

KARA WALKER: Narrative Silhouettes

Museum Connections: Art and Enlightenment

Purpose: In this lesson students will investigate contemporary forms of storytelling through Kara Walker's work. They will do so in order to create their own narrative silhouette that utilizes traditional techniques to convey historical African American content.

Course: Fine Arts

Time Frame: (approximately 5 class periods)

Maryland State Visual Arts Essential Learner Outcomes (ELOs)

Visual Art Outcome I: Perceiving and Responding – Aesthetic Education

The student will demonstrate the ability to perceive, interpret, and respond to ideas, experiences, and the environment through visual art.

Expectation B

The student will select works of art and interpret their meaning based upon the application of expressive characteristics and use of symbolism.

Indicators of Learning

1. **Creative Expression:** Working from observation, memory and/or experience, the student will create a work using a mode of representation and format that serves personal ideas, thoughts, and feelings.
2. **Critical Response:** The student will describe, analyze, and interpret how artists select modes of representation and formats to express personal ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

Visual Art Outcome II: Historical, Cultural, and Social Context

The student will demonstrate an understanding of visual art as a basic aspect of history and human experience

Expectation A

The student will propose ways that visual art reflects significant historical, cultural, and social issues.

Indicators of Learning

1. **Critical Response:** the student will determine how works of art provide social commentary, document historical events, and reflect the values and beliefs of the society in which they are created.
2. **Creative Expression:** Inspired by selected artworks from different times and places, the student will create an artwork that explores a contemporary cultural or social issue.

Objectives:

1. Students will identify components of narrative art works in order to compare and contrast similarities and differences between contemporary artist Kara Walker's works and other historically narrative artists.
2. Students will draw objects and forms from observation, memory, and research in order to create a contemporary narrative silhouette illustrating balance and space.
3. Students will judge self and peer works in order to evaluate the successfulness of designs.

Vocabulary and Concepts:

Word or Concept	Definition
Balance	a principle of design, that refers to the way the elements of art are arranged to create a feeling of stability in a work (symmetrical or asymmetrical).
Silhouette	an outline filled-in with a solid color, typically black on a white ground. Silhouette-like images can be found among Stone Age cave paintings, ancient Greek vase paintings, and Indonesian shadow puppets. But the term and what most people think of as silhouettes originated in the early

	<p>eighteenth century in Europe.</p> <p>The term "silhouette" originates from the name of Etienne de Silhouette, a Frenchman who was a finance minister to the Duke of Orleans. He was not the originator of this type of picture, but the French were apparently very impressed by the silhouettes he created and came to refer to all works of this type by his name.</p>
Space	an element of art that refers to the distance or area between, around, above, below, or within objects within a plane (positive or negative)
Narrative Art	art that conveys a story, either as a moment in an ongoing story or as a sequence of events unfolding over time.
Contemporary Art	art and culture that is current and belonging to the present time.
Composition	combining distinct parts or elements to form a whole. When creating a composition, one has to consider how to use the elements and principles of design.
Deluge	an overflowing of the land by water and may be the result of a large downpour of rain which often results in a flood.
Hypothetical Themes	something that is assumed or based on theory.

Materials:

For the Teacher:

Narrative Silhouettes PowerPoint Presentation (included)

Note: Links are provided in PowerPoint for images that are copyrighted.

Kara Walker Visuals

<https://www.google.com/search?q=kara+walker+silhouettes+images&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=CVW0U5P6DKeD8QH0wICQCA&ved=0CBwQsAQ&biw=1034&bih=875>

For the Student:

Student Resource Sheet 1: Narrative Silhouette Research Worksheet
Student Resource Sheet 2: Compare & Contrast
Student Resource Sheet 3: Self-Evaluation
Student Resource Sheet 4: Rubric Worksheet

Materials:

Black construction paper
Bristol board or white mat board
White colored pencils
Scissors
X-Acto knives/ blades/ and cutting surface
Spray adhesive
Sketchbooks
#2 Pencils
Computers

Resources:

McFadden, David Revere. *Slash: Paper Under the Knife*. Milano, Itaila: 5 Continents Editions, 2009. 224. Print.

Walker, Kara Elizabeth. *Kara Walker: pictures from another time*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 2002.

