

The Legacies of African-American Artists Ellis Wilson, John Biggers, and Jonathan Green And Their Influence on American Art

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Overview

This curriculum unit focusing on African-American Artists, Ellis Wilson, John Biggers, and Jonathan Green is designed for fourth and fifth graders in an art classroom. The purpose is to introduce the individual artists and explore how they share a link to the South. The unit will also introduce the Gullah culture from the coastal Sea Islands of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. It will examine the Gullahs' unique language, basketry, quilting, weaving, fishnets, folklore, folktales, and crops of indigo, rice and cotton. The unit will focus on the ways this culture with its retention of West African traditions and practices impacted these artists and shaped their legacies. It explores motivational forces and beliefs that were behind each man's creative energy. Additionally, the unit examines the obstacles and hurdles that these artists confronted and overcame as they painted African-American themes on canvases and walls throughout the 20th century.

Rationale

Art and literature that contain images that spark children's curiosity and expand their perspectives on African American culture, particularly that of the South, will provide an exciting opportunity and an interesting way to broaden the existing art curriculum for fourth and fifth graders in the Pittsburgh Public School District. It will enhance learning at my urban neighborhood school located in southwest Pennsylvania. The contrast of urban vs. rural life style will be a focal point as the unit develops connections not only to our Pittsburgh heritage but also to Pennsylvania and United States history and culture. Although several aspects surrounding the artists are unique, as are many characteristics of their work, many aspects are universal. Connections bridging the Pittsburgh community to other regions will be made, including the fact that word of mouth, and the African -American weekly,

the *Pittsburgh Courier*, kept people in the Carolinas, including Biggers' family, informed about African-American political activities, issues, and philosophies seventy five years ago. Wardlaw (19)

The purpose of this unit will be to help students develop a deeper appreciation of and a historical perspective of the South. It will examine the South as a sense of place through new visual images. Students do learn about The Great Migration, particularly when they study artists Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence in the art curriculum. Artists have documented this in their paintings and drawings. Ellis Wilson paved the way for those two individuals. This unit will contrast Biggers' memory of his Southern childhood roots and memories in North Carolina with his lonely college experiences at Penn State and weekend visits to Pittsburgh. Since he grew up in a Southern community where people cultivated their own land, built their own houses, made their own clothing, and their self-sufficiency seemed to give them so much integrity, it was an abrupt awakening to visit Northern neighborhoods where food was scarce, housing was inadequate, and few people were employed. Wardlaw (34) Slides and prints of paintings and murals will draw students from their immediate urban neighborhood environment into contrasting settings with rural and coastal influences of water, hanging moss, and sea grass marshes.

Studying these three African-American artists, Ellis Wilson, John Biggers, and Jonathan Green, will broaden students understanding of national events, collectively spanning and at times overlapping, from 1900 to 2002. The unit will examine the artistic contributions by these southern artists, the paths their lives took during the eras including the Depression, World War II, and the Civil Rights movement in our country, and the way they expressed their feelings in their painting. It will explore the strength, strong sense of community, and faith that each artist possessed which contributed to their success and impacted their painting. Sometimes being enlisted in the service interrupted their work and was a major source of frustration; often times it led them towards a new direction. John Biggers was deeply involved in his studies and mural painting at Hampton Institute when he was drafted for World War II. He was resentful when his peaceful campus was taken over by white United States officers, particularly when they had little regard for the students. Biggers was resentful and angry when he witnessed foreign prisoners of war being served in cafes in town while African –Americans were still expected to go to the back window to get their food. When invited to paint a mural in the dining hall, he exposed his bitter feelings. Wardlaw (32) The unit will also applaud the artists' accomplishments, their deep convictions, their strength and self-determination while not ignoring injurious and discriminatory practices and injustices that they and many African-Americans confronted. Jonathan Green was lured into the service because he had a desire to travel and study, however, the promise of being a military illustrator was not fulfilled immediately. He was assigned to be a cook much to his dissatisfaction, although, eventually this led him to studying art at the Chicago Art Institute. Biggers explains that when he went to Africa in 1957 on a UNESCO grant, it was not only unusual, it was prohibitive for a Black artist to go there under colonial rule.

www.getty.edu/artsednet/resources/Biggers/Conv/civil.html Biggers was influential because he encouraged Black Texans to see themselves in a positive way, and along the way, earned respect for them in a state with a history of what he refers to as institutional racial prejudice. Bearden (427) During this time period, Penn Center, St. Helena Island, was a meeting place for civil rights groups in the 1960's. The 1963 *I Have a Dream* speech by Martin Luther King was partially written there. Krull (25)

From a personal perspective, the people and the culture of the South have a particular appeal to me because as a child, I lived in Georgia for five years, returned to Pennsylvania for the remainder of my childhood, and then as an adult, I lived and taught in Austin, Texas. This personal history sparked an interest in several artists from the South. Personally meeting artist John Biggers while teaching in Texas was an inspirational experience that motivates me to share his work and teach my students about him and his philosophy on art and life, which requested students to respect the conditions of their own American experience as well as their African heritage.

