

Library Paintings Inspired by Jacob Lawrence

A HANDS-ON ART ACTIVITY
DESIGNED BY REBECCA
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Description

Inspired by Jacob Lawrence's painting *The Library*, students will create their own compositions to express the importance of reading to society and to themselves. The project will allow them to experiment with new ways to use shape, color & space.



Example by Lynn Prewitt

Materials

- Pencils
- Erasers
- Acrylic paint in a variety of colors
- Paintbrushes
- Water cups
- White thick paper or canvases
- *The Library* painting by Jacob Lawrence (included in this lesson)
- Optional: Mirrors (for self-portraits)

Instructions

- 1) Show students *The Library* by Jacob Lawrence (included at the end of this lesson) and use Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to talk more and think deeper about the art.
 - VTS is an inquiry-based method of facilitating discussion. Tips and resources on VTS are included at the end of this lesson.
- 2) This would be a good time for a discussion about the importance of reading to the students. You might want to ask students about a time that a book changed their way of thinking or why they think reading is important for society.
- 3) Ask students to plan a composition that expresses their feelings about books or reading. They can first sketch out their design onto their paper using pencil. Challenge them to try to incorporate some of the notable traits of Lawrence's work, like using simple shapes and striking blocks of color.
- 4) Once they have their design the way they like it, they can add paint to fill in their plan. Ask them to try and use a similar color palette to Lawrence's work.
- 5) Optional: Ask the students to sketch a self-portrait of themselves using mirrors provided at the tables and incorporate themselves into their work.

Learning and State Standards

Fulfills **Washington State Arts Learning Standards**:

- **VA:Cr1.2.4** (Collaboratively set goals and create artwork that is meaningful and has purpose to the makers)
- **VA:Cr7.2.4** (Analyze components in visual imagery that convey messages)

Visual Thinking Strategies

MoNA's Education programs utilize Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), which is a research-based teaching method that promotes aesthetic development including critical thinking and communication skills. Here in the MoNA, we use VTS to engage students and general visitors with art encouraging them to observe closely, think critically and discuss respectfully; however, VTS can be effectively used across curricula. This approach teaches its participants how to take the time to observe closely, describe what they see in detail and provide evidence for their observations. Students learn that their reflections and thoughts are valued and appreciated in this inclusive teaching method.

In order to facilitate a VTS discussion, you first encourage viewers to take a quiet moment to observe the work you are going to explore. Then you ask the following questions and paraphrase the responses without adding any of your own judgements. You can insert additional vocabulary and point to specific parts of the artwork.

What's going on in this picture?

What do you see that makes you say...?

What more can you find?

Visual Thinking Strategy Links

If you are interested in learning more about VTS, [here is their website](#). If you already know and love VTS, but want help finding great images to use in your classroom, here is a [fantastic gallery](#). You can also visit this website for additional resources: www.monamuseum.org/resources-for-educators

About the Artist: Jacob Lawrence



Portrait of Lawrence

Source:

Smithsonian American Art Museum

Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) was an African American painter who specialized in the cubism style. Born in Atlantic City, New Jersey to southern migrants, he spent the majority of his life in New York City. His art was inspired by the Harlem Renaissance and depicted African-American life with vivid color. He moved to Seattle, Washington in 1970 and began teaching at the University of Washington until 1983. He is most famous for his series of paintings known as the *Migration Series*. This series of paintings depicts the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural south to the urbanized north in the United States.

**"WE HEAR ABOUT MOLLY PITCHER. WE HEAR ABOUT BETSY ROSS, THE NEGRO WOMAN HAS NEVER BEEN INCLUDED IN AMERICAN HISTORY."
-JACOB LAWRENCE**



The Library, 1960, Jacob Lawrence
Tempera on Fiberboard
Source: Smithsonian American Art Museum