Publications:

Sandagata, Emily, and Rob Sandagata. "Narrative Silhouettes: Expanding a concept to address multiple levels." Davis School Arts 109.9 (2010): n. pag. Web. 8 Aug 2010. <http://www.davisart.com/Portal/SchoolArts/articles/5_10-elementary-high-school-studio-art-lesson-plan-narrative-silhouettes.pdf>.

Websites:

<http://learn.walkerart.org/>

<http://www.metmuseum.org/search-results?ft=kara+walker&x=16&y=6>



Cave Painting at Lascaux, France



Greek Vase

Historical Background:

Historically, the origins of silhouettes set the groundwork for this lesson. From the cave paintings in Lascaux, France, to Greek Vases, to Henri Matisse, throughout history silhouettes have played a part in artworks as well as storytelling. In Lascaux, cave paintings served as a method of communication and documentation. Primitive people painted images of hunting rituals and other methods of survival. In Ancient Greece, people also used the human silhouette for storytelling purposes. Mythological stories, the Olympic Games, and other major events were documented on pottery and vases. In Egypt, silhouettes were used to represent some characters in the ancient form of writing in hieroglyphs. Henri Matisse simplified the human form, producing colorful collages and paintings, in which he “drew” with scissors.

An understanding of African American history and events is what the subject of this lesson draws from. These events may begin from the time of slavery when African people were taken against their will on ships to America, to the civil war, the Underground Railroad, public segregation, and the Emancipation Proclamation. Current African American events which may also hold influence in this unit may include Rodney King, Labor Laws, Hurricane Katrina, and many other events that especially impacted African Americans.

Through research, students will select an African American story to depict in silhouette form. The story may be related to a historically significant American like Sojourner Douglas or a current figure like Oprah Winfrey. The only requirement is that the person selected must have an illustrative life story. The life story aspect will ensure that the student will have the opportunity to capture the sense of his or her selected individual.

Lesson Development:

1. Introduction to Narratives (artwork that tells a story)
2. Introduction to Silhouettes and Kara Walker as an artist
3. Lesson on Katrina with images
4. Kara Walker's *After the Deluge* and the connection to Katrina
5. Possibility of ideas (current events and other pioneer examples)

Motivation: *Narrative Silhouettes PowerPoint Presentation*

Teacher will introduce imagery from Hurricane Katrina and how this event influenced Kara Walker to create a series of art pieces entitled *After the Deluge*.

For images, open the hyperlinks below:

<http://tinyurl.com/m2odht7>

<http://tinyurl.com/l68bvpc>

<https://www.google.com/search?q=henri+matisse+silhouettes&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=5Nq6U5u7Kc6cyASk14DIDA&ved=0CCQQsAQ&biw=1280&bih=923>

http://bittleston.com/artists/giacomo_balla/

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/09/photogalleries/hurricane_katrina_aftermath/photo2.html

<http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/component/content/article?id=1333&Itemid=>

<http://tinyurl.com/odjac22>

Focal Questions:

- How did Kara Walker’s selection of artworks represent the events of Hurricane Katrina?
- Does Walker maintain neutrality in her artwork or does she “choose a side”?
- Is Walker’s ethnicity or gender relevant to her content?
- Does Walker’s simplification of objects and people make the content “easier” for viewers to digest?

Lesson One: Students will identify components of narrative art works in order to compare and contrast similarities and differences between contemporary artist, Kara Walker’s work and other historically narrative artists.

- Teacher will introduce artist Kara Walker, her artwork, and her significance as a contemporary artist.
- In groups, students will compare a Walker silhouette with silhouettes from Lascaux, Matisse, Greek Vases, and Giscomo Balla. Class will then discuss group’s findings.
- Individually students will compare a Walker silhouette with several works from the Reginald F. Lewis Museum (see Lesson Extensions section).

Lesson Two: Students will research an African American pioneer collecting stories and imagery in order to design imagery which depicts a Narrative Silhouette.

- Students will use the computer lab and library to locate articles and images which explore their selected topics.
- As research is collected students will create a reference page which cites all supporting material.
- Students will begin sketching shapes, objects, and figures which best represent 3-5 important events from the story.

Lesson Three: Students will utilize traditional methods and contemporary topics in order to illustrate balance and space.

