

Special Exhibition Teacher's Resource Guide

***Jacob Lawrence: Three Series of Prints  
Genesis – Toussaint L'Ouverture - Hiroshima***

January 26 – May 4, 2008



Exhibition organized by Landau Traveling Exhibitions, Los Angeles, CA - Peter T. Nesbett, Curator

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## **Teacher's Resource Guide**

	<i>Page</i>
<b>Exhibition Overview</b>	
Summary	3
Toussaint L'Ouverture Series	3
Object Labels	4
<b>About the Artist</b>	
Biography	6
Themes	8
Quotes	9
<b>Pre-Visit Materials</b>	
History: Black History Month Overview	10
History: Art Movement	11
The Harlem Renaissance	11
Key Artists in the Harlem Renaissance	12
General Toussaint L'Ouverture	14
Media: Jacob Lawrence & the Silkscreen Technique	15
Further Information	16
Vocabulary List	18
<b>Post-Visit Materials</b>	
Questions for comprehension	19
Themes for extended writing	19
Project Ideas	19
Worksheets	21

This guide created January, 2008 by Nicole Ciccotelli, Associate Curator of Education  
The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art

## **Exhibition Overview**

*Alexandra Libby, Assistant Curator of European Art  
The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art*

### **Summary**

Featuring 44 works including 31 color prints and 13 text pages from the series *Eight Passages for The Book of Genesis, Hiroshima, and Toussaint L'Ouverture*, this exhibition offers a sampling of the work of Jacob Lawrence, among the best-known African-American artists of the 20th Century. Incorporating the figure of Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture, Mr. Lawrence's work invokes the power of liberation narratives, showing his strong grasp of social injustice, nationally and internationally, while maintaining fantastic artistic integrity.

### **Toussaint L'Ouverture Series**

Jacob Lawrence's *Toussaint L'Ouverture* prints also find their origins in the past. These sixteen prints are excerpts from a larger story about a Haitian-born slave who fought and died for Haiti's independence from French colonial rule in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Through his efforts, Haiti became the first independent republic to be run by people of African descent.

Lawrence originally painted forty-one paintings on the subject in 1937-38, which depicted the full life of L'Ouverture. They were both stark indictments of slavery and colonialism, and also empowering images of struggle through education, negotiation, and self-defense. Lawrence began making the prints after the painted series in 1986, working on the project every year until his death in 2000. Rather than translating the paintings to print, however, Lawrence instead saw this as an opportunity to change the forms, composition, and colors. "It would be very boring for me to try to copy what's already done," Lawrence said, "so it becomes a new work—the same imagery and the same story, but a new work."

Lawrence was commissioned to create the *Toussaint L'Ouverture* prints for a fundraiser at the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans (where the original paintings remain today). His willingness to revisit the subject may have been inspired by contemporary events in Haiti. In 1986, the year Lawrence completed the first print, the thirty-year Duvalier dictatorship ended—a signal of the dramatic transformation to follow. For Lawrence, Toussaint L'Ouverture's life provided a heroic example of how one oppressed person, who lacked a formal education, was able to overcome great obstacles to better his own condition and that of others.

## **Object Labels – Toussaint L'Ouverture**

### *General Toussaint L'Ouverture, 1986*

Portraying L'Ouverture in profile—a standard of noble portraiture—with his distinctive features sharply articulated, Lawrence, too, pays homage to L'Ouverture as a dignified military leader, powerful intellectual, and founding father of the first independent republic governed by people of African descent. Rich colors further ennoble the portrait as a vibrant gold climbs the lapel of L'Ouverture's coat and radiates against a lush red, reminiscent of French regal robes.

### *The Capture, 1987*

The war for Haitian independence was fought not only against the white colonists but also against Haiti's interracial population, which, for the most part, was free, owned property, and actively supported the repression of blacks. In this print, Jacob Lawrence depicts General L'Ouverture's defeat of the interracial town, Marmalade. Although this was a decisive victory for L'Ouverture's forces, the mood of the print is somewhat somber. Pictured on horseback, the army and its captives are slumped over with their gazes turned down—perhaps a reflection of Lawrence's own disappointment concerning the divisiveness of racial identity.