This is an opportunity to give children the tools and resources they need in order to expand their knowledge of twentieth century American art by utilizing images as well as literature, language, and music. Additionally, it examines cultural traditions in an attempt to better understand and explore the perspectives of individuals who are African-American. One has to know the artists in order to gain a strong understanding of how they helped shape our American culture. Lewis (226) These artists are proof of the power of art to inform, educate and communicate. These men were pioneers in their thoughts and means of self-expression. They earned representation in national and international art circles as they focused on many of the indigenous values of their cultural heritage. Ellis Wilson had to leave his home state to exhibit his work. Spareth (17) After the middle of the twentieth century, these were influential in changing museum practices and policies so that all Americans were welcome to exhibit and visit. This will be evident as we explore painting and mural motifs.

African American artists in the twentieth century were searching for identity in a cultural sense. Artists were purposely establishing their own symbols, departing from the widely accepted European aesthetic standards. Lewis (227) These three artists succeeded. It was a challenge for African-Americans to find paths to combine both spiritual and material powers of art in such a way that they create a vehicle for the understanding of people, such as these men did. Prior to the 1900's, there was a scarcity of black images in American art and painting. The year after Biggers was born, Alain Leroy Locke, a prominent black philosopher, Rhodes scholar, and appointed the "Father of the Harlem Renaissance," had just written *The New Negro*, published in 1925. Locke's aspiration was that blacks should pursue an artistic interpretation of their own culture. He and others encouraged African Americans to reclaim their past. Langston Hughes, Milton Meltzer, C. Eric Lincoln, and John Michael Spencer discuss this throughout their publication, *A Pictorial History of African Americans*, published over fifty years ago. Americanism was always taken for granted according to these authors. Reclaiming the past could be in the physical sense but also as an intellectual journey. At the same time, W.E.B. Dubois was simultaneously promoting the progress of Blacks as well exposing horrible lynchings. Marcus Garvey, a

Jamaican social activist, encouraged a pan-American philosophy that suggested Blacks move back to Africa. Wardlaw (19) Writers, artists, and musicians were challenged to come together and create an image of African –Americans reflecting their complexity and diversity. They were challenged to combine images incorporating African, Caribbean, southern, rural, and northern urban experiences, types, and characterizations. Wardlaw (79) According to Gaither, Locke’s point of view was directly challenged by James Amos Porter, a fellow colleague at Harvard University. As an art historian studying Black art systematically, his view was that Black artists were American artists who had basically been overlooked and under discussed. These two views were debated by black intellectuals. Wardlaw (79)

Gaither explains that three separate demands surfaced in the visual arts: the inclusion of the African theme as symbol of racial heritage; sympathetic portrayal of Black life; and portrayal of Caribbean themes representing a global black identity. Wardlaw (79) This unit will examine how Wilson went to Haiti and the Sea Islands, and brought the everyday life of black people to light, elevating their struggles to the level of art in the nineteen thirties and forties. www.ket.org/elliswilson Two decades later, Biggers, who was not attracted to social protest painting, was clearly influenced by the first two demands of taking pride in what African –Americans did and who they were when he portrayed the beauty, dignity, and value of rural black men and women as they performed ordinary tasks and celebrated their planting, harvests, and lives together. When he traveled to Africa, he expressed the feeling that he felt a responsibility to reflect the spirit and style of the Negro people and a new direction and focal point for Black creativity develop in his art. Bearden (431)

By the nineteen eighties, he developed a unique style unlike any other which was totally separate from the modern art movement in America. According to Allison Greene, John Biggers’ career as an African American artist surpasses all others in the last century. No other artist has provided such a vivid and inclusive record of African-American community life and evolvement of self-identity in the rural and urban South. Wardlaw (106) By the time Green came of age in the sixties, artists, writers, and musicians were grouping together, looking for a new direction, and contemporary African American art was displaying a combination of a new expressiveness, new historical perspective, and a new sense of dignity and pride. Lewis (143) Green, like Biggers, rejected American modernism during the eighties.

He painted narratives that show the strong African oral tradition transplanted to America. [www.scafam-hist.org\(1\)](http://www.scafam-hist.org(1)) They found ways to reclaim and recollect the poetic sensibilities of their childhood-its spontaneity, enthusiasm, and pleasures. Bearden (433)

Many retentions, connections and direct links between the crafts, folklore, language and stories can be established between the Lowland and West African history and practices. The Gullahs were brought against their will from Africa and enslaved for over two centuries working the plantations. After the Civil War their descendents stayed and worked the land as freed men and women. Though the Africans were

stripped of everything but their names, they carried fragmented memories of their music, folklore, social structure, and religion to the mines and plantations of America. Pinckney (1) They passed their African roots to their descendents in a rich and lasting oral tradition, a tradition that survives today. Pinkney (2) Isolated on large plantations with little migration, most blacks on the Sea Islands retained their biological and cultural heritage. The Gullahs created a culture that helped them survive in their new environment. Krull (17) The fact that they were so isolated helped keep their Gullah culture intact. For three hundred years they produced a geographical and social isolation, which has lasted in some instances to the present day. Opala (8) Some people said the Africans left everything behind when they came to the New World. The Gullahs labored in the fields, shops, and homes in a foreign land where they brought their skills, memories, beliefs and practices of their homeland while they adapted to new ways. Pollitzer (195)

