The Great Migration

Basic Information

Grade Level: 6–8
Subject Area: Visual Arts, Social Studies, U.S. History
Time Required: 3 sessions
Student Skills Developed: Making inferences and drawing conclusions, comparison and contrast, narrative writing, evidence-based learning, decision making, interpreting written information

Artworks

Newark Museum Collection
Jacob Lawrence
Born 1917, Atlantic City, New Jersey
Died 2000, Seattle, Washington
The Bo-Lo Game, 1937
poster paint on pebbleboard
Purchase 1984 The Members' Fund 84.32

National Endowment for the Humanities, *Picturing America Collection*
Jacob Lawrence
The Migration Series—Negro Panel no. 57,
1940–41
casein tempera on hardboard, 18 x 12 in.
The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

Introduction

Jacob Lawrence's 1940 *Migration Series* chronicles the massive African American exodus from the rural South to northern cities during and following World War I. Lawrence painted this series of sixty small gessoed panels with casein tempera paint and captioned each panel. In this lesson, after students study *The Migration Series*, they analyze Lawrence's *The Bo-Lo Game*, 1937, a Harlem street scene of children playing with paddleballs, and consider how this scene relates to *The Migration Series*. Students write a narrative from the viewpoint of one of the figures in this street scene. They also read a letter describing the need to move North.

Guiding Questions

+ Why did so many African Americans migrate from the South to the North? How did their migration change the United States?

+ How did Jacob Lawrence paint and describe African American life and history in *The Migration Series* and *The Bo-Lo Game*?

Learning Objectives

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

+ Explain why African Americans left the South during the first half of the twentieth century.
+ Describe the new life African Americans found in northern cities.
+ Explain how the Great Migration changed the United States.
+ Describe how Joseph{Jacob?} Lawrence kept colors consistent throughout all *The Migration Series* panels.
+ Analyze the composition of Lawrence's *The Bo-Lo Game* and *Panel 57* of *The Migration Series*.
+ Describe the relationship of the subject of the Harlem street scene in *The Bo-Lo Game* to *The Migration Series*.
+ Write an essay explaining the reasons for and the results of the Great Migration.

Background Information for the Teacher

The Great Migration

As the flow of European immigrants dwindled in World War I, northern industries found another inexpensive source of labor in the African American workers from the rural South. Over the next fifteen years, more than ten percent of the African Americans in the South migrated North in search of a better life. Put another way, between 1900 and 1960, about five million black people migrated from the South. Most settled in northern industrial cities.

Learn more about the Great Migration at

In Motion, The African American Migration Experience

http://www.inmotionaame.org/home.cfm

and

The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/index.html

Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000)

Jacob Lawrence's parents had "moved up" from the rural South to Atlantic City, New Jersey, where he was born. When he was thirteen, his by-then single mother relocated her family to Harlem, in New York City. In 1930, the Harlem Renaissance was in full swing, as black artists, writers, and scholars

flooded into this New York City neighborhood. Lawrence became immersed in this culture of talented artists. They mentored and encouraged him to pursue a career in art. Lawrence began painting scenes of his community, like *The Bo-Lo Game*, 1937. He had his first solo exhibition, in 1938, at the Harlem YMCA. In 1940, when he was twenty-two, he began painting *The Migration Series*. When it was displayed at the Downtown Gallery, he became the first African American artist to be represented by one of New York City's major galleries. After serving in the U.S. Coast Guard during World War II, he painted his *War Series*. One summer he taught at Black Mountain College, in North Carolina, where he met Joseph Albers, who encouraged him to teach. Eventually, he taught painting at the University of Washington, in Seattle.
Learn more at the Educators Resource Book, 17a, on the Picturing America website for further information and discussion ideas.

Picturing America Teachers Resource Book
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/educators.php?subPage=edu_guide

and

Jacob Lawrence biography, American Art @ The Phillips Collection
http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american_art/bios/lawrence-bio.htm

The Migration of the Negro (1940–41)
Jacob Lawrence's *The Migration of the Negro (The Migration Series)* is a series of sixty paintings that tells the story of the mass exodus of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North around the time of World War I and continuing throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Lawrence worked on the series for months, writing short captions and creating preliminary drawings. His wife, artist Gwendolyn Knight, helped him prepare the boards. He painted the scenes with water-based casein tempera, which dries quickly to a matte finish. By applying one color at a time to all the paintings, he was able to maintain consistent colors throughout all sixty boards.

