

**VOICES**  
**PEACE • PRIDE • ACTIVISTS • SOCIAL ACTION**

**TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE**  
**Contemporary Art In and Out**  
**of Africa**

Jesús, Estrella, Esperanza, Mercy:  
Sails flashing to the wind like weapons,  
sharks following the moans the fever  
and the dying; horror the corposant and  
compass rose.

Middle Passage:  
voyage through death  
to life on these shores.

Middle Passage  
Robert Hayden



The Dutchman  
Painting by Moyo Okediji 1995

**Grade Level**

Grades 3-12

**Curriculum Area**

Art • Language Arts

**Overview**

Over the centuries, a dialogue evolved across the Atlantic as Africans came to the New World and blacks from America returned to their continent of origin. An aesthetic conversation or dialogue has recently developed between African and African American artists as they work from different perspectives to reconcile their African identity and heritage within the currents of contemporary art. The exhibition, *Transatlantic Dialogue: Contemporary Art In and Out of Africa*, explores the varied ways that African and African American artists interpret their ideas and identities. Similarities of style as well as diversity of expression emerge from a shared African heritage.

**Objectives**

To look at art that is historical, environmental, communal, spiritual, original, royal, colorful, musical, powerful, political, symbolic and transformative.

Utilize the Internet through an online exhibition, to discover African and African American art in order to compare and contrast aesthetics.

To recognize that the art of a culture can communicate historical information about that culture.

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**Key Words**

**Environment**

Definition-the surroundings or conditions within which something or someone exists.

Context-African artists have responded to outside cultural forces for centuries, but their aesthetic responses have been rooted in their own cultural understanding and environments that were suitable for their own needs.

**Dialogue**

Definition-a discussion of ideas.

Context- An aesthetic conversation or dialogue has recently developed between African and African American artists as they work from different perspectives to reconcile their African identity and heritage within the currents of contemporary art.

**Expression**

Definition-the act of expressing; a word or phrase.

Context- Similarities of style as well as diversity of expression emerge from a shared African heritage.



JamPact/JelliTite Jeff Donaldson 1980

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**Activities**

**Activity**

Africa has come to be more metaphor than reality in the West. Some speak of it as if it is a nation rather than a continent that is nearly as vast, and at least as diverse, as Asia. Africa and Africans came to represent things non-Western, the antonym of Europe and European. Today problematic terms like “Third World” and “developing nations” replace older pejorative terms like “primitive” and “tribal” when describing Africa, and too many people think of African art only in terms of so-called tribal or traditional arts. This promotes false ideas of authenticity and the mistaken notion that African cultures have been self-contained entities that somehow are polluted by alien ideas and cultural practices. African artists have responded to outside cultural forces for centuries, but their aesthetic responses have been rooted in their own cultural understanding and environments that were suitable for their own needs.

Through research online describe why *The Dutchman*, painted by Moyo Okediji, was inspired by Robert Hayden’s poem, *Middle Passage*.

**Activity**

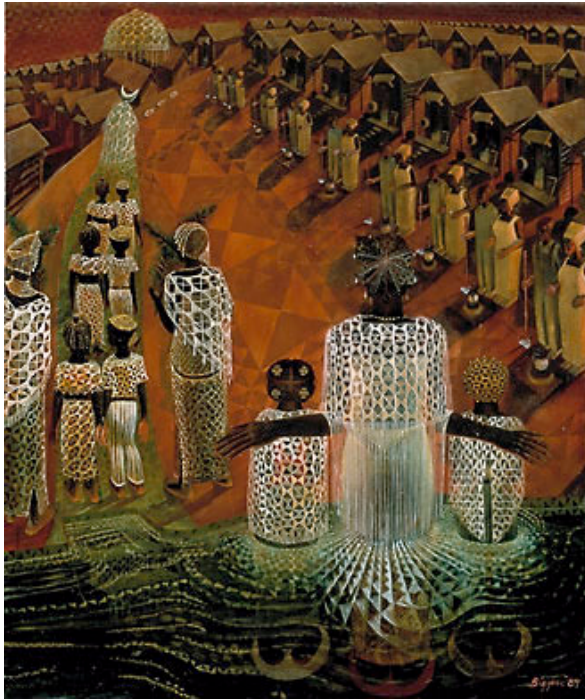
Countee Cullen painted with words. He is known as a lyric poet whose writings were influenced by the English poet John Keats. His work dealt with issues relevant to the lives of African Americans, without utilizing stereotypes; he saw art as universal. Cullen wove vibrant pictures with words.

Heritage  
What is Africa to me:  
Copper sun or scarlet sea,  
Jungle star or jungle track,  
Strong bronzed men, or regal black  
Women from whose loins I sprang  
When the birds of Eden sang?  
One three centuries removed  
From the scenes his fathers loved,  
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,  
What is Africa to me?...

Give visual form to Cullen's words by making a painting inspired by his poem. Alternatively, or in addition, students may wish to use Cullen's work as a model for their own poem dedicated to ideas of their own personal heritage. Words and painted imagery might be interwoven on the same painting as in the works of Jean-Michel Basquiat, Skunder Boghossian. Compare to other contemporary artists that have been influenced by poetry.

**Activity**

Read: *African art is...Images of Power and Identity*. Using the guide as a model, create a guide to an online exhibition of your own. Use images from CD-Roms, the internet and scanned images. Websites for images are listed in Internet Links.



Baptism  
Painted by John Biggers



Filas for Sale  
Painted by Charles Searles

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**Resources**

- Transatlantic Dialogue: Contemporary Art In and Out of Africa.* Michael D. Harris. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Ackland Art Museum-The University of North Carolina. 1999.
- African art is...Images of Power and Identity.* Smithsonian National Museum of African Art. Washington, D.C. 2000.
- Contemporary Art of Africa.* Andre Magnin. New York, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1996.
- Seven Stories about modern art in Africa.* Clementine Deliss. New York, New York: Whitechapel Art Gallery. 1996.
- Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity.* Doran H. Ross. Los Angeles, California: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History. 1998.

**Internet Links**

**Teachers**

*Akan Arts*

<http://web.marshall.edu/akanart/abramo.html>

*Transatlantic Dialogue Exhibition National Museum of African Art*

<http://www.si.org/>

**Textbooks**

- ***The African-American Odyssey***  
Prentice-Hall Inc.
- ***African American Literature***  
***Voices in a Tradition***  
Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
- ***Ancient Africa and the Atlantic***  
***Slave Trade***  
Modern Curriculum Press



Painting Tom Feelings 1991

# TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE

## Contemporary Art In and Out of Africa

### Standards and Expectations

•*MPS Standards Level 3 English Language Arts A.3.3*

Read and discuss literary and nonliterary texts in order to understand human experiences.

•*MPS Expectations Level 3 English Language Arts A.3.3*

Distinguish fiction from nonfiction, realistic fiction from fantasy, fact from opinion, and biography from autobiography.

•*Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Visual Arts*

Students will reflect upon the nature of art and meaning in art and culture.

•*Wisconsin's State Expectations for Visual Arts J.3.8*

Know that different cultures have different concepts of beauty.

### Assessment

After viewing examples of historical, environmental, communal, spiritual, original, royal, colorful, musical, powerful, political, symbolic and transformative art, students will incorporate a single design motif into an original artworks or multi-media presentations.

Students will use the revised Arts Assessment—2000 to defend and critique their artistic choices.

Teachers will use the scoring rubric provided in the revised Arts Assessment-2000.