The cultural traits most retained, although modified, in the Sea Islands were faith and feelings that promoted survival which were best expressed in the bonds of the extended family, in religion, and folklore. *Brer Rabbit*, ghosts, and witches inhabited the minds of children, if not the island itself, as they were instructed by older folk in ancient lore along with the weaving of baskets. Pollitzer (197) The language was the most characteristic feature of the sea island people, clearly marked with distinct intonation rhythm, and syntax. Gullah was words and phrases from African languages, blended with English, and molded into distinct speech patterns, many in time enriched the American language in the Sea Islands. Looking at folktales will give a clear sense of the unique language. The language and culture were more than retention, more than a mixture: they were a creative synthesis born of memory, necessity, and improvisation in a new environment. Pollitzer (200) The Sea Islands consist of many small islands and inlets, with ocean on one side and salt marsh on the other, guard the coast of the eastern United States. This is where folk culture and the vivid Creole language exist. Joyner (276) By the American Revolution, it is reported that that the Black majority, from many places in Africa, as well as from more than one language and linguistic group, had already created a unique culture. They probably came from many villages, speaking over dozens of different languages, over from the banks of the Gambia River through the Congo.

Tobacco, indigo, rice, and cotton were the main crops towards which the Sea Islanders devoted their skills and energy. Pinckney (21) The Sea Islanders had a self-sufficient life-casting nets for crabs, shrimp, fish, and oysters; hunting deer, rabbits, raccoons, ducks, and other game; making quilts and baskets. Krull(12) They brought with them the skill of rice farming, the main crop that dominated and characterized South Carolina from the late 18th to the mid 19th century. Indigo, the plant used for making dye, flourished too, followed by a long staple crop of Sea Island cotton, hoed and picked by Africans. The Sea Island people readily adopted medicinal herbs, many of them similar to those of their homeland. Pollitzer (196) Although not an easy life, it was undeniably a self-sufficient lifestyle adapted to the environment and shaped by rich folk culture. The idea that they had little connection to the mainland, the Sea Islanders preserved their cultural heritage, reflecting both continuity with Africa and creativity in the New World culture was. Joyner (226-277)

The Gullah learned to adapt to new ways while they retained stored memories of their native culture, beliefs, and skills with them. Pollitzer (195). They brought grammar and vocabulary that shaped the cloth, quilts, love of color, and skills in forming metals, wood, and ceramics. Pollitzer (197) They made contributions to basketry, wood, and clay, and woodcarving with their feel for texture, familiarity with natural materials, pride of workmanship, improvisation, and necessity to produce creative crafts. Baskets, woven of native grasses, were especially valued to in the Carolina rice culture: quilts, using discarded fabrics in an original manner, preserved not only the material but family history in their designs. The African feel for texture, familiarity with natural materials, pride of workmanship, improvisation, and necessity combined in the low country to produce crafts, particularly quilts. Pollitzer (196) and Branch (76) Producing baskets and quilts provided an opportunity for a group activity dear to the African. Basketry, one of the dominant crafts of the region, is also one of the oldest crafts of African origin. Baskets were made for practical purposes; winnowing rice, carrying clothing, cradling infants, fanning, sorting foods. Jones-Jackson (18) Sengambian basket weaving serves as an outstanding example of cultural retention as well as contemporary baskets woven by Gullah crafters and sold to tourists. Sweetgrass baskets, dating back several decades, are nearly identical to baskets being made today. Pinckney (29-31) The Sea Island crafts, pottery, fans, and baskets, often reflect African styles. There is also high retention among the Sea Islanders cultural customs including social the construction of boats and nets. Nowhere is African belief better expressed than in those varied objects of broken glass and shells placed on the grave that shield the deceased and return his spirit to his gods and forebears. Folklore of the Sea Islands, re-created with gestures before a responsive audience, preserved African memories and relieved the monotony of slavery. Pollitzer (197) For generations, Sea Islander storytellers entertained their audiences with tales of the animal trickster *Brer Rabbit*, blending African folk narrative with elements of the Sea Islanders historical experience. Joyner (278)

Travel, the physical landscape, and the environment shaped the outlook and the perspectives of these artists in places including Haiti, the Sea Islands, West Africa, and Texas. These artists discovered and confirmed Africanisms through their travels, some of which they had seen or been exposed to in childhood. West African journeys shaped Biggers' art and his selection of symbols and images. He was overwhelmed by what he saw and once said that nothing in America prepared him for his journey The Gullah culture impacted Wilson and Green in their choice of subject material and method of figurative painting; the West African culture impacted Biggers. These experiences led to motifs of fishermen with nets, people carrying coiled baskets, tall trees with hanging moss, and black figures of all shapes and sizes, sometimes with featureless faces, as seen in Ellis Wilson and Jonathan Green's paintings, reflect the Gullah or Geechee people. The baskets, the fishermen, the thatched houses, the trees with intricate roots, the dancing and the landscapes that Biggers sketched reflect the West African culture in Togo, Ghana, Republic of Benin and Nigeria. This unit will examine the visual imagery of both cultures. Wilson's traveled, observed the people, made sketches, and went back to his New York studio to paint, where he elevated the ordinary man like fisherman and workers in his paintings. Biggers' publication of *Ananse* in 1962 enabled many to gain insights into Africa, just as Green's paintings in the eighties and nineties gave elegance and importance to the Gullah culture. This unit will be a way to sense and explore emotions and recognize and experience cultural pride.

