africobra-iii-exhibition-catalog-18689>

"In the latter months of 1968 . . . my expression changed from the negativism of America to the positivism of defining and building a BLACK NATION. My subject matter changed from desolation and depression to themes of "THE BLACK FAMILY," "I AM BETTER," "HERITAGE," and "UNITE." My color schemes change from Red, White, and Blue to RED, BLACK, and GREEN; and my People's color changed from red-violet to gold and copper, the riches of the earth." —**Barbara J. Jones-Hogu**



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"I'm anti-war. And I'm more interested from the standpoint of the individual, not so much as nations go. Nations are made up of many different individuals . . . I'm trying to dignify the goodness of man in the sense that we won't have wars.

And then we can go all the way across. We won't have segregation, we won't have poverty. I'd like to contribute to heaven on earth, which I don't believe we're ever going to get."

—**Benny Andrews**

Source: "Tape-Recorded Interview with Benny Andrews" by Henri Ghent, June 30, 1968
<http://www.bennyandrews.com/andrews-and-ghent>



"Art has a very vital part to play in the lives of people . . . I think that much of these needs are denied people in our culture. I see art as an inspiring revolutionary message for people. I think that it's about time that we took some

leadership in helping to bring about the kind of culture that is more interested in life than the kind of culture that we presently live in." —**Cliff Joseph**

Source: "Oral History Interview with Cliff Joseph, 1972" by Doloris Holmes for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1972
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-cliff-joseph-11487#transcript>



"Later I realized that every time I took a picture, I had been trying to capture a feeling, an emotion . . . You take a picture with your heart and not with your eyes.

The eyes see what the heart feels. You have to be there first—recognizing pain or joy or whatever—in order to show it to the viewer. That's the artist's job and it's why I love my work." —**Adger Cowans**

Source: Kiener, Robert. "Veteran Photographer Adger Cowans is Still Learning at 81." *Professional Photographer*, June 2018.
<https://ppmag.com/profiles/veteran-photographer-adger-cowans-is-still-learning-at-81>

Look and Discuss (grades 7–12)

Individual Observation (3 minutes)

Ask students: What might the artist be saying about a nation or a community or an individual?

Circle one: nation, community, individual.

Describe what you notice in the artwork that shows this idea.

Share and Reflect (5 minutes)

Have students share their initial observations and interpretations with their partner and note where their ideas overlapped and what new ideas they got from their partner.

Context

Context cards (10 minutes): Pass out context cards to each pair and have them attach their cards to their graphic organizers. Students read and underline the artist's ideas about nation, community or the individual.

Have pairs discuss: How did this information change what you see in the artwork?

Question: Ask students to write what they might ask the artist, if they could.

Reflection (15 minutes)

Share out: Invite a few pairs to hold up their artwork and share the title, the artist, and an observation, discovery, or question they have about the work.

Reflect: How did working with a partner change how you saw the artwork?

Group Discussion:

Invite students to return to the central questions of the exhibition:

- What questions do the artworks in this exhibition ask about America?
- What questions do these artworks help answer about America?

Conclusion: Share with your students that many artists say the viewer's perspective completes their work. The museum educators at the de Young are interested in their insights and questions about these artworks.

Graphic Organizer (grades 7–12)

Look closely at the artwork: What might the artist be saying about a nation or a community or an individual?

Circle one: NATION COMMUNITY INDIVIDUAL

Describe what you notice in the artwork that shows this idea.

Context Card

Underline the artist's ideas about nation, community or the individual.

How did this information change what you see in the artwork?

What questions would you ask the artist?

Context Cards (grades 7–12)

Copy and cut one context card per student according to their poster.

"So in my art I must reflect the attitude of my people, the colors, the style, the hip, the rhythm. My role is to make social imagery to intrude upon the thoughts to jar the sense of African people. To produce an Art which is as warm and awesome as the songs and prayers of Sunday morning Baptist meeting. Art that's getting into the color and sound of those songs and prayers. An art that African people can relate to. The awesomeness of the African sculpture and rhythmic patterns used in African weaving has been a profound influence on me. The vibrant lines and colors of African art are duplicated in African music, and African music is duplicated in Afro-American brothers and sisters like . . . I'm painting the colors, the sounds, and the messages of this music." —**Wadsworth A. Jarrell**