- Teachers will review and practice contour drawing with students.
- Students will recall prior knowledge of space and balance.
- Students will develop visual narrative concepts in their sketchbooks.
- Students will complete layout of narrative in their sketchbooks.

Lesson Four: Students will draw objects and forms from observation, memory, and research materials in order to create a contemporary narrative silhouette.

- Students will transfer their completed layout designs onto black construction paper using a white colored pencil.
- Students will use scissors and X-Acto knives to cutout their designs (students must be sure to cut inside the white outline or be prepared to flip the paper once design is cut out).
- Construction paper silhouette will then be positioned on white Bristol board, to check the design prior to gluing. Students should lightly mark the edges of the construction paper on the Bristol board so that pieces will be attached in their correct locations.
- Once all corrections are made, construction paper will then be placed face-down to apply spray adhesive and promptly attach to Bristol board.

Lesson Five: Students will judge self and peer works in order to evaluate the successfulness of designs.

- Outcomes will be reviewed.
- Students will determine if they have met the requirements by completing their self-assessment worksheets and referencing the rubric.
- Class will engage in a critique of peer artworks.

Assessments:

Research Worksheet (see attached)

Reference Page (MLA guidelines)

Sketchbook Sketches

Design Layout

Focal Questions (during PowerPoint Presentation)

Narrative Silhouettes: Self Assessment Worksheet (see attached)

Narrative Silhouette (which meets rubric requirements)

Closure:

The class will revisit Kara Walker’s thematic works and address the concept of theme in relation to their own artistic growth and development. Individually students will answer one of two questions:

1. Name three of your own artworks that share a common theme and explain their connections.
2. List three hypothetical themes you see yourself attempting in your own work; and explain how you would accomplish each theme.

Modifications:

Students who struggle with small motor skills can create a larger silhouette using an overhead projector to create a larger, but more simplified, outline of their figure(s). This modification could also work for students who are kinetic learners and are more successful when given the opportunity to become more physically oriented with their artwork.

Thoughtful Application(s):

Narrative silhouettes challenge students to convey strong political and social messages through simplified form. The social and political theme pairs well with Social Studies, English, and Foreign Languages. The unit's ability to correlate with other departments creates strong multidisciplinary connections for students.

School Sponsored Social Issues Evening

- The Art Department in conjunction with Social Studies could hold a Social Issues Evening.
- The event could highlight current social issues . The Narrative Silhouette artworks could be showcased in an art show and serve as the visual backdrop for the event.
- The debate team could debate specific political positions on subjects such as the Gulf oil spill, the recession, and the war in Iraq.
- National Art Honor Society could use select Narrative Silhouette works to design and sell t-shirts to the community. All proceeds will benefit a charity, such as but not limited to, Make It Right, which benefit's New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward.

Lesson Extensions:

- Students may create silhouettes from three different mediums (watercolor, charcoal, or ink).
- Students may select another Contemporary African American artist and discuss whether race or ethnicity was an influence on his or her artwork as a whole. Areas which may be addressed can include, but are not limited to, traditional arts and crafts, subject(s), content, theme, or absence of ethnic/racial identity.
- The Narrative Silhouettes Unit bridges historically relevant African American imagery with contemporary artistic methods.

- Students will explore the work of contemporary African American artist Kara Walker and in doing so, address the historical background and stories of selected African American pioneers who have paved the way for today's freedoms and equality.
- The Heritage Tour at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum provides students with a general background of African American history and struggles that would serve as a strong introduction to this unit and subject matter. Alternatively, the Freedom Tour would assist students in the process of selecting an African American pioneer to represent in their own visual works.
- The Journey in History Theatre at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum offers theatrical performances that highlight the stories of Rosa Parks and Josiah Henson both of whom could serve as influential figures for students as they conduct their research.
- The Museum offers several school programs that connect to the curriculum lessons.
 - *Journey in History Theater* provides living history and theatrical performances which highlight African Americans in the museum's gallery.
 - Take the theme tour, *Heritage* and experience the rich, cultural heritage of Maryland's African American community. Learn how African Americans established and influence Maryland's historic communities, social organizations, work traditions and artistic customs.
 - Contact group reservations for schedule updates.
 - While touring the museum, select a historic time or event that impacted the Maryland African American community such as the Civil War or Jim Crow to create a narrative silhouette.
- Reginald F. Lewis Museum: *Heritage Tour*
Identify historical, social, and cultural themes in selected artworks that influence the beliefs, customs, or values of a society. 2.2.a (Grades (6-8))

