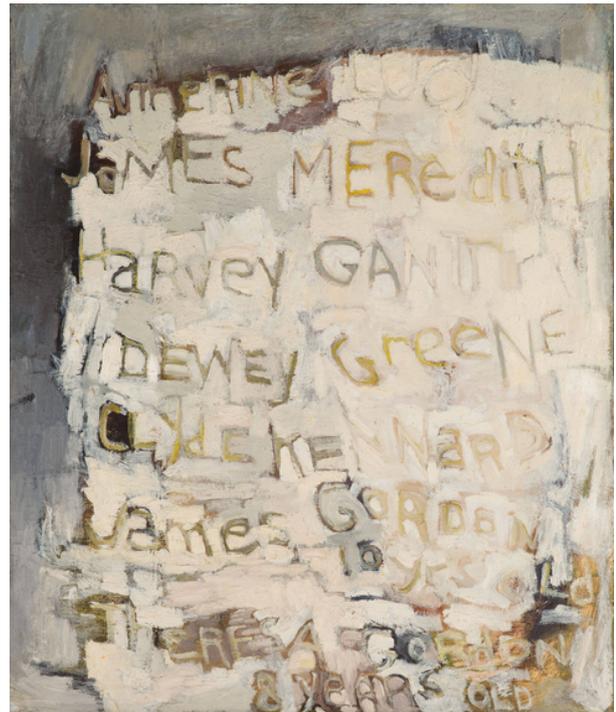
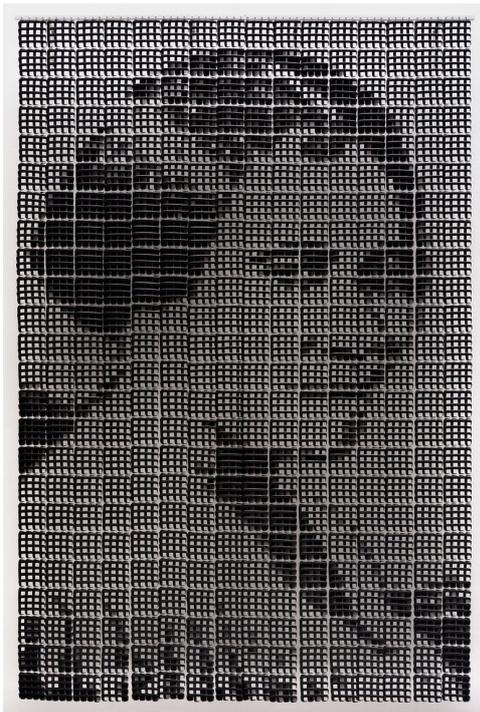


Social Issues in Art

Leading by Example

A guide for looking, talking, and taking action



Our hope

We strongly believe that an in-person visit to the museum benefits students in myriad ways. Being in the galleries, seeing art up close, and being guided by a gallery teacher all foster a sense of wonder and an openness to consider and discuss difficult concepts. Perhaps you've already brought your students for a visit, or maybe scheduling a visit is not possible. In any case, we hope that this guide may serve you and your students in exploring issues of identity, community, and society through looking at, discussing, writing about, and making art.

The Blanton Museum of Art is pleased to offer Social Issues in Art. This series presents objects from the Blanton's collection that provide opportunities for students to discuss issues relevant to individuals, schools, communities, our nation, and our world.

About this guide

The Theme: "Leading by Example" offers educators the opportunity to explore themes related to using your own resources to help others, defining and developing leadership skills, and being an ally to others. Each work prompts students to ponder how they might use their own position and power to help others, and to recognize the contributions of others who have drawn attention to the injustices experienced by various peoples.

The Plan:

- Select a work to share with students. The title of each work is linked to the Blanton collections website that provides more information AND an image that can be expanded onscreen for projection in the classroom. Zoom in and out to allow students to look closely at the work as you lead students in discussion. (1-2 min.)
- Use the thinking routine (Unveiling Stories) on the next page to help students make personal connections to the artwork and to each other. (5-10 min.)
- Select some (or all) of the suggested questions and prompts for follow-up activities of artmaking or research. (5-10 min.)

The Resources:

- A thumbnail image
- Link to object label information (click on the title of the artwork to access curatorial comments about the artist and the art)
- Suggested discussion questions and follow-up activities
- A high resolution image (for providing photocopied images for classes)

[Relevant TEKS, by grade level](#)

In addition, each page in this resource may include a gray box that highlights TEKS specifically addressed by the artwork.

