

CPS SOURCE bySunday

Everyone remembers the past differently. They have their own unique experiences and emotions that shape how they see things and remember events. When we talk about collective histories it's the same thing - the group that is telling the story of history influences what parts of history are discussed.

For the most part, American history has been remembered and taught from the perspective of caucasian Europeans, but today, in the 21st century, there are countless historians, educators, researchers, and scholars that strive to challenge and change the way we look at and understand American history, specifically in the context of history as experienced by minorities in our country.

One such educator is the artist, **Kara Walker**. Ms. Walker anchors much of her work in documents reflecting life for African Americans before and after the Civil War. She is best known for her panoramic friezes of cut-paper silhouettes, usually black figures against a white wall, which address the history of American slavery and racism through imagery. The black and white silhouettes confront the realities of history, while also using the stereotypes from the era of slavery to relate to persistent modern-day concerns and working to bridge unfinished folklore in the Antebellum South. Recovering lost histories, and battling the historical erasure that plagues African Americans, by poking holes in our standard descriptions of American history often exposes the humiliating, desperate realities that was life for plantation slaves.

The sculpture to the right by Ms. Walker, titled *The Bush, Skinny, De-Boning*, was made in 2002. It shows three African American women at their daily chores on the plantation. Their work includes gardening chores, caring for a child, and preparing dinner.

Walker is not attempting to correct late-19th century depictions of African-Americans but rather uses her art to develop discussions: are these merely images from the past or do these caricatures still resonate in the twenty-first century?



The Bush, Skinny, De-Boning
Edition No. 19, 2002
by Kara Elizabeth Walker, b. 1969
American
Black pigment on stainless steel

Museum of Art & Archaeology ID #2017.15 A-D
University of Missouri
Search: maacollections.missouri.edu



EXPLORE

To see more artifacts, visit the Museum of Anthropology's online databases: <https://anthromuseum.missouri.edu/?q=online-databases>

Tips for Using the Museum Databases

- Log in as a "Guest."
- Enter search terms into one or more fields and click the "Perform Find" button in the status area on the left-hand side of the screen.
- Use the book icon in the status area to move from one record to another in the found set.
- Click on the magnifying glass icon to return to find mode and perform additional searches.
- When finished working with a database, please be sure to click the "Log Out" button in the status area to close your session.

