

# WHITNEY

**Over the Line:  
The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence  
November 8, 2001 - February 3, 2002**



**Teacher Guide**  
pre- and post-visit materials

# Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence

November 8, 2001 - February 3, 2002

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These pre- and post-visit materials were prepared by the Education Department of the Whitney Museum of American Art in collaboration with Roy Reid, educator, art and technology, Urban Academy High School, Manhattan; Mildred Rodriguez, educator, PS 111/Adolph S. Ochs School, Manhattan; and Georgene Thompson-Brown, educator, MS 246/Walt Whitman Middle School, Brooklyn; and Ellen Wong, educator, The Lab School, Manhattan.

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**We welcome your feedback! Please let us know what you think of these pre- and post-visit materials.**

**How did you use the materials?  
What worked or didn't work?**

**E mail us at [education@whitney.org](mailto:education@whitney.org)**

**Bring examples of your students' pre-visit work when you visit the Whitney!**

This exhibition has been organized by The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. The exhibition is accompanied by a republished version of the critical monograph, *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence*, from *The Complete Jacob Lawrence*. A curator's statement, letter from the director, lender's list, and an illustrated checklist are included with essays by eight leading scholars which explore the full range of Lawrence's development. Published by The Phillips Collection in association with the Jacob Lawrence Catalog Raisonné Project and the University of Washington Press, this full-color publication is available in the Whitney bookstore for \$40.00.

The national tour of *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence* was made possible by ExxonMobil. Additional support was provided by AT&T. This exhibition was also supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. The presentation of this exhibition at the Whitney is sponsored by HSBC Bank USA. Additional New York support is provided by AT&T and the Chairman's Council of the Whitney Museum.

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**Cover:**

*Self-Portrait*, 1977  
Gouache and tempera on paper  
23 x 31 inches  
National Academy of Design, New York  
© Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence, courtesy of the Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation

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Dear Educator,

We are delighted that you have scheduled a visit to *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence*. This groundbreaking exhibition brings together over two hundred works of art to present an unprecedented survey of Jacob Lawrence's long and complex career.

When you and your students visit the Whitney Museum, you will be given a tour of the exhibition by a museum educator. The enclosed information consists of pre-visit materials designed specifically for you to use with your students in the classroom prior to your museum visit. In addition, we have included post-visit projects to use with your students after you have seen the exhibition.

To make your museum experience enriching and meaningful, we strongly encourage you to use this packet as a resource and to work with your students in the classroom before your museum visit. The pre-visit materials will serve as the starting point from which you and your students will view and discuss the exhibition. Please ask your students to think about these themes in the classroom:

- 1. Migration and Immigration**
- 2. Students' perceptions of the United States today**
- 3. Repeated shapes and patterns (younger students)**

When you visit the exhibition, you and your students will see a selection of works by Jacob Lawrence that chart the evolution of his style, technique, and methods, and his exploration of ideas and themes over time.

This packet contains a selection of two pre-visit projects to choose from in preparation for seeing the exhibition, and two post-visit projects. We have included topics for discussion, art projects, and writing activities that introduce some of the key themes and concepts of the exhibition.

Please feel free to adapt and build on these materials and to use this packet in any way that you wish. We look forward to welcoming you and your students to *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence*.

Sincerely,

**Dina Helal**

Head of Curriculum and Online Learning

*My belief is that it is most important for an artist to develop an approach and philosophy about life--if he has developed this philosophy he does not put paint on canvas, he puts himself on canvas. Jacob Lawrence<sup>1</sup>*

For more than sixty-five years, Jacob Lawrence was an astute observer and storyteller who focused on telling the story of the struggle of African Americans for freedom and justice, from the Civil War period of the 1860s through the civil rights movement of the 1960s to the end of the twentieth century. Balancing line, color, form, and gesture, Lawrence's drawings and paintings portray diverse aspects of African American experience and communicate his reflections on culture and race relations in the United States.

## Early Childhood

Jacob Lawrence was born on September 7, 1917 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Originally from South Carolina and Virginia, the Lawrence family, like thousands of black migrants, hoped to find more promising economic opportunities in the North. By 1919 his family had moved to Easton, Pennsylvania. In 1924 after Lawrence's parents separated, his mother moved the family to Philadelphia where she left the children in foster care while she worked in Harlem, New York. At the age of thirteen, Jacob Lawrence arrived in Harlem.

Since it was almost impossible for black Americans to attend the regular art academies, the art schools and workshops of Harlem provided crucial training for the majority of black artists in the United States. Lawrence was one of the first artists trained in and by the African American community in Harlem.

Lawrence received his earliest art instruction from Charles Alston at Utopia Children's House, a community daycare center which Lawrence attended after school. Using theories from Arthur Wesley Dow's textbook *Composition*, Alston taught nonrepresentational drawing and encouraged Lawrence to invent his own pictorial language based on personal decisions about composition and space.

## Teen Years

While in high school, Lawrence attended art classes taught by Charles Alston at the Harlem Art Workshop in the New York Public Library's 135th Street branch. This library housed Arthur Schomburg's distinguished collection of literature and artifacts on African and African American culture. It also became a forum for exhibitions, social, cultural, and political events.

Despite financial hardship Lawrence's mother made great efforts to have a beautiful home. Lawrence's eye became attuned to visual relationships and he developed his predilection for certain shapes.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press in association with the Seattle Art Museum, 1986), 73.

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*Our homes were very decorative, full of pattern, like inexpensive throw rugs, all around the house. It must have had some influence, all this color and everything. Because we were so poor the people used this as a means of brightening their life. I used to do bright patterns after these throw rugs; I got ideas from them, the arabesques, the movement and so on.* Jacob Lawrence<sup>2</sup>

As a teenager, Lawrence made frequent visits to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He developed an appreciation for the works of old masters such as Giotto, Breughel, and Goya, and modern masters such as van Gogh and Matisse. He became interested in African art and abstract art, and was aware of the narrative serial tradition in Egyptian and Medieval wall paintings, as well as the contemporary mural cycles of Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco.

### Harlem in the 1930s

Lawrence found inspiration in the Harlem community where he was raised. His early work depicts scenes of Harlem life--people, rooms, facades, sidewalks, streets, and storefronts--using bold colors and elemental shapes in commercial tempera [poster] paints on lightweight brown paper. Several early paintings portray his immediate environment, including his studio, home, and family.