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"Fundamentally I have been a printmaker since 1966. At that time I was concerned with my people and their conditions and position in the United States . . . In the latter months of 1968, I became a member of COBRA and my expression changed from the negativism of America to the positivism of defining and building a BLACK NATION. My subject matter changed from desolation and depression to themes of "THE BLACK FAMILY," "I AM BETTER," "HERITAGE," and "UNITE." My color schemes change from Red, White, and Blue to RED, BLACK, and GREEN; and my People's color changed from red-violet to gold and copper, the riches of the earth." —**Barbara J. Jones-Hogu**



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"I'm anti-war. And I'm more interested from the standpoint of the individual, not so much as nations go. Nations are made up of many different individuals. I'm interested in it from the standpoint of man, individual man. To say that you shouldn't do these things, you shouldn't kill, you shouldn't do this or that. I'm trying to dignify the goodness of man in the sense that we won't have wars. And then we can go all the way across. We won't have segregation, we won't have poverty. I'd like to contribute to heaven on earth, which I don't believe we're ever going to get." —**Benny Andrews**

Source: "Tape-Recorded Interview with Benny Andrews" by Henri Ghent, June 30, 1968
<http://www.bennyandrews.com/andrews-and-ghent>



"Art has a very vital part to play in the lives of people, not just aesthetically, but in terms of their real needs. Many people don't understand the way in which art can influence thinking and feeling and lifestyle and so on. . . . I'm talking about emotional needs and needs in terms of living more creative lives, more productive lives, and so on. I think that much of these needs are denied people in our culture. I see art as an inspiring revolutionary message for people. I think that it's about time that we took some leadership in helping to bring about the kind of culture that is more interested in life than the kind of culture that we presently live in." —**Cliff Joseph**

Source: "Oral History Interview with Cliff Joseph, 1972" by Doloris Holmes for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1972
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<https://ppmag.com/profiles/veteran-photographer-adger-cowans-is-still-learning-at-81>

Resources

"Lesson: What is Community?" from Facing History and Ourselves

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/identity-and-community/what-community>

"Analyzing Images," from Facing History and Ourselves Teaching Strategy

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/analyzing-images>

"How We Interpret Images" (video, 4:27), from Facing History and Ourselves

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/video/how-we-respond-images>

Digital Public Library of America: Black Power Movement

<https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/the-black-power-movement>

National Archives: Black Power

<https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/black-power>

Creative Questions Strategy

<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/creative-questions-0>

"5 Tips for Talking About Race with Children," from Facing History and Ourselves

<https://facingtoday.facinghistory.org/5-tips-for-talking-about-race-with-children>

"Let's Talk! Discussing Race, Racism and Other Difficult Topics with Students," from Teaching Tolerance

<http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/TT%20Difficult%20Conversations%20web.pdf>

"The Five Essential Practices for Teaching the Civil Rights Movement," from Teaching Tolerance

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/the-march-continues/the-five-essential-practices-for-teaching-the-civil-3>

The Black School: An experimental art school teaching art and radical Black history

<http://theblack.school>

The de Young museum is the fifth venue for this important exhibition. Rich resources are available from the originating museum, Tate Modern in London, and all subsequent hosts.

Please note: The selection of artworks at each host venue changes. The presentation at the de Young may not include all images you see featured at other museums, and it will include additional pieces closely connected to the Bay Area.

Tate

<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/soul-nation-art-age-black-power>

Kids Think about Art and Race: A video of students visiting the exhibition with curator Zoé Whitley

<https://www.tate.org.uk/kids/explore/kids-view/kids-think-about-art-and-race>

Crystal Bridges

<https://crystalbridges.org/exhibitions/soul-of-a-nation/>

Interactive Guide

https://crystalbridges.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Guide_Final_inter.pdf

Playlist: The Greats

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5XGQup5BkcSZ90WyYlgegu?>

Playlist: Improvisation

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/27bvkXnp393Pm9OovxJpgU?>

Video playlist: Black Heroes

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLgwwJx_aihhBla5aQHkI7hI2q3JmM8yru

The Brooklyn Museum

<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/3364>

The Broad

<https://www.thebroad.org/soul-of-a-nation>

Quincy Jones's playlist

<https://www.thebroad.org/soul-of-a-nation>

“We are a family of image-makers and each member of the family is free to relate to and to express our laws in his/her individual way . . . dig the diversity in unity. We can be ourselves and be together, too. Check.

We hope you can dig it, it's about you, and like Marvin Gaye says, 'You're what's happening in the world today, baby.'”

—Jeff Donaldson, AFRI-COBRA III exhibition catalogue, 1973

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