This unit will be a vehicle to inspire and enlighten students as they look for and interpret symbols. Biggers developed an extensive collection of symbols in his paintings and murals throughout his

career. Symbols such as wash pots, rooted in images of the South, washboards, and cast iron pots invoked memories of his mother. Southern wash pots conjure images of African *yabbas*, or round earthen vessels used for cooking. Biggers used these to symbolize rejuvenation and cleansing. Wardlaw (89) Gaither points out many symbols in Biggers art including the shotgun house that he chose as an icon of Southern black housing, repeating row after row, suggesting community, closeness, and interdependence, just as African Dogon door figures suggest people descending from primordial ancestors. Wardlaw (90-91) The snake, a powerful symbol, is found in the Sea Islands and in Africa. Pollitzer (xviii).

A clearer image of the south will be revealed and some of the myths surrounding it may be dispelled. Although a strong narrative tradition has served writers well, it has sometimes placed visual artists outside of the national creative mainstream. In the South, often the identity has prescribed attributes and characteristics that have been accepted as Southern, but in reality they have come from people outside the region. Some “non-southerners” have created their own versions, while others have strived to compile a national image of the South. Stories and folktales have survived generation after generation. Written narratives give us wisdom just as paintings give us impressions. This unit calls up memories of the past. In *Look Away: Reality and Sentiment in Southern Art*, emphasis and much recognition is given to the fact that memory and nostalgia have assumed an important role in Southern minds, especially to the impact the past has over the future, because Southerners do not forget. They seem to perpetuate a desire to remember and recollect. Robertson (18) The unit will uncover the culture collected, retold, and reflected by Wilson, Biggers, and Green as they created images and painted from what they observed, experienced, and remembered. A sense of place gives equilibrium, since it is by knowing where you stand that you judge where you are. Joyner (11) Biggers’ publication, *Ananse, The Web of Life*, helped to erase Hollywood’s image of the “Dark Continent” in American thinking with realistic images of African life in the fifties. Wardlaw (51)

Objectives

The fourth graders focus on art around the world, therefore, my goal is to set the scene for students to explore African American perspectives with an emphasis on common threads and links to the South with connections to Africa. (Art and Humanities Content Standards 1,2,3) They will research and learn about images, symbols, history and culture with origins in Africa that were retained in the Sea Islands and make connections between both. (Communication Standards 1,2,3,4,5) Students will learn about the Gullah people, their culture, history, folklore, folktales, and landscape. They will discover ways that basketry, crafts, quilts, fishnets, and the knowledge and skills for cultivating indigo, rice, and cotton in the Sea Islands can be traced to African cultures. Students will research, identify, compare, and contrast geography, motifs, symbols, and themes that are recognizably reflected, recollected and retold in paintings and folktales. (Communication Standards 6,7,8) Students will design a puppet to accompany a

Gullah folktale. They will use indigo dyed fabric and create their own patterns after studying fabric patterns and symbols in Ghana adinkra cloth. The fabric may be use for puppet costumes or curtain panels for their puppet theatre. (Art and Humanities Content Standards 2, 3, 4)

The fifth graders focus on American art; therefore, my goal is to establish ways for students to familiarize themselves with three African American artists: Ellis Wilson, John Biggers, and Jonathan Green, and recognize and analyze their art using the elements and principals of design. (Art and Humanities Content Standards 1, 2, 3; Communication Standards 1,2,3,) They will explore movements and practices in the United States during the twentieth century such as the Civil Rights movement, WPA projects, and Jim Crow laws and the effects they had on these artists. They will see how the artists brought about change using art as their voice. (Communication Standard 3; Social Studies Content Standard 9) Students will compare and contrast these artists and their work. Students will create a figurative painting or a conte crayon sketch incorporating the figurative style of Wilson, Biggers or Green. Students will become familiar with baskets and their functions and successfully learn to create a coaster or simple coil basket. (Art and Humanities Content Standards 1,2,3, 4) Since my students meet for forty minutes, approximately six times a month, this art curriculum unit will span approximately 10-12 weeks of study. This timeline can be adjusted to meet the students' needs whenever necessitated.

Strategies

Methods and strategies that I will use to implement this unit will include showing slides, prints, books, and using technology for students to develop research skills and foster creativity. Several websites are listed in the appendix. The objectives and strategies correspond to the Pittsburgh Public School Art and Humanities Content Standards 1, 2, 3 and 4; Communications Standards 1-10; and Social Studies Standard 9. A list of these is provided in the appendix.