For Lawrence the 1930s "was actually a wonderful period in Harlem although we didn't know this at the time. Of course it wasn't wonderful for our parents. For them, it was a struggle, but for the younger people coming along like myself, there was a real vitality in the community."<sup>3</sup>

In his early twenties, Lawrence began to develop a new brand of modernism, distilling subject matter based on his experience of Harlem and the lives and aspirations of African Americans. Some works reveal a satirical view of Harlem poverty, crime, racial tensions, and police brutality.

By 1936 Lawrence had established workspace at Charles Alston's "306" studio at 306 West 141st Street. During this time he met notable writers and activists such as Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, Claude McKay, and artists Aaron Douglas, Romare Bearden, and Augusta Savage, all of whom emphasized cultural identity and black achievement

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<sup>2</sup> Leslie King-Hammond, "Inside-Outside, Uptown-Downtown, Jacob Lawrence and the Aesthetic Ethos of the Harlem Working-class Community," in Peter T. Nesbett, Michelle Dubois, Patricia Hills, eds., *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001), 73.

<sup>3</sup> Leslie King-Hammond, "Inside-Outside, Uptown-Downtown, Jacob Lawrence and the Aesthetic Ethos of the Harlem Working-class Community," in Peter T. Nesbett, Michelle Dubois, Patricia Hills, eds., *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001), 69.

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Also in 1936, Lawrence took art classes with Augusta Savage who had renovated a garage that she called the Uptown Art Laboratory [known as the Harlem Community Art Center today]. From 1937-39 Lawrence attended the American Artists School in New York on a scholarship, and in February 1938 he received recognition for his paintings of Harlem with a solo exhibition at the Harlem YMCA at 135th Street. From 1939 to 1940, Lawrence made paintings with the easel section of the WPA Federal Art Project.

## **Picturing Narratives**

Lawrence painted not just what he saw, but also what he heard from Harlem's oral historians. He became interested in African and African American history and culture and researched and chronicled the lives of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and John Brown. His narratives were created on small, same-size panels with accompanying texts.

In 1940-41 Lawrence created a sixty-panel narrative, *The Migration of the Negro*, based on the experience of his family, the recollections of people in his community, and research that he undertook in the Schomburg Collection. This powerful portrayal of migration communicates the struggle, strength, and perseverance of African Americans who, between 1900 and the 1930s moved from the agricultural communities of the South to the industrial cities of the North and Midwest in search of a better life. Artist Gwendolyn Knight prepared the gesso panels and helped write the captions. Lawrence conveyed the message through the texts that accompanied each panel. Knight and Lawrence married in 1941.

*The Migration Series* was exhibited at Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery and in 1942 began a two-year national tour. As the first African American to join Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery, Lawrence found himself living in two different worlds. For the rest of his life he struggled between his experiences as an African American and his acceptance in the white art community.

The experience of creating historical works in a series format led Lawrence to make discrete images that functioned as thematic groupings. Between 1942 and 1943 he made a group of thirty paintings that again focused on life in Harlem. His themes included black working women, health concerns, leisure time, and the role of religion and spirituality in people's daily lives. In these works, Lawrence portrayed the community in bold colors, repeating patterns, and asymmetrical compositions. He also incorporated the rhythms, breaks, and changes of jazz music into his visual representations of the Harlem environment.

In 1942, Lawrence was drafted into the United States Coast Guard as a Stewards Mate, the only rank then available for black Americans. He was stationed in St. Augustine, Florida. Lawrence served one year in a segregated regiment. In 1944 he was reassigned first to a weather ship in Boston, then to a troopship, where he served as Coast Guard Artist, documenting the experience of war in Italy, England, Egypt, and India. While he was on the troopship, he produced about forty-eight paintings documenting the lives of men in World War II. These works are now lost. After his tour of duty in 1946, he received a Guggenheim Fellowship that enabled him to paint his *War* series.

### New Artistic Directions

In the summer of 1946 Lawrence was invited by artist and director Josef Albers to teach at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. According to Lawrence, Albers was the first person “outside the community” who had a significant artistic influence on him. Through his exposure to Albers’ work, Lawrence began to understand more analytically the devices he already used—making a two-dimensional picture plane appear three-dimensional, how the meaning of color changes within different forms, and juxtaposing organic movement with geometric shapes.

In 1949 Lawrence voluntarily sought help for depression at Hillside Hospital in Queens, New York. His hospital paintings during this time show a marked departure from his other works. The people in these paintings are resigned, their facial features agonized; the colors are mixed and subdued. His eleven-month stay at Hillside gave Lawrence a fresh perspective on Harlem and the subjects of his earlier works. He began visiting theatrical productions, and in 1951 made a new body of work based on his memories of performances at the Apollo Theater on 125th Street.

During the 1950s many elements contributed to Lawrence’s art developing greater psychological depth. This depth is expressed through greater layering of patterns and heightened use of shadow and light. With the publication of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* in 1952, many Americans were made aware of how intrinsic the notions of visibility and invisibility were for African Americans. At this time, Lawrence addressed issues of identity by using the mask as a metaphor.

### Changing Perspectives

The theme of social protest was a consistent focus for Jacob Lawrence throughout his career. In the 1960s Lawrence was inspired by news reports and photographs, as well as images of segregated lunch counter sit-ins and stories of the Freedom Riders in the civil rights movement. From the 1970s onward, Lawrence’s work focused less explicitly on contemporary social issues.

*I like the symbolism [of the builder]...I think of it as man’s aspiration, as a constructive tool—man building.* Jacob Lawrence<sup>4</sup>

From 1946-98, Lawrence made paintings based on the theme of builders. These works show a limited palette of primary colors, black and white; and human activity is juxtaposed with architectural elements, building tools, and materials. They communicate Lawrence’s ideas about American worker culture, include female workers, and expand the idea of builder to the family. These works also symbolically reflect increased African American participation in the building trades during the 1940s and late 1960s.

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<sup>4</sup> Lowery Stokes Sims, “The Structure of Narrative, Form and Content in Jacob Lawrence’s Builders Paintings,” in Peter T. Nesbett, Michelle Dubois, Patricia Hills, eds., *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001), 209.

Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, Lawrence spent much of his time painting commissions. As he continued to experiment with composition and space, abstraction and representation, Lawrence bridged the gap between form and content to create a distinctly modern pictorial language.

### His Life's Work

Today Lawrence's work can be found in almost 200 museum collections. His numerous awards include the National Medal of Arts, the NAACP's prestigious Spingarn Medal, three Julius Rosenwald Fund Fellowships, and more than two dozen honorary degrees. In 1983 Jacob Lawrence was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the highest honor in the humanities in the United States. He was also a member of the Black Academy of Arts and Letters, and the National Academy of Design.