Our donors

Generous support for School Programs at the Blanton is provided by The Brown Foundation, Inc. Education Endowment, with additional support provided by the Buena Vista Foundation, the Burdine Johnson Foundation Education Endowment, The Powell Foundation, the CFP Foundation Endowment for K-12 Excellence, the Lowe Foundation, the Meinig Family Foundation, and the Susan Mayer Art Enrichment Endowment. Support is also provided by Applied Materials, Malú Alvarez and The Bingham Group, LLC.

A Thinking Routine

Unveiling Stories*

1. What is the story being told by this work/artist?
2. What is the human story?
3. What is the world story?
4. What is the untold story?
5. What is the new story?

This thinking routine invites students to reveal multiple layers of meaning in an image, text, or journalistic report. Each layer addresses a key dimension of quality global journalism: the central, most visible story; the way the story helps us understand the lives of fellow humans; the ways in which the story speaks to systemic global issues; what is new and instructive about the story and issues explored; and the important absences or unreported aspects of the story. This routine can be used in global competence development in the arts, geography, literature, and history.

You may consider selecting some – not all – of the routine’s questions, depending on your goals. You may also consider modifying the order in which the questions are introduced.

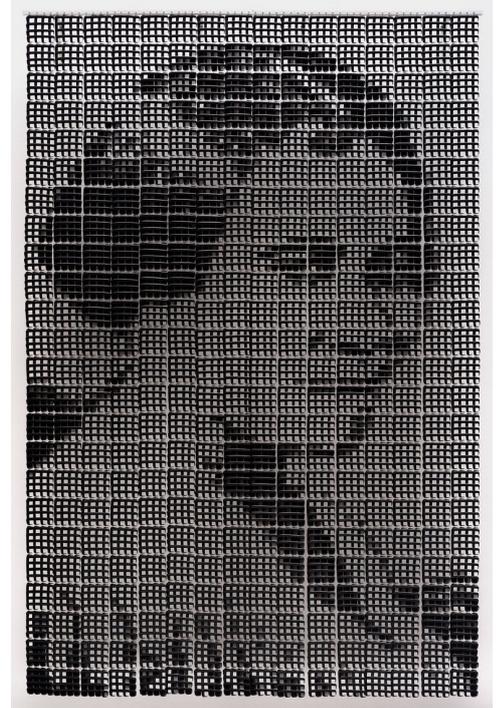
Madam C.J. Walker

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Sonya Clark, 2008

Sonya Clark composed this 10-foot-tall portrait of Madam C. J. Walker entirely of plastic hair combs. Born Sarah Breedlove in 1867 shortly after the end of slavery, Madam Walker is believed to be the nation's first self-made female millionaire. Orphaned as a child and widowed with a daughter when she was 20, Walker earned her fortune and fame by building a prosperous beauty empire. As a businesswoman, she employed thousands of African American women who would have otherwise been relegated to low-paying jobs. Walker flourished as an entrepreneur despite the odds, before women's suffrage and long before the civil rights movement.

"I used 3,840 fine-toothed pocket combs to assemble this image of Walker, based on a photo taken around the start of her career," Clark said. "Combs speak to Walker's career as a pioneer of hair care. I also used them because they capture our national legacy of hair culture, and the gender and race politics of hair. As disposable objects, they parallel the low social status of African American women born in the late 1800s. But together, the thousands of combs become a monumental tapestry, signifying Walker's magnitude and success despite her humble beginnings."



*TEKS connections (US History Studies since 1877; African American Studies)

LOOK

Take a few moments to look closely.

- What do you notice first when you look at this work?
- What does the portrait show about the person it represents?
- What material do you imagine this sculpture is made from?
- Why do you think the artist chose to use combs to represent this person?

