

MARIE SELBY
BOTANICAL
GARDENS



*We Dream A World: African American Landscape Painters of Mid-Century
Florida, The Highwaymen*

Visual Arts Curriculum

Grades 9-12



Curricular Unit Designed and Prepared by Dr. Jackie Henson-Dacey, 2021

Overview and Purpose

Students will explore, describe, analyze, interpret, and create artworks that reflect a deep understanding of the exhibition: ***We Dream A World: African American Landscape Painters of Mid-Century Florida, The Highwaymen.***

Standards covered by this unit:

Visual Arts

VA.912.C.1 Cognition and reflection are required to appreciate, interpret, and create with artistic intent.

VA.912.S.2 Development of skills, techniques, and processes in the arts strengthens our ability to remember, focus on, process, and sequence information.

VA.912.O.3 Every art form uses its own unique language, verbal, and non-verbal, to document and communicate with the world.

VA.912.F.1 Creating, interpreting, and responding to the arts stimulate the imagination and encourage innovation and creative risk-taking.

VA.912.H.1 Through study in the arts, we learn about and honor others and the worlds in which they live(d).

Lesson One: Visual Literacy (45 minutes)

Display printed images or prepare a PowerPoint showing selected works of art from the exhibition, ***We Dream A World: African American Landscape Painters of Mid-Century Florida, The Highwaymen.***

Print out copies and use the *Thinking Cards* below to help students explore the artworks. Students may be placed in small groups or have them choose a partner to work with, or you can facilitate as a large group. You can also cut the cards into sections and pass them out to encourage students to view the art through a different perspective.

After students have viewed and discussed the artworks using the *Thinking Cards*, ask them to share their ideas about what they have learned by examining the Florida Highwaymen exhibition. Encourage students to apply art terminology while sharing their knowledge of the artworks. Display or provide individual copies of the art elements and principles of design below.



Crystal Productions: <https://www.amazon.com/Elements-Art-Principles-Design-Poster/dp/B01GKRZ0PQ>

Explore Viewpoints	Question and Investigate
<p style="text-align: center;">Step Inside</p> <p>Choose a work of art and....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a person, object, or element in the work of art, and step inside that point of view. • Consider what the person/thing can perceive and feel? • What might the person/thing know about or believe? • What might the person/thing care about? 	<p style="text-align: center;">See, Think, Wonder</p> <p>Find a work of art and ask...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you see? • What do you think about what you see? • What do you wonder about?
Observe and Describe	Compare and Connect
<p style="text-align: center;">Tell a Story: Beginning, Middle, and End</p> <p>Every artwork has a story...use your imagination to tell one of your own!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find an intriguing work of art • If this artwork is the beginning of the story, what might happen next? • If this artwork is the middle of the story, what might have happened before? What might be about to happen? • If this artwork is the end of the story, how did the story start? 	<p style="text-align: center;">Connect, Extend, Challenge</p> <p>Choose a work of art and answer the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the artwork or object connected to something you already know about? • What new ideas or impressions do you have that extend your thinking in new directions? • What is challenging or confusing? • What do you wonder about?

Lesson Two: Who are the Florida Highwaymen? Reading and Sharing Knowledge (45 minutes)

Display the following artworks from the exhibition, either print in color for student use or present PowerPoint on monitor for students.

Share this story with the students:

In 1958, a young African American high school student named Alfred Hair was introduced to landscape painter A.E. “Beanie” Backus by his art teacher Zanobia Jefferson. Backus and Hair became friends and began a new painting partnership that broke through racial barriers of the times. Backus was a white artist and gallery owner who opened his doors to young artists from any racial background. He became a mentor to Alfred Hair. Backus started to train Hair on his painting techniques and with this mentorship, Alfred Hair began his career as an artist and business entrepreneur. Alfred Hair became one of the original twenty-six Florida Highwaymen on the East Coast of Florida. Alfred Hair, as well as Harold Newton and Mary Ann Carroll, were resourceful, painted very quickly, and had a love for nature. They loved to paint royal poinciana, palm trees, and the ocean. Unable to be represented in any of the white-only galleries in Florida, the Florida Highwaymen relied on a method of high-quantity sales of affordable paintings, usually around \$25 each. A technique of “fast painting,” with which the artist produced several paintings each day, provided them with a good living as an artist. The paintings created by the Florida Highwaymen depict serenity and undisturbed wilderness. The Florida Highwaymen did not paint directly from observation, but rather painted scenes from memory and imagination. Because the group could not show or sell their work in galleries or museums as a result of segregation, the group became very creative and persuasive salespeople. These paintings were quintessential Florida scenes that became ideal vacation souvenirs because they were affordable and relatively easy to transport.