In 1977, Jacob Lawrence described his work as a continuation, and referred to his life's work as constant growing and building. Like Harriet Tubman, whom he portrayed crossing the American Canadian border in his painting *Over the Line*, 1967, Lawrence was able to transcend racial barriers and find common ground among all Americans. Lawrence died on June 9, 2000 at the age of eighty-two.

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## Website--Exploring Stories: The Art of Jacob Lawrence

For additional information, art projects, and writing activities, go to the Whitney's website:

<http://www.whitney.org/jacoblawrence>

This online space is designed to introduce visitors to the art and life of Jacob Lawrence. It is for families, teachers, students, and anyone else who is interested in exploring Jacob Lawrence's work, his themes, and his approach to visual storytelling. Here you'll find some of Lawrence's paintings, information, learning resources, and fun activities:

- ❑ Take a close look at twelve of Jacob Lawrence's images.
  - ❑ Discover inventive ways to make your own visual narratives.
  - ❑ Find out how to make your own egg tempera paints and paintings.
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## Objective:

To explore migration and/or immigration.

*I grew up the son of migrants....My mother and father were on their way North when I was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, so at the very beginning of my understanding of communication with words I was very much aware of this movement. Jacob Lawrence<sup>5</sup>*

*I don't think in terms of history about that series. I think in terms of contemporary life. It was such a part of me that I didn't think of something outside. It was like I was doing a portrait of something. If it was a portrait, it was a portrait of myself, a portrait of my family, a portrait of my peers. Jacob Lawrence<sup>6</sup>*

In 1940 Jacob Lawrence received a \$1,500 fellowship from the Rosenwald Foundation to complete a series of panels on the Great Migration. Lawrence conducted research at The Schomburg Collection in Harlem and completed the series in 1941. Although the series was originally meant to remain together as one work, the artist agreed to a joint purchase by the Museum of Modern Art and the Phillips Collection in the winter of 1941-42.

Lawrence's *Migration* series depicts the migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North during and after World War I. The Great Migration was the largest movement of black peoples since slavery removed Africans to the Americas. Lawrence's sixty panels portray the story of people seeking a better life. The text captions for each image combine history, sociology, and poetry in a visual narrative.

The railroad is the link in the series of events that comprise Lawrence's epic story. The narrative cycle begins and ends with images of a train station. In the first panel, African Americans embark on a journey from the South to the North, through time and geography, conflict and hope. Scenes of the train station are repeated throughout the series with the words "And the migrants kept coming." In the first half of the series, the South is depicted as a bleak landscape where social inequities and injustice prevail--poverty, hunger, segregation, lynching, and discrimination. Some scenes are portrayed as if seen from a moving train; the North is shown only as names of train destinations. In contrast to the environment of the South, the second half of the narrative depicts the buildings, people, and industry of the urban North. The final section of *The Migration Series* focuses on the new African American communities of the North--the positive effects of improved social conditions as well as the conflicts of overcrowding and race riots.

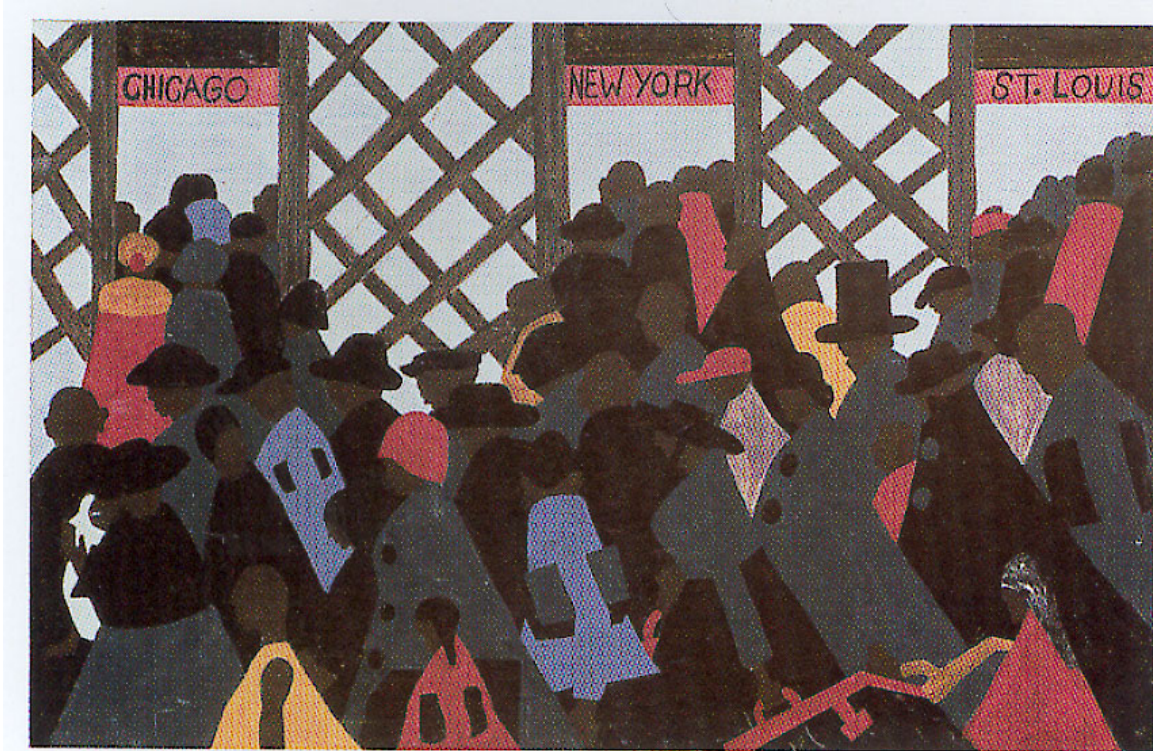
To render social content more forcefully, Lawrence pared down his compositions, distorting and distilling shapes and using perspective and flatness at the same time to create powerful visual statements. Lawrence also heightened the gesture of central figures, and sometimes stretched the figure beyond the confines of the frame, expanding the viewer's scope.

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<sup>5</sup> *Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series*, The Phillips Collection (Washington, D.C., 1993-94) n.p.

<sup>6</sup> *Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series*, The Phillips Collection (Washington, D.C., 1993-94) n.p.

**Suggested Discussion With Students:**



1. *During the World War there was a great migration North by Southern Negroes.*

*The Migration of the Negro, panel 1, 1940-41*

Casein tempera on hardboard, 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm)

The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

© Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence, courtesy of the Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation

□ View and discuss this image with your students.