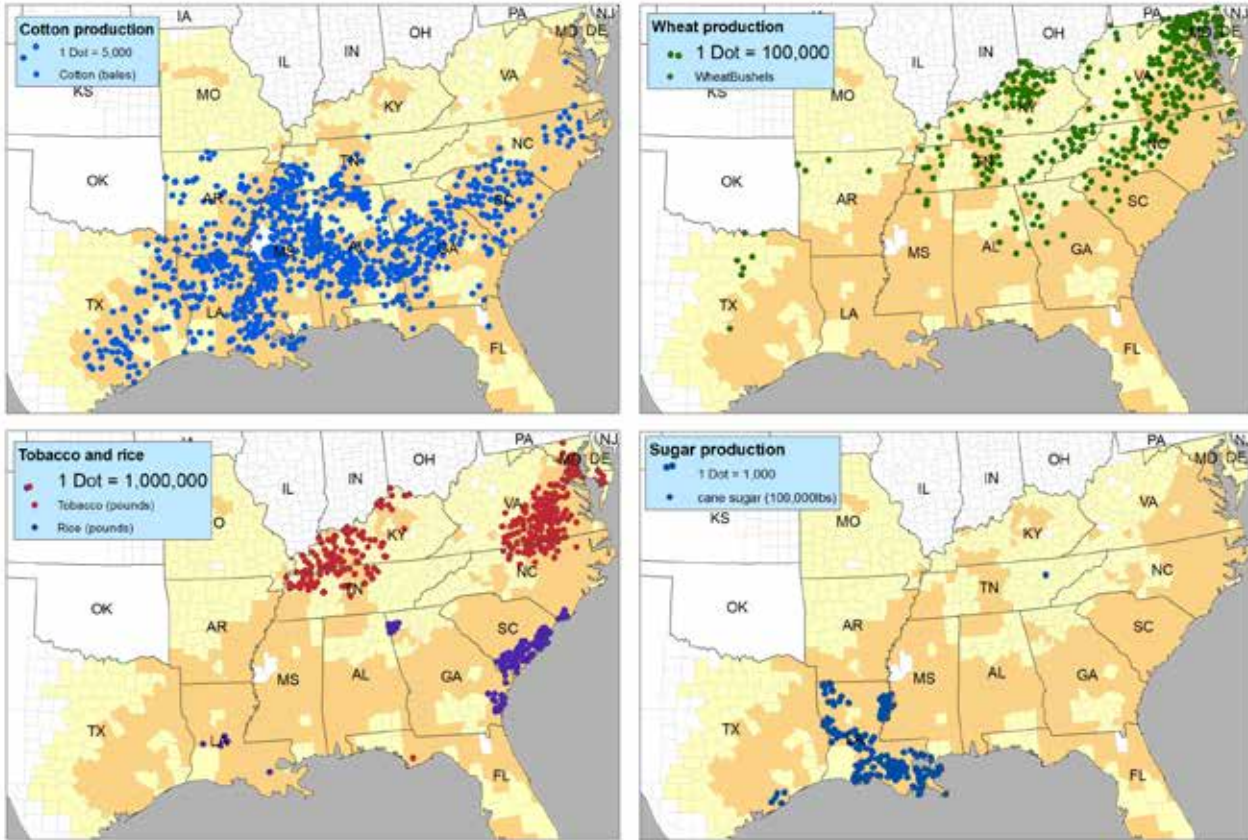
M A | The MUSEUM of ANTHROPOLOGY

Mizzou North, 2nd Floor

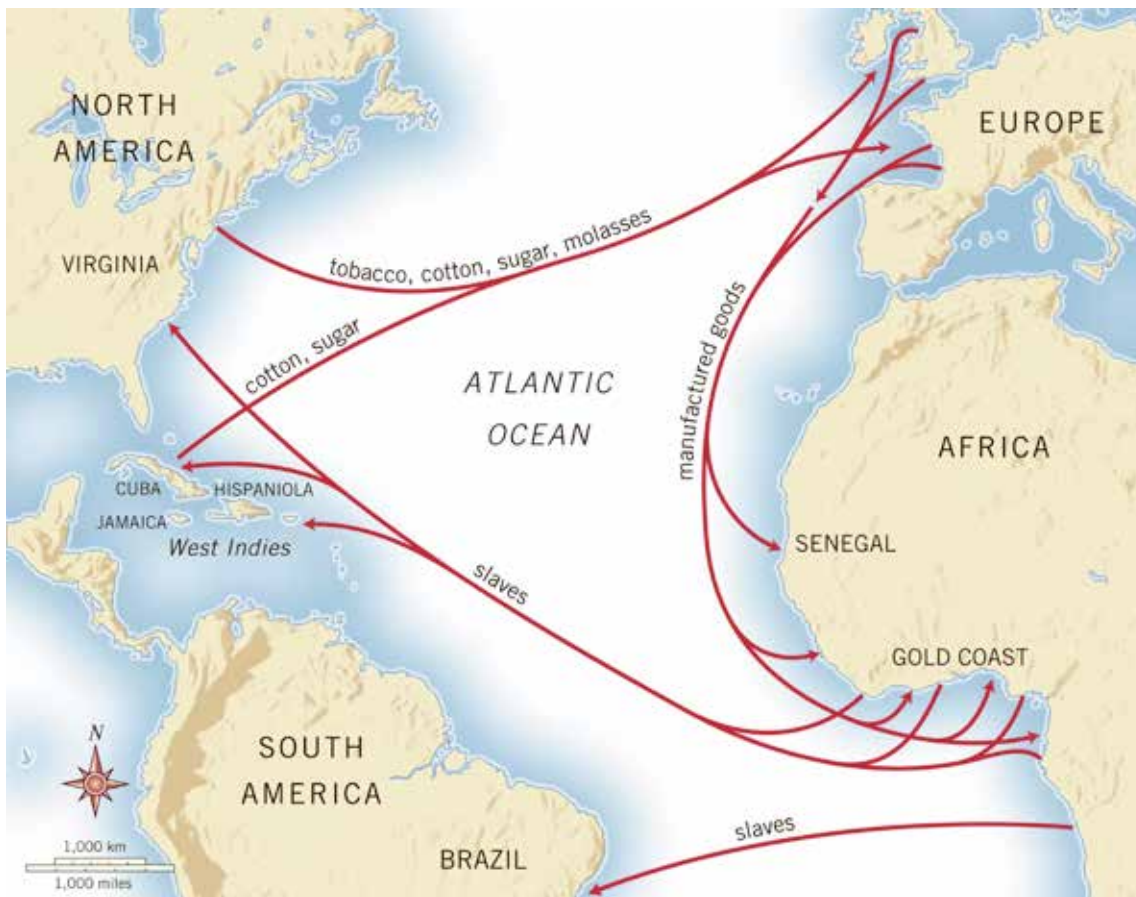
115 Business Loop 70W, Columbia, MO 65203

