

Across Hope

Lesson plans for viewing the work by artist Charly Palmer



"I often pose a question opposed to necessarily having an answer. As an artist, I ask a question instead of making a statement; and that's why it's difficult as an artist to make an artist statement."

— Charly Palmer

Conversations with African American Art

On exhibition January 5 - February 28, 2024

Artists' Cooperative Gallery of Westerly,
44 Railroad Avenue, Westerly, RI

Wednesday – Saturday, 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.
Sunday, 1-5 p.m.

Opening Receptions, 5-8 p.m.
Friday, January 5, 2024
Friday, February 2, 2024

On exhibition: A selection of pieces of the Bill and Paula Alice Mitchell Collection of African-American Art, selected and interpreted by Westerly ARC members April Dinwoodie, Leslie Dunn, and Kevin Lowther.

Free and open to the public.

Visit our website for more information and lesson plans:

<https://westerlyarc.weebly.com/arc-art-exhibit>

This lesson plan was created by Tim Flanagan for the Westerly ARC exhibit “Conversations with African American Art.” The plan follows Lincoln Center Education’s Learning Framework: *The Capacities for Imaginative Thinking*.



The Westerly Anti-Racism Coalition, is a community coalition unaffiliated with any state, national, or international organization. ARC embraces multiculturalism to address racism. Join our weekly gatherings on the steps of the Westerly Post Office each Sunday, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Learn more and subscribe to ARC’s newsletter at westerlyarc.weebly.com. Contact us at westerlyarc@gmail.com.

Across Hope

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Line of Inquiry

In *Across Hope*, how does Charly Palmer combine mixed materials and color to explore the idea of hope for African Americans?

Student Learning Goals

National Core Art Standards

- Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
- Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.
- Additional subject-specific goals for English language arts, social studies, or other areas will depend on which post-viewing lessons are developed.

Grade Level

“Across Hope” is most appropriate for middle and high school, but it can be adapted for any grade level.

Capacities for Imaginative Thinking

Notice deeply
Pose questions

Teacher Preparation

Teachers using the lessons in this series should familiarize themselves with topics that may come up during these student-centered lessons.

It is important to be prepared to have conversations about race and racism while considering the various identities of students and their needs. The resources below have specific suggestions for preparing teachers and their students for these conversations.

Fostering Civil Discourse (Facing History & Ourselves)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1m7lrg90w0fug6lclCJq60-0cKcBv2VTT/view?usp=sharing>

How Should I Talk about Race in My Mostly White Classroom? (ADL)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MZ7FWvzHrbAnTLsX5Y2Vu91vpoqGloCi/view?usp=sharing>

Let's Talk! Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students (Learning for Justice)

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/publications/lets-talk>

Preparing for a Conversation about Policing and Racial Injustice (Facing History & Ourselves)

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/preparing-conversation-about-policing-racial-injustice>

Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism (ADL)

<https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/race-talk-engaging-young-people-conversations-about-race-and-racism>

Talking about Race (National Museum of African American History and Culture)

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/audiences/educator>

Toolkit for Talking About Racism and Police Violence with Students (Learning for Justice)

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/spring-2015/toolkit-for-talking-about-racism-and-police-violence-with-students>

Attention to Safe Spaces

It is important to consider how students of color might be impacted by conversations about race as well as by the works of art. Some of the works of art in these lessons and in the exhibit contain racist language and images and can trigger strong emotions. Teachers should intentionally curate spaces that will create the conditions for all students to feel as safe as possible with particular attention paid to students who might not be comfortable with the works of art or the conversations during the lessons. Teachers should also prepare for possible feelings of discomfort and defensiveness on the part of white students while learning about racial inequality and injustice. With this in mind it is important that as educators you are also listening to what may be activating in you as you prepare for these lessons.

Pre-Viewing Lesson: Word Splash and Group Collage

Note: Suggested times are given for each portion of the lesson, but these can vary widely depending on how deep you go into the concepts. This could be completed over one class period or extended to more class periods as time allows.

Warm-Up: Quickwrite (5 minutes)

Quickwrite: Describe a time when having hope was important to you.

Give students 2-3 minutes to write quickly on the topic. Tell them their answers are private, unless they choose to share them. If there is time, allow a few volunteers to share their response.