***Narrative must display a **political or current social issue**.

Student Resource Sheet 1

Name _____ Date _____ Pd _____

Narrative Silhouette: Research Worksheet

Kara Walker is best known for her silhouette images. Walker's silhouettes are often staged in positions of conflict, creating a sense of uneasiness in viewers, after they are able to see past the clean crisp silhouette.

Answering the questions below will assist you in planning your own narrative silhouette.

1. African American story to be addressed: _____

2. Timeline or Time Period issue occurred: _____

3. Location(s) (city, state, country, geographic locations): _____

4. Two opposing viewpoints:

i. _____

ii. _____

5. List and briefly describe at least three events associated with your selected African

American Pioneer:

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

Student Resource Sheet 1 (back page)

6. What images can represent the setting, the people involved, and the actions that occurred?

Setting/ Environment: _____

People: _____

Events/ Actions: _____

7. What objects will assist you in telling the story visually? (Examples: trees, lamp, table, ring, etc...) _____

8. What type of balance (symmetrical, asymmetrical, or radial) will best tell your story? Explain. _____

9. How will you address space within your artwork? Consider proximity between people and objects. _____

Sketch three rough thumbnail designs which show how you intend on addressing the elements of balance and space:

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Student Resource Sheet 2

Name _____ Date _____ Pd _____

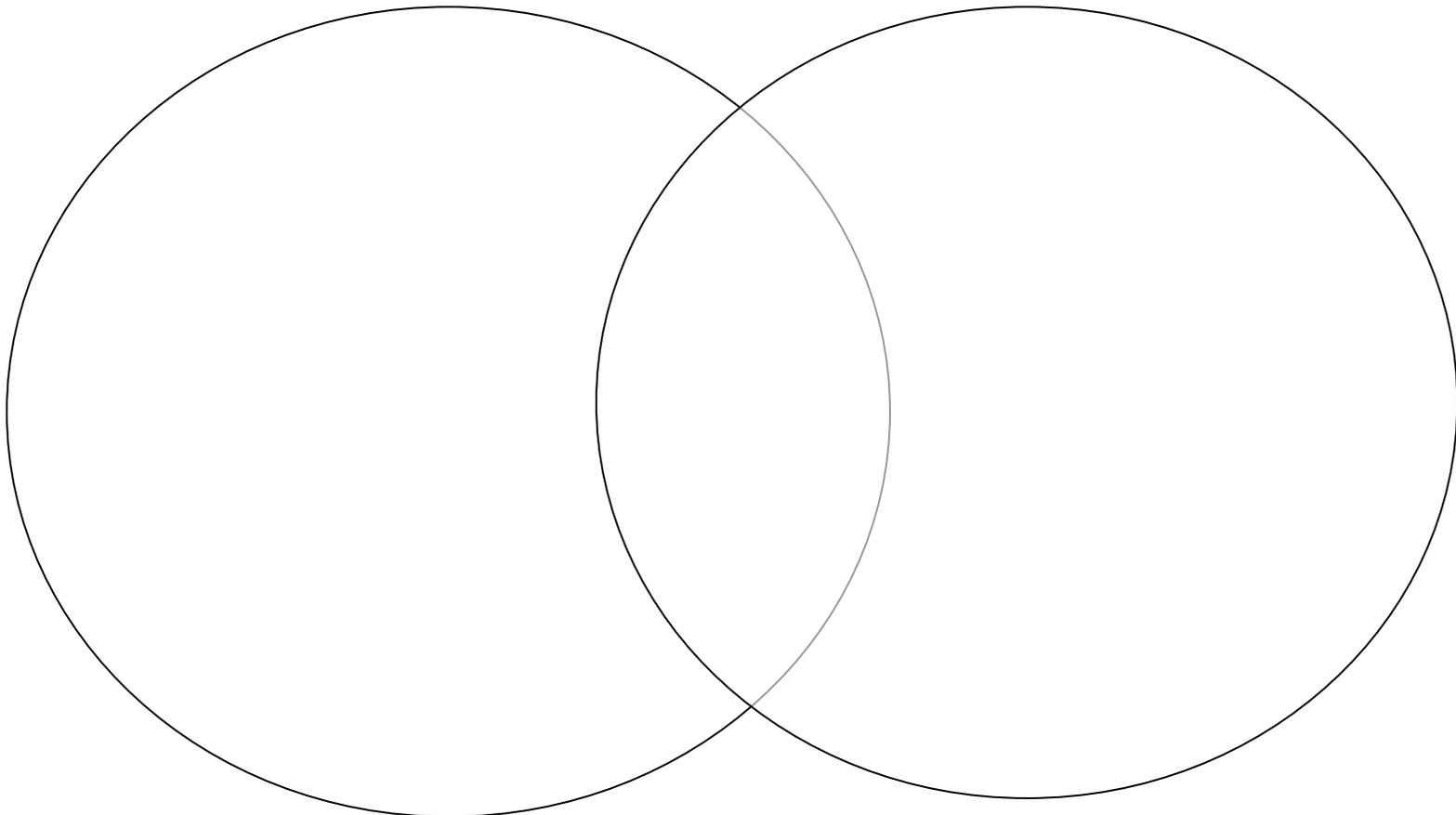
Compare and contrast the Kara Walker with a work by another artist. Visuals will be provided to you by your teacher.

