

THE ARTIST-ACTIVIST: HISTORY AND HEALING THROUGH ART

By **Angela Davis Johnson**

I was in the winter of my life when I first understood there is peace in the brushstrokes of a painting. I was fourteen years old, which to some may seem like the spring of life, but for me, everything had become numb because of a major change. My mother, my siblings, and I had fled the sandy coast of Norfolk, Virginia, to escape homelessness and landed in the gumbo mud of Lambrook in Phillips County, Arkansas. We had been evicted from our apartment, and rather than live in a shelter, my mother bravely relocated us to our family-owned homestead where she grew up. We faced many challenges in our new rural community. Phillips County, where one of the largest lynchings in America took place during the 1919 Elaine Riots, was still affected by the tendrils of deep-rooted racism. The Elaine School District, the primary education system for the surrounding area, was in constant threat of being taken over by the state and in academic distress. Though the lack of jobs beyond farming made it difficult for everyone in the community, my family faced tremendous judgment and mistreatment from our neighbors because of our poverty.

Despite these trials, my mother always stressed the importance of seeing and cultivating our own beauty through art and prayer. She made creativity a priority for the renewal of our spirits. We sang songs, read books, and whittled carvings from broken branches of cedar, oak, and fruit trees as we cleared the land and rebuilt our life. My mother also encouraged me to continue my studies of the visual arts by buying supplies whenever she could spare, as well as allowing me to spend hours at the nearest accessible public library (thirty minutes away in Helena, AR) to research art movements and methods. Painting was my way to process and heal. In an early piece I created, *Through the Darkness, Into the Light*,² my healing process is particularly evident. When I started this painting, I was navigating the hardships of my environment by studying history. I read about Jewish families who hid in a cave for more than a year during the Holocaust and I became encouraged by their strength and resilience. To express this, I painted with vibrant saturated colors an image of a Black girl sitting beneath a tree surrounded by books as Jewish men, women, and children exited a dark cavernous hole. Painting their freedom felt like my freedom. With each brushstroke I put all of my problems on the canvas and I could see my way through the growing pains.

What started as a cathartic practice of retelling a story became a way to connect with others and their life experiences. At the present time, I continue to approach art

and wellness by retelling, amplifying, and uplifting difficult but important stories. However, being an artist with an interest in African American and world history, as well as social justice issues, I am often confronted with imagery and text that is difficult to absorb both mentally and spiritually. As a means to gain a deeper understanding of my craft and life, I use certain methodologies (i.e., meditation, connecting with nature, studying inspirational artists) that aid how I maneuver through these moments and process information. Meditating and connecting with nature is an important methodology because it allows one to reflect deeply on a subject and feel connected to something larger than one's self. Along with meditation and connecting with nature, part of my process has become searching and learning from modern and contemporary artists who resonate with my own beliefs—those who have a proclivity to illuminate the past and to bring understanding to the present, which could potentially allow others to reimagine the future.

As a way to speak truth about my journey as an artist-activist for young people and educators curious about how history and healing converge in art, in this article I share how I and other artists have been able to activate healing spaces and de-familiarize social constructs such as race, gender, and class through exploring the past and present; explain how investigating the past can act as a healing tool; and also, unpack how this form of activism is expressed through a Black feminine artistic practice. By providing the reader with glimpses and snapshots of my journey, I hope to create a spark in the minds of students, educators, and organizers to consider ways they can use art to make meaning in their lives and work to address social justice issues.

Engaging Spaces as Activism

To engage space as an artist is to challenge perceptions by interrupting and disrupting social environments with your voice and body. I began to explore this idea not because of art, but because of a personal incident that happened when I was a teenager. My sisters and I would often visit our cousins in Little Rock, AR, for slumber-party-like weekends. One particular visit, we went to the mall to go to a popular teenage jewelry and accessories store. The sight of five Black girls from ages ten to sixteen must have been alarming to the staff, because everywhere we went, they followed. There were other groups of teenagers, all white, who walked through the store freely, but it was our presence that elicited surveillance. At that time, this incident sparked anger and frustration in me, but it also left me curious about the power of being in a space and activating it. Whether my presence was perceived as a threat or nuisance, I was changing, taking up, and creating space.