Activity 1: Word Splash (15 minutes)

inspire	enslaved*	life
genuine	reward	auction
young	valuable	robbed
shelves	dream	imagine

*The term "slave" is in the work of art. "Enslaved" has become a more widely accepted term for a variety of reasons. Take this opportunity to discuss with students why this term is more appropriate and provide other examples of how language to describe marginalized groups has changed.

Display the words above for the students. Lead them in a discussion and record their responses. Start by reading the words aloud. Then ask some or all of the questions below and see where the discussion leads.

- What questions do you have about the meanings of any of the words? Are there words that have multiple meanings?
- Do you see any connections between the words? Can you make any categories of words?
- What feelings do the words evoke in you?
- Is there one idea that comes through strongly (a theme or topic)?
- Follow up student responses with questions such as:
 - What word or words are giving you that idea?
 - Can you give me an example?
 - Can you tell me more about that?
- Tell students that the words are from a work of art. Ask, "What new questions do you have after our discussion?" Record students' responses on chart paper.

Activity 2: What does “hope” look like to you? (30 minutes)

Explain to students that the work of art they will view is titled *Across Hope*. (They will learn more about the work of art and the artist later, but at this time only give students the title.)

Students should work in groups of about three for this activity. Even though the idea of “hope” is personal, ask students to include all of their group members’ ideas in the activity.

Ask students to think about what “hope” might look like to them. Some ideas to consider:

- What situations require hope for you?
- What makes you more hopeful?
- What makes you less hopeful?
- What are some words and symbols that can represent hope?

Students will create a mini-collage to represent what hope means to them. Have a variety of magazines, newspapers, and other materials available for students to use. In this activity, students will not need paint, nor will they create a fully finished product. The idea is to get students to work together to explore the theme of hope. Encourage them to work quickly and not worry about making something beautiful or complete - it will be a work in progress.

Once the allotted time is up, have each group display their unfinished collage. Have students go on a silent gallery walk by visiting each collage and jotting down what they notice and any questions they have.

Lead a whole-class discussion on what students noticed about the collages.

Closing

Exit slip (or turn and talk to a partner): What is one question you have about the work of art you are going to view?

Contextual Information

Charly Palmer (1960-)

Share all or some of this information either before or after viewing the work of art.

Excerpts from <https://www.charlypalmer.com/about>

Over 30 years and counting, Charly Palmer's art speaks for itself. Literally, Palmer's paintbrush is as a Griot. In every painting, he bears witness of African ancestry and contemporary experiences — rhythmic, visual stories that shift what each viewer believes to see — should one dare to look deeply.

In 2020, Palmer illustrated the cover art for John Legend's Grammy Award-winning studio album *Bigger Love*. That same summer he was also selected to do the July 2020 cover for the acclaimed *Time Magazine* for the "America Must Change" issue. Several other illustrations were included in the issue, including portraits of George Stinney, Jr. and James Baldwin paired with American iconography. The paintings were received as both beautiful and mournful. Palmer was chosen to work on the cover based on his 20 years of experience painting on the subject of race.

Viewing the Work of Art: Analyzing Across Hope

Preferably, students will view the actual work of art. If this is possible, consider dividing the class in half to have the discussion about the art. If viewing the work in person is not possible, the teacher can project an image of it for the students in class or share a link to the work of art:

http://art.state.gov/portfolio/manila_2010/#foogallery-159875/i:10

As you view the work of art with students, lead them in a discussion. Choose questions from below to help your students describe, analyze and interpret the work of art. Encourage multiple interpretations and ask students to provide evidence for their interpretation.

Describe: Open questions that elicit pure noticing.

A few examples:

- What do you notice?
- What do you see?
- How would you describe . . . “

Analyze: Open questions that ask the students to analyze various aspects of the work.

A few examples:

- What relationships do you notice among the elements?
- What do you see
 - that is similar;
 - that is different;
 - that is a pattern?
- How is the work of art put together?
- What patterns or relationships do you identify in the work of art?
- What questions do you have?

Interpret: Open questions that help us find our own meaning in the work of art after considering our responses to the prior descriptions and analyses.

A few examples:

- What connections do you make
 - to your life?
 - to your world?
 - to things you have read?
 - to things you are studying in school?
- What do you think is going on in the work of art? What is it about?
- What ideas was the artist trying to convey in this work of art?
- What does it mean? What does it mean to you?
- Does it represent something? If yes, what?
- Does the work of art evoke any emotions? What does it express?
- If this work of art is a metaphor for something - what might it be?