Tues - Fri, 9am - 4pm; Sat - Sun, 12pm - 4pm

Slavery and agricultural production, 1860



Map prepared by Patrick Rait, Department of History, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine.
 Data source: U.S. Census data.
 Shapefile source: Corvill-Earth, Changing Co., John Hippen, and Samuel Overman, 1999.
 The Historical United States County Boundary Files 1792 - 1999 as CD-ROM. Geographic Publications, Louisiana State University.



Teacher Resources:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/02/04/582468315/why-schools-fail-to-teach-slaverys-hard-history>

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2017/what-learning-about-slavery-can-teach-us-about-ourselves>

<https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery>

Lesson/Activities:

EXPLORING RACE AND IDENTITY: CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS THROUGH THE ART OF KARA WALKER



BIG IDEAS:

How can silhouette narratives explore social justice issues while fostering collective agency through self-reflection and group collaboration?

These lessons center on the work of artist Kara Walker. Starting with personal memories, students create large-scale silhouette narratives that speak about important experiences, highlight their contributions as young people in an urban context, and manifest future possibilities.

- Understand how stereotyping shapes notions of identity and creates conditions for some groups to oppress others
- Explore ways of creating with means and materials at hand (e.g. our environment, chalk, cell phone cameras, our beautiful minds)
- Reflect on themselves and the world around them
- Take part in guided discussion to identify how Kara Walker addresses issues of social justice in their work
- Analyze selected works by Kara Walker to analyze how artists communicate ideas through their choice and use of materials

GUIDED LOOKING

Grades 8-12

Show “Keys to the Coop”- Kara Walker



(Inquiry based teaching: allowing the student to use their prior knowledge when responding to specific questions asked by the teacher/artist.) You can teach your whole lesson and critique this way. This empowers students and allows them to feel they are bringing something to the class that is valuable.

Build on students’ prior knowledge first by asking students:

- What do you see?
- What do you think the chicken and key symbolize?
- Can you tell which race/ethnicity this image is representing? How/Why?
- How is the image exaggerated? Visually?
- Why might Kara Walker choose to exaggerate certain characteristics and features?
- Would she have to do this if this work was a painting/drawing in color instead?

Show “Restraint” –Kara Walker



(Inquiry based teaching: allowing the student to use their prior knowledge when responding to specific questions asked by the teacher/artist.) You can teach your whole lesson and critique this way. This empowers students and allows them to feel they are bringing something to the class that is valuable.

Build on students’ prior knowledge first by asking students:

- What do you see?

(Possible answers: being watched, mocked, chained, enslaved)

- What do you think this was used for?
- Why is there a bell hanging?
- What does this remind you of?

(Possible answers: a reminder, a dog or animal, an alarm)

- Can you relate to every feeling represented, always watched, mocked, changed, enslaved? (Physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, etc?)

Show “Slavery! Slavery!” –Kara Walker

Build on students’ prior knowledge first by asking students:

- What do you see?
- Are these all individual works of art? Or part of a collective?