The unit will strengthen and reinforce higher level thinking skills that promote research and discussion, small cooperative learning groups, and opportunities for writing and sketching in art journals. Art and literature will be tools motivate students to examine, discover, explain, and understand African retentions and African American customs and traditions. I will encourage students to listen to the language and the music, look at the crafts and art that existed, read about the folk lore, beliefs, the skills, the crops and customs that were brought with the Africans from their diverse homeland. Next, they will be given tasks to begin to see what parallels can be established with this new knowledge, particularly looking at the baskets, the cotton, the quilts, the pottery, the ironwork, the grave designs and links to Africa.

I will motivate students by showing prints, slides, video clips and examples from books of the Sea Islands and West Africa as seen through the eyes of Ellis Wilson, John Biggers, and Jonathan Green. There will be many opportunities to collaborate with the school librarian and other teachers as students conduct research and students can read artists' interviews at various websites.

I will collect and display folktales in the art room. Students will read a variety of books and Gullah folktales. They will analyze the illustrations and look for specific items such as fishnets, boats, conjure bags, coil baskets, and sea grass. They will divide into small groups to study guides for several pronunciations and meanings for the Gullah vocabulary.

I will provide large maps and travel brochures for students to divide into groups and locate geographical areas, islands, water bodies, etc. The librarian's unit on *Gullah Culture* is designed to support this art unit, particularly in the realm of the Gullah language, folklore, history and current events and environmental issues.

I will demonstrate the following techniques: sketching with conte crayon; methods of painting the figure emphasizing people in a variety of shapes and sizes with featureless faces; showing movement, wearing bright colors and patterns; how to dye cotton fabric with indigo; method of creating a simple coil basket or a coaster; and ways to create a puppet. Students will recognize, practice, and master these processes and become involved in making their own sketches of artifacts, simple coil baskets or coasters, paintings of figures, adinkra patterned cloth like that from Ghana patterns similar to Ghana adinkra cloth, and an animal puppet to accompany a Gullah folktale.

Class discussions will take place focusing on basic facts about Africa versus the myths that often have been believed. Some common myths may be dispelled as the class discusses a variety of issues and becomes more informed. Kendall Jackson's essays, *Living Gifts from Old Africa*.

Students will meet at each grade level to plan and organize a culminating event featuring an art exhibit, puppet performance, and a celebration with food and music so that they can share their drawings and paintings with the entire school community.

Activities

I will present art activities to students in the classroom with an interdisciplinary approach emphasizing a variety of paths to intertwine art, social studies, writing, and research. Students will use the Internet and the library to conduct research. They will view art images such as slides, prints, and illustrations. They will create a timeline of the 20th century depicting important dated relative to the artists, the Civil Rights era etc. They will record terms and sayings in their art journals along with sketches of symbols, sea grass, moss, baskets, fishnets, animals and fish. They will read and discuss a variety of folktales listed in the bibliography. They will sketch animals and design and assemble puppets to correspond with Gullah folktales. They will dye cotton cloth with indigo and create adinkra patterns. They will sketch artifacts and paint figurative paintings reflective of the style of one of the three artists that they studied. They will exhibit their own art, present a puppet performance, taste Gullah cuisine, and listen to Gullah Island music as a culminating event.

Annotated Bibliography for Works Cited

Bearden, Romare and Henderson, Harry. *A History of African- American Artists: from 1792 to the Present*. New York, Random House, 1993. Useful source for biographical information on Ellis Wilson and John Biggers. It provides informative and historical details concerning Black Americans during the Depression and their involvement with WPA projects.

Biggers, John. *Ananse: The Web of Life in Africa*. Austin, The University of Texas Press, 1962. This is John Biggers' personal account of traveling throughout western Africa in 1952. Featuring his conte crayon drawings interspersed with text; it is an excellent way to share daily life in Ghana such as men working on boats, repairing fishing nets, and harvest festivals.

Branch, Muriel Miller. *The Water Brought Us, The Story of the Gullah-Speaking People*. New York, Cobblehill Books, 1995. Source for quote by Jonathan Green and impressions from his art exhibit at McKessie Museum. Source for net making and quilt making in the Sea Islands.

Bum, Billie. *An Island names Daufuskie*. Spartanburg, The Reprint Company Publishers, 1991. Source for photos of the landscape, teacher's records and Confederate money. Useful appendix for Gullah words and phrases, recipes.

Burn, Billie. *An Island Named Daufuskie*. Spartanburg, The Reprint Company Publishers, 1991. Useful as source for historical accounts, stories, personal interviews and photos of Daufuski Island.

Dabbs, Edith. *Face of an Island*. New York, Grossman Publishers, 1971.

Useful because it contains a large collection of Leigh Richmond Miner's photographs of Saint Helena Island that reveal much about the Penn School begun in 1865 and the isolated life on the island in the early 1900's. Photos of the basket maker and the child, women preparing food, woman bringing firewood home on her head.

Davis, Gerald L. *Afro-American Coil Basketry in Charleston County, South Carolina: Affective Characteristics of an Artistic Craft in a Social Context*. American Folk Life, pgs.151-84. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1976. Useful information edited by Don Yoder that analyzes basketry including the technique, form, and function.

Derby, Doris A. *Black Women Basketmakers*. Illinois, University of Illinois, 1980.