Questions come from Lincoln Center Education materials which were adapted from:

Weitze, Morris, “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (1956): 27-35.

Post-Viewing: Reflecting, Art-Making, Celebrating

Activity 1: Reflecting on Questions

Revisit the list of questions students created in pre-viewing lesson. Discuss what students have learned and new questions they might have.

Activity 2: Art-Making Explorations

Use as many classes as time allows to develop post-viewing activities for your subject area. Incorporate concepts and vocabulary students have learned from exploring the work of art. Below are some ideas for developing lessons and activities in specific areas.

Social Studies

- Research one or more of the items in the work of art (such as the diagram of a slave ship, one of the photographs, one of the ads or articles). What can you find out about the document? Why do you think the artist chose to include it? How does the new information enrich your understanding of the work of art? How does the work of art enrich your understanding of US history?

English Language Arts

- Write a poem about hope inspired by the work of art. Think about what gives you hope. Are you inspired by your ancestors? What are your greatest hopes for yourself, your community, the world?
- Imagine you are the person standing in the doorway in the work of art. Write a series of diary entries about what you see, feel, and think as you look at your surroundings.

Arts

- Create a work of art in the style of *Across Hope*. You can choose to make it about hope or choose another theme that is relevant to your life. Gather clippings and other materials that can represent the ideas you want to convey. Attach the items to a canvas and use paint to add color, more texture, and layers. Think about the following when creating your piece:
 - What do you want the viewer to notice from a distance? What should they notice up close?
 - What feelings do you want to convey?
 - How can you use layers and color to convey meaning?
- Find out more about Charly Palmer's life and his art. Choose three pieces of his art to compare and analyze. Describe how his art has changed over the years.

Final Lesson: Celebrating Student Work

Be sure to save time to celebrate student work while reflecting on what was learned in this unit.

About the Work of Art

Charly Palmer (b. 1960); American

Across Hope

2009

Mixed media and acrylic on canvas

Collection of Bill and Paula Alice Mitchell

The colors drew me in, and as I looked closer, I wanted to study the details embedded within.

— Leslie Dunn and Kevin Lowther II

In this work, artist Charly Palmer reflects on the word “hope” and all of its connotations. It is a piece that questions the histories we often accept as true, with nods to historic events incorporated throughout the canvas.

Across Hope was included in an exhibition mounted by Pine Point School in Stonington in February of 2023. When asked to share her thoughts about it, Maeve, a sixth-grade student, wrote, “*This piece of art made me feel thoughtful. It showed me a story without words and it was loud and clear to me what the story was when I saw it. You have to look at the painting carefully to see the story and once you see it, you will be able to see what it means.*”

Additional Resources

Charly Palmer website: <https://www.charlypalmer.com/>

Across Hope (Charly Palmer): http://art.state.gov/portfolio/manila_2010/#foogallery-159875/i:10

Grandfather's Hope (Charly Palmer): http://www.artjaz.com/artists/palmer/cp_granfather.html

The Story Behind TIME's 'America Must Change' Cover:
<https://time.com/5858673/charly-palmer-cover/>

Artist Charly Palmer Tells a Story That Still Needs To Be Told:
<https://www.artworkarchive.com/blog/artist-charly-palmer-tells-a-story-that-still-needs-to-be-told>

Charly Palmer retrospective highlights the artist's versatility:
<https://www.ajc.com/life/arts-culture/charly-palmer-retrospective-highlights-the-artists-versatility/UJCGAIFPMJB53PNIDOTZF5FDFY/>

Archive of Palmer's work: <https://www.artworkarchive.com/profile/charly-palmer>

How the Memphis Sanitation Strike Changed History - JSTOR Daily:
<https://daily.jstor.org/how-the-memphis-sanitation-strike-changed-history/>

An Archive of Fugitive Slave Ads Sheds New Light on Lost Histories | Smart News| Smithsonian Magazine:
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/archive-fugitive-slave-ads-could-shed-new-light-lost-histories-180959194/>

Infographic: The Slave-Ship Chart That Kindled The Abolitionist Movement:
<https://www.fastcompany.com/1670325/infographic-the-slave-ship-chart-that-kindled-the-abolitionist-movement>

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