

Community Zines: Living Library

Educator Resource | Grades 9–12

Subject Area: Art

INTRODUCTION

Community Care refers to a system of support and services that are created and maintained by family, friends, neighbors, volunteers, and local organizations. It emphasizes collective responsibility, sharing what we have, and supporting the community's most vulnerable members, such as the elderly and people with disabilities.

LEARNING TARGET

In these three lessons, students will explore the *Reimagine African American Art* galleries at the Detroit Institute of Arts and create their own zines as a reflective artistic response to their thoughts and findings. Through classroom discussion, guided inquiry, and hands-on creation, students will examine how community care functions as cultural preservation, how art and abolition are intertwined, and how artists of color have historically taken risks to share their truths. They will also investigate how storytelling through art can both challenge and preserve history. By designing and crafting zines, students will express their reflections, amplify under-represented narratives, and engage with art as a form of resistance and remembrance. At the conclusion of this lesson series, teachers can choose to incorporate a living zine library in their classrooms where students and teachers work together to build and preserve a collection of reflective zines.



Wadsworth Jarrell, *Revolutionary*, 1972. Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of the Azzi/Lusenhop Black Arts Movement Collection

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Students will be able to:

1. Understand how cultural preservation is an act of community care, using examples from the African American art galleries.
2. Explore how abolitionism and art have worked together as powerful tools for fighting injustice.
3. Recognize the historical risks taken by artists of color when working with different mediums, styles, and approaches.
4. Use storytelling through zine-making to preserve and challenge history.

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COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

ART.VA.II.HS.1

Identify, define problems, and reflect upon possible visual solutions. (21st Century Skills: I.2, I.3, I.4)

ART.VA.II.HS.2

Create artwork using materials and techniques with skill so that personal intentions are carried out. (21st Century Skills: I.1, 1.2, II.7, III.3)

ART.VA.II.HS.8

Explore social and global issues through the application of creative processes. (21st Century Skills: III.7, III.8, III.9, III.10)

ART.VA.III.HS.5

Recognize and understand the relationships between personal experiences and the development of artwork. (21st Century Skills: I.3)

ART.VA.IV.HS.3

Analyze the correlation between art, history, and culture throughout time. (21st Century Skills: I.6, III.1, III.2, III.7, III.8, III.9, III.10)

Pre-Visit Activities

Materials Needed:

- High-resolution image of selected artwork (digital projection or print)
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- Student journals or reflection sheets

Visual Thinking Strategies Activity | 15 minutes

1. Select one of the following artworks to examine for this VTS activity:
 - a. Krista Franklin, *Lush Life*, 2008
 - b. Faith Ringgold, *The Bitter Nest, Part II: The Harlem Renaissance Party*, 1988, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase
2. Ask students to silently observe the artwork without discussion. Encourage them to look carefully at shapes, figures, positioning, contrasts, and negative spaces.
3. Ask the question “What’s going on in this picture?” Encourage open responses. Paraphrase each answer neutrally and point to the part of the artwork they’re referencing.



Krista Franklin, *Lush Life*, 2008



Faith Ringgold, *The Bitter Nest, Part II: The Harlem Renaissance Party*, 1988. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase

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4. Ask the question: “What do you see that makes you say that?” This deepens observation and helps students ground their interpretations in visual evidence. Encourage students to be specific with their interpretations.
5. As the conversation develops, add the question: “What more can we find?” Encourage students to continue scanning the artwork for clues and interpretations.
6. Provide historical and artistic context. Depending on the artwork selection for this activity, develop and provide a thorough explanation.

Guided Discussion | 25 minutes

Facilitate a whole-group teacher-led discussion using some of the sample guiding questions below. Encourage students to be specific with examples or evidence when stating their response.

Examples could be societal or personal.

1. What do you think it means to care for a community through art?
2. Why might some artists feel it’s important to tell stories that others don’t want to tell?
3. What role do you think art has played in movements for freedom, justice, or abolition?
4. How can storytelling in art help preserve histories that are often overlooked or erased?
5. What do you expect to see, feel, or learn when exploring African American art at the DIA?