Informative source for comparing and contrasting the form and function of basketry by African-American women.

Five Decades: John Biggers and the Hampton Art Tradition. Hampton, Va., Hampton University Museum, exhibition catalogue, 1990. Useful source for biographical information, the influences of his mentor Victor Lowenfeld, and images of Biggers' art.

Green, Jonathan. *Gullah, Images: The Art of Jonathan Green*. Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1996. Outstanding publication citing biographical information about Jonathan Green and featuring large color plates of his Gullah paintings. Excellent to use in the classroom to analyze, compare, and contrast his work including fishing scenes, waiting for the tide, and places on the island.

Greene Jr., Carroll. *Coming Home Again, Artist Jonathan Green Returns to His Gullah Roots*. American Visions, vol. 5, Number 1, February 1990, pgs 44-52. Useful source for a few anecdotal stories about Green.

Hart, Carol and Dan. *Natural Basketry*. New York, Watson- Guptill Publications, 1976. Handbook with detailed instructions and photographs of making coil baskets. Describes variety of materials and sea grasses that can be used in the classroom.

Herskovits, Melville J. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Gloucester, Peter Smith, 1941 and 1958. Nine chapters, useful notes, bibliography and supplementary bibliography with a thorough index and a pioneering study by one of the leading scholars on Africanisms.

Holland, Rupert Sargent Holland, Ed. *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina 1862-1884*. New York, Negro Universities Press, 1969. Source for personal accounts of activities and descriptions of the Sea Islands.

Holloway, Joseph E., Ed. *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1990. Good source for Africanisms with essays from historical, linguistic, religious, and artistic perspectives.

Hughes, Langston, Milton Meltzer, C. Eric Lincoln, Jon Michael Spencer. *A Pictorial History of African-Americans*. New York, Crown Publishers, Inc., 1995. Good source for referring to chronology of African American history. Useful for the timeline activities.

Jackson, Kennell. *America is Me*. New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 1996. Source for referencing eras in American history that is useful for developing a historical time line. A good book on African American History that would be useful in the classroom because it is written in a question and answer format, detailing issues over the past 400 years including myths, short backgrounds about Africa, the 1920-40's in America, the Jim Crow laws, the Civil Rights Movement, and the 1990's.

Johnson, Guion Griffis. *A Social History of the Sea Islands*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1930. Useful for the social history, mainly cultural developments of the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia, particularly St. Helena, one of the largest islands. Information on the people, the land, Sea Island cotton culture, indigo, boat carving, fishing nets, and oral traditions of Africans and their descendents on the Sea Islands.

Johnson Guy B. *Folk Culture on St. Helena Island, South Carolina*. Hatboro, Pa. Folklore Associates, Inc., 1968. Useful for information on folk songs and folklore from St. Helena.

Jones, Bessie and Bess Lomax Hawes. *Step It Down, Games, Plays, Songs, and Stories from the Afro-American Heritage*. New York, Harper Row, Pub. 1972. Divided into nine sections with games, clapping, plays, jumps, and skips, singing plays, ring dances, outdoor games, songs, and stories.

Jones-Jackson, Patricia. *When Roots Die. Endangered Traditions on the Sea Islands*. Athens, The University of Georgia Press, 1987. Useful for learning specific details about the storytellers and Gullah tales.

Joyner, Charles. *Shared Traditions, Southern History and Folk Culture*. Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1999. A source for documenting the endangered traditions of weeding, reaping, fishing, shrimping, crabbing, and quilting in the Gullah culture.

Kennedy, Jean. *New Currents, Ancient Rivers: Contemporary African Artists in a Generation of Change*. Washington D.C., Smithsonian Institution, 1991. Good source for comparing what artists are doing at the end of the twentieth century and the visibility they are getting.

Lewis, Samella. *African-American Art and Artists*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990. Samella Lewis, art critic, museum educator, art historian, Professor Emeritus, Art History a Scripps College, of the Claremont Colleges, provides biographical information on Wilson and Jonathan Biggers. Useful source for understanding the development of Black American artists in the 1920's through the 1990's.

Livingston, Jane and John Beardsley. *Black Folk Art in America 1930-1980*. Jackson, Mississippi, Concoran Gallery of Art and the University Press of Mississippi, 1983. Source for biography and work of Gullah folk artist Sam Doyle.

Martin, Thad. *John Biggers: Artist Who Influenced a Generation*. *Ebony*, March 1984, p87-90. Source for reading about John Biggers outlook upon his retirement from Texas Southern University and his desire to continue portraying the African-American life in the South.

McElroy, Guy C. *Facing History, The Black Image in American Art*. Bedford Arts, Publishers, Concoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., 1990. (Exhibition Catalogue) Source for background and history of paintings with African American subjects.

Moutoussamy-Ashe, Jeanne. *Daufuski Island*. University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 1982. Collection of photographs of descendents of slaves and the landscapes and seascapes of Daufuski, in between Beaufort, South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia. Depicts Sea Island cotton, fishing, and shell fishing scenes. A forward by Alex Haley accompanies this photographic essay.

