

“Decoding Jacob Lawrence”



Objective: Infer info about time, place, and culture through observation of art.

Materials

- Image of the painting *Forward* by artist Jacob Lawrence.
- TAB centers such as painting, drawing, sculpture, and collage.

Motivation

- Have students share what they know about Harriet Tubman. Fill in gaps in their knowledge.
- Communicate that Jacob Lawrence painted her to tell the story of her strength and bravery.
- Discuss the basics of the Underground Railroad.

Step 1: Decode the Painting

Show the painting and ask students questions to facilitate their analysis of the artwork:

- Which figure is Harriet Tubman?
- What is she holding? Why would she need a weapon?
- How do the other figures in the painting feel? What about their expressions or body language gives you that information?

Step 2: Create

Before students start work in centers ask: “How could you make artwork that tells an important story?” Some students will choose to work on this and others will decide to work on other ideas.

Step 3: Reflect

After the class cleans up, leave a few minutes for students to share their work. Ask them to share what inspired them and pick one volunteer from the class to give them positive feedback about the work.

Tip: The Underground Railroad is a fascinating subject for children. Have books checked out from the library about Harriet Tubman and the railroad for students who want to learn more. Students who do more research can be called to share what they’ve learned during reflection time.