Preparing Students for the Museum Visit | 10 minutes

The day before your visit, ask students to write short responses to one or more of the following prompts:

- Why might artists of color choose to explore identity, history, or justice, or other themes?
- What kinds of stories or truths are you hoping to discover?

Zine Definition:

1. Share the definition of a “zine” in class. Show examples of zines, their uses, and different formats through a slideshow.
2. Tell students that they are expected to bring a journal, sketchbook, or paper to take notes and sketch to prepare to create their own reflective and responsive zines based on their museum visit.
3. Resources: Review the following links to find examples of zine templates, definition, and examples:
 - a. [5 Stunning Zine Examples and Tips For Creating Your Own](#)
 - b. [Zines and Self-Published Materials](#)
 - c. [Resources for Reading and Making Zines](#)

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During Visit Activities

Guided Tour Experience and Rationale | 45–60 minutes

To complement this lesson, consider booking the “Shaping Identity | Africana” guided gallery experience with one of the skilled Gallery Teachers. Designed for students in grades 3–12, this tour explores art from the African diaspora and uses a variety of open-ended questions while layering in information about the artworks and artists. [Click here to book a field trip today!](#)

Self-Guided Experience | 45–60 minutes

During their visit to *Reimagine African American Art* at the Detroit Institute of Arts, students will use this journal activity to observe, reflect, and gather inspiration for the zines they will later create. Through a combination of writing, sketching, and personal response, students will engage with themes of storytelling, resistance, community care, and cultural preservation.

1. Print and distribute copies of the half-sheet **Student Handout A: Self-Guided Experience**.
2. Instruct students to carry a sketchbook or journal with them during their visit to the DIA. Make sure students have a pencil to record their notes and observations. As a reminder, pens are not allowed in the galleries.

Post-Visit Lesson | 1–3 Periods

ZINES AS RESISTANCE: RESPONDING TO AFRICAN AMERICAN ART

Materials Needed:

- Paper (quantity will vary depending on zine layout)
- Scissors
- Pens, markers, colored pencils
- Glue sticks or tape
- Magazines, newspapers (for collage)
- Photocopy machine (optional, for reproduction)
- Staplers (optional for booklet format)
- Zine examples (printed or digital)
- Bookshelf / designated area for zine library

Museum Visit Debrief | 10 minutes

Once back in the classroom, ask students to use DIA reflections to answer the following questions.

- Which artwork(s) resonated with you the most — and why?
- What messages or ideas do you want to carry in your zine?
- What have you learned about the power of art as a form of storytelling, cultural preservation, self-expression, or resistance?

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- Zines are meant to contribute to an in-class growing zine library; each group of students that participates in this lesson and tour will add to this library. Emphasize the importance of how a living library is an act of cultural preservation and community care.
- Consider encouraging students to maintain this living library within their classrooms.

Peer Zine Brainstorm | 10 minutes

1. Students will partner with a peer in class for support. Based on their reflections, students will brainstorm together on what story or message they want to tell. They will compile their writings, reflections, and drawings into a series of sequential thumbnails or generate a simple storyboard for their zine.

Share Out | 10 minutes

2. Students will share their ideas for their zines. Invite students to give each other feedback on layout, message, or images.

Zine Creation | 30 minutes

3. Instruct students to create their original zines as a personal and artistic response to their visit to the African American art galleries at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Drawing from themes explored during the tour — such as cultural preservation as an act of community care, the relationship between abolition and art, the risks artists of color take to tell the truth, and the power of storytelling to challenge and preserve history — students will synthesize their reflections, journal notes, and sketches into a hand-made publication. The zine-making process will allow students to explore visual storytelling, collage, and text/image integration, using their own voices to reflect on what they saw, felt, and learned.

Reflection Questions | 10 minutes

- During your visit, what common or repeated themes were you able to identify?
- For each theme, provide a supporting artwork/story that you learned about.
- Which artist did you feel embodied all the themes discussed in class and during the tour?

CREDITS

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