

Painted Stories

An Art With Kids Art Making Workshop based on the Art of Jacob Lawrence (1917– 2000) by Trish Maunder, Creative Programs Director 2005/2006



Barber Shop 1946

Gouache on paper, 21 1/8 x 29 3/8 inches. Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio.
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This art making workshop is designed for students Grade 2-6 and is based on the painting *Barber Shop* 1946 by Jacob Lawrence.

Background Information

Jacob Lawrence is known today as a "storyteller artist." His many paintings show the lives of the people around him in Harlem, New York, the community where he grew up. He loved the energy of the city and was excited by the interesting street scenes. As a child Lawrence saw that the barbershop was a place for men to chat and socialize together while having a shave and haircut. It was the energy of the shop, the bright colors and interesting shapes that inspired him to make a painting about it.

Students should look at this painting in detail and notice how he repeated certain shapes and colors to create this dynamic composition. Large triangles, representing the clients' capes, overlap one another in a variety of colors and the barbers have shirts that match the smocks. Some of the fabrics have patterns to create more interest. Students should employ these techniques in their own work. Note the angles, shapes and size of the barbers' arms and hands. Lawrence once said, "I love hands, I think hands are very beautiful. At times I exaggerate the hand to show its importance as a useful tool." (Linda Freeman, [Jacob Lawrence: The Glory of Expression](#). Chappaqua, NY: L & S Video, 1998. www.landsvideo.com) Students may wish to exaggerate features in their work to highlight something of importance to them.

After studying the painting *Barber Shop* students should prepare to create their own "Story in Art" by using a similar style and palette of colors to create their own story about something that is of excitement and interest in their lives.

Objectives

To encourage students to examine the strong style and technique of Lawrence's work and then create a unique painting of their own in a similar style to that of Jacob Lawrence. They may wish to look at other pieces of his work for further inspiration.

To encourage students to look at Lawrence's work and appreciate his use of color and placement of forms to create balanced and dynamic compositions.

Lawrence worked in strong bold areas of flat color, introducing pattern to create further interest. His geometric lines are clean and angular and his compositions fill the canvas. Students should plan to create a similar effect with their work.

Topics for Painted Stories

Using a similar style and palette of color as Lawrence used, students should prepare to create a painting featuring three to five simple human images. They should create geometric shapes and pay attention to the repeated use of both shapes *and* colors to create a powerful composition. The design should cover the whole paper and attention should be paid to background shapes and colors as well as the main subject matter.

Students may choose from the following topics adding appropriate surroundings and detail:

- on the block
- at the library
- in the mall
- playing baseball
- on the soccer field
- in the art room
- at the market
- playing ball
- at the park

Materials for Painted Stories

medium sized sheets of white paper (14" x 17")
markers

tempera paint of assorted colors
paintbrushes of assorted sizes
posters of *Barber Shop* for direct reference
other posters of Lawrence's work for ideas and inspiration



Summer Street Scene 1948
Egg tempera on hardboard, 20 3/8" x 24 1/4 inches.
Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, NY
© 2005 The Estate of Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, NY.



Migration of the Negro, Panel 1 1940/41
Casein Tempera on hardboard, 12 x 14 inches. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC. © 2005 The Estate of Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, NY.

Activity

With time to consider their work prior to the workshop students could collect images from newspapers and magazines as reference for their paintings.

Using three to five images of the human form based on the suggested topics students should first draw out their designs and then begin to paint, using repeated areas of flat color and incorporating pattern for interest. Images should be clear with clean edges in the style of Jacob Lawrence. Attention should be given to the surrounding details and images, which can also be colorful and geometric.

Students should select a color palette of 5–6 colors. In *Barber Shop* Lawrence used red, orange, green, blue, black and white: whereas in other pieces he limited his palette even more. It creates a real cohesion and overall balance to the piece if colors are carefully considered and placed.

If photographs can be taken throughout the workshop they will serve as an exciting stimulus, particularly if taken with a digital camera and shown to the students at the end of the workshop. Children love to see themselves at work and photos serve as a great reinforcement for the value of the project.