Myers, Lynn R. *Row Upon Row Sea Island Grass Baskets of South Carolina Low Country*. Columbia, McKissick Museum, 1987. Useful for information and pictures of basketry.

Newman, Thelma R. *Contemporary African Arts and Crafts*. Crown Publishers, Inc. New York, 1974. Source for photographs of African coil basketry.

Opala, Joseph A. *The Gullah. Rice, Slavery, and The Sierra- Leone American Connection*. (Pamphlet) Freetown, Sierra Leone, USIS, 1987. Source from Africa that details rice crop and connection from South Carolina and Sierra-Leone.

Pinckney, Roger. *Blue Roots*. St. Paul Minnesota, Llewellyn Publications, 1998. Useful for learning background information about rice, indigo, cotton and tobacco and their ties to Africa, as well as the baskets weaving in the lowland country of South Carolina that is almost identical to basket weaving in Africa.

Pinckney, Roger. *Blue Roots*. St. Paul, Minnesota, Llewellyn Publications, 1998. Useful source for Sea Island culture.

Pollitzer, William, S. *The Gullah People and Their African Heritage*. Athens, The University of Georgia Press, 1999. Features the Gullah culture, its strong identity to Africa, as much as to America, its past and its future outlook. Good source for research about clay pottery, (monkey face pots), the architectural

ideas of Africa(porches), and the use and repair of fishing nets. Photographs of boat in the marsh grass, nets, pottery, and basketry.

Thompson, Robert Farris. *The Song That Named the Land, in Black Art, Ancestral Legacy*, ed. Anita Wardlaw. Dallas, Dallas Museum of Art. 1989. Useful for information on yard art and bottle trees in Texas.

Lone Star Artists. Time. June 30, 1952. Useful to see how Biggers was portrayed as an emerging artist drawing sad pictures of tired newsboys and harvesters.

Turner, Lorenzo Dow. *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1949. Great source for West African words in the Gullah language.

Twining, Mary Arnold and Keith E. Baird, editors. *Sea Island Roots: African Presence in the Carolinas and Georgia*. Trenton, Africa World Press, Inc., 1991. Useful resource for basketry and quilts in the Sea Islands.

Visona, Monica Blackmun, Robin Poynor, Herbert M. Cole, and Michael D. Harris. *A History of Art in Africa*. New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 2001. Useful for looking at masks, sculpture, basketry, and painting in various regions and cultures in Africa. Helpful in making the connections and links to African-American art.

Vlach, John. *Sources of the Shotgun House: African and Caribbean Antecedents for African-American Architecture*. Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, 1975, 69-73. Source for learning about the architecture of the shotgun house and its influence.

Wardlaw, Alivia J. *The Art of John Biggers, View from the Upper Room*. Houston, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Museum of Fine Arts, 1995. Excellent source for essays about John Biggers life and work. Useful for

showing colored photographs of his murals and paintings. Helpful for studying symbols and their meanings.

Annotated Student Reading List

Banks, Sara Harrell. *A Net to Catch Time*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1997. Useful source for students to see a slice of life on the Sea Islands through the eyes of a young boy, Cuffy. Of special significance is the illustrated Gullah calendar that reflects the simple eloquence of the Gullah language, contains a glossary of translations, and illustrates island activities.

English, Karen. *Neeny Coming, Neeny Going*. New York, Bridge WaterBooks, 1996. This short story about two cousins, set in the 1950's, one that likes Daufuskie Island and the other who seems to have lost interest. Source of great illustrations by Synthia Saint James with figures with featureless faces. Helpful for a painting lesson.

Gauch, Patricia Lee. *Noah*. New York, Philomel Books, 1994. Picture book vividly illustrated by Jonathan Green. Source for showing how he was inspired by figures and stories that he was taught in church as a young boy and reproduced in a bright painterly style for a young audience.

Graham, Lorenz. *I, Momolu*. New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1966. A chapter book, illustrated by John Biggers, affords students the opportunity to read about a young boy, Momolu, and his father, Flumbo, as they share their story about leaving their Liberian village to venture to Cape Roberts, a contrasting scene in a coastal city. Useful source for learning about life in Africa.

Hamilton, Virginia. *The Dark Way. Stories from the Spirit World*. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Pub., 1990. Source for comparing Black folklore to folklore from other cultures.

Haseley, Dennis. *Crosby*. San Diego, Harcourt Brace and Co., 1996. Picture book illustrated by Jonathan Green. Story about a father and son and activities in a Gullah setting.

- *The People Could Fly*. New York, Scholastic Inc., 1985. pgs. 35-47 and 166-173. *Bruh Alligator Meets Trouble* is a Gullah dialect tale that is retold in a very modified Gullah. Source for black folklore emphasizing the phrase to fly, very symbolic and meaningful.

-*When Birds Cold Fly*. New York, The Blue Sky Press. Scholastic, 1996. These are imaginative folktales retold by Virginia Hamilton, which she presents in a prose style in verse and song containing a moral for children. The unique aspect is that these are written in black dialect in an easy-to-read colloquial speech. This is ideal for reading aloud.