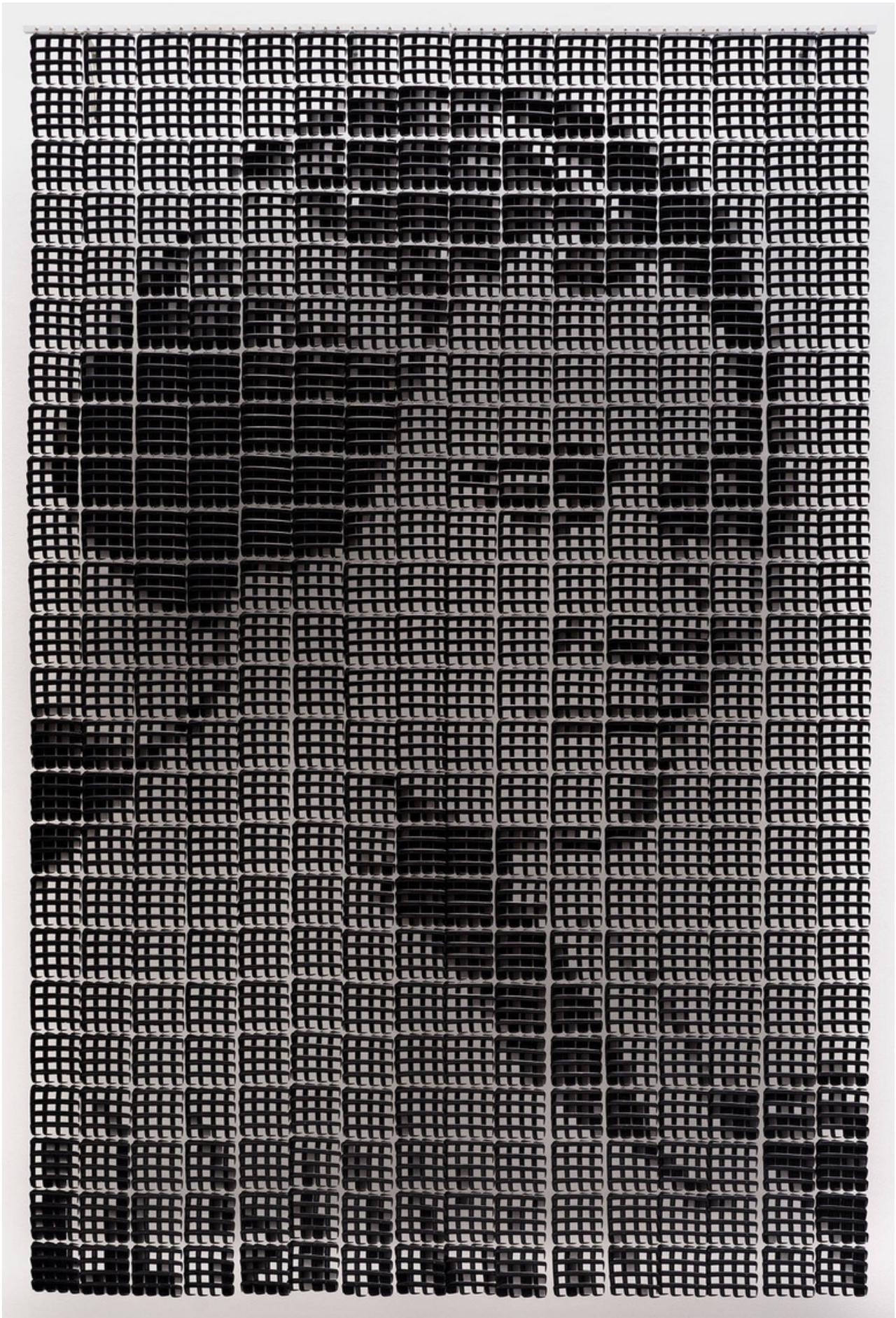
LEARN MORE... and TALK

Share the object label information with students – both about Madam C. J. Walker and about the artist Sonya Clark.

- What do you think it means to "lead by example?"
- In what ways did Madam C.J. Walker "lead by example?"
- Provide specific examples of people who model leadership by example, and what qualities they possess.
- What opportunities of leadership do you currently have?

MAKE

- What everyday object would you choose to represent yourself in a sculpture?
- Construct a model of a self-portrait using your chosen object.



Sonya Clark, *Madam C.J. Walker*, 2008, 122 x 87 in., combs. Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Purchase through the generosity of Marilyn D. Johnson; Beverly Dale; Buckingham Foundation, Inc.; Jeanne and Michael Klein; Fredericka and David Middleton; H-E-B; Joseph and Tam Hawkins; Carmel and Gregory Fenves; The National Council of Negro Women (Austin Section); Lone Star (TX) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated; Town Lake (TX) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated; National Society of Black Engineers-Austin Professionals; Greater Austin Black Chamber of Commerce; National Black MBA Association Austin Chapter; and other donors, 2016.150

Set C: *íittaaschtee* (dress): *huuptáahile* (moccasin); *ichkíishbaalo* (beaded leggings)

Wendy Red Star, 2023

Wendy Red Star, a contemporary artist from the Apsáalooke (Crow) tribe, aims to bring attention to the often flawed stories about Native people, both historically and today.