Title: _____

Title: _____

Artist: _____

Artist: _____



Student Resource Sheet 3

Name _____ / _____ Points

Period _____

Narrative Silhouette Self-Evaluations

Using complete sentences, complete each section on a separate sheet of paper. Be specific in your responses, providing examples to support your statements.

Description:

Include the title of the artwork, an explanation of the title choice, and a description of the work including background, objects, figures, etc. Describe the historically relevant African American Pioneer and story depicted. Describe how the elements of line, shape and space were utilized. (5 sentence minimum.)

Analysis:

Explain how the elements of **line, shape, and space** contributed to balance in your work. Identify examples of each of these elements of art in your work. (5 sentence minimum)

Interpretation:

Identify your narrative and explain how you achieved this concept. Address the following: viewer's reaction to subject, relevance of narrative to yourself as well as your viewing audience, similarity to Kara Walker's work (i.e. struggle, conflicting powers, hero/heroine, race/gender/ethnic/religious issues addressed). (5 sentence minimum)

Judgment:

What areas of your image would you improve upon? Change or do differently, if given the opportunity? Explain how you would improve these areas. (5 sentence minimum)

Student Resource Sheet 4

<u>Narrative Silhouettes Rubric</u>					
	4	3	3	2	1
Evidence of Planning	Planning is very detailed, sketches are complete and comprehensive	Planning is detailed, sketches are mostly complete.	Planning is minimal but sketches may or may not be complete.	Planning is somewhat evident; the majority of sketches are incomplete.	Planning is insufficient or absent.
Originality and Accuracy of Historical Concept	Design is original and narrative is identifiable and visually dynamic.	Design is mostly original and narrative is identifiable and interesting.	Design may or may not be original and narrative was attempted.	Originality or Narrative may be absent.	Design lacks originality and narrative is entirely absent.
Technical: Min. of 5 figurative silhouettes, 3 setting silhouettes, 1 object silhouette	Silhouettes are clearly defined and all required 9 silhouettes are included in artwork	Silhouettes are defined and the majority, 8 or 7, silhouettes are included in artwork	Silhouettes are identifiable and the some 6 or 5 silhouettes are included in artwork	Silhouettes are not well defined and the some 4 or 3 silhouettes are included in artwork	Silhouettes are not defined and 3 or less silhouettes are present in the artwork
Craftsmanship & Time Management	Craftsmanship and quality are strongly evident in work (i.e. work displays clean edges, free of cuts, and white outline is not visible).	Craftsmanship and quality are evident in work is clean and mostly free of errors.	Craftsmanship and quality are evident but work contains some errors and time may not have been used wisely.	Craftsmanship may or many not have been evident and time was not used wisely.	Craftsmanship and time management were absent or were of significantly poor quality.
Total =					