Hooks, William H. *The Ballad of Belle Dorcas*. New York, Alfred A. Knopfs, 1990. Gullah folktale of a free woman who seeks help from a conjure woman so that she can remain with her beloved. Illustrated by Brian Pinkney.

-*Freedom's Fruit*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1996. Useful for students to read and discuss a conjure tale from the Lowland. Excellent illustrations.

Lyons, Mary E. *The Butter Tree*. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1995. Includes six folktales that have been retold and recorded in Beaufort, South Carolina and Murrells inlet in South Carolina collected from 1935-1941.

McDermott, Gerald. *Ananzi the Spider*. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1972. This is a simple traditional poetic Ashanti folktale about *Ananzi*, a hero who triumphs over his foes in life. Useful for making connection to John Biggers' publication in 1962.

San Souci, Robert D. *Sukey and the Mermaid*. New York, Four Winds Press, 1992. Authentic Gullah tale about a mermaid. Excellent scratchboard illustrations of the island environment, the water, and the people.

Siegelson, Kim. *In the Time of the Drums*. New York, Hyperion Books for Children, 1999. Easy to read. Useful resource with scratchboard illustrations showing the landscape of the islands, the water, the sea grass, the Ibo people.

The Terrible Wonderful Tellin' at Hog Hammock. New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 1996. Easy to read story about a young Gullah storyteller, whose grandfather had been one of the very best storytellers on Sapelo Island.

Annotated Classroom List

Jackson, Kennell. *America is Me*. New York, Harper Collins Publishers, , 1996. Helpful for researching eras in American history and for developing a historical timeline. Useful in the classroom because it is written in a question and answer format, detailing issues over the past 400 years. Particularly helpful for discussing myths, since it provides short backgrounds about Africa, the 1920-40's in America, the Jim Crow laws, the Civil Rights Movement, and the 1990's.

Krull, Kathleen. *Bridges to Change*. Dutton, New York, Lodestar Books, 1995. A resource students can easily read and see photographs of the children that live on the Sea Islands, their environment, and the baskets that they make using sweetgrass.

Video

John Biggers' Murals and Illuminations, Hampton University, 1992. Excellent for showing clips of the development of a mural from start to finish. Good source for seeing and hearing Biggers in a casual setting.

Recording

Georgia Sea Island Songs, New World Records nw2781977

Appendix 1

Web sites and Internet Resources for Students and Teachers

The following sites provide information on Ellis Wilson.

<http://www.ket.org/content/elliswilson/bio1kentucky.htm> (available 6/2002)

<http://tffaoui.commm/1aa/1aa488.htm> (available 6/2002)

<http://www.uky.edu/University Press/books/elliswilson.html> (available 6/2002)

<http://www.genesiiiartline.com/g206.htm> Source for the *Funeral Procession* (available 6/2002)

http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/wilson_ellis.html (available 6/2002)

The following sites provide information on Jonathan Biggers.

<http://www.mfa.org/exhibitions/biggers.html> (available 6/2002)

<http://www.getty.edu?artsednet/resources/Biggers/Conv/civil.html> (available 6/2002)

<http://www.arts.state.tx.us/news/newspage.asp?nid=mem.3> (available 6/2002)

<http://grandpaasart.com/johnbiggers.html> Resource for *Nubia* and *Jubilee* (available 6/2002)

The following sites provide information on Jonathan Green.

http://www.scafam-hist.org/search_detail.asp?FeatureMonth=4&Feature Year=1997 (available 6/2002)

http://www.gallerychuma.com/jgreen_bio.html (available 6/2002)

<http://www.gallerychuma.com/glad.html> (available 6/2002)

<http://www.tffaoi.com/am/10am/10am163.jpg> (available 6/2002)

The following sites provide information on the Gullah Culture and the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

<http://www.gacoast.com.navigator/quimbys.html> (available 6/2002)

<http://www.hiltonheadisland.com/beaufort.htm> (available 6/2002)

The following sites provide information on the Gullah Culture and sweetwater baskets.

<http://www.cobeaufort.sc.us/bftlib/sweetgra.htm> (available 6/2002)

<http://www.visitsoutherncomfort.com> (available 6/2002)

http://www.gibbes.com/shop/jackson_baskets.html (available 6/2002)

Appendix 2

This is a list of the specific Pittsburgh Public Unit of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Content Standards that were addressed in this unit.

Arts and Humanities

1. All students describe meanings they find in various works from the visual and performing arts and literature on the basis of aesthetic understanding of the art form.
2. All students relate various works from the visual and performing arts and literature of various individuals and cultures showing that they understand important features of the works.

3. All students evaluate and respond critically to works from the visual and performing arts and literature to the historical and cultural context within which they were created.
4. All students produce, perform, or exhibit their work in the visual arts, music, dance or theater, and describe the meanings their work has for them.

Communications

1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.
2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.
3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.
4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform and persuade, in all subject areas.
5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all the forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.
6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and given spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify their purpose, structure and use.
8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform, or describe.
9. All students communicate appropriately in business, work and other applied situations.

Citizenship

9. All students demonstrate an understanding of the history and nature of prejudice and relate their knowledge to current issues facing communities, the United States and other nations.