As I grew older, this curiosity developed into an art practice. Early on, I would conduct small personal performances at bus stops, acting as though I was a teenage

unwed mother when in fact I was a twenty-eight-year-old childless working artist. I did this to disrupt my own perception about the expectations of young Black female bodies. Later, I created a piece, *When the Sun and the Moon Stood Still, I Witnessed*,³ which brought awareness to the issue of the growing number of missing women of color. I presented paintings of two missing persons of color (a woman from Little Rock, Arkansas, and a schoolgirl from Chibok, Nigeria) at various non-typical art locations such as a community college, a library, and street corners throughout the city of Little Rock to engage spaces and raise consciousness about this issue.

To enhance my knowledge of how to use my body as an art form, I looked to the work of artist Carrie Mae Weems. At a panel discussion on the Black aesthetic, I had the privilege to hear Weems recite the words of her powerful piece *From Here I saw what happened and I Cried*. With the cadence of her voice and the placement of text contrasting with thirty-four images of enslaved Africans, Weems not only activated the auditorium as a space where the presence of the Black spirit was honored, but she de-familiarized the audience's expectations of the stereotypical images attributed to our Black ancestors. Weems, who is primarily known as a photographer, has in her words "developed a complex body of art that has at various times employed photographs, text, fabric, audio, digital images, installation, and, most recently, video."⁴ The crux of Weems's healing and activism work lies in the way she positions and documents her physical body in spaces that are historically seen as unavailable to persons of color, especially women. Her work shatters preconceived limitations by allowing viewers to shed the negative weight of stereotypes and embody their true selves. By countering the void of the Black feminine presence in the historical and contemporary senses, she creates space for both the marginalized and the hegemonic community to confront and undo the damage of societal oppression via individual and institutional practices. Observing her use of performance art has guided many of my pieces—not only aesthetically, but I resonate with her self-proclamation to investigate family relationships, gender roles, the history of racism, sexism, class, and various political systems by presenting my body as a vessel to recognize and speak back to these aspects of society.

Reconstructing the Black Aesthetic as Activism

In my experience, the Black female presence in society, and particularly in art, has been either considered angry, hyper-sexualized, victimized, or rendered invisible.⁵ To counter the narrow essentialist and exclusionary treatment of Black women, I have made the Black woman figure a central focus in my work. I believe telling my own story, and showing the complexity of the Black woman, is an essential way for me to reconstruct this viewpoint and change the narrative. For example, I painted a series of small works titled *She Has A*

Name.⁶ I was inspired to create this series after a formative trip to New Orleans where I almost became lost and missing. The last day I was there, my car broke down and I was disoriented in the city streets. I was without a phone, money, or car, and no one would help me, including a female officer. It was as though I was invisible. A few days earlier, a young Black female teacher had gone missing in New Orleans, and I wondered, "What if I had been her and no one would help me?" It made me consider the missing and invisible—Black women who do not make the news headlines. Since that time, it has become important for me to make the invisible seen.

My desire as an artist-activist to connect with social issues and bring greater awareness and understanding to these experiences is grounded in the tradition of other great Black women artists who have done the same, including master printmaker and mixed media artist Delita Martin. In her work she refutes the notion that Black women are undesirable by reframing domestic workers, grandmothers, and average sisters as magical women, bringing visibility and vibrancy to our stories. "I wanted to take my work and reconstruct the identity of Black women. You look historically . . . when you think about Mammy, Jezebel and Sapphire and all those stereotypes, it wasn't a very positive outlook. Well, I wanted to take these images of women and present them in a different way."⁷ Martin uses her media of printmaking, drawing, and painting to recreate images and stereotypes of Black women who have, in the past and even still today, been ignored for their contribution as unrelenting and instrumental pillars in communities. Gathering inspiration from family and community members, she layers symbols with warm earth and jewel tones and overlays them with charcoal drawings of Black women on large paper. Her visual vocabulary expands from Italian architecture to feminized domestic objects such as spoons, bowls, scarves, and headdresses to show the depth and span of our presence. Martin's work weaves together beautiful visual expressions of the true complexity of Black womanhood. In an effort to undo the ugliness that has been projected on the Black woman, she stitches a clearer picture of us through memories, dreams, and history. Her work is a balm for many Black women because it validates our being, and when looking at her work we are seeing our true reflections.