Jacob Lawrence painted sixty pictures about migration. Together, they told the story of the nearly one million African Americans who left harsh conditions in the southern United States, hoping for better opportunities in the North and Midwest. This painting is the first one that Jacob Lawrence made about migration. It shows a crowd of people going to the railway station to catch trains going to three big cities.

Where do you think these people are?

Why do you think they are leaving?

How do you think these people feel?

When do you think this migration is taking place?

Why do people migrate?

What situations would make a family decide to migrate or immigrate?

What do you suppose happens in the next picture?

What might happen in the third picture?

## Suggested Discussion With Students (continued):

Where were you born?

Where did you grow up?

Have you ever moved from one place to another?

From where to where? One place? More than one place? Another country? A different state or city? A different part of the state or city?

Why did your family choose to move here?

What were your family's concerns about migrating or immigrating?

What were your concerns?

What were your family's expectations about migrating or immigrating ?

What were your expectations?

How long have you lived here?

Where do you think of as home?

Do you have family or friends who live in other cities or other countries?

Where do some of your relatives live?

- Find or create three maps: a map of the world, a map of the state, and a map of the city. Have students use yarn, string, or tape and map pins to locate the countries and places where they and their families have moved from to their current location.

## Suggested Projects:

### (Im)migration

**Supplies:** Notebook or journal, pencil or pen, paper, photographs and/or drawings.

You are getting ready to migrate or immigrate. Write an account of your move from one place or country to another.

or

Interview an adult in your family or community who has immigrated to this country, or migrated from one place to another in the United States.

## Suggested Projects (continued):

Think about these questions for your own narrative, or use them for your interview. Invent your own questions too. Take notes.

- Why did you leave the place where you were?
- What were you thinking about as you were getting ready to move?
- How did you feel when you left?
- Who came with you?
- Who did you leave behind?
- What did you bring with you?
- What did you leave behind?
  
- What do you remember about when you first came here?
- What challenges did you face?
- How did you overcome these challenges?
- What has changed in your life since you moved here? How has it changed?
- In what ways have you changed since you moved here?

If you can, find photographs of yourself or the person you interviewed, or make drawings to illustrate your story.

Read and discuss your migration or immigration narratives with the class.

### Migration History

- Ask students to research the history of migration and/or immigration in their neighborhood, city, or community. Use your local library, websites, and the resources included in these materials. Invite a local historian to your class. Conduct interviews with people who have migrated or immigrated to the area. Document your findings by creating a book, video, or computer presentation.

## Suggested Projects (continued):

### For younger students:

- Read and discuss stories of migration and immigration with your students.

Jamie Gilson	<i>Hello, My Name is Scrambled Eggs</i> , New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1985
Jacob Lawrence	<i>Harriet and the Promised Land</i> , New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993
Bette Bao Lord	<i>In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson</i> , New York: Harper and Row, 1984
Walter Dean Myers	<i>The Great Migration: An American Story with Paintings by Jacob Lawrence</i> , New York: HarperCollins, 1993
Clare Pastore	<i>Fiona McGilray's Story: A Voyage from Ireland in 1849 (Journey to America, 1)</i> , Berkley Publishing Group, 2001
Clare Pastore	<i>Aniela Kaminski's Story: A Voyage from Poland During World War II (Journey to America)</i> , Berkley Publishing Group, 2001
Clare Pastore	<i>Chantrea Conway's Voyage from Cambodia in 1975 (Journey to America)</i> , Berkley Publishing Group, 2001
Maxine Rosenberg	<i>Making a New Home in America</i> , New York: Morrow, 1986

- Invite people from students' families or community to discuss their migration and immigration stories with your students.

### Migration History

- Explore and discuss the Great Migration with your students. Divide students into small groups, or ask them to work individually. Ask students to imagine that they are part of the Great Migration, traveling from the South to a city in the North. They write a letter to a friend back home about their journey or arrival in the North, describing their adventures, or their hopes and dreams for a better life.

**Objective:**

To examine Langston Hughes' view of America in the 1940s. To explore students' experience of the United States today.

*My pictures express my life and experience. I paint the things I know about and the things I have experienced. The things I have experienced extend into my national, racial, and class group. So I paint the American scene.* Jacob Lawrence<sup>7</sup>

*I would like to think that...my work would stimulate, be provocative and appreciated, not only for its content but for its form, not only for the form but for the content which, I hope, (would be) appreciated on various levels.* Jacob Lawrence<sup>8</sup>

Throughout his career, Jacob Lawrence emphasized the crucial role that the black community of Harlem played in his development as a young man and as an artist. Of special significance was his exposure to leading black intellectuals and artists of the post-Harlem Renaissance, such as Aaron Douglas, Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, and Richard Wright, who each represented different, often opposing points of view about the position of blacks in American society and the responsibility of artists to address this topic in their work.

The degree of political content in Lawrence's work and his attitude toward its presence in his art are open questions. One of the defining features of Lawrence's body of work is the attention he pays to race in America and the interaction between blacks and whites, yet he has generally avoided overt statements. In discussing his series, *Struggle...From the History of the American People*, 1954-56, Lawrence explained: "Years ago, I was just interested in expressing the Negro in American life, but a larger concern, an expression of humanity and of America, developed."<sup>9</sup> Over the years, Lawrence's point of view appears to vacillate between optimism and pessimism regarding race relations and the promise of integration. With an acute social conscience, his attitude is of a humanist's insistence on the unity of humanity coupled with horror at mankind's capacity to justify racism, hate, and prejudice. Lawrence depicts acts of racism but he also portrays alternative views that can be interpreted as an affirmation of the possibility of a new American society.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen Harkins Wheat, *Jacob Lawrence: American Painter* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press in association with the Seattle Art Museum, 1986), 192.

<sup>8</sup> Paul J. Karlstrom, "Jacob Lawrence Modernism, Race, and Community," in Peter T. Nesbett, Michelle Dubois, Patricia Hills, eds., *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001), 240.

<sup>9</sup> Paul J. Karlstrom, "Jacob Lawrence Modernism, Race, and Community," in Peter T. Nesbett, Michelle Dubois, Patricia Hills, eds., *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001), 242.

## Suggested Discussion With Students:

- Read and discuss Langston Hughes' *My America* (below) with your students. Use the questions below and vocabulary following the essay as a guide for discussion.

What is Langston Hughes' view of America?

How does Langston Hughes define himself as an American?

What were the contradictions of democracy in a segregated America?

What limitations did segregation impose on African-Americans?

What transitions was the United States facing during the 1940s?

How has the United States changed since Langston Hughes wrote *My America* in 1943?

What hasn't changed? Why?

