This toolkit encourages deep dives into UMFA exhibitions via four entry points: how this exhibition relates to our personal lives, connects to our studies, teaches us about foundational art elements, and conveys big ideas. Whether you use this in the galleries or in your classroom with the “slideshow” of larger images toward the end of this document, we hope educators can find inspiration for potential discussion topics, writing prompts, group exploration, or art-making—regardless of discipline.

These categories are:

- Personal Connections
- Classroom Connections
- Elemental Connections
- Thematic Connections
Personal Connections

Art can stir emotions—positive, negative, and anything in between. Whatever your response, your feelings about a work of art are valid and worth exploring. Most museum-goers spend just a few seconds in front of a single work, but we encourage you to look slowly before exploring the questions below.

• In three words, how does this exhibition make you feel?
• What’s one work with which you feel a personal connection? Why?
• If you could talk to one artist in this exhibition, who would it be? What would you ask or say?
• Complete the following sentences:
  o What I find most interesting about this exhibition is…
  o What I find most complicated about this exhibition is…
  o What this exhibition made me think differently about is…
• If you made a playlist for this exhibition, what are three songs you’d include? Why?
• What’s something you’d like to learn more about because of this exhibition? Why?

Classroom Connections

Whether you’re studying math, science, art, or the humanities, you can find surprising connections between your coursework and the work in this exhibition.

Questions for individuals, pairs, or groups:

• List three words you’d use to describe this exhibition.
• What are recurrent threads you notice throughout the exhibition? These could be themes, ideas, images, symbols, patterns, colors, etc.
• What is one thread or element that connects to your class coursework? How does it connect? Depending on your field, this could be tricky—creative leaps are encouraged!
• What’s one work of art here that represents the connection you see? How does it do that?
• How could you apply your current coursework to this exhibition? For example, a creative writing student might write a poem about a painting, a history student might research a social movement that informed an artist’s perspective, a biology student might analyze the environment within a landscape, etc.

Elemental Connections

Whether you’re an artist yourself or someone who doesn’t spend a lot of time with art, the elements of art give us a way of thinking about how a work was created and what it comprises. These include: line, shape, color, form, texture, space, and value.

• Which artist uses **lines** in the most interesting ways? How would you describe the feeling of those lines? (Organized, chaotic, simple, etc.?)

• Choose a work of art that utilizes interesting **shapes**. Can you sketch the work using only the basic shapes you identify?

• Scan a group of works, taking in the many **colors** the artists used. Which color catches your eye more than any other? Why does it stand out? What feeling does it convey?

• Find a work with interesting **textures**. How would you describe the textures to someone who wasn’t looking at the piece?

• Identify a 3D work in this exhibition and consider **form**. How would this piece be different if it were a drawing or painting instead? What would the viewer miss? How would it change the way you think about the piece?

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**EXHIBITION TOOLKIT**

Thematic Connections

Exhibitions might be organized with specific themes in mind. Sometimes these are explicitly stated in the title or description. Other times, they might be implicit or less obvious. Here are some questions related to themes we might find in any given exhibition:

- What might this exhibition help you understand about identity? Your own? Other people’s?
- What might this exhibition tell us about power? Who has it? Who doesn’t? What is it?
- What might this exhibition tell us about memory? What do we remember as individuals? What do we remember collectively? Who decides what our culture remembers or forgets?
- How does this exhibition connect to what’s happening in our world right now, this present moment? What is the connection you see?
- What is a theme you identify within this exhibition? What makes you think that? There’s no wrong answer here!


Resources For Further Learning

The Studio Museum Harlem’s website provides access to their collection, information on programs and learning, and previews of upcoming exhibitions. You can also check out their excellent Studio Magazine.

https://studiomuseum.org
https://studiomuseum.org/collection
https://studiomuseum.org/learn-engage
https://studiomuseum.org/exhibitions-events
https://studiomuseum.org/studio-magazine

Read this article in Culture Type about the Studio Museum’s Black Refractions exhibition (Nov. 20, 2018).


Explore artworks by artists of African descent in the National Gallery, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

https://www.nga.gov/features/african-american-artists.html
https://collections.mfa.org/collections/315161/aoafricanamerican-artists/objects
https://americanart.si.edu/art/highlights/african-american

Learn more about our programming partner, the University of Utah’s Black Cultural Center.

https://diversity.utah.edu/centers/bcc/

Resources For Further Learning cont.

Read about the elements of art or check out The Getty Museum’s short guide.
https://thevirtualinstructor.com/artfundamentals.html
https://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/elements_art.pdf

Ibram X. Kendi, bestselling author of Stamped from the Beginning and How to Be an Antiracist, created this Antiracist Reading List.
https://www.ibramxkendi.com
https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/29/books/review/antiracist-reading-list-ibram-x-kendi.html

Take a look at embracerace.org’s list of children’s books to support conversations on race, racism, and resistance. Or generate your own list with the help of socialjusticebooks.org.
https://www.embracerace.org/resources/20-picture-books-for-2020

The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) has published the web portal “Talking About Race.”
https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race


Right | Jordan Casteel, Kevin the Kiteman, 2016, oil on canvas. The Studio Museum in Harlem; Museum purchase with funds provided by the Acquisition Committee, 2016.37. © Jordan Casteel. Courtesy American Federation of Arts. Photo: Adam Reich.
Sponsorships for

Black Refractions

Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem is organized by the American Federation of Arts and The Studio Museum in Harlem. The exhibition is curated by Connie H. Choi, Associate Curator, Permanent Collection, The Studio Museum in Harlem. The presentation at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts is coordinated by Whitney Tassie, senior curator and curator of modern and contemporary art.

The UMFA exhibition is presented in partnership with the University of Utah Black Cultural Center:

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