She layers together images she takes of Apsáalooke cultural objects – both in her own collection and from museum collections across the country – and puts them next to historic photographs of Apsáalooke individuals wearing the objects. Red Star then adds history and context to the materials. She says, “It is critical to preserve and pass along culture, heritage, and shared values while also providing future generations with a sense of identity, solidarity, and empowerment.”



*TEKS connections (US History Studies since 1877)

LOOK

Take a few moments to look closely.

- What details of the work draw your immediate attention?
- What colors do you see? What feelings do the colors evoke for you?
- What do you think the dresses might be made of?
- What do you notice about the women in the photographs?

TALK

Turn to a friend and share what you see when you look at this artwork.

- What does this work remind you of?
- What questions do you have about this? What would you ask the artist?

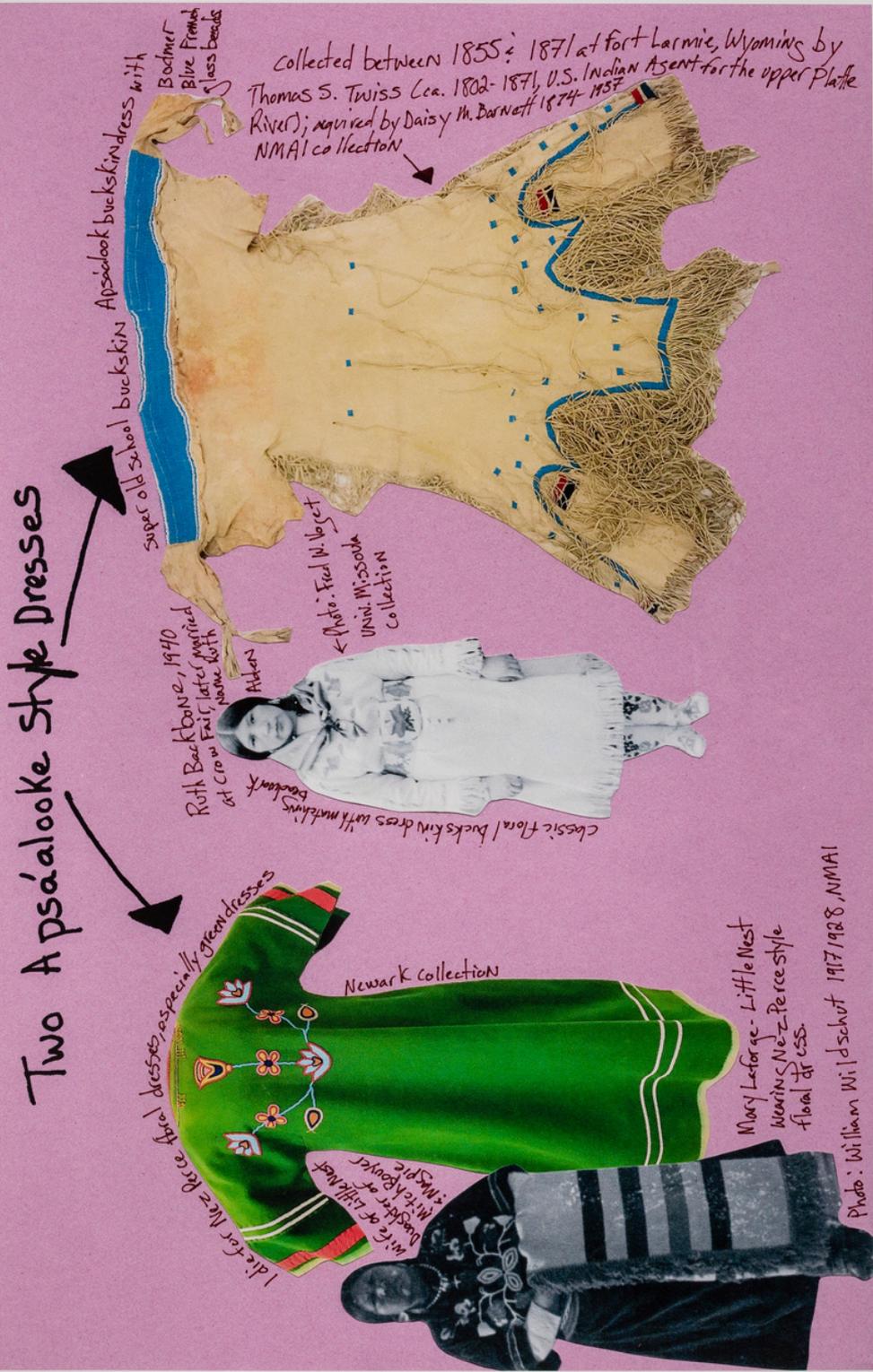
LEARN MORE... and TALK MORE

Share the object label information with students.