### My America

This is my land America. Naturally, I love it—it is home—and I am vitally concerned about its mores, its **democracy**, and its wellbeing. I try now to look at it with clear, unprejudiced eyes. My ancestry goes back at least four generations on American soil—and, through Indian blood, many centuries more. My background and training is purely American—the schools of Kansas, Ohio, and the East. I am old stock as opposed to recent immigrant blood.

Yet many Americans who cannot speak English—as recent is their arrival on our shores—may travel about the country at will securing food, hotel and rail accommodations wherever they wish to purchase them. I may not. These Americans, once naturalized, may vote in Mississippi or Texas, if they live there, I may not. They may work at whatever job their skills command. But I may not. They may purchase tickets for concerts, theaters, lectures wherever they are sold throughout the United States. I may not. These Americans, once naturalized, may vote in Mississippi or Texas, if they live there. I may not. They may work at whatever job their skills command. But I may not. They may purchase tickets for concerts, theaters, lectures wherever they are sold throughout the United States. I may not. They may repeat the **Oath of Allegiance** with its ringing phrase of "liberty and justice for all," with a deep faith in this truth--as compared to the limitations and oppressions they have experienced in the Old World. I repeat the oath too, but I know that the phrase about "liberty and justice" does not fully apply to me. I am an American--but I am a colored American.

I know that all these things I mention are not *all* true for *all* localities *all* over America. **Jim Crowism** varies in degree from North to South, from the mixed schools and free franchise of Michigan to the tumbledown colored schools and open terror at the polls of Georgia and Mississippi. All over America, however, against the Negro there has been an economic color line of such severity that since the Civil War we have been kept most effectively, as a racial group, in the lowest economic brackets. Statistics are not needed to prove this. Simply look around you on Main Street of any American town or city. There are no colored clerks in any of the stores--although colored people spend their money there. There are practically never any colored street-car conductors or bus drivers--although these public carriers run over streets for which we pay taxes. There are no colored girls at the switchboards of the telephone company--

**Suggested Discussion With Students (continued):**

but millions of Negroes have phones and pay their bills. Even in Harlem, nine times out of ten, the man who comes to collect your rent is white. Not even that job is given a colored man by the great corporations owning New York real estate. From Boston to San Diego, the Negro suffers from job discrimination.

Yet America is a land where, in spite of its defects, I can write this article. Here the voice of democracy is still heard--**Roosevelt, Wallace, Willke, Agar, Pearl Buck, Paul Robeson.** America is a land where the poll tax still holds in the South but opposition to the poll tax grows daily. America is a land where **lynchers** are not yet caught--but **Bundists** are put in jail, and majority opinion condemns the **Klan**. America is a land where the best of all democracies has been achieved for some people--but in Georgia, **Roland Hayes**, world-famous singer, is beaten for being colored and nobody is jailed--nor can Mr. Hayes vote in the State where he was born. Yet America is a country where Roland Hayes can come from a log cabin to wealth and fame--in spite of the segment that still wishes to maltreat him physically and spiritually, famous though he is.

This segment, however, is not all of America. If it were, millions of Negroes would have no heart for this war in which we are now engaged. If it were, we could see no difference between our ideals and Hitler's, in so far as our own dark lives are concerned. But we know, on the other hand, that America is a land in transition. And we know it is within our power to help in its further change toward a finer and better democracy than any citizens has known before. The American Negro believes in democracy. We want to make it real, complete, workable, not only for ourselves--the fifteen million dark ones--but for all Americans all over the land.<sup>10</sup>

L.H. February 1943.

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<sup>10</sup> Langston Hughes, "My America," *The Langston Hughes Reader* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1958), 500-501.



## Vocabulary

<b>Pearl Buck</b>	Winner of the Nobel Prize in 1938. Buck was one of the first writers to try to explain the mystery of the Far East to Western readers.
<b>Bundists</b>	Possible reference to members of the "Bund," the Yiddish abbreviation for General Jewish Workers' Union in Lithuania, Poland and Russia. Alternatively, this may be a reference to the German-American Bund, which was an organization established to promote Hitlerism in the United States.
<b>Democracy</b>	This term comes from two Greek words: <i>demos</i> , meaning "the people," and <i>kratos</i> , meaning "rule." An ideal democracy would be a "government of the people, by the people, for the people," as Lincoln defined in his 1863 Gettysburg Address. A true democracy means a society in which all the people are citizens with the same rights to participation in its government.
<b>Roland Hayes</b>	A tenor, born in Georgia, noted for singing Negro spirituals. He sang with many leading orchestras, including New York and Boston.
<b>Jim Crowism</b>	From the 1880s to the 1960s, a majority of American states enforced segregation through "Jim Crow" laws (so called after a black character in minstrel shows). The most common types of laws forbade intermarriage and ordered business owners and public institutions to keep their black and white clientele separated.
<b>Klan</b>	The Ku Klux Klan is a secret terrorist organization that led underground resistance against the civil rights and political power of newly freed slaves during the Reconstruction period after the American Civil War. In the 1920s, the Klan's popularity peaked again. Today the Klan continues to advocate white supremacy.
<b>Lynchers</b>	A mob action of putting a person to death (as by hanging) without legal sanction. Between 1900 and 1914, there were more than 1,000 known lynchings in the United States. Typically, white mobs would lynch a black victim.
<b>Negro</b>	African Americans used to be identified as Negroes. Negro is an old fashioned term used to refer to people of African descent, living in the Americas and the Caribbean.
<b>Oath of Allegiance</b>	This refers to the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States flag. In pledging allegiance, one must stand with his/her right hand over his/her heart or at attention and declare: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."
<b>Paul Robeson</b>	Internationally known U.S. actor, singer and social activist, Paul Robeson enjoyed success unparalleled among African Americans in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. He was an eloquent and controversial speaker against racial discrimination in the U.S., colonialism in Africa, and economic injustice throughout the world.
<b>Roosevelt</b>	Franklin Delano Roosevelt became President of the United States in 1933 during the Great Depression. Through his policies, he changed the role of government in national life. He used his power to create jobs and help those who needed it. He also served as Commander and Chief of the armed forces during World War II and was instrumental in setting up the United Nations.
<b>Wallace</b>	Henry Agard Wallace was a U.S. public official, serving as Secretary of Agriculture, 1933-40, Chairman of the Board of Economic Warfare, 1941-43, Vice-President of the United States, 1941-45, Secretary of Commerce, 1945-46, and Progressive party candidate for President in 1948.

## Suggested Discussion With Students (continued):

- Many contemporary musicians and songwriters make music about their communities and lives in the United States. Ask students to bring in music that they find and listen to it in class. Discuss these artists' views of America. How are they similar or different from Langston Hughes' perceptions?