What is an installation? What does it sound like? What happens when art is installed in a specific space? What is the role of the viewer when viewing? Do they also become a part of the installation? Can installations be interactive? How do you think this can be interactive? (Can think/talk about how Kara has used projectors in her galleries so while the viewer is looking, their shadow becomes part of the installation)

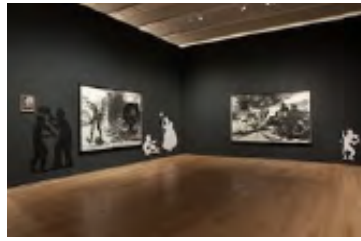
- What do these images do when organized together?
- Do you see a narrative? Is story telling happening? What can you make of the story or meaning?



Reflection:

- How would the effect be different if Walker painted this scene instead of creating it from cut-paper silhouettes?
- What does looking at the black colored paper silhouette allow you to do?
- Would looking at it in color be too “difficult to swallow” because of the images?
- What would happen to the image or meaning if Kara Walker used white paper instead of black for her silhouettes?
- Many of Kara Walker’s silhouettes are cut larger than life size. What happens when you see these images and they are larger than you?
- Do they grab your attention?
- Where do we see “larger than life” images in society? Signs? Billboards?

Show images of "Rise Up Ye Mighty Race" - Kara Walker



- What happens to the images when white paper is used instead of black?
 - What do you see?
 - What do we know about slavery in the United States of America?
 - How do you see what you know reflected in the work?
 - Do you see anything new that raises questions?
- (*be open to student voices, questions, dialogue*)

Examining Race, Power, and Identity through Depictions of the Civil War

Grades 8-12



Kara Walker, Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated): Lost Mountain at Sunrise, offset lithography and screenprint, 2005

Kara Walker, Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated): Confederate Prisoners Being Conducted from Jonesborough, offset lithography and screenprint, 2005



Gone, An Historical of a Civil War as it Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart, paper, 1994

Through the construction of narrative scenes incorporating silhouettes, printmaking, and a writing assignment based on Kara Walker's artwork, antebellum, and civil war literature, students will examine identity and race and how artists process their experiences. Students will redefine historical scenes, explore potential missing elements, and will incorporate their own characters into the scenes from Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War and *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell.

- Demonstrate an understanding of race relations in the U.S., focusing on the civil war era to the present.
- Explore issues of race, identity, and power through the construction of a narrative scene referencing civil war literature.

Materials: Selected photocopies and excerpts from:

- o Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War
- o *Gone with the Wind*

Art 21 video, Kara Walker in Stories: <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/kara-walker>

Steps:

1. Students will read civil war era literature or later works inspired by events from the civil war, such as *Gone with the Wind*, prior to the art activity and introduction to Walker.
2. The teacher will explain the inspiration behind Walker's artwork and will show a clip from an Art 21 interview documenting the artist's process.
3. Show students examples of Walker's art, such as Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated): *Lost Mountain at Sunrise* and Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War

(Annotated): *Confederate Prisoners Being Conducted from Jonesborough*, and facilitate the discussion by asking the following open-ended VTS questions:

- What's going on in this picture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find?

4. Teacher will engage students in discussion relating to how Walker deals with issues of power, race, oppression, and identity through her artwork.
5. Have students examine the Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War scenes, both those recreated by Walker and from the original. Ask students if any scenes are missing from the original. How has Walker changed historical scenes and rewritten history?
7. Students may conduct research and will write an essay or short story about their narrative scene.

Grades 8-12

- Explore a variety of media and materials utilizing painting, mixed-media, and writing to construct a self-portrait from imagination and symbolic imagery.
- Understand ways to create a personal response in artwork through the use of metaphor.
- Know the relationship between creating an artwork and how it reflects self-expression and the consideration of personal intention.



Kara Walker, *Cut, cut paper and adhesive on wall*, 1998



Kara Walker, *cut paper and adhesive on wall*, 1998



Kara Walker, *Untitled (Scene #18 from Emancipation Approximation portfolio)*, 1999–2000

1. The teacher will discuss how Walker's artwork is inspired by literature and mythology.
2. Students will analyze Walker's work. What is significant about creating shadow forms? How does one imbue a sense of identity within a silhouette?