### *To Preserve their Freedom, 1988*

### *The Coachman, 1990*

### *Flotilla, 1996*

### *Contemplation, 1993*

Just as Jacob Lawrence sought to inspire harmony and acceptance through his art, contemporary written sources characterize Toussaint L'Ouverture as a man who advocated contemplation, education, and negotiation over the violence of revolution. Picturing L'Ouverture seated at a table reading by candlelight, Lawrence reinforces the general as an intellectual and celebrates the idea that his strength derived from education. The books in the upper right corner line up like soldiers—L'Ouverture's *true* troops—and the bright flame of the candle evokes the idea that the pursuit of knowledge can illuminate the future path for a new nation.

### *St. Marc, 1994*

Among the Haitian landmarks recaptured by Toussaint L'Ouverture from the British soldiers in the early 1790s was the major port of St. Marc. In order to communicate the significance of this accomplishment and endow the composition with the appropriate dynamism and energy, Lawrence used strong diagonal lines and confident, bold shapes, such as the triangle. L'Ouverture's shoes, clothing patterns, and even his posture all loosely follow the triangular

form, giving the General a sense of stability and command presence, and the overall print a sensation of vitality and victory.

*Strategy, 1994*

After he was freed, Toussaint L'Ouverture became involved in a slave uprising organized by three Haitian leaders, Jean François, Georges Biassou, and Jeannot. Pictured here is one of the many clandestine meetings at which the men, along with L'Ouverture, organized the details of the coup. To convey the secrecy of the event and scarcity of resources, Lawrence depicts the men in the midst of the uncultivated Haitian terrain, surrounded by tall, sinuous blades of grass.

*The Burning, 1997*

After Napoleon's troops invaded Haiti, L'Ouverture and his army set fire to their villages and took refuge in the mountains in order that the French could not benefit from their labors. To emphasize the desperation of this act, Lawrence composes a scene in which more than half the picture is comprised of dense vegetation. Dwarfed by the Haitian terrain—whose plant life resembles the flames of the fire—the homes appear helpless against impending devastation, and act as a powerful reminder of the extreme measures the Haitians took in defense of their country.

*The Opener, 1997*

French for “opening,” *L'Ouverture*, the surname the general adopted in 1793, may refer to the path he forged for himself, his ability to exploit his enemies' weaknesses, or, as some have joked, to the large gap between his teeth courtesy of a spent bullet. More likely, “opening” signifies the broadening opportunities L'Ouverture's leadership provided for black Haitians. In this image, Lawrence underscores the notion of “opening” or progress through composition and line. By angling the shape of the terrain and the rider in an ascending motion, from the lower left to upper right, Lawrence suggests clearly L'Ouverture's commitment to forward movement.

## About the Artist

### Biography: Jacob Lawrence (September 7, 1917 – June 9, 2000)



Jacob Lawrence was an African American painter and printmaker. His style is referred to as Dynamic Cubism, but rather than be influenced by European Art (as most Cubists were), he was influenced by his community, Harlem. He and his wife, fellow artist Gwendolyn Knight, worked together to send a social message out to the world – the everyday man has a place in history, along side the heroes.

He was born in Atlantic City, NJ. At the age of 13, he moved with his Mother and siblings to New York City's Harlem neighborhood – the area above 110<sup>th</sup> Street. This area became Jacob's inspiration in later years. We know it as the cradle of the Harlem Renaissance – a time in art when creation of music, visual art, writing, dance and theater was booming and the work was plentiful.

After dropping out of high school at 16, Lawrence worked in a laundry and a printing plant. More importantly, he attended classes at the Harlem Art Workshop, taught by his mentor, the African American artist Charles Alston. This is where his skills were cultivated and refined.

His early work centered on Harlem life. Images of the people, rooms, front stairways, and stores filled his paintings – these were the things he saw right before him. These people were always shown simply – bold colors, flat shapes – for he felt that complex stories warranted simple art style. The message was clear – he respected and enjoyed his community and his neighbors.

Later work of Harlem's community changed – just as the community itself changed. Images of poverty and crime, racial tension, and police brutality became more prevalent as the world around Lawrence took these same turns.



In 1939, Jacob Lawrence joined the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project. This provided artists with materials and space to concentrate on creating art, rather than worrying about their next paycheck. In addition to getting paid,

he was able to study and work with such notable Harlem Renaissance artists as Alston and Henry Bannarn in the Alston-Bannarn workshop. Not long after receiving this position, Jacob married fellow artist, Gwendolyn Knight.

