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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1993 Volume IV: The Minority Artist in America

Seven Famous African-American Masters of American Art

Guide for Curriculum Unit 93.04.09
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This unit is designed to provide teachers with materials to teach students in middle school grades about outstanding contributions made by African American artists to American art history. My goals are to expose students to a wide range of artistic and cultural expressions by the artists and to enhance their academic achievement and develop positive self esteem. In addition, the unit will show how African-American culture played an important role in mainstream art history. Through the use of books, photographs, slides, paintings, and visits to art museums students will examine artistic works of masters of American art.

The specific contributions of seven artists will be examined. The artist Joshua Johnson, a mysterious painter of 19th century Baltimore has become known recently through a number of portraits which bear the touch of a master. There is Robert S. Duncanson whose landscape paintings helped shape an American school of landscape painting. Next, there is Henry Ossawa Tanner who portrayed in thick, rich and dark colors, scenes from Black life and from the Bible. There is Horace Pippin who burned into wood with a hot poker both the horrors of war and the joys of country life. Then there is Augusta Savage who sculpted the famous and unknown among her contemporaries and helped to inspire a future generation of African-American artists. There is William H. Johnson who aspired to be an artist at an early age, despite his poverty and lack of education. Last, there is Jacob Lawrence, one of those youths encouraged by Augusta Savage, who is living today and is one of America's most important painters. He has painted the history, heroes and bold patterns of colors that Africa has given the world.

(Recommended for Art or American History, Grades 6-8; Art History, Grades 9-12)

Key Words

Art African Afro-American

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