Important fact: The Florida Highwaymen did not choose to go by this name when they began painting in the 1950s. The name was coined by an art collector and gallery owner, Jim Fitch, in 1990.



Harold Newton

Source: <https://backusmuseum.org/highwaymen>



Harold Newton, *Fire Sky*



Harold Newton, *Hibiscus*



Harold Newton, *Rough Surf Crashing Ashore*



Mary Ann Carroll

Source: <https://www.thehistorycenter.org/mary-ann-carroll/>



Mary Ann Carroll, *Twilight Orange Sunset*



Mary Ann Carroll, *Royal Poinciana on the Indian River*



Alfred Hair

Source: <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/tcpalm/name/alfred-hair-obituary?pid=186323869>



Alfred Hair, *Washer Woman*



Alfred Hair, *Old Florida*



Alfred Hair, *Poinciana on the River*

Using the information cards below, ask students to work in small groups to read about each artist. You can use a Round Robin approach by providing each student in the small group with one of the *Voices of the Artist* cards to share information with each member of the group. Have students discuss inquiry questions that follow. Make copies for each student to use for this reading section.

Voices of the Artist: Harold Newton

Harold Newton was an African American artist who painted images of the Florida landscape. Florida was considered a paradise by the outside world. Newton, along with other Florida Highwaymen, painted images of this foreign and mysterious landscape up and down the east coast from Fort Pierce to Daytona Beach, and Fort Lauderdale, as well as inland around Lake Okeechobee. Newton could produce several paintings in one day, and he created technically astute paintings. His painting style reflected a knowledge of traditional Romanticism and the Hudson River School artists. He would travel up and down route A1A and would visit businesses during the day to sell his artwork from the trunk of his car. Sometimes the oils were still wet. His work was considered “fast painting,” but it was never rushed. He painted on inexpensive Uson board, a thick cardboard used for house construction, instead of canvas. Harold Newton was a successful artist and businessman. He was considered an entrepreneur. That means that he organized and operated his own business, taking on greater than normal financial risks. He only had a few career opportunities in Florida during the 1950s. He could either work picking fruit in the orange groves or pull beans in a nearby field. Before learning the Highwaymen style, Newton began painting religious images on black velvet and selling them at churches and on the roadways. After he met A.E. “Beanie” Backus and studied his painting techniques, Newton decided to paint the Florida landscape instead. This was risky because, during the 1950s, the Jim Crow laws kept Florida residents segregated and did not provide the same financial opportunities to African Americans. Newton painted exotic flowers, swaying palm trees, and beautiful sunsets. His paintings brought nature indoors. When he visited Backus at his gallery, he would observe how he used a palette knife to spread paint and build images. Harold soon began using a palette knife to improve his own technique, which allowed him to create different tonal effects to produce a serene feeling in his artworks. This made his work in high demand. Jet travel, interstate systems, mosquito control, and air conditioning were new modern conveniences and made Florida a great tourism state. This helped to provide Harold Newton and the other Florida Highwaymen, with a steady flow of income by selling the natural beauty of Florida.