Collaborative Civic Art as Activism

As an artist-activist, I balance my work between a studio practice that creates content about historical events and social issues to inform an audience, and a social practice in which I execute a vision to engage with a particular community. In a recent project, *The Hollerin' Quiet*,⁸ I employed both practices. In collaboration with Philadelphia artist Serena Muthi Reed, a multimedia composer and visual artist, I created a site-specific installation that transformed a chapel into a healing space to honor missing Black women throughout history. Reed and I combined our artistic strengths

to explore a sankofic practice by reverencing ancestral gifts in order to move forward to reimagine a greater present and future. For the project, I created large paintings on unstretched canvas that depicted missing Black women, from an enslaved African to a trafficked teenager. Reed created soundscapes from sonic instruments, noise, chants, stories, and repetition of the names of the missing and disappeared. Along with atmospheric sounds, the paintings, anchored and connected by strings, were placed spatially throughout the grounds for people to walk along. Using traditions such as the ring shouts, dance, and ritual, together we conducted three themed processions: to grieve, to celebrate and to shout. The morning procession began with Reed and I, wearing all white, singing and walking from our respective lodgings to the chapel. As people gathered and entered into the Hollerin' Space, they were met with the sounds of trickling water, shuffling feet, and mournful vocalizing. By noon, we cleared the space to open the floor for celebratory dancing with loud throbbing sonic music intermingled with sounds of Black life. Lastly, we deconstructed the ring shout, a pre-Christian ritual first practiced by enslaved Africans in the West Indies and United States, in which worshipers dance, praise, and shout in a circle. We sang traditional songs and improvised lyrics about contemporary issues ranging from paying student loans to police brutality. The work served as a space to de-functionalize media by creating an avenue where all stories and voices were honored; it also created a communal space where one could come to self-heal by meditating, dancing, or singing. In the next iteration of this project, I am now interested in moving toward a civic art (social practice) where we can co-create with a specific community. In this work, I hope to make shifts in a particular social justice area to address issues such as perceptions surrounding race and culture.

Historical Exploration as Healing Activism

As I stared at the photograph of Willie Brown, a Black man lynched in 1919, it was not until I noticed the way the ashes wisped around his burning body, thinly and poetically, that my spirit became open to create a work of art that spoke to the horrific history of lynching in America. In 2015, I was asked to create a body of work in conjunction with the acclaimed play *Blood at the Root*, written by Dominique Morisseau and directed by Steve Broadnax.⁹ The play examined the racial tension and miscarriage of justice that occurred during the Jena Six case, which began when nooses were hung from a tree at a high school in Jena, Louisiana, in 2006. Racial strife between community members ensued and subsequent fights broke out, which led to six Black teenagers being charged as adults for a schoolyard fight.¹⁰ Beyond the contemporary issues such as the criminalization of Black youth and racial divide, I wanted to examine at a deeper level the tinderbox subject of what the nooses meant symbolically.

My exploration naturally led further into the recesses of the history of lynching. Historian Leon Litwack states in

Without Sanctuary that between 1882 and 1968 an estimated 4,742 Black men and women died at the hands of lynch mobs.¹¹ The statistics are staggering, and for this project I needed to understand what that looked like. I spent nights searching online, and I found countless tales and photographs of Black men and women who were tortured and lynched. Though several of the images were startling in the egregious lack of compassion for humanity, it was the infamous photograph of Willie Brown that haunted me the most. It happened September 28, 1919, in Omaha, Nebraska, when Brown, an African American man, was accused of sexually assaulting a white woman. Before his trial, an angry mob demanded his release from the Douglas County Courthouse. Given into their violent hands, he was beaten, shot, and hanged, and ultimately, his remains were set on fire as men stood around to watch. As an artist-activist, in order to move beyond the horrors of lynching, I shifted the gaze by viewing the atrocities through a world built of the lynching ashes. I wanted to let the ashes speak.