- Why might it be uncomfortable to see objects from your culture in a museum far removed from where you live?
- How does seeing something in a museum change how you might view the object?
- How does Red Star adding her own comments and descriptions affect the way you see the objects?
- How does Red Star’s art exhibit the idea of “leading by example?”

MAKE

Choose a favorite item that you use or wear frequently. Take a photo of it, and then a photo of you using/wearing it. Make a collage of the photos, and annotate it with personalized descriptions of where you got it, when you use it, and why it’s so meaningful to you.



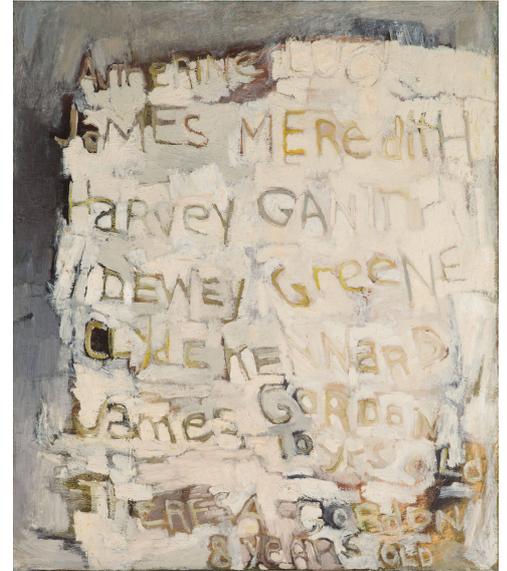
Wendy Red Star, *Set C: iíttaaschtee (dress): huuptáahile (moccasin); ichkiishbaalo (beaded leggings)*, 2023, 16 x 25 in., Archival pigment print on Satin Photo Rag. Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, PA2023.436.a-c.

Honor Roll

May Stevens, 1963

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

In the context of this 1963 canvas, the phrase “honor roll” takes new meaning. The canvas honors the bravery of seven young African American men, women, and children who were among the first to attempt to integrate schools in the South in the early 1960s. May Stevens renders their names in childlike lettering that looks like it was carved into a tree or wet cement, in the hope that we might remember them. Stevens, a white artist, credits her passion for civil rights in part to the friendship she and her husband developed with Charles White, an African American artist whose work is also part of the Blanton collection. When Stevens first exhibited this painting at a New York gallery in 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. contributed a brief but powerful introduction to the catalogue that accompanied it: “The men and women who rode the Freedom Buses through Alabama, who walked in Montgomery, who knelt in prayer in Albany, who hold hands and sing We Shall Overcome Someday in the face of hostile mobs—their acts cry out for songs to be sung by them and pictures to be painted of them.”



TALK

When you hear the phrase “honor roll,” what do you think about? Who usually gets included, and why? What qualities might we honor in a person?

LOOK

Take a few moments to look closely.

- What do you see? What details or elements stand out to you?
- What does this work make you think about?
- What do you wonder? What are you curious about?