This program lasted only a year, leaving many artists to continue on their own. Jacob's work continued successfully, leading to works in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art, 1941. Lawrence was, soon after, the first African American artist to have a one-man exhibition at the MOMA in 1944.



Many people influenced Jacob's work. He shared a studio space with Romare Bearden, another well-known Harlem artist. Jacob's mentor was African American artist Charles Alston (1907-1977). He gave Lawrence studio space and guidance, and introduced him to other influential artists like Josef Albers. His wife, Gwendolyn, was also a source of inspiration.

Lawrence lived in New York until 1971, where he created paintings and prints, and taught at many colleges and universities. He and Gwendolyn then moved to Seattle, Washington. He became a professor at the University of Washington, until his retirement in 1983.

Jacob was honored with many accolades in his lifetime, including the Springarn Medal, the NAACP Black Artists Award, and the National Medal of Arts.

Lawrence worked consistently until his death in 2000. He always worked as an artist, through success and challenge, and his joyful work represents the fondness he held for his community, and mankind.



## Themes: Jacob Lawrence

Jacob Lawrence preferred to use figures in his work, at a time when Expressionism was taking over America and non-objective paintings were in the mainstream. He was a storyteller, choosing to create series of paintings, rather than individual works. Lawrence often felt the stories he wanted to tell could not be told in a single work.

Lawrence's first series of paintings, done at the age of 21, was of the Haitian General Toussaint L'Ouverture. These paintings were done with inexpensive paints that have deteriorated over time. The series was revisited in the 1980's when the Amistad Research Center commissioned him to do a series based on L'Ouverture – rather than copy his old works, he used new imagery and a new medium: silk screen printmaking.



Through another series of paintings, in *The Great Migration*, Jacob Lawrence illustrates the mass exodus of African-Americans who moved to the North in search of a better life. Lawrence's parents were among those who

migrated between 1916-1919, considered the first wave of the migration. Lawrence himself was not a direct witness to the migration, but his artistic talent prompted his teachers and friends to persuade him to express those events in paintings. Subsequently, after extensive research, Lawrence gathered enough information about the migration to compile a story in paintings about the subject. The paintings are now housed in The Museum of Modern Art.

Notable figures in the history of America that have found their way into Jacob's series include Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and John Brown.

Lawrence is very fond of showing images of people working together and building. A collector of antique tools, Lawrence felt that the act of building together brought races and cultures together in ways few other endeavors could do. Other themes that captivated Lawrence include war, theater, Nigeria, Hiroshima, and, of course, his beloved Harlem neighborhood.



## **Quotes: Jacob Lawrence**

*“To best express these subjects I rely on composition—which to me is the essence of creative painting.” 1960*

*“For me a painting should have three things: universality, clarity and strength. Universality so that it may be understood by all men. Clarity and strength so that it may be aesthetically good.”*

*“I attended church, I attended Sunday school, and I remember the ministers giving very passionate sermons pertaining to the Creation. This was over fifty years ago, and you know, these things stay with you even though you don't realize what an impact these experiences are making on you at the time. As I was doing the series I think that this was in the back of my mind, hearing this minister talk about these things.”*

*“Most of my work depicts events from the many Harlems which exist throughout the United States. This is my genre... the happiness, tragedies, and the sorrows of mankind as realized in the teeming black ghetto.”*

*“My belief is that it is most important for an artist to develop an approach and philosophy about life — if he has developed this philosophy, he does not put paint on canvas, he puts himself on canvas.” 1946*

*“I used my own experience... I don't think I could have executed the Japanese [features], and I don't think it was important either. I didn't want it to be an illustration of that sort; I wanted it to be in terms of man's inhumanity to man—a universal kind of statement.” 1984 (on Hiroshima)*

*“Years ago, I was just interested in expressing the Negro in American life, but a larger concern, an expression of humanity and of America, developed.” 1961*

*“I like the symbolism [of the builder],” Lawrence admitted, “I think of it as man's aspiration, as a constructive tool—man building.” 1977*

*“This is my genre,” Lawrence once said. “My surroundings. The people I know ... the happiness, tragedies, and the sorrows of mankind ... I am part of the Black community, so I am the Black community speaking.”*

## Pre-Visit Materials

### History: Black History Month Overview

Even though African Americans have had the right to vote in the United States since the passing of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment on February 3, 1870, the history of the United States of America has not always included African Americans and their stories. Key historical moments, disputes, accomplishments, and figures had been left out of the textbooks until one man saw the opportunity for change.