In the exhibition *Ashes on the Fruit Trees*, each piece acted as a portal to remember ancestors and process both past and current trauma of racially motivated brutality. The transformative power of ashes is a metaphor that I have been thinking about for a while; ashes, though they do not resemble their former lives, still have the power to heal. By placing ashes (the past) at the roots of fruit trees (our minds), we can remember, grieve, and hopefully move toward processing this hurt in a healthy truthful way. Within this body of work, there are eight pieces that personify Ashes in the image of a Black woman and embody the Black spirit. To quote the great African American artist Eldzier Cortor, "The Black woman represents the Black race. She is the Black Spirit; she conveys a feeling of eternity and continuance of life."¹² These works reflect that sentiment. They are titled as such: *Remember. Forget. Dig. Wail. Weep. Endure. Rise. Remember.*

The work *Remember* is the first call of Ashes to acknowledge the past. Her hair, a champion tree adorned with nooses hanging from its limbs, serves as a stark reminder of the cruel brutality. Across her chest is text from filmmaker/activist Jordan Flaherty's book *Floodlines*,¹³ which gives a firsthand account of the Jena Six case and its effect not only on that community, but also the nation. At the right of the painting, the image of the lynched body of a pregnant woman is distressed, yet her face is visible and unforgettable. All of these strong images combine to strike a visual chord to remember and acknowledge these acts. I also think that to remember our past, there should be space to *Forget* as well. In the next piece, the central figure, colorful with deep dark tree hair, is surrounded with faded images of lynched men and women that disintegrate into flakes of Blackness. This painting serves the purpose of asking us to let go of what is holding us back. *Dig* represents the investigation of going beyond the surface knowledge of a situation and exploring the deeper meaning. In this piece, the upper panel depicts Ashes

digging earnestly into the lower half, which is constructed out of white and gold thread lace. Positioned in the center of the lace there is an ink transfer of the image of a lynching. *Wail* and *Weep* both show the image of two women as Ashes consoling one another, conveying the need to outwardly express grief and evoking a great sense of sadness. In contrast, *Endure* and *Rise* are the most optimistic of the works, because the Ashes are upright and they have a shock of bold color within them. These works are to honor the sacrifice and resilience of an oppressed people. *Remember* was the last painting that I created in the series. Unlike the other Ashes, the image is stripped from the outward trauma of the evidence of lynching, and all the pain rests in her heart. Her heart, which held the disintegrated image of Willie Brown, is where she can balance both the heartache and the hope of a more humane future. Collectively, these eight small drawings depict the images of Black women and spirit as hopeful sorrow songs of history and healing.¹⁴

Sense Making and Activism

When I was younger, I was not sure how my voice or art could create change in my reality, let alone help anyone else. A recent encounter, however, gave me a sense of the power of the artist-activist. At my latest exhibition, which showed the paintings from my missing women series, a security guard came into the gallery, and I was sharing with him the meaning behind the work. He revealed to me that his daughter went missing a couple of years ago. I found out that she was one of the first missing women I painted, and through my art her story had been shared from Australia to Atlanta. Unbeknownst to this grief-stricken father, he and his daughter were not forgotten. Knowing this now has given him strength to continue to search for his daughter.

Heeding the lessons of healing and prayer my mother taught when I was a child, I know that young people should not underestimate (regardless of social positioning) the power of mining the corridors of their own personal history and finding ways to connect their story with others' by using their gifts and talents. Engaging spaces, reconstructing dominant aesthetics, taking up collaborative civic art, and/or using historical exploration as a form of healing activism are just a few ways young people can work to make the world a better place.

