

Virtual Visit: Outline

Aaron Douglas, *Building More Stately Mansions*, 1944

Content Areas

English/Language Arts, Social Studies, Visual Art

Essential Question

Artist Aaron Douglas was inspired by ancient and contemporary architecture, visual art and poetry. By exploring his painting and finding connections to poetry, what can we learn about how artists use different artistic styles and art forms to represent the many kinds of work it takes to build societies, both in the past and today?

Overview

A museum educator leads students to explore Aaron Douglas's 1944 painting *Building More Stately Mansions*. The educator describes the painting's visual elements such as color, line, shape and form and provides contextual information about Douglas, an influential artist of the Harlem Renaissance. Students will read two poems by Oliver Wendell Holmes and Langston Hughes to look for literary connections to *Building More Stately Mansions*. Finally, students are prompted to work on an assignment on their own with teacher support to create an artwork with a contemporary message inspired by Aaron Douglas's murals.

Objectives

- By analyzing visual elements, students will explore and grow their understanding of Douglas's painting, ideas and times.
- Students will find connections between visual artworks and poetry by comparing the work of Douglas and Langston Hughes, two key figures of the Harlem Renaissance.
- Students will explore the contemporary relevance of the themes of these artworks by creating their own artworks inspired by Aaron Douglas.

Materials

Blank paper and pencil.

Optional: colored pencils, paint, or other materials of students' choice.

Key Terms

- Visual Element
- Mural
- Monument
- Labor
- Harlem Renaissance

Discussion/Support

Teachers can support students by checking for comprehension and prompting students to reflect and respond to questions asked during the virtual visit.

They can assist students to complete the assignment and help students share their work with each other, as well as online (#RISDMuseum #museumfromhome #TeachingwithArt) or with the RISD Museum at teachers@risd.edu.

Evaluation of Student Work

Students will write or share meaningful responses to questions during the virtual visit. As takeaway work, students will write a plan or sketch a proposal for an artwork (of any medium) or poem that celebrates people who perform essential yet unrecognized work in our society.

Discussion Questions and Prompts

Write 5 words or phrases from Langston Hughes poem *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* that you think show a connection to Aaron Douglas's painting *Building More Stately Mansions*.

Who does the work of building a great society? Who is credited and remembered by history? How does the painting *Building More Stately Mansions* answer these questions and what do you think of the answers?

What are some essential types of labor that go unnoticed in our society? Create an original artwork to celebrate the people who perform these types of labor.

Works in this Lesson

Aaron Douglas, [*Building More Stately Mansions*](#), 1944

Roman, [*Arch of Titus*](#), ca. 81 CE

Cass Gilbert, Architect, [*Woolworth Building*](#), 1912

Egyptian, [*Sphinx and Pyramid of Khafre*](#), ca. 2500 BCE

Aaron Douglas, [*Dance Magic*](#), 1930

Betsy Graves Reyneau, [*Portrait of Aaron Douglas*](#), 1953

Charles M. Muskavitch, [*Copy of Egyptian Wall, Mastaba of Pthath-Sekhem-Ankh*](#), 1936

Charles Sheeler, [*Delmonico Building*](#), 1927

James Van der Zee, [*Dancer, Harlem*](#), 1925

Aaron Douglas, [*Illustration for Langston Hughes' The Negro Speaks of Rivers*](#), 1941

Poetry

Oliver Wendell Holmes, [*The Chambered Nautilus*](#), 1895

Langston Hughes, [*The Negro Speaks of Rivers*](#), 1921

More Activities and Resources

Teaching Notes: [Imagining the Americas](#) pg. 18