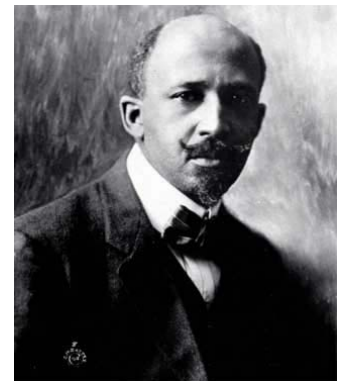
In 1926, Negro History Week was first recognized by Dr. Carter G. Woodson.

The son of former slaves, Woodson worked in Kentucky coal mines early in life. At the age of 20, he started high school, and went on to earn his doctorate at Harvard University. During this study, he noticed that Black Americans were scarce in history books, and established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915.

In 1916, he founded the *Journal of Negro History*, and ten years later, launched Negro History Week to focus on the many contributions of blacks to American society. Woodson chose the second week of February for this celebration because it contained the birthdays of two figures whose work was instrumental in freedoms for all black Americans – Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.

This eventually grew to an entire month of recognizing African Americans through the work of W. E. B. DuBois, the co founder of the NAACP – National Association for the Advancement of Colored People – in 1909.

Born, February 23, 1868, William Edward Burghardt DuBois was a noted scholar, editor, and African American activist. Throughout his life DuBois fought discrimination and racism. He made significant contributions to debates about race, politics, and history in the United States in the first half of the 20th century, primarily through his writing and impassioned speaking on race relations. By the time he died in 1963, he had written 17 books, edited four journals, and played a key role in reshaping black-white relations in America.



## History: Art Movement

### The Harlem Renaissance



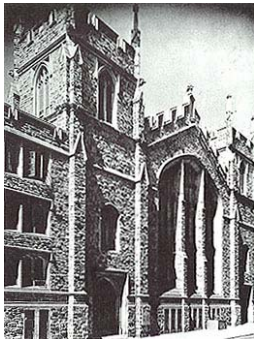
Harlem Renaissance, an African American cultural movement of the 1920s and early 1930s, was centered in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. Various known as the New Negro movement, the New Negro Renaissance, and the Negro Renaissance, the movement emerged toward the end of World War I in 1918, blossomed in the mid- to late 1920s, and then faded in the mid-1930s.

The people who lived in Harlem at this time came from all over the country. Harlem was seen not only as a center of African American culture in the US, but the center for the whole world.

The Harlem Renaissance marked the first time that mainstream publishers and critics took African American literature seriously, and acknowledged that African American literature and arts attracted significant attention from the nation at large. Although it was primarily a literary movement, it was closely related to developments in African American music, theater, art, and politics.



At the heart of the Harlem community was the Abyssinian Baptist Church. It traces its roots to 1808, when parishioners left the First Baptist Church of New York, in protest over racially segregated seating. In 1908, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. became pastor of the church, and in 1923, oversaw its move uptown to West 138<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem. His son, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. followed in his father's footsteps, and under his direction, the congregation was the largest of any Protestant church in America by 1935.



It was an important center for non-secular music during the Harlem Renaissance, and remains a center for the Harlem gospel tradition today. The church is active and flourishing today under the direction of Reverend Calvin O. Butts.

## Key Artists of the Harlem Renaissance

### Visual Artists

Romare Bearden



Lois Mailou Jones



Gwendolyn Knight &  
Jacob Lawrence



Augusta Savage



William Henry  
Johnson



Charles Alston



### Writers

Langston Hughes



Zora Neale Hurston



Claude McKay



**Actors**

Paul Robeson



Josephine Baker



Florence Mills, known  
as "Blackbird"



**Musicians**

Louis Armstrong



Billie Holliday



Thomas "Fats" Waller



Bessie Smith



Duke Ellington



Jelly Roll Morton



## General Toussaint L'Ouverture

Toussaint L'Ouverture (20 May, 1743—8 April, 1803) was an important leader of the Haitian Revolution and the first leader of a free Haiti. In the struggle against the institution of slavery, L'Ouverture defeated French, Spanish, and British armies, emancipated the slave population, secured control over Haiti, and established a Haitian constitution.



