



Teacher:
Class: 2nd grade
Duration: 3 class periods
Course Unit:
Lesson Title: Aaron Douglas–Inspired Paintings: Tints, Shades, and Silhouettes
LESSON OVERVIEW
<p>Aaron Douglas (1899–1979) was a leading visual artist of the Harlem Renaissance who inspired many through his original illustrations, prints, and paintings. He developed a unique style of painting that combined modern forms with African motifs to represent themes of African American experience, history, and identity. Students will look at various works by Douglas to identify the elements and principles that characterize his style, and create their own Aaron Douglas–inspired paintings, in which they will discover the color value theory of tints and shades and how to create silhouette forms.</p>
STANDARDS
<p>Tennessee State Standards Visual Art—Grade 2 2.1 Identify, understand, and apply the elements of art. 2.2 Identify, understand, and apply the principles of art. 2.3 Understand and apply purpose in art. 2.4 Understand and apply context in art. 3.1 Select subject matter, symbols, and ideas for the student’s own art. 4.2 Understand that culture, history, and art influence one another. 5.1 Analyze the characteristics and merits of the student’s own artwork.</p> <p>Social Studies—Grade 2 2.40 Analyze primary and secondary source maps, photographs, and artifacts for contradictions, supporting evidence, and historical details.</p> <p>Common Core Connections for Integrated Subjects—Language Arts, Writing, Speaking & Listening CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.1a Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion). CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.2 Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.8 Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.</p>
OBJECTIVES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will learn about the historical purpose and context of Douglas’s artwork. 2. Students will be able to identify the characteristics of Douglas’s style. 3. Students will be able to describe the importance of the Harlem Renaissance. 4. Students will be able to apply tint and shade, silhouette shapes, and concentric circles to their own paintings.

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION

1. Students will participate in a class critique in which they compare the characteristics of their completed paintings with the style of Aaron Douglas.
2. Students will write 3–5 sentences describing Aaron Douglas’s role in the Harlem Renaissance and why this was an important artistic movement in America.

MATERIALS

- Paper or journals for writing and sketching
 - 5 sheets or pages for the Activating Strategy and Day 1
 - 1 sheet or page for Day 3
- 1 pencil per student
- PC-to-projector connection
- Examples of Aaron Douglas’s paintings from the Internet (see under Extended Learning)
- Newspaper and masking tape
- 1 paintbrush per student
- 1 paint palette per student, with tempera or acrylic paint in black and white
- 1 water cup per student
- 2 paper towels per student
- 1 compass per table
- 1 black marker per table
- One 8” x 12” piece of cardboard per student
- Access to a large garbage can and a sink, for cleanup
- Drying racks

ACTIVATING STRATEGY

1. At the start of this lesson, each student should have with them either their journal or 5 sheets of paper, along with a pencil.
2. Show the “[Art Appreciation](#)” episode of [ArtQuest: Art Is All Around You](#).
3. Provide a brief biography of Aaron Douglas in a few sentences. [Say:] **Aaron Douglas** overcame many obstacles to pursue his passion for art. He was born in Topeka, Kansas, in 1899, and graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1922. After teaching at a high school, Douglas moved to Harlem, New York, in 1925 to join a cultural movement called the Harlem Renaissance. He is considered one of the most important visual artists of this movement because he developed a unique style of painting to represent themes of African American life, history and heritage, and hopes for the future. This style continues to influence artists today.
4. [Ask:] What do you know about the Harlem Renaissance? [Allow 1–2 student responses.]
5. Describe the Harlem Renaissance as a historical movement in the United States. [Say:] The **Harlem Renaissance** was a cultural movement that took place in Harlem, New York, in the 1920s and 1930s. African American writers, artists, musicians, poets, and scholars went to Harlem to express their talents freely and to publish their works. Most important, this movement helped to promote equality in America and reinforce pride among African Americans.
6. Explain that Douglas was greatly **inspired** by the values of the Harlem Renaissance and used symbols to visually express them in his art.
7. Ask students to consider something that inspires or is important to them, and why. It could be a pet, a subject in school, a sport, a place, etc. Have students write their answers down.

