

17-A The Migration Series, panel no. 57, 1940–1941

Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000)



17-A Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000), *The Migration of the Negro Panel no. 57, 1940–1941*. Casein tempera on hardboard, 18 x 12 in. (45.72 x 30.48 cm.). The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. Acquired 1942. © 2008 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

The Art

The artist, Jacob Lawrence, used his own mother as a model for the woman in the painting doing laundry. Lawrence’s mother moved north before World War I. She spent long hours cleaning houses for other people. Lawrence used the public library in Harlem, New York, to read and learn more about the subject of his art. This painting of a woman doing laundry is part of a group of 60 paintings. Because Lawrence wanted his paintings to flow together to tell a story, he worked with one color at a time on all 60 paintings. The words below the paintings were written first and are an important part of each work.

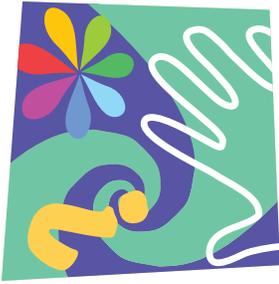
The Artist

Jacob Lawrence was born in New Jersey. When Lawrence was 13 years old, his mother moved to Harlem with her three children. Lawrence always wanted to be an artist but thought he would have to do another kind of work when he grew up, such as cleaning clothes like his mother. However, two famous artists—a painter named Charles Alston and a sculptor named Augusta Savage—convinced Lawrence he could choose to earn a living as an artist.

In addition to his studies at the public library, Lawrence depended on true stories his family told him to help him with his painting. The stories were about how black people moved north to big cities to find better jobs and start new lives with their families. Lawrence’s paintings were so good, and told the story he chose so well, that he became very famous. Some of his paintings were shown in magazines and now are in important museums in big cities like New York, Washington, D.C., and Seattle, Washington. Lawrence went on to create many more pictures that told about his people, their families, the places they lived and worked, and the games they played.

The Historical Perspective

Black people began moving to northern cities in the United States from country areas in the south during World War I. They continued leaving the south through the period of the country’s history called the Depression and during World War II. Moving north was called “coming up,” and it was one of the most important things to happen in African American history. It changed big cities like New York; Chicago, Illinois; Detroit, Michigan; Cleveland, Ohio; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—and the areas around these cities—forever.



Conversations and Teaching Activities

Head Start Children ages 3 to 5

Encourage children to look closely at this artwork—the objects, the background, the colors used. Ask questions, introduce new vocabulary, and find books that relate to the painting.

Describing



- ✓ What shapes and colors do you see?
- ✓ How does the person in the painting look?
- ✓ What is the person doing? Explain to the children that in the past, people didn't have washing machines and dryers, so clothes had to be washed and dried by hand.
- ✓ How is she doing the laundry? What is she holding? She is holding a laundry stick. How is she using the stick? What is she washing? What colors are the things she is washing?
- ✓ How many pieces of laundry are hanging up behind her? How many are in the water she is stirring with the stick?
- ✓ What is the woman wearing on her head? Do you think she looks cold or hot?
- ✓ Why are her arms bare? Does it look like what she is doing is easy or hard?

Analyzing and Interpreting



Ask the following questions to stimulate thinking and discussion:

- How does the painting make you feel?
- Do you think working as a laundress would be a hard job?
- Did you ever see someone wash clothes by hand? Have you washed clothes or dishes by hand? What was it like?
- Are there other things you would like to tell me about this painting?



Connecting and Extending

Introducing Vocabulary

concentrate	laundromat	washing stick
detergent	migration	wrinkle
fringe	museum	
journey	smock	
laundress	vat	



Books

Career Day by Anne Rockwell (HarperCollins, 2000)

Young children learn about the different kinds of work when special visitors share what they do in their jobs.

A Pocket for Corduroy by Don Freeman (Viking Press, 1978)

A little girl takes her stuffed bear to the laundromat, where they become separated.

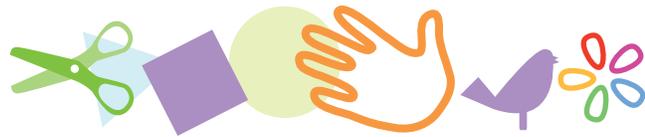


Connecting and Extending continued...

Related Family Literacy Experiences

Parents and children can:

- ✓ sort laundry together.
- ✓ hand wash some clothes and, after they dry, compare how they look with clothes that were machine-washed.
- ✓ share stories about family members who had or currently have physically challenging jobs.



Related Educational Experiences

- ✓ If the classroom has a “sensory” table or water table, the class could gather around it and pretend it is a wash tub, with or without water in it.
- ✓ Lawrence used tempera paint, commonly used in classrooms, to paint *The Migration Series*. Allow the children to explore the texture, smell, and colors of paint in the classroom. Mix existing colors to make new colors.
- ✓ Tell a story with paintings and explain the paintings with words. Use small boards as a surface for the children’s art, just as Lawrence did.
- ✓ Have children paint pictures of their families, neighborhoods, work they like to do or would like to try, things that happened in their families, a time when their families moved, a place they would like to live or travel to, cities, rural places, and people and places that help them learn. Take story dictation.
- ✓ Enhance the dramatic play area with laundry baskets, a box of laundry detergent, clothespins, a clothesline, an iron, hangers, sheets, shirts, or other articles of clothing.

The ideas listed are just a few of the many activities that could be used to introduce or extend children’s learning. Your knowledge of your children and families supports your ability to ensure positive learning experiences and outcomes for students. As an educator, you probably have ideas for books, songs, finger plays, and activities that you have thought of when introducing or extending children’s learning related to the “A Head Start on Picturing America” artworks. We encourage you to confer with your colleagues, visit the local library or bookstore, and share your ideas with others.