Born Toussaint Bréda—Bréda was the name of the plantation to which he was enslaved—he changed his surname to the French word for “opening” in 1793. Although born a slave, L'Ouverture was relatively fortunate. He was employed as a coachman by his master, Bayou de Libertas, which sheltered him from the horrific treatment most black slaves suffered. As a boy he taught himself to read and write—making him one of the few literate black men in Haiti—and later became deeply influenced by the writings of the renowned 18<sup>th</sup>-century thinker, Guillaume-Thomas “Abbé”

Raynal, who predicted that a black man would become the emancipator of his race.

In 1791, L'Ouverture became involved with abolitionist forces and quickly rose to the level of chief military commander. When the Spanish army promised to support emancipation of slaves, L'Ouverture organized an uprising of allied Haitian slaves. When the Spanish failed to keep that promise, L'Ouverture allied himself with the French, who also declared intentions to abolish slavery. When this alliance, too, proved false, L'Ouverture continued to campaign for independence and by 1797 he had defeated all European contingents and secured control over the island.



*Written by Alexandra Libby, Assistant Curator of European Art, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2008*

## Media: Jacob Lawrence & the Silkscreen Technique

Silkscreen printing, the medium Lawrence used for the works in the present exhibition, was not always associated with art. Originally used for mass-produced commercial images, it was not until the 1950s and 1960s that it became accepted as an artistic medium.



To make a silkscreen print, a piece of silk or other mesh material is tightly stretched over a wooden frame, creating a screen.

Paper is placed below the screen and a stencil is affixed on top—a separate stencil is required for each color.

A squeegee is then used to force paint through the silk or mesh—the stencil providing boundaries for the paint—and the color is deposited upon the surface of the sheet below.

Before printing the final edition, trial proofs are made to determine whether alterations to the stencils are necessary.

When a full run of one color is completed, the screen is thoroughly cleaned before other colors are printed.

Jacob Lawrence made several prints in the latter part of his career, and often reworked some of his earlier paintings into graphic works. In the *Toussaint L'Ouverture* group—one of his earliest painted series (1938) — he saw an opportunity to alter form, composition, and color. Stylistically different from his paintings, the prints are simplified, have a more limited in color palette, and focus less on detail and modeling. Instead of making the screenprints himself, however, Lawrence created paintings that could be made into prints by the printmaking studio—a technique long employed in the history of art.



*Written by Alexandra Libby, Assistant Curator of European Art, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2008*

## Further Information

### Books

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## **School Tours**

Booking your school tour is simple! Log on to [www.ringling.org](http://www.ringling.org) for details, and visit the Scholastic Programs page for teacher resources and tour information.

## **Vocabulary List**

The following words are used throughout the teacher's resource guide and exhibition. Have students become familiar with their definitions and the context in which they are used.

1. Activist
2. Color
3. Composition
4. Contemporaries
5. Cubism
6. Dynamic Cubism
7. Emancipation
8. Exhibition
9. Exodus
10. Expressionism
11. Federal Art Project
12. Flotilla
13. Form
14. Genre
15. Haiti
16. Harlem
17. Harlem Renaissance
18. Illustration
19. Inspiration
20. Mentor
21. Migration
22. NAACP
23. Non-Objective Art
24. Printmaker
25. Proofs
26. Renaissance
27. Series
28. Silkscreen
29. Slavery
30. Stencil
31. Storyboard
32. Symbolism
33. Works Progress Administration

## **Post-Visit Materials**

### **Questions for comprehension:**

1. Where was Jacob Lawrence born?
2. Where is Harlem?
3. What factors influenced Lawrence in his early years?
4. Where did Lawrence learn to make art?
5. What artists mentored Lawrence?
6. What themes were important in Lawrence’s work?

### **Themes for extended writing:**

1. What inspired Jacob Lawrence?
2. How are symbols used in Lawrence’s work?
3. Why did he use series of paintings, instead of single works?
4. How did Lawrence’s community affect his artistic point of view?
5. What had the largest impact on Lawrence’s art?
6. Why did they refer to this time in Harlem as a “Renaissance?”

### **Project Ideas:**

#### **Storyboarding**

Using the images provided, the students can place the *Toussaint L’Ouverture* images in order, telling the story as it happens. Clues can be found in the wall text, imagery, and historical accounts of the battle and life of L’Ouverture.