As I continue on this path of art as activism, its meaning is ever changing and expanding. Activism through a Black feminine gaze I now define as taking care of spirit-self, family, and communities. I am learning that activism is changing the negative and oppressive dynamics of social constructs by building and connecting with community. It is enacting power through resistance with truth speaking and nurture; it is redefining limitations, moving mountains, honoring ancestors. It is creating a new image of the future.



Angela Davis Johnson is an award-winning artist who is best known for her vibrant narrative paintings that examine universal connections, identity, and historical occurrences through personal symbols. Navigating between academic influences and outsider art individuality, she creates textured figures using paint, scrap paper, and fabric within unique compositions.

Her practice has extended to installation, performance, and public art to amplify social issues. Davis Johnson was selected as 2015 Joan Mitchell/Alternate Roots Visual Arts Scholar for her work as an artist and activism. Her pieces can be seen in cultural centers, galleries, and private collections throughout the United States. A wife and mother of two, Davis Johnson lives between Little Rock, Arkansas, and Atlanta, Georgia.

Notes:

¹ Grif Stockley, *Blood In Their Eyes: The Elaine Race Massacres* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1919).

² *Through the Darkness, Into the Light*, 2000, artist's private collection.

³ *Where the Sun and Moon Stood Still, I Witnessed*, 2014, Mosaic Templars Cultural Arts Center.

⁴ Carrie Mae Weems, "Biography," accessed December 7, 2015, <http://carriemaeweems.net/bio.html>.

⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search For Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

⁶ Artist's collection.

⁷ Delita Martin, "Notes From the Road: Little Rock," *The Huffington Post*, May 5, 2014, accessed December 7, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/don-bacigalupi/delita-martin-the-road-little-rock_b_4899179.html.

⁸ Artist's collection.

⁹ Dominique Morisseau, *Blood at the Root*, 2014.

¹⁰ Jordan Flaherty, *Floodlines: Community and Resistance from Katrina to the Jena Six* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010).

¹¹ James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000), 12.

¹² James Manheim, "Cortor, Eldzier 1916–," *Encyclopedia.com*, 2004, accessed December 23, 2015, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3430800020.html>.

¹³ Flaherty, *Floodlines*.

¹⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Library, 1996). Sorrow songs as defined by W. E. B. Du Bois are the music of an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment; they tell of death and suffering and unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways.

LESSON PLAN: ART ACTIVISM IN THE CLASSROOM

By: **Angela Davis Johnson**

Overview: This lesson plan series challenges middle and high school students to develop and define their voices through art as it relates to history and society. Students will generate ideas on how to connect personal history to a shared history and investigate how the past can act as a healing tool for activism. The overall vision is to provide students with tools to amplify the voiceless, make visible little known histories, and share personal stories through art as a way to express themselves and to make changes in their communities. As a result of this lesson plan, students will gain a greater sense of the power of their own stories and relate to history in a deeper way.

National Core Arts Standards for Visual Arts

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.

Anchor Standard 4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Enduring understandings for the Visual Arts²

- Artists and designers shape artistic investigations, following or breaking with traditions in pursuit of creative artmaking goals.
- People create and interact with objects, places, and design that define, shape, enhance, and empower their lives.
- Artist and designers develop excellence through practice and constructive critique, reflecting on, revising, and refining work over time.
- Artists and other presenters consider various techniques, methods, venues, and criteria when analyzing, selecting, and curating objects artifacts, and artworks for preservation and presentation.

- Objects, artifacts, and artworks collected, preserved, or presented either by artists, museums, or other venues communicate meaning and a record of social, cultural, and political experiences resulting in the cultivating of appreciation and understanding.
- Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments.
- Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.
- People gain insights into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of art criticism.
- Through art-making, people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.
- People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.

Common Core State Standards³

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6-12.4: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6-12.7: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6-12.4: Craft and Structure

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6-12.1-3: Key Ideas and Details

Opening: Reading an Artist-Activist Journey

Have students read the accompanying article. As they read, students should make connections to the artist process of creating, performing/presenting/producing, responding, and connecting, and consider the ways in which Angela Davis Johnson is engaged in this process.