INSTRUCTIONS

DAY 1

1. Use the projector to show one or more of the following examples of artwork by Aaron Douglas:
 - *Ma Bad Luck Card*, from *Opportunity Art Folio*, 1926
 - *The Judgment Day*, 1927
 - *Science*, 1930
 - *Harriet Tubman*, 1931
 - *Aspiration*, 1936
 - *Building More Stately Mansions*, 1944
2. As you show the example(s), ask these questions to elicit open-ended responses from the students:
 - What do you see? What do you see in the images that you wonder about?
 - What is happening in the scene?
 - Can you identify any symbols in these works? What might they represent?
 - What stories do these images tell?
3. Guide the students in visual analysis and discuss the elements and principles of art that characterize Douglas's style. [Say:] Aaron Douglas was an American Modernist. His modern style of painting is characterized by tints and shades of color, silhouette shapes, and radiating concentric circles.
4. Discuss Douglas's use of limited color and introduce the terms *tint* and *shade*. Explain that a tint is a color with white added to it, and a shade is a color with black or brown added to it. Ask the students to find the tints and shades within Douglas's artwork. [Ask:] How many different colors do you see? Do you see any shadows or shading?
5. Discuss Douglas's use of flat silhouette shapes. Explain that a **silhouette** is a simplified picture outline of an object or a person that is filled in with a solid color in front of a contrasting background. Ask students to notice the flatness and the lack of detail in Douglas's figures. Have the students identify some of the silhouetted shapes in the provided images. [Ask:] What shapes do you see? Are they geometric or organic? Notice the figures in the paintings. Are the figures flat or three-dimensional?
6. Discuss Douglas's use of **concentric circles**. Explain that concentric circles are circles of different sizes that have the same center. Douglas used patterns of concentric circles to create radiating movement and to draw the viewer's eyes to certain spots within the picture plane.
7. Remind students of the ideas and subjects that inspired Douglas, including the Harlem Renaissance. Emphasize his leadership within the movement and how he hoped to inspire and empower people through his imagery. [Say:] Douglas used symbols to represent the ideas and subjects that were most important to him, using limited colors, silhouette shapes, and radiating concentric circles. Now that you know these elements and principles, let's apply them to our own Aaron Douglas-inspired paintings.
8. Have students sketch the image of something that inspires or is important to them (referring to the answers they wrote down in Step 7 of the Activating Strategy). Explain that this will become the silhouette for their painting. Remind them that silhouettes are simplified picture outlines of objects or people, so their subjects will rely on the shape rather than the color or facial expression of their inspiration.
9. Demonstrate on the board how to simplify a sketch to create the outline for a silhouette.
10. Each student will simplify their original sketch and repeat this process 1–2 more times before completing their final silhouette design.

DAY 2

1. Prior to class, set up each table as follows:
 - a. Using newspaper and masking tape, cover the working surface.
 - b. Add the following items per student: 1 paintbrush, 1 paint palette with white and black paints, 1 water cup, and 1 paper towel.
 - c. Add the following items per table: 1 compass and 1 black marker.
2. Quickly review the lesson and show 1 example of Aaron Douglas's artwork.
3. Hand out one 8" x 12" piece of cardboard per student. Have each student use a black marker to write their name on the back of their cardboard.

4. Next, demonstrate how to use a compass to create concentric circles on a piece of cardboard with a pencil. Start from the largest circle to the smallest one and advise students to draw at least 4 circles inside each other to have a repeated concentric effect. These circles may radiate from any point in the picture plane (e.g., from the center, top or bottom, or left or right, or from a corner). Allow the students to decide their starting points for themselves.
5. As students take turns drawing their concentric circles, remind them of the limited color palette they will use and reintroduce the terms *tint* and *shade*. Tell students that they will be choosing 1 color to paint in and making different tints and shades of that color by adding black or white.
6. Move around the room and observe student progress while administering paint colors.
7. Using the cardboard example, demonstrate how to create tints and shades of a color. Apply these tints and shades to the concentric circles, radiating from the lightest tint (painting it into the center) to the darkest shade (painting it into the outermost circle).
8. Direct students to establish their tints and shades on paint palettes and begin painting their concentric circles.
9. Walk around the class to assess progress, provide positive feedback and affirmation, and assist students who may be having trouble.
10. To clean up:
 - a. Students will move their paintings to drying racks.
 - b. One student per table will place paint palettes and brushes into the sink for the teacher to wash.
 - c. One student per table will place water cups into the sink for the teacher to wash.
 - d. One student will gather compasses from each table and return them to the designated bin.
 - e. The students at each table will roll up the newspaper and tape into a tight ball and place it into the large garbage can.