Create your own storyboard about a historical figure. Give students 10 blank index cards, with the directive to illustrate the story step by step. Writing an outline at the beginning, captions for the cards, and a “wall label” for each piece is often very beneficial.

#### **Venn Diagram: Jacob Lawrence and Toussaint L’Ouverture**

Compare and contrast the life and work of two people using a Venn Diagram. The attached sheets can be used to compare the following:

Leaders of the African American Community:  
Jacob Lawrence and Toussaint L’Ouverture

Studio-mates and Contemporaries:

Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden

An Artistic Marriage:  
Gwendolyn Knight and Jacob Lawrence

Jacob Lawrence's Mentors:  
Augusta Savage and Charles Alston

Women in the Harlem Renaissance:  
Zora Neale Hurston and Josephine Baker

Contrasting Time Periods:  
Jacob Lawrence and Jean Michel Basquait

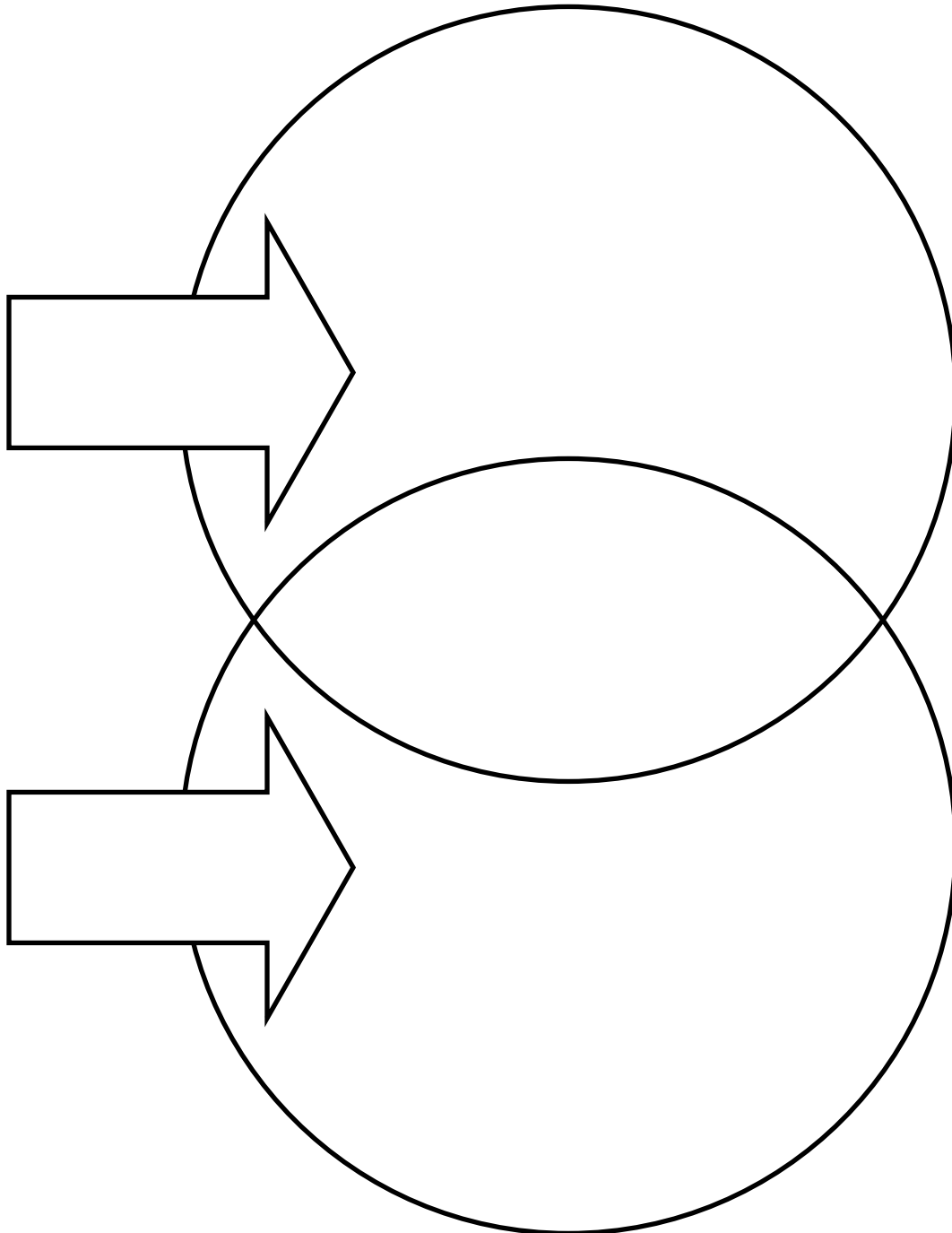
Similar Artistic Media:  
Jacob Lawrence and Andy Warhol