## Suggested Project:

**Supplies:** Journal or notebook, pencils, pens, computers, Internet access, Hyperstudio, PowerPoint or software that can combine image, text, video, and sound.

What are your views of America today?

Write a prose piece, poem, or lyrics about your America. Present and discuss your writing with the class.

What is your collective view of contemporary America?  
Compare your collective view with Langston Hughes' view.  
How are they similar? How are they different?

Make a collaborative book or computer presentation of your writings. Include photographs, drawings, and song lyrics that symbolize or express your views of America. If you are making a computer presentation, include sound and video. You could also expand your anthology by including prose, poetry, lyrics, and images by writers, musicians and artists.

### For younger students:

## Objective:

To explore pattern and repeated shapes.

Jacob Lawrence was inspired by the Harlem community's interest in the stories of its heritage. He became the storyteller or visual; griot of the neighborhood. His ability to tell the story of a community visually revealed Lawrence's capacity for observation and acute attention to detail. The flatness of forms allows the subject to move in a storyboard, cinematic style almost in anticipation of the next frame of action.

Jacob Lawrence's early art training helped him to see patterns everywhere: in architectural decorations, window placements, cornices, subway ties, and in human activities of all kinds. Patterns helped him to compose his work and simplify its content.

## Suggested Discussion With Students:

Look around your classroom. Where do you see repeated shapes?

Look outside the window. What kinds of repeated shapes do you see in the environment?

Find a repeated shape that makes a pattern.

- Ask your students to look closely and follow the pattern in space. Discuss what type of rhythm these shapes make, and how they form a visual rhythm or pattern.

Is there the same or a different amount of space between each shape?

Are these shapes the same or different colors?

In which direction(s) are the shapes repeated?

How would you describe the pattern of these repeated shapes? Is it regular? Irregular?

Does it flow?

## Suggested Project:

### Recording Shapes and Patterns

**Supplies:** Notebook or journal, paper (8.5" x 11"), pencils, erasers, markers or colored crayons

- Ask your students to do this project as a class or homework assignment. When a shape is repeated, it can become a visual rhythm or pattern. Have students look for repeated shapes that make visual rhythms or patterns in their classroom, on the way to or from school, or at home. Here are some examples: classroom desks, chairs, windows, doors, bookshelves, fire escapes, ladders, stairs, sidewalks, parking lots, cars, subway cars, ice cube trays, egg boxes, pizza slices, chest of drawers, chocolate bar squares.
- Have students record the patterns they find in a notebook or journal, or with a camera.
- In class, hand out small sheets of paper and ask your students to make drawings of one pattern that they have seen, filling the whole sheet of paper. Make a wall of students' pattern drawings in your classroom. Discuss the types of patterns that students found, and why they selected them. In addition, discuss the symbolism of shapes and the effect of repetition and patterning.

## Objective:

To explore and represent students' neighborhood(s).

*Most of my work depicts events from the many Harlems which exist throughout the United States. This is my genre. My surroundings. The people I know...the happiness, tragedies, and the sorrows of mankind as realized in the teeming black ghetto.* Jacob Lawrence<sup>11</sup>

*Harlem is the queen of black belts, drawing Afroamericans together into a vast humming hive. They have swarmed from different states, from the islands of the Caribbean and from Africa. And they are still coming in spite of the grim misery that lurks behind the inviting facades. Overcrowded tenements, the harsh Northern climate and un-employment do not daunt them. Harlem remains the magnet.* Claude McKay<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the Great Migration, one of the main destinations was Harlem, New York. Less than two square miles, this area was home for more than a quarter of a million African American migrants. Harlem abounded with African ancestral traditions, philosophies, culture, and religion, practiced and carried North by the new black migrants. At same time, Harlem was a new city caught in the flux of modernism, technology, and urbanity. Lawrence witnessed the innovative and improvised lifestyles created by the confluences of the Great Migration, the depression, the jazz age, and the emergence of new Negroes of the Harlem Renaissance.

Jacob Lawrence was inspired by the Harlem community's interest in the stories of its heritage. He became the storyteller or visual; griot of the neighborhood. His ability to tell the story of a community visually revealed Lawrence's capacity for observation and acute attention to detail. The flatness of forms allows the subject to move in a storyboard, cinematic style almost in anticipation of the next frame of action. In recalling the impact of the sights and sounds of Harlem when he first arrived there in 1930, Lawrence referred to the "endlessly fascinating patterns" of "cast-iron fire escapes and their shadows created across brick walls." He remarked on the "variegated colors and shapes of pieces of laundry on lines stretched across the back yards...and the patterns of letters on the huge billboards and the electric signs."<sup>13</sup>

In his images of Harlem, Lawrence painted his vision of poverty, crime, racial tensions, and police brutality based on his experience of urban life around him. He also portrayed a vibrant, thriving community and the aspirations of its people.

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<sup>11</sup> Leslie King-Hammond, "Inside-Outside, Uptown-Downtown, Jacob Lawrence and the Aesthetic Ethos of the Harlem Working-class Community," in Peter T. Nesbett, Michelle Dubois, Patricia Hills, eds., *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001), 84.

<sup>12</sup> Leslie King-Hammond, "Inside-Outside, Uptown-Downtown, Jacob Lawrence and the Aesthetic Ethos of the Harlem Working-class Community," in Peter T. Nesbett, Michelle Dubois, Patricia Hills, eds., *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001), 68-69.

<sup>13</sup> Lowery Stokes Sims, "The Structure of Narrative, Form and Content in Jacob Lawrence's Builders Paintings," in Peter T. Nesbett, Michelle Dubois, Patricia Hills, eds., *Over the Line: The Art and Life of Jacob Lawrence* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001), 202.

## Suggested Projects:

- ❑ After you have visited the exhibition, lead a discussion with your students. Explore what it means to examine an artist's life and work. Review how you traced Jacob Lawrence's evolution. Discuss what inspired Lawrence to create his work.

### Neighborhood Map

**Supplies:** Notebooks, journals, sheets of paper, pencils, pens, digital or film cameras, film, computers, scanner, Internet access, Powerpoint or software that can combine image, text, video, and sound.

How do you define your neighborhood?  
Does it have boundaries?  
Where does it begin and end?

