

Pre-Visit and Post-Visit Mini-Lessons for The Ties That Bind: African American Art and Artists for Grades 3 to 12 Tour: Preparing Your Student for the Museum



These mini-lessons are intended to be used before and after your students' visit to the museum. They are to help you and your students get acquainted with the museum and the things you will learn about while you are visiting. This tour focuses on art about African Americans as well as artworks created by African American artists.

Before the Visit Mini-Lesson

What's a museum?

Before your visit to the museum, talk to your students about the Morris Museum of Art. For younger students ask questions like, "Who can tell me what a museum is? Now that we know what a museum is, what things might we see when we visit?" This helps students create a definition in their own words. Remember to mention that the Morris Museum of Art focuses on Southern artwork. The Morris has artwork and objects from the late eighteenth century to the present day: paintings, photos, sculptures, and even furniture that were made in the South or made by Southern artists.

Older students, too, need to know where they are going and what to expect during their visit.

Museum: a place devoted to the care, study, and display of objects of lasting interest or value; a place where artworks are shown

What's a docent?

Introduce the concept of a docent. After defining a museum, you could say "Museums have their own teachers, just like school. They are called *docents*. When you visit the museum, a docent will teach you about the things that you will see."

Docent: a person who leads guided tours through a museum; a teacher of the museum

Who else will we see at the museum?

Besides docents, they will see visitor service and security staff. Explain to younger students that they are our "museum friends." They help you if you have any questions. They are also there to protect you and the artwork.

What are "museum manners?"

Talk to students about helping the museum protect the art by taking care when in the museum. For younger students, we call this special set of museum rules "M & M's" or Museum Manners. The M & M's include:

- Look with your eyes, not your hands. This includes the art and the walls.
- Do the "Museum Walk": walk with your hands behind your back or close to your sides. This helps us remember not to touch.
- Listen while others are talking. Talk in quiet voices so everyone can be heard.
- No running. If you run, you might damage an artwork.

Explain to students how important these M & Ms are.

The visit will go more smoothly for older students if they know ahead of time to:

- Stay with the group.
- Keep their hands away from the walls and the artworks.
- Walk down the middle of the galleries.



Focusing on One Artwork



Benny Andrews, *Southern Landscape*, 1965.
Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Georgia

Storytelling is a rich tradition in African American history. As is true in all cultures, these stories record their history and define their culture. From before the Civil War, during the Civil Rights movement, and continuing through the present day, African Americans have shared their past while also creating a sense of community and a culture. Storytelling affirms a personal identity. African American culture and history are an important part of America's story, and that story is one every American needs to know.

The following activity allows students to create their own story about *Southern Landscape*.

Creating a Narrative

- *Can someone tell me what's going on in this painting? How many people are there, and what are they doing? What tools are they using? Where are they?*
- *What colors, lines, and shapes can you see? Is this painting realistic or lifelike? Why or why not? Talk about primary and secondary colors.*
Primary colors (red, yellow, blue): a color that cannot be created by mixing other colors; primary colors can be mixed to create most of the other colors.
Secondary colors (orange, green, purple): a color that is created by mixing two of the primary colors.

- *Why do you think this painting is called Southern Landscape? What makes you think that they are in the South? What year do you think this is?*
- *Let's create our own story. There are three main parts to a story: characters, the setting, and the main events. Who do you think the people in the painting are? What were they doing before they were working? What were they doing after? What is the conclusion to the story?*

Activity: Telling Your Story

Materials:

- One "Telling Your Story" worksheet for every student
- Pencils
- Colored pencils

Preparation:

- Print the "Telling Your Story" worksheet and copy enough for every student.

Procedures:

1. Talk to students about the African American tradition of storytelling. Discuss Benny Andrews and how he tells stories about his family through his paintings. Even though we're not sure if the people in the painting are his parents, we are sure that the painting is autobiographical. He painted a memory and told a story through paint. Explain this to students and that they will do a similar project.
2. Pass out the worksheets and explain the activity. Students will answer the guiding questions based on a favorite memory they had while growing up or one that someone in their family told them.
3. Once they have completed the writing part of the activity, there is a section at the bottom where they can draw a picture of their memory with colored pencils.

Assessment:

Once the drawings are completed, hang the pictures so that students can share their memories with others. Students may read their memory aloud if they want.

After the Visit Mini-Lesson

Allow time at the beginning of class for students to take turns talking about their visit to the Morris Museum of Art. *Whom did you meet? What did you see? What did you do? What did your docent talk to you about?*

Lead the discussion into the African American tradition of storytelling and explain how you can tell stories through art.



George Andrews, *This Is the Andrews Family (Andrews Family Tree)*, 1991.
Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Georgia

Activity: This Is My Family

In this activity, students define family, create a nontraditional family tree, and tell a story through pictures. See photographs for details.

Materials:

- One sheet of an 18 x 12 inch white construction paper for each student
- Colored pencils, markers, or crayons
- Pencils

Preparation:

- Cut white construction paper into an 18 x 12 inch rectangle.

Procedures:

1. Tell the students to closely observe the painting to discover as much as they can about the Andrews family. Discuss George Andrews's *This Is the Andrews Family*. *What can you tell me about this family? How many children did George Andrews have? What were their names? You can create a story just by looking at the painting. We can tell that George Andrews was a farmer and that he had a mule named Nellie Bell. See him talking to the mule? Even though he did not go to school after the third grade, he was able to tell a rich story about his family through his painting.*

2. Talk about families. *A family is made up of people who look after you or who are very important to you. There are various kinds of families. Families mean different things to different people. Who is important to you?* Encourage students to create their own definitions. Write their answers on the board.
3. Explain to students that today's project is to create their family trees so that they can tell the story of their families. After they have finished drawing, they can add color with crayons or colored pencils.

Assessment:

After students have completed their trees, hang them up and allow time for students to talk about the choices they made in their artwork.

Book Suggestions:

Here are a few book suggestions that relate to storytelling in African American literature and nontraditional family trees:

- *God Bless the Child*, by Billie Holiday and Arthur Herzog, Jr., illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. Harper Collins/Amistad, 2004.
- *Tar Beach*, by Faith Ringgold. Crown Publishers, 1991.
- *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*, by Deborah Hopkinson. Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.
- *Who's Who in My Family?* by Loreen Leedy. Holiday House, 1995.



Telling Your Story

Name _____

Date _____

Where were you born? _____

Do you have any brothers or sisters? If so, what are their names and how old are they?

Do your family or friends have any special traditions? _____

What is your favorite memory? Were you with your family or with friends? Were you at home, school, or someplace else? Write about your memory.

Draw a picture of your memory on the page provided.