Voices of the Artist: Mary Ann Carroll

Mary Ann Carroll was the only female artist associated with the original group of Florida Highwaymen. In the world in which she grew up, black women were provided with limited opportunities. During the 1950s and 1960s, Florida was still segregated, but Mary Ann's life as a prosperous artist crossed race and class lines. Social norms of the time were dismissive of, if not downright hostile toward, black ambition. Instead of cleaning houses for five dollars a day, Mary Ann Carroll would sell two paintings a day and make 50 dollars. The money from the sale of her paintings provided for her family. She woke up every morning and prayed for strength and happiness. She often described her artwork as expressing her love for God. She dedicated her time to family, art, and church. Mary Ann Carroll's artwork represents the beauty of Florida with colorful landscapes, palm trees, and shimmering waters. The scenes that Mary Ann Carroll painted suggest serenity and undisturbed wilderness. Mary Ann Carroll met Harold Newton when he was selling his work in Fort Pierce on Avenue D. Mary Ann would watch Harold paint royal poinciana trees. She was amazed at how he was able to create a flaming tree within a landscape with quick brushstrokes and bright colors. Mary Ann came back several times to watch Harold paint and they became good friends. He taught her how to create deep space in the artwork and how to mix colors to create the nuanced sky. They both intuitively developed their paintings. Mary Ann started to paint the Florida landscape from memory and stated, "I paint the way I feel (Monroe, 2014, p. 15)." Mary Ann and the rest of the Highwaymen did not paint directly what they saw. They would travel and observe the landscape at different times of the day, but their work came from their imaginations. Mary Ann stated, "nature's never wrong (Monroe, 2014, p. 29)." The Florida Highwaymen learned from one another and began developing their neighborhood, Avenue D in Fort Pierce, which became a center of creativity for black-owned establishments.

Voices of the Artist: Alfred Hair

Alfred Hair was drawn to art even as a child, like most of the Florida Highwaymen. In the early 1950s, Alfred Hair's art teacher Zanobia Jefferson introduced him to Fort Pierce painter A.E. "Beanie" Backus. Backus trained Alfred Hair to paint landscapes. Backus, a gallery owner and painter, served as a mentor to Alfred Hair as well as Harold Newton. He allowed these young African American artists to study his painting techniques. The Florida Highwaymen learned painting techniques from one another, while also developing their own style. Alfred Hair, along with the other Florida Highwaymen, were barred from showing their works in galleries, art shows, and other venues. In response, Alfred Hair inspired the group and became a very creative and persuasive salesman. Most notably, the Highwaymen sold their works on the sides of roadways. They would also travel door-to-door and frequent churches and offices. Hair selected the materials commonly identified with the Highwaymen: the Upson board used as canvas and the crown molding that was used for frames. His work represented "fast painting." Alfred Hair's work included turquoise seas, peach clouds, and scarlet royal poinciana trees. When the original 26 Florida Highwaymen began painting in the 1950s, they did not choose to go by that name. They were more of a loose community than a formal collective. Alfred Hair mentored other artists and shared his studio space. They were a group of African American landscape artists who supported one another. They cultivated a style of painting quickly and capturing the tropical beauty of Florida in bright colors. It wasn't until 1995 that a gallery owner and collector, Jim Fitch, coined the term Florida Highwaymen.

Inquiry Questions:

- 1) What role does religious belief play in Mary Ann Carroll artwork?
- 2) What relationship do spirituality and religious belief have on understanding the intent of the artist?
- 3) What is the role of imagination in the development of the Florida Highwaymen artworks?
- 4) What knowledge do we gain by studying artwork created from the imagination?
- 5) What art skills do you possess that you can apply without conscious thought?
- 6) To what extent are intuition, imagination, and technical skill important to the success of an artist?

Have individual students share out ideas/comments from the small group discussion with the larger group.

Lesson Three: Capturing the tropical beauty of Florida (1-2 weeks)

Display the artworks from the exhibition, either print in color for student use or present PowerPoint on monitor for students.

Materials needed:

- Color or black and white images of the Florida Highwaymen paintings
- Tracing paper
- Ebony pencils
- Ball point pens
- An assortment of acrylic paints
- Watercolors
- Paint brushes
- Palette knives (or tongue depressors)
- Drawing pencils
- Small canvas panels or Bristol board
- Sketchbooks for experimentation (project planning) and reflection

By studying the artwork from the exhibition, think about the difference between transparency, translucency, and opacity. How have these artists used these qualities in their artwork? How have these artists used color to communicate the serenity of the Florida landscape?

Using tracing paper and the images from the exhibition, trace over areas to capture three different elements in the landscape paintings that you find interesting. Transfer these images to your sketchbook (or use a piece of Bristol board). To transfer the image from the tracing paper, place a layer of ebony pencil on the back of the paper after you have traced the images and then place it on a page in your sketchbook or on a piece of Bristol board and draw over the image using a ball point pen. This will transfer the image onto the paper.