- ❑ Ask students to divide into small groups for this project. Have students define the neighborhood around their school and draw a street map with a key of symbols that represents important neighborhood sites on their map.
- ❑ Invite a local historian to your classroom or ask students to interview two people about the history of their neighborhood. Visit your local historical society or library. Have students research and find photographs of how the neighborhood looked 25-100 years ago.
- ❑ Ask students to research stories that have been told about the neighborhood and the people who live there. Use local newspapers, books, and or interview people. Ask each group to rewrite one or more stories in their own words.
- ❑ Have students design a tour of their neighborhood that includes:
  - The oldest building
  - The newest building
  - The most important building
  - At least ten additional sites that are indicated on their map.
- ❑ Have students take their peers on a tour of their neighborhood.

## Suggested Projects (continued):

### Neighborhood Views

- ❑ Have students make sketches and a painting of a special or favorite place in their neighborhood.
- ❑ Ask students to research the architecture in their neighborhood.
- ❑ Ask students to research and create a sample view of their neighborhood on paper, on the computer, or as a webpage, using images and text. If they use a computer, students could also include sound and video.

What is special or unique about your neighborhood?  
 What is your most ordinary view of your neighborhood?  
 What is your most surprising view?  
 What evidence of different cultures do you see in your neighborhood?  
 What kinds of work do you see people doing in your neighborhood?

What would you like people to know about your neighborhood?  
 What would you be able to learn as a visitor or tourist?  
 Which views would you select to create a sampling of your neighborhood: Buildings?  
 People? Streets? Stores? Styles? Music? What else would be included?  
 How do people use the neighborhood's spaces?

1. Choose an area of the neighborhood near your school. Find a place where you can observe what happens there.
2. Spend time taking notes, making drawings, and compiling data on what you see. Take photographs or make a video if you have access to the equipment.
3. When you have gathered your information, discuss and summarize your observations with your group.

What did you learn about how your neighborhood is used?  
 What does the space you selected tell you about the neighborhood?  
 Was there anything you hadn't noticed before?

4. Use images--drawings, photos, video--and text, to make your own multi-media sampling of your neighborhood. Include images of yourselves in the environment.
5. Record the sounds of your neighborhood. For example, cars, horns, voices, sirens, car alarms, animals, footsteps. Incorporate the sounds in your multi-media presentation.
6. Present and discuss your neighborhood views with the class. Which views did you select? Why?

### Objective:

To explore Jacob Lawrence's approach to narrative series, and to create a visual narrative.

Throughout his career, and particularly during the late 1930s and early 1940s, Jacob Lawrence used a series format to convey narrative content. Lawrence's fascination with movies during the Depression years inspired his approach to storytelling.

Lawrence created visual narratives that involved a process similar to the storyboards used to plan the sequence of a film. Lawrence told his story on hardboard panels, employing all their edges and angles to convey his story's physical, social, historical, and economic significance. He devised a system to create each cycle. He designed vertical and horizontal sequences of hardboard panels, each the same size by laying them out on his studio floor. In this way, the thirty to sixty panels of a series could be seen together, and painted at the same time.

For his earlier narrative series, Lawrence first wrote the captions and then completed the sketches for each scene. Later he drew directly onto gessoed hardboard panels and then systematically applied one color to each panel, beginning with black and moving on to lighter colors.

Lawrence often used unmixed colors so that they would not vary from one panel to the next. He added white to obtain lighter shades of a color. His selection of colors--black and burnt umber to cadmium orange and yellow--created an overall unity and consistency.

Lawrence repeated motifs, shapes, and words throughout his narrative series. In the *Migration Series*, the repetition of an enlarged single spike or nail, chain links or lattice, hands, and the hammer act as refrains in the lives, experiences, and struggles of African Americans.

### Suggested Project:

#### Storyboarding

**Supplies:** Journals or notebooks, storyboard template on page 31, a large sheet of paper, blank index cards, or packets of Post-It notes, pens, pencils, erasers, markers or colored crayons.

- A story is an account, narrative, tale, or report of incidents or events. Stories make a point, but are not necessarily linear. They can be as short as a few sentences, or as long as an encyclopedia. An effective story combines timing, sequence, experience, memory, and imagination.

## Suggested Project (continued):

- Ask students to plan their own narrative by creating a storyboard. Use the following suggested themes, or have each student think of an event in their life that had a significant impact on them. For example, their story could be about a place they visited, a person they met, overcoming a challenge, or achieving a personal goal.

### Suggested themes:

Migration or immigration  
 Harlem  
 Workers  
 Street life, family, community, neighborhood  
 Games or entertainment  
 Health  
 Education  
 Injustice  
 Discrimination

- When Jacob Lawrence made his series of paintings he developed a method of putting a certain color into all shapes of one kind, for example, making all triangles blue and all rectangles green. This method was later adapted into his narrative series paintings. For example, he would paint 30 panels with only the blue finished in each. Then he might paint all the reds, or greens, and so on with each panel. When he completed the last color, the whole series was finished. This highly individual way of working gave his color a consistency from panel to panel.
- Ask students to use the template on the next page, a cartoon or comic book format, blank index cards, or a sheet of paper and Post-Its to plan their own narratives. If you have access, have students create their storyboards on the computer. Use software such as PowerPoint or Hyperstudio, and a scanner. Students could use as many storyboards as they need to tell their story. Ask your students to repeat 2-3 different shapes in each drawing and color the shapes in each drawing using Jacob Lawrence's method described above.

As you plan your storyboard, think about the following questions:

What was the event?  
 (Think about the place, time, incident or series of incidents that occurred).  
 What was your relationship to the event?  
 Did the event include other people? Who?  
 Was there a defining moment during this event? What was it?  
 How did you feel during this event?  
 What did you learn from this event?  
 Did the event change your life? How?  
 How will you tell the story in words?



## Suggested Project (continued):

1. Use a notebook or journal to write your narrative. Leave spaces between sentences and number them in sequence. Edit your story in your notebook or journal. Assign no more than two sentences per image.
2. When your text is ready, use your storyboard or the computer to combine images, text, and sound.

What images will you use?

What sound (music and/or voice) do you want to include?

What special effects could you use to enhance your story?

How will you make transitions from one part of the story to the next?

### Narrative Series

- Ask your students to use their storyboards to design their own narrative series with images and text, on paper, on the computer, or as two or more paintings, using water-based paint or egg tempera on paper or panels. Encourage your students to use the themes that Jacob Lawrence focused on and his methods of composition. If students are creating their narratives on the computer, ask them to include sound, video, and/or animation.

### Paper

**Supplies:** A roll, long strips, or individual sheets of paper, pens, pencils, magazines, scissors, glue sticks, students' own drawings and/or photographs.

- Ask students to use long strips or sheets of paper to make a narrative that they can display in a continuous line on the walls of the classroom. Students could work individually or in small groups.
- Students could also use fabric paint to write and draw a non-linear narrative on an item of clothing.