3. Students will construct a self-portrait incorporating symbols and metaphors from their personal histories, which may include their community, family, or personal narrative. Walker's art style will serve as inspiration, but students are encouraged to experiment with a variety of media to mimic the silhouette form.

4. Assessment will include a narrative writing assignment in which the students describe the personal symbols, imagery, and metaphor within their artwork and how it references Walker's artistic process. Students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of Walker's techniques and motivation.

(Elementary-High School)

Students will explore their personal histories to construct narrative self-portraits utilizing storytelling and metaphor. Students will employ art techniques inspired by Walker.

Learning Objectives:

Students should be able to:

Simple Detail

This activity looks at how including and excluding detail can lead to stories using simple shapes and cuts outs.

Materials: paper, pencil, scissors, black paint or markers

In the Classroom:

- Provide each student with a piece of paper.
- Draw a person or an object on the piece of paper and cut out the outline.
- Paint the whole cut out all black, covering any details so all that is left is a black shape.
- Have students lay out their silhouettes on the floor at random.
- Ask each student to select someone else's silhouette.
- Ask each student to describe what they think is happening in the silhouette they are holding or what they think their shape could be.
- Look at how Kara Walker uses detail in her silhouettes and objects to show what is happening. What details can pupils see in Kara Walker's cut outs? (see images attached at bottom of this handout, the S by S, and/or Walker's work online)
- What details are missing from Kara Walker's cut outs that you can only imagine?
- How can you change your silhouette to give it more detail on the outlines? As a group, think about how Kara Walker has arranged her cut outs on the wall.
- Work in small groups to arrange the silhouettes and shapes to tell a story.
- Can other students guess what story is being told with the shapes and silhouettes? Is it different or the same as the one the group intended.

(Middle School-High School)

Going Down in History

This activity looks at visibility and invisibility in the recording and telling of history.

Materials: Paper and pens

In the Classroom

- Ask students to raise their hands in answer to the following questions:
- Raise your hand if you have heard of Big Mama Thornton. (Count the show of hands)
- Raise your hand if you have heard of Elvis Presley. (Count the show of hands)
- If any pupils have heard of either name, ask them to tell the class who they are.

As a class, watch the following clips:

Clip1: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xlbot_big-mama-thornton-hound-dog_music

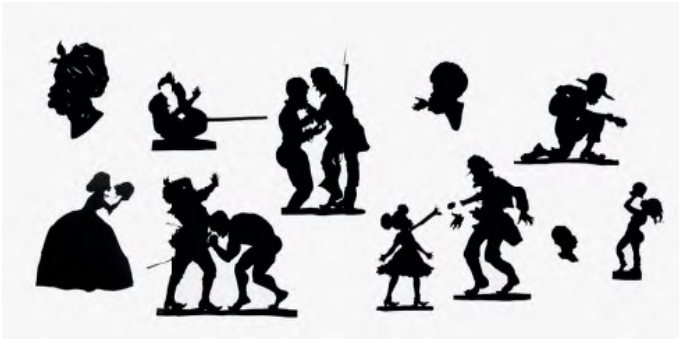
Clip 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzQ8GDBA8ls>

1. Big Mama Thornton's version of Hound Dog was recorded in 1953, while Elvis Presley's version of Hound Dog was recorded in 1956. Which singer does the class think is more famous?
2. What are some reasons that singers have more visibility and recognition than others?

As a class, look at how Kara Walker tells stories with her cut out figures (use images online, found at the bottom of this handout, or in the S by S article.

1. Which characters look like the most powerful people?
2. Which characters look the least powerful?

Imagine you are writing or recording these characters' experiences to go down in history – how might their versions of history be different from each other?



Kara Walker, Auntie Walker's Wall Sampler for Civilians (detail), 2013. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York © Kara Walker

Kara Walker, Urban Relocator, 2011. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York © Kara Walker



Kara Walker, Fall Frum Grace, Miss Pipi's Blue Tale (film still), 2011. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York © Kara Walker