The Phillips Collection and New York's Museum of Modern Art each bought half the series. The Phillips has the odd-numbered paintings, and the Museum of Modern Art the even-numbered ones.

Learn more about Jacob Lawrence's *The Migration of the Negro* at:

Jacob Lawrence: *Over the Line*
http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/over_the_line/index.html
An interactive biography of Jacob Lawrence's life and art with teaching resources.

and

Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series*
http://www.phillipscollection.org/migration_series/flash/experience.cfm
This colorful interactive site features all sixty paintings in *The Migration Series* with their captions. African American music adds to the excitement of this site.

and

The Great Migration Series, by Jacob Lawrence (HUM225)
http://analepsis.org/2012/03/25/the-great-migration-series-by-jacob-lawrence-hum225/
This site lists all sixty paintings and captions with thumbnail links to larger images.

Bo-Lo
Today, the word *bolo* conjures up everything from computer games to military slang to some type of machete, but in the 1930s it referred to a children's game. Children competed to see how many times in succession they could hit a rubber ball fastened to a small wooden paddle by a rubber band. A bolo was inexpensive enough for poor Harlem children to own.

Preparing to Teach This Lesson

+ Review the lesson plan and the websites used throughout.
+ Locate and bookmark suggested materials and websites.
+ Download and print out documents you will use, and duplicate copies as necessary for student viewing.
+ Students can access the primary source materials and some of the activity materials via the EDSITEment LaunchPad.

Lesson Plan Activities

1. Reading a Primary Source Document
2. Analyze the differences between life in the North and the South
3. Write a Narrative

Lesson Activity 1

Moving North

Students learn the reasons that African Americans moved from the agricultural South to the industrial North via a primary source document.

Distribute a copy of the letter from Mrs. J. H. Adams, Macon, Georgia, to the Bethlehem Baptist Association in Chicago, Illinois, 1919. (Holograph Carter G. Woodson Papers.)

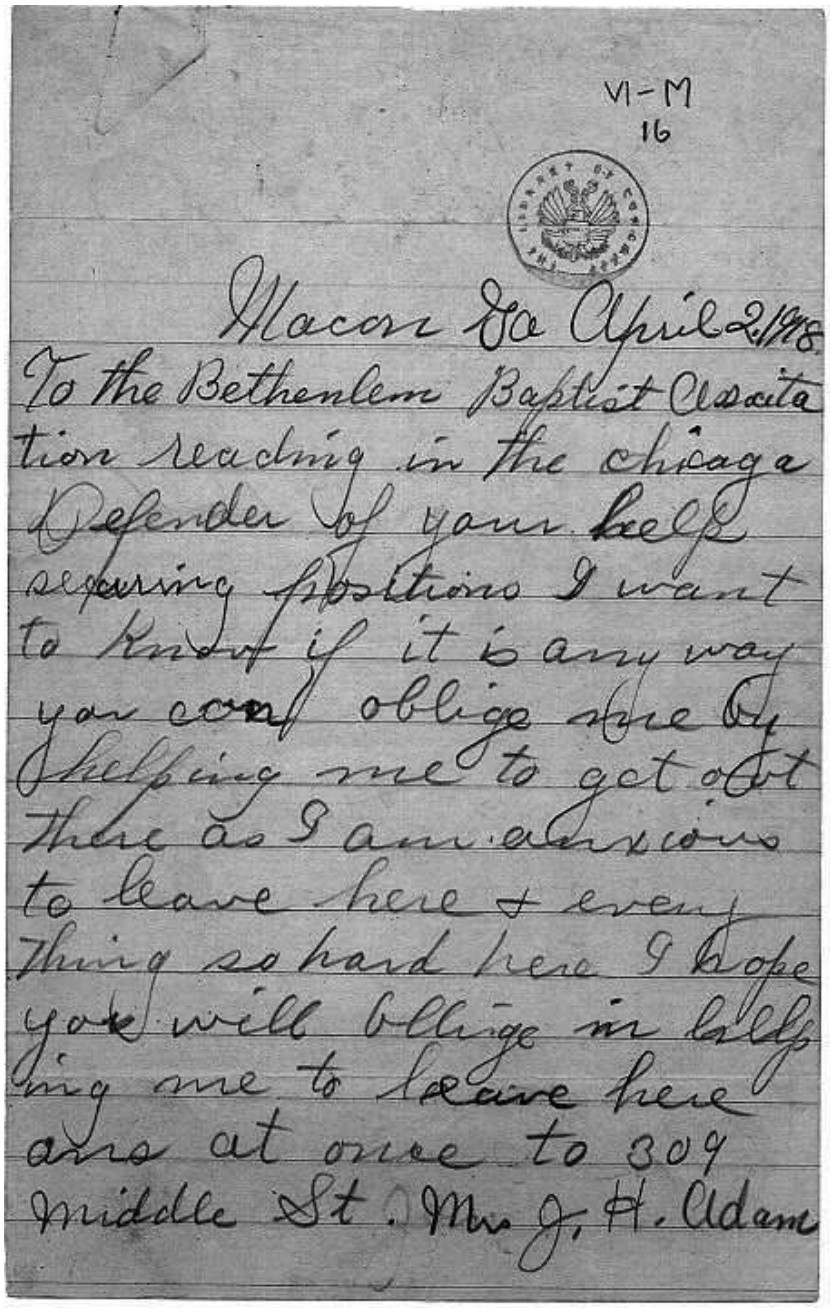
Ask students to figure out what she was asking for, why she wanted to leave the South, and what she hoped to hear back from Chicago.

PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENT
MRS. J. H. ADAMS TO CHICAGO

Read and Discuss

The following is a letter written by Mrs. J. H. Adams, Macon, Georgia, to the Bethlehem Baptist Association, in Chicago, Illinois, 1919. (Holograph Carter G. Woodson Papers.) Read the letter and answer the questions below.

Why did Mrs. Adams want to leave the South?
What was she asking for by writing to an organization in Chicago?



VI-M
16

Macon Ga April 2/1918

To the Bethenlem Baptist Associa
tion reading in the chicago
Defender of your help
securing positions I want
to know if it is any way
you can oblige me by
helping me to get out
there as I am anxious
to leave here & every
thing so hard here I hope
you will oblige in help
ing me to leave here
and at once to 309
Middle St. Mrs J. H. Adams

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Lesson Activity 2

Living in the North

After arriving in a northern city, life presented its challenges and rewards to the African American community. By comparing life for people in the North, featured in artworks, students will assess how it was both a struggle and rewarding.

Show students the three different artworks. Each student should have a good view of the artwork either on a computer, a projection, or as printed color copies. Before discussing these paintings, have students study them silently. This allows them time to formulate initial impressions.

Have students, either independently or as a group, answer the questions on the following worksheet. As the facilitator, have students share their answers and different opinions about what is happening.

After they have formulated their own ideas, provide students with the historical background of this artwork.

From:http://www.history.com/topics/great-migration
By the end of 1919, some one million blacks had left the South, usually traveling by train, boat, or bus; a smaller number had automobiles or even horse-drawn carts. In the decade between 1910 and 1920, the black population of major northern cities grew by large percentages, including New York (66 percent) Chicago (148 percent), Philadelphia (500 percent), and Detroit (611 percent). Many new arrivals found jobs in factories, slaughterhouses, and foundries, where working conditions were arduous and sometimes dangerous. Female migrants had a harder time finding work, spurring heated competition for positions in domestic labor.

Aside from competition for employment, there was also competition for living space in the increasingly crowded cities. Although segregation was not legalized in the North (as it was in the South), racism and prejudice were widespread. After the U.S. Supreme Court declared racially based housing ordinances unconstitutional in 1917, some residential neighborhoods enacted covenants requiring white property owners to agree not to sell to blacks; these would remain legal until the Court struck them down in 1948.