You also may want to create questions to guide students in the reading process that relate to the enduring understandings for visual arts. Possible questions are as follows: *What type of methodologies does Angela Davis Johnson use as an artist-activist? Why does she identify as an artist-activist? How does her work support this claim? What types of methodologies does Angela Davis Johnson use in her practice as an artist-activist? What similarities and differences exist between Angela Davis Johnson and other artists that you know? How impactful do you think her work is? Why or why not? Do you think youth can be artist-activists? As a young person, how might you apply the ideas shared by Angela Davis Johnson in your own life? How might you use art as a form of activism and healing in your own life and the lives of others?*

Critical Thinking and Art: I See, I Wonder, and I Think

After discussing the article, students will engage in a critical thinking process called “I See, I Wonder, I Think.”⁴ Have students examine *Through the Darkness, Into the Light*, and *When the Sun and Moon Stood Still, I Witnessed* to practice this process. Angela Davis Johnson’s artwork is available online via www.angeladavisjohnson.com. Click the tab “Work” and then “Titles” to access the art for this lesson.

Encourage students to look carefully at the work and elicit initial responses to these representations. You may also want to consult the Visual Arts Glossary⁵ to consider specific terms you may want to teach for analysis. If students need additional practice they can examine additional pieces of Angela Davis Johnson’s work (e.g., *She Has A Name, Ashes on the Fruit Trees*).

Using Art to Tell Stories

Based on their discussion of the article and critical analysis of Angela Davis Johnson’s work, students will now explore ways to use art to tell their stories. In preparation for this work, you want to encourage students to consider the underlying stories that are behind art.⁶

Explain to students that they will have the following two choices:

1. *Create a painting telling two stories as one:* Start by asking students to create one personal story and another story from an interesting historical event. Have students consider the process Angela Davis Johnson engaged with developing *Ashes on Fruit Trees*. Have students consider the following questions: What important social issues do I want to address through art? What historical event do I need to research and learn more about? How might the stories I tell through art be used as a healing tool? After identifying the personal and historical story, students will begin the creating and producing process of connecting the two stories in one painting. Then, they will share their work for an I See, I Wonder, I Think in small groups to get a sense of how an audience will respond to their work and make any necessary adjustments. Remind students that they should consider the artist-activist message of Angela Davis Johnson and consider telling stories that will have an impact on broader society; work to make the world a better place in some small way.

2. *Create a performance piece:* Start by having students explore or create an image.⁷ Then, have students develop a

choreographed performance piece based on the identified or created image. It can be a reenactment of a personal story or an event that happened in their community. Also, challenge the students to perform in a public space such as the school grounds, library, or community center once the project is complete. Students can work in groups or individually. Encourage students to consider Angela Davis Johnson’s *The Hollerin’ Quiet* and engaging spaces as activism ideas when developing their performance pieces. Remind students of the importance of connecting their performance pieces to larger social justice issues that are relevant to their experiences as youth.

Responding and Connecting to the Artist-Activist Work

Create a venue for students to present their work in public. For example, you may want to stage a mini-museum exhibit in the school or in a local community-based organization so a broader community audience may have access to their work. Or, you may utilize social media and local news outlets to distribute and raise awareness about the artist-activist work students are taking up. As part of their closing work, students must explain how they connect their work to broader understandings of society, culture, and history through development of artistic expressions. All students should also have the opportunity for others to respond to and/or interact with their artistic work in order to reflect on the larger impact of the activist-artist and consider the role of artistic criticism. Finally, they should synthesize key understandings of the artistic habits of mind.⁸ If you are considering specific assessment for students’ work in school, the National Core Arts Standards Visual Arts Model Cornerstone Assessments⁹ may be a useful resource.