## Suggested Projects (continued):

### Digital

**Supplies:** Computer, Internet access, PowerPoint or software that can combine image, text, video, and sound.

- The non-linear nature of the Web offers unprecedented opportunities to use image, text, sound, music, and video to create new forms of expression and communication that includes narratives and virtual spaces without beginnings, middles, and ends. Divide students into small groups for this project. If your students have access to web software, ask them to make a web narrative. Ask students to use their paper narrative and digital software with hypertext multimedia capability to write a collaborative narrative using images, text, sound, and/or video. Each person in the group should write a paragraph of the narrative and create links between the paragraphs.
1. Use your storyboards as a starting point and a hypertext program to write a collaborative digital narrative.
  2. When you have written your narrative, link the parts of your narrative and explore it. See how your audience will navigate your narrative.
  3. Make revisions to the text to create connections and smooth transitions between parts of the story.

## Suggested Projects (continued):

### Painting

Jacob Lawrence's early training at the Utopia Children's House, the Harlem Art Workshop, and the Works Progress administration introduced him to the materials that he would use throughout his career—opaque, water-based gouache and tempera paints, various types of paper, illustration board, and hardboard. He used a vibrant, colorful palette with browns and blacks to delineate outlines and shadows. In the 1940s Lawrence shifted from working in tempera to gouache. During this time, many of his works appear to contain both types of paint.

**Gouache** An opaque water-based paint, most commonly used for commercial illustration. These paints are made by adding chalk to the pigments to make them opaque. The use of gouache goes back to medieval manuscript illumination and was used in 16th - 18th century miniature painting. Many painters combine gouache, pastel watercolors, and India ink in the same painting.

**Tempera** A type of paint that consists of dry color or pigment, a glutinous substance, (such as egg yolk or gum), and water. Tempera was the most commonly used medium until the introduction of oil paint.

For additional definitions of art terms, go to:

<http://www.artlex.com>

**Supplies for gouache or tempera painting:** Paper, or panels made of wood, masonite, or composition board, gesso, paintbrushes, palettes, water-based tempera or gouache paint.

□ If possible, have students make their own egg tempera paints.

**Supplies for egg tempera painting:** Paper, pencils, erasers, eggs, a pin, distilled water, pigment (from an art supplier or art supply store), eye droppers, glass jars, small porcelain bowls or cups, spoons, paper towels, acrylic gesso, wood or masonite panels (do not use paper for egg tempera paintings), fine sandpaper, disposable palettes, a plastic palette knife, a selection of sable brushes, charcoal sticks, dust mask or respirator.

## Suggested Projects (continued):

### How to make egg tempera paints

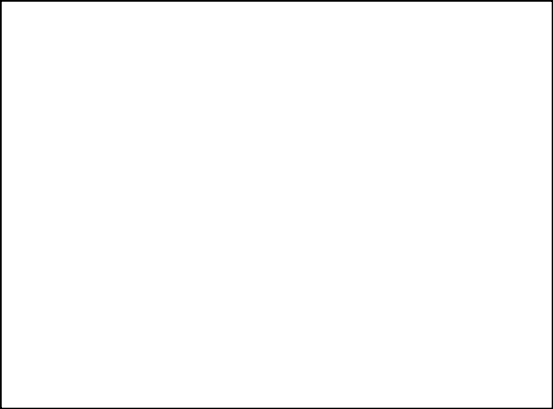
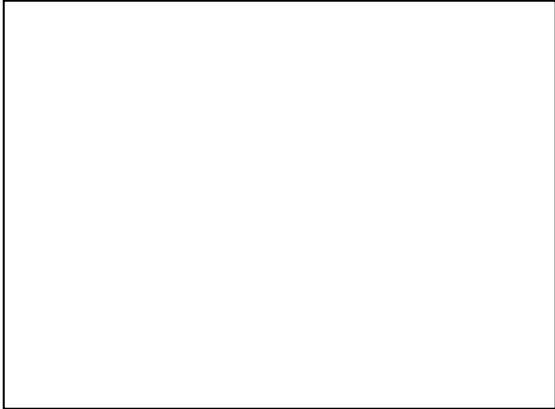
1. Lightly sandpaper the surface of your wood or masonite panel.
2. Prepare wood or masonite panels with gesso. Use a wide brush and acrylic gesso paint. Brush gesso on the panel in one direction. Apply 4 layers of gesso. Allow each layer of gesso to dry completely before applying the next one. Leave to dry for several days. When your panel is dry, lightly sandpaper the gessoed surface.
3. **Making egg binder.** Crack an egg with one hand and pour the yolk and egg white into the palm of your other hand. Try not to break the yolk!
4. Roll the egg yolk from hand to hand, and let the white drain into a cup or bowl. When the egg white has drained away, carefully hold the yolk over a jar, break the sac with a pin and let the liquid yolk drain into the jar.
5. Add small amounts of distilled water to the yolk and mix with a spoon. Put your egg binder aside to use when you begin painting.
6. **Making pigment paste.** Use a dust mask or respirator when handling dry pigments. Put dry powdered pigment in a separate glass jar. Fill over half the jar.
7. Add enough distilled water to the pigment to make a thick creamy paste. Mix with a plastic palette knife. Make as many colors as you need. To store, cover the surface of the paint mixture with a small amount of water and close the lid tightly.

### Instructions for egg tempera painting

1. Plan your picture first. Draw your image on the panel. Use charcoal or a thin brush and your tempera paint. Do not use a pencil unless you want your drawing to show through.
2. Work out the order in which you will mix and use your colors. Write it down on a piece of paper.
3. Place a small amount of each pigment paste in a row along the sides of your palette. Use an eye dropper to place some egg yolk binder on your palette near the row of pigments. Use the space in the center of your palette to mix a small amount of egg binder with the pigment colors. Always have a little more binder than pigment in the mixture.
4. Fill a jar with distilled water and keep it nearby in case you need to thin your mixed paints.
5. Apply your paint colors in thin layers. Thick layers will not stick to the panel! Brush the paint onto the panel in single strokes and in one direction.

## Suggested Projects (continued):

6. Egg tempera paint dries fast, but do not paint over the same area immediately. To avoid a clogged effect, work on another part of the panel first.
  7. Use a variety of brushes and experiment with different paint strokes.
  8. Present and discuss your painted or electronic narratives with the class.
  9. Invite your peers to see your narratives in your classroom or on a computer.
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A selection of books, exhibition catalogues, and videos related to Jacob Lawrence's work.

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- |  |  |
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