Create your own Venn Diagrams at **Teachnology**:  
[http://www.teach-nology.com/web\\_tools/graphic\\_org/venn\\_diagrams/](http://www.teach-nology.com/web_tools/graphic_org/venn_diagrams/)

### **Venn Diagram**

Compare and contrast two different people or things using this Venn Diagram.

1. In the top arrow, write the name of the first subject.
2. In the bottom arrow, write the name of the second subject.
3. In the top circle, list characteristics that are only true for the top subject.
4. In the bottom circle, list characteristics that are only true for the bottom subject.
5. Where the circles overlap, list characteristics that are true of both subjects.



## **Sketching a Series, Making a Storyboard**

Jacob Lawrence felt stories could be told by using many panels, or paintings in a series. He felt stories about notable African Americans made good subjects – stories about Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and many of his neighbors in Harlem found their way into his work.

Ideas:

- What stories do you like best? (Fairy tales, mysteries, scary stories, historical stories, etc.)
- What story could be told very well in pictures, with few words?

Choose a story to tell in series form, and answer these questions to get your ideas started:

- Story name:
- Who are the characters?
- What is the setting?
- What time period is the story in?
- What is the main plot?
- What colors will help to tell the story?
- What story elements can you use symbols for?

## Storyboard Squares

Each series Jacob Lawrence created is very much like a storyboard – similar to a comic strip, storyboards tell stories using many frames or pictures in succession.

Sketch each section of your story in the box below. Write notes and dialogue next to the box for comprehension.

Make more copies if you need more squares.

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## Storyboarding *Toussaint L'Ouverture*

Using storyboarding as your basis, try creating a storyboard of someone else's works.

1. Take the images from Jacob Lawrence's *Toussaint L'Ouverture* series and cut them out, so each is on its own square.
2. Then, put them in order from start to finish – the same order in which the actual events occurred in history. Use the wall text in this packet to help you figure out the story.
3. Don't be afraid to try different things - re-arrange the images, and see if you can tell a different story!

Images:



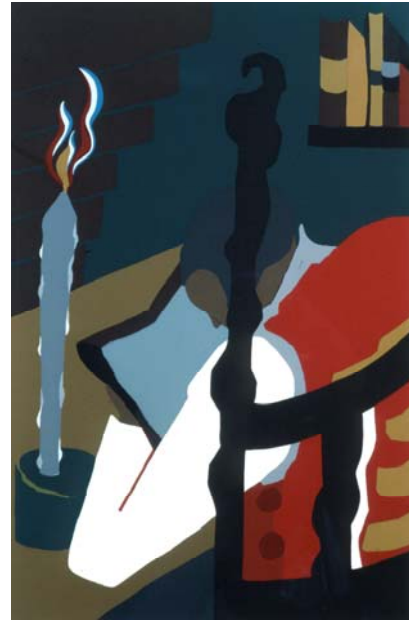
***General Toussaint L'Ouverture***  
Jacob Lawrence  
Toussaint L'Ouverture Series, 1986



***The Capture***  
Jacob Lawrence  
Toussaint L'Ouverture Series, 1987



***The Coachman***  
Jacob Lawrence  
Toussaint L'Ouverture Series, 1990



***Contemplation***  
Jacob Lawrence  
Toussaint L'Ouverture Series, 1993



***The Opener***  
Jacob Lawrence  
Toussaint L'Ouverture Series, 1997



***Flotilla***  
Jacob Lawrence  
Toussaint L'Ouverture Series, 1997



***The Burning***  
Jacob Lawrence  
Toussaint L'Ouverture Series, 1997



***Strategy***  
Jacob Lawrence  
Toussaint L'Ouverture Series, 1994



***St. Marc***  
Jacob Lawrence  
Toussaint L'Ouverture Series, 1994



***To Preserve Their Freedom***  
Jacob Lawrence  
Toussaint L'Ouverture Series, 1988