After students have been able to transfer at least three images onto a page in their sketchbook, ask them to add more details and to start thinking about what combination of colors best reflect the serenity in the Florida landscape. Suggest adding watercolor, acrylics, value range with selected colors to add more detail to their sketchbook images. Encourage students to write their ideas out next to the images, provide sampling of color schemes (such as analogous and triadic).

Project planning can also be done using various software programs, such as Procreate. Digital sketchbook pages can also be developed instead of traditional methods. After three days of experimentation, facilitate small formative assessment groups.

Provide small groups of three to four students with the following questions to help develop discussion around the planning and experimentation of Florida Landscapes.

- 1) How do your landscape studies compare to the images from the Florida Highwaymen collection?
- 2) How do your landscape ideas compare with others in your group?
- 3) Why did you choose certain colors or arrange the compositions in certain ways?
- 4) How does layering colors, values, and images help express your ideas about the serenity of Florida landscapes?
- 5) What are some challenges to working from your imagination?
- 6) Provide a suggestion to help each member of your group move into the next stage of developing their final Florida landscape.

Think about the comments and suggestions provided by members of your group to help develop your final Florida landscape composition. You may choose to redesign what you have already developed in your sketchbook or you may take some ideas from your sketchbook and develop them in a different way on your canvas board or Bristol board.

Suggest a couple of different techniques to transform student planning into final products by either gridding their work, working from observation, or transferring the images using tracing paper onto the canvas panels or Bristol board. Demonstrate how to do each technique to provide options for all learners. Digital options are also a way to differentiate the final project. Introduce the Assessment Rubrics below and explain what is expected with the final Florida landscape composition. Allow students another week to complete their final artwork for group exhibition and critique.

Assessment Rubrics:

Advanced	Proficient	Developing	Incomplete
Sketchbook	Sketchbook	Sketchbook	Sketchbook
Has considered and experimented with several kinds of Florida landscape options. Has redesigned based on peer feedback. Considers unique arrangements and color theory combinations.	Explored and experimented with at least 3 different ideas. Selects landscape elements with some care and personal interest. Limited exploration of color theory.	Selects landscape idea with little reference to Florida Highwaymen exhibition. Explores only a few ideas for composition and color theory.	Does not address Florida landscapes. Selects typical landscape elements with very little planning or exploration of color theory.
Create Composition	Create Composition	Create Composition	Create Composition
Creatively designs a Florida landscape that is interesting in composition and applies a color theory to achieve a serene and peaceful result. Evidence of project planning and careful consideration of feedback to improve compositional impact.	Creatively designs a Florida landscape that is interesting and applies color theory to achieve a visual impact. Evidence of application of techniques and/or feedback to improve overall compositional impact.	Has created a recognizable Florida landscape with some application of color theory. Little evidence of application of techniques and/or feedback to improve overall compositional impact.	No finished product or submits a very limited representation of Florida landscapes. No evidence of application of techniques and/or feedback to improve overall compositional impact.

Differentiated instruction to address social emotional learning:

When demonstrating expectations, present information in a variety of ways, focusing on the various learning styles of your students. Emphasize that they are trying to evoke/imagine a sense of this new Florida landscape rather than copying an exact image or series of images. Allowing students to select digital or time-based methods to communicate this new idea of Florida landscapes should be embraced

as a useful studio tool. Much of the teaching comes with individualized coaching as students are working on their project planning and then creating their final products. Some students might feel more comfortable with creating a montage or collage using images from magazines. Find what works for each student and then guide them on the path to: preparing ideas; creating + reflecting; and then final production and assessment.

References:

Backus Museum <https://backusmuseum.org/highwaymen>

Monroe, Gary (2007), Harold Newton: The Original Highwayman. University Press of Florida.

Monroe, Gary (2014), Mary Ann Carroll: First Lady of the Highwaymen. University Press of Florida.

Monroe, Gary (2001), The Highwaymen: Florida's African American Landscape Painters, University Press of Florida.

Smithsonian Museum <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/collection/florida-highwaymen>