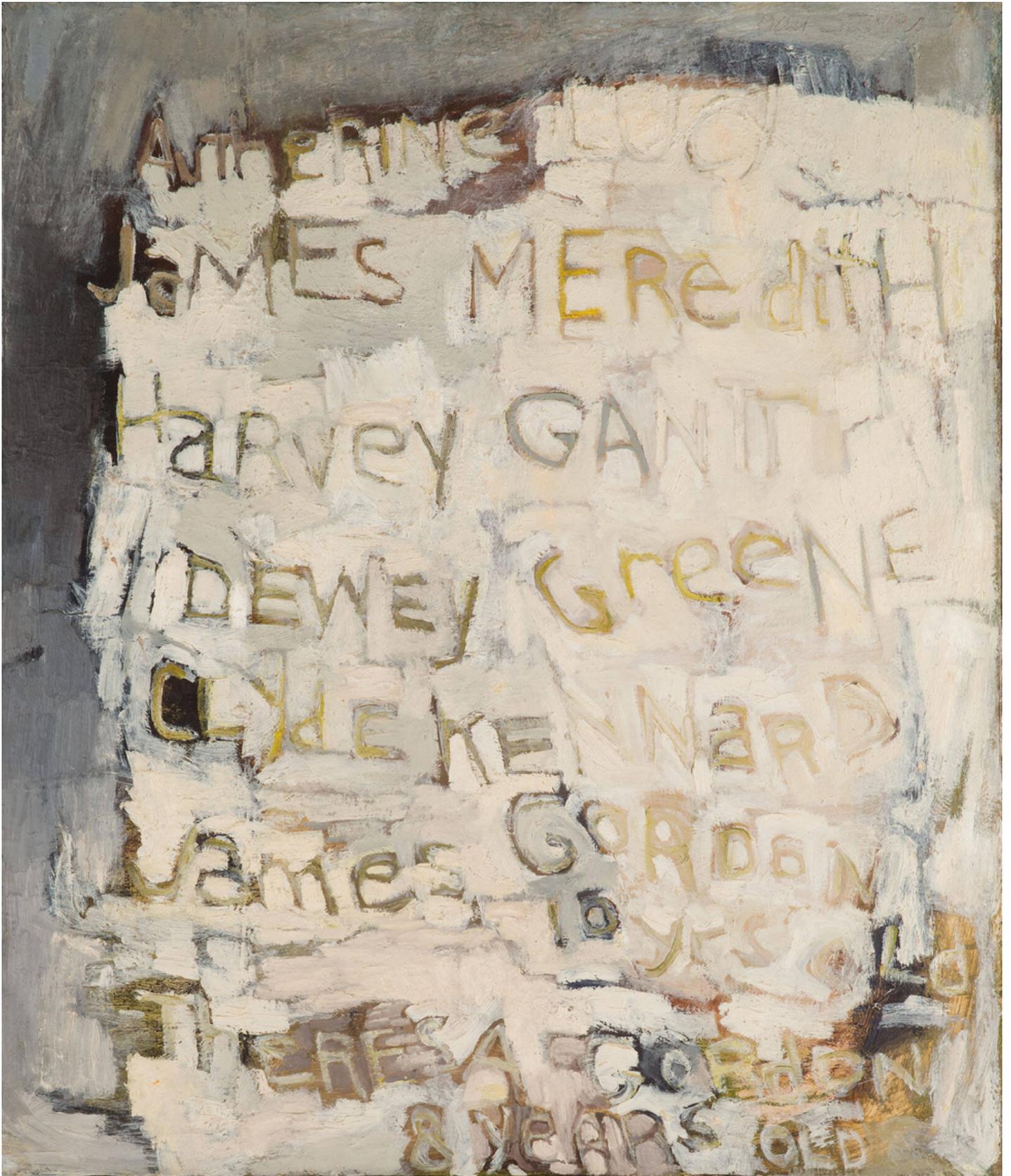
*TEKS connections (US History Studies since 1877; African American Studies)

READ

US history textbooks inform students about James Meredith (the first name listed in the painting) successfully becoming the first African American to graduate from the University of Mississippi in 1963. May Stevens’ painting was likely inspired by the tragic story of his fellow freedom fighter Clyde Kennard, an unsung hero of the civil rights movement. In the late 1950s, Kennard attempted to enroll at Mississippi Southern College to be close to his widowed mother and to help run her chicken farm. To deter him from applying, the FBI, local police, and the college referred to him as an “integration agitator.” When he applied to the school for the third year in a row, they framed him for crimes he did not commit. In 1960, after ten minutes of deliberation, an all-white jury sentenced Kennard to seven years in high-security prison for stealing five bags of chicken feed – on the basis of testimony by an illiterate white teenager. Placed in a high-security prison, Kennard was forced to perform manual labor despite developing colon cancer. The NAACP and Medgar Evers took up Kennard’s case. In 1963, the governor of Mississippi released him fearing that he would become a martyr if he died in prison. Kennard died shortly thereafter, on July 4.

TALK

- Why do you think the artist chose to use childlike lettering?
- How did the artist learn about these people?
- Whose names would you choose to honor, and why?



Mary Stevens, *Honor Roll*, 1963, 42 1/2 x 36 in., oil on canvas. Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Purchase through the Amon G. Carter Art Acquisition Fund and Archer M. Huntington Museum Fund, and made possible by generous support from Alessandra Manning-Dolnier and Kurt Dolnier in memory of Ruth Seay, Charles Irvin, Jeanne and Michael Klein, Anthony Meier, Fredericka and David Middleton, and an anonymous donor, 2015.26