Rising rents in segregated areas and the resurgence of Ku Klux Klan activity after 1915 worsened relations between blacks and whites across the country. The summer of 1919 began the greatest period of interracial strife in U.S. history, including a disturbing wave of race riots. The most serious riot took place in Chicago in July 1919; it lasted thirteen days and left thirty-eight people dead, 537 injured, and nearly one thousand black families without homes.

THE GREAT MIGRATION
LIVING IN THE NORTHERN CITIES

Name: _____ Date: _____

Spend some time looking at Jacob Lawrence's artwork,
The Bo-Lo Game, 1937, and *The Migration Series*—Negro Panel no. 57.

1. Glance briefly at the paintings. What do you notice first? What makes you say that?

2. What is going on in the paintings? What makes you say that?

3. What kind of mood does the artist portray? What makes you say that?

4. How would you describe the energy in these scenes? How are the scenes different?

5. What do all these people have in common? What do you notice is different about them?

Lesson Activity 3

Matching Diary Entry

Have students write an imaginary diary entry for a day in the life of an African American migrant living in a northern city. The students should include information about the job they do, what brought them to the North, if they are with family or alone, and how they are handling the change of locations.

Extending the Lesson

+ Have students observe the Newark Museum's three dimensional image of a women's hat. Ask the students to describe the woman who wore this hat. Was she in the southern or northern part of the United States, and what supports their answer? What was her typical day like? Why did she select this hat to bring with her on the journey North?

+ Have students read Jacob Lawrence's introduction to his book *The Great Migration*. Have them discuss how Lawrence was related to the movement of African Americans from the South to the North. They may write how Lawrence's childhood experiences led him to paint his *Migration Series*.

+ Jacob Lawrence (author and illustrator), *The Great Migration: An American Story*. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Phillips Collection, HarperCollins Publishers, 1993.
+ At online bookstore sites, you can preview the opening pages of *The Great Migration* book with Lawrence's introduction, which describes how he created the series.

+ Ask students to describe their family's migration or immigration. If students themselves have not moved, they should ask older relatives or other members of the community about their ancestors' migration within or immigration to the United States. Discuss why their families moved, what they hoped to find in their new homes, and their journey. Have students paint a series of at least three small paintings describing their family's move or immigration. They could try Jacob Lawrence's method of painting one color at a time in all three pictures. Like Lawrence, they should write captions that explain what they have depicted to display with each picture.

+ Have students watch a YouTube video of 1930s film clips of Harlem children playing games. Tell students to paint or draw games that city children played during the Great Depression http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7I0Tr0buwCc

Resources

Selected NEH EDSITEment Websites

Picturing AmericaTeachers Resource Book
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/educators.php?subPage=edu_guide

Picturing America On Screen: Lawrence/Puryear.
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/educators.php?subPage=edu_guide&lang=english

Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration Series*
http://www.phillipscollection.org/migration_series/flash/experience.cfm

Migration During the Great Depression: Living History
Library of Congress Lesson Plan
http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/florida-migrants/

Jacob Lawrence: *Over the Line*
http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/over_the_line/index.html

In Motion, The African-American Migration Experience
http://www.inmotionaame.org/home.cfm

African American World
Arts & Culture: Art Focus, The Legacy, Jacob Lawrence
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/arts/lawrence.html

The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow: The Harlem Renaissance
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories_events_harlem.html

Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey
http://www.newarkmuseum.org

Selected EDSITEment Lesson Plans

Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series: Removing the Mask

African-American Soldiers After World War I: Had Race Relations Changed?

Romare Bearden's "The Dove"—A Meeting of Vision and Sound
An Introduction to the Relationship Between Composition and Content in the Visual Arts

Standards Alignment

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
Visual Arts Standards:
Grades 5–8 Content Standard 4
Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures
Grades 5–8 Content Standard 4b
Students describe and place a variety of art objects in historical and cultural contexts
Grades 5–8 Content Standard 5b
Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry
Grades 5–8 Content Standard 6
Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

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Died 2000, Seattle, Washington
The Bo-Lo Game, 1937
poster paint on pebbleboard
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The Migration Series—Negro Panel no. 57, 1940–41
casein tempera on hardboard, 18 x 12 in.
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