Additional Resources: Examples of Art Activism

- Angela Davis Johnson www.angeladavisjohnson.com
- Angela Davis Johnson’s *Ashes on the Fruit Trees* <http://www.angeladavisjohnson.com/#!/ashes-on-the-fruit-trees/i2p3f>
- Angela Davis Johnson and Serena Muthi Reed’s *The Hollerin’ Quiet* <https://www.behance.net/gallery/28641083/Hollerin-Space-Asheville-NC>
- Delita Martin <http://www.blackboxpressstudio.com/GalleryMain.asp?GalleryID=158336&AKey=5XCHL8AH>
- Carrie Mae Weems <http://carriemaeweems.net/galleries/beacon.html>

• Jacob Lawrence's *Migration Series* <http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2015/onewayticket/>

• Zanele Muholi: *Isibonelo/Evidence* https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/zanele_muholi

• *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to Now* <https://mcachicago.org/Exhibitions/2015/The-Freedom-Principle-Experiments-In-Art-And-Music-1965-To-Now>

Notes:

¹ National Core Arts Standards, <http://www.nationalartsstandards.org>

² Ibid.

³ Common Core State Standards Initiative, <http://www.corestandards.org/>

⁴ See this video segment to learn more about this strategy: "Interpreting Ancient Art in Social Studies," Teaching Channel, <https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/interpreting-ancient-art-getty>

⁵ National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, "Glossary for National Core Arts: Visual Arts Standards," <http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/sites/default/files/NCCAS%20GLOSSARY%20for%20Visual%20Arts%20Standards%201%20column.pdf>

⁶ See this video clip for approaches to examining the stories behind art: "Examining the Stories Behind Art," Teaching Channel, <https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teaching-young-students-art>

⁷ This video segment presents an idea of how students can create art based on key ideas/vocabulary. "Illustrating Democracy: Art Brings Words to Life," Teaching Channel, <https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teaching-democracy-through-art>

⁸ This webpage offers another tool for thinking about artistic habits of mind: "8 Habits of Thinking Learned from Artists," Tchers' Voice (blog), March 3, 2015, <https://www.teachingchannel.org/blog/2015/03/03/8-habits-of-thinking>

⁹ "Visual Arts Model Cornerstone Assessments," National Core Arts Standards, <http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/mca/visual-arts>

AFTERWORD: REIMAGINING THE RACIAL PROJECT OF BLACK YOUTH ACTIVISM

By **Conra D. Gist**

I am becoming more convinced that the role of a scholar should be more closely aligned with Baldwin's conceptualization of an artist. That is, our role should be not only to inform, but also to inspire and foster a collective imagination about how to make the world a more humane dwelling place . . . making the world a more humane dwelling place, however, requires that our research and advocacy create space to foster a collective imagination among youth. While rare, these spaces hold the possibilities to reframe and reimagine the type of world in which we choose to live.¹

The critical scholar, as artist, must cultivate intellectual spaces that invite and encourage the generation of transformational and emancipatory ideas. Thus, my vision as the guest editor of the *Black History Bulletin* Volume 79, No. 1: *Youth Empowerment: Hope, Action, and Freedom* was to portray a collective radical imagination by featuring freeing-hopeful-movement-building knowledge developed by scholars and practitioners in the field. To do so, however, required assembling an eclectic and dynamic group of cultural and justice-focused contributors who could rewrite youth narratives of criminality and disposability² to instead situate youth as leaders who will make the world a more humane dwelling place. In order to highlight this type of scholarship,³ the construct of Black youth activism was situated for practitioner and scholarly rumination in a cross-disciplinary fashion to look through a prism of epistemologies and ideological perspectives, cultural legacies and traditions, and social and political practices as a type of intellectual activism.

Franklin's opening article demonstrates the ways in which political scientists can illuminate the politics of youth activism by exploring how youth have been politically active historically while also wrestling with possibilities and challenges for working on the side of justice in the current times of the Black Lives Matter Movement. Marsh's essay demonstrates how educators can use critical and public pedagogies as liberatory educational vehicles for youth by challenging them to consume and generate emancipatory