DAY 3

1. Prior to class, set up each table for this activity as follows:
 - a. Using newspaper and masking tape, cover the working surface.
 - b. Add the following items per student: 1 paintbrush, 1 paint palette with black paint, 1 water cup, and 1 paper towel.
2. Have students collect their 8" x 12" pieces of cardboard from the drying racks. Each student should also have their silhouette sketches from Day 1 and a pencil.
3. Quickly review the lesson and show 1 example of Aaron Douglas's artwork.
4. Use the example to point out the silhouette shapes, figures, and/or architectural structures within Douglas's artwork. Review the term *silhouette* and [Say:] A **silhouette** is a simplified picture of the outline of an object filled in with a solid color in front of a contrasting background. What were some of the silhouette shapes we identified in Douglas's paintings?
5. Have 1–2 students recall the silhouette shapes that were discussed in previous conversation. Ask students to consider these subjects and why Douglas may have chosen to represent them in his artwork.
6. Ask students to review the silhouette sketches they created on Day 1, which they are to use as templates once they begin painting.
7. Have students consider the size or scale of their silhouettes in relation to the picture plane. [Say:] Keep in mind that the larger the silhouette is, the less visible the concentric circles will be.
8. Students will be painting these silhouette shapes in front of their concentric circles. Review the term *shade* and explain how they will use their darkest shade or the color black to fill in the silhouette shape.
9. Demonstrate how to create shade with paints and how to paint a silhouette shape on the cardboard.
10. Distribute one color per student. Students will then establish their shades on paint palettes and begin painting the silhouettes.
11. As students paint, walk around to observe their progress and assist those who need further instruction.
12. Have students display their completed paintings in designated areas around the room.
13. To clean up:
 - a. One student per table will place paint palettes and brushes into the sink for the teacher to wash.
 - b. One student per table will place water cups in the sink for the teacher to wash.

- c. The students at each table will roll up the newspaper and tape into a tight ball and place it into the large garbage can.
14. Direct students to their seats for the class critique. If students are not using journals, distribute a sheet of paper to each student.

ALTERNATE/EXTRA ACTIVITIES

- Students may focus on painting gestural figure silhouettes by using classmates as models.
- Students could create a class mural in the style of Aaron Douglas.
- Students could stage a historical moment or period in history, such as the Harlem Renaissance or Civil Rights Movement, to narrate various perspectives and to describe the actions, thoughts, and feelings of the participants in the event.
- Students with special needs or motor impairment may work with oil pastels to create tints and shades. Have them focus on simple silhouette shapes such as triangles, circles, and squares while creating their Douglas-inspired artwork.
- Students could use circle templates of various sizes instead of a compass.

CLOSURE

1. Ask students how their paintings are similar and different to those by artist Aaron Douglas. Have students describe the characteristics of his style in their own words.
2. Allow students to guess the silhouette shapes in their peers' paintings. Then, permit 1–2 students to share their paintings with the class by describing the subjects, symbols, or ideas they have chosen to represent and why it inspires or is important to them.
3. Have students write 3–5 sentences (on the new sheet of paper or in their journals) describing Aaron Douglas's role in the Harlem Renaissance and why this was an important artistic movement in America. Students should recall details and information gathered from source images and class discussions.

CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Language Arts

Social Studies

EXTENDED LEARNING

Activities:

- Patty Bode and Stephanie Schmidt, "[A Study of Artist Aaron Douglas: Painting the Human Figure in the Tradition of Resistance](#)" lesson plan, [civilrightsteaching.org](#)
- Corcoran School of the Arts and Design, "[Foreshadowing History](#)," *Arts 101 Lesson Plans*, [ccadarted.wordpress.com](#)
- Frist Center for the Visual Arts, *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist* teacher guide (visit [fristcenter.org/learn/schools-educators/teacher-guides](#) to request a copy)
- Trisha Maunder, "[Mini Murals](#)" lesson plan, [anyonecanflyfoundation.org](#)

Articles, books, and interpretation:

- Susan Earle, editor, *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007)
- Benjamin Genocchio, "[Works That Testify to the Nurturing of Black Artists](#)," *New York Times*, February 12, 2010
- Amy Helene Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, and the Harlem Renaissance* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995)
- Smithsonian American Art Museum, [Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist](#) wall text and extended labels (2008)
- Spencer Museum of Art, [Aaron Douglas: Teacher Resource](#) (Lawrence: University of Kansas Spencer Museum of Art, 2007)

Videos:

- Amber Edwards, *Against the Odds: The Artists of the Harlem Renaissance* (1994; distributed by PBS)
- Frist Center for the Visual Arts, "[Art Appreciation](#)," [ArtQuest: Art Is All Around You](#) (2015; available at [fristkids.org](#))
- New York Public Library, [Treasures of the New York Public Library: The Harlem Renaissance](#) (2008; available at [nypl.org/audiovideo/harlem-renaissance](#))

Websites:

- Kennedy Center, [ARTSEdge: Drop Me Off in Harlem](#), [artsedge.kennedy-center.org](#)
- Spencer Museum of Art, [Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist](#), [aarondouglas.ku.edu](#)

For additional lesson plans and activities, visit us at [fristkids.org](#). This lesson plan was created by an art education student in the Frist Center for the Visual Arts' Teaching Assistant Program under the guidance of education department staff and/or a mentor teacher. The Teaching Assistant Program is designed to introduce participants to museum education by providing unique teaching experiences in an informal learning environment. For more information about this program or other educational opportunities offered by the Frist Center, please visit

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