

Translating the physical movement of a figure onto a piece of paper can be challenging for students. Let's break down the complexity of depicting the body in motion and explore how to guide students to think through the details with easy-to-manipulate visual aids. This activity features a work of art from *Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem*, a special exhibition at the Frye Art Museum.



Henry Taylor. *how i got over*, 2011. Acrylic on canvas. 56 1/8 × 75 1/2 in. The Studio Museum in Harlem; gift of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg 2013.11.1. © Henry Taylor. Courtesy American Federation of Arts.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

Take a moment to look closely at this artwork on your own.

- What is going on in this work? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What can you say about the figure in this painting? What are some clues in the artwork that tell you more about this person in particular?
- Do you see movement in this painting? If so, how did the artist show movement?
- Where do you think this might take place? What type of setting might this be?
- Why do you think the artist chose not to provide a specific setting for the painting?
- If this were a scene from a movie, what might happen next?
- What does this painting remind you of?
- The artist painted this image from a photograph. Where do you think the photographer was in relation to this figure when the photo was taken at this moment?
- If you were to give this painting a title, what might it be?

## ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Alice Coachman, the first Black woman to win an Olympic gold medal in 1947, is the central figure in the painting. As a high jumper, she set American and Olympic records with her first attempt at 5 feet 6 1/8 inches. Born in 1923 during an era of racial segregation in Georgia with no access to regular training facilities, Coachman created her own hurdles with tied rags, ropes, and sticks to practice jumping and ran barefoot in fields and on dirt roads as part of her training. At sixteen, she was awarded a scholarship to attend the high school program at Tuskegee Institute, one of the largest historically Black universities in the United States, in Tuskegee, Alabama. After entering the college division in 1943, she played on the basketball team and ran track and field, for which she won four national championships for events in sprinting and high jumping. At the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, she was honored as one of the 100 greatest Olympic athletes in history. In 2004, she was inducted into the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame.

This painting is titled *how i got over*, recalling a song with the same title, “How I Got Over,” performed by Mahalia Jackson to introduce Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech. With Coachman’s fist pump in the air a triumphant gesture and a propelling thrust, Taylor implies one getting over the sociopolitical hurdles beyond the track.

Learn more about *how i got over* on The Studio Museum in Harlem’s website: <https://studiomuseum.org/collection-item/how-i-got-over>

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Los Angeles-based artist Henry Taylor painted this image of Coachman with her Tuskegee uniform from a photograph taken at the US National Women’s Track and Field meet in 1939. His portraits often draw from historical moments and personal memories while focusing on social and political issues as he explores the shared Black American experience. Taylor says, “My paintings are what I see around me...they are my landscape paintings.”

## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

With works in a variety of mediums by nearly eighty artists dating from the 1920s to the present, *Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem* presents close to a century of creative achievements by artists of African descent. Celebrating The Studio Museum in Harlem’s role as a site for the dynamic exchange of ideas about art and society, this landmark exhibition proposes a plurality of narratives of Black artistic production and multiple approaches to understanding these works. Organized by the American Federation of Arts and The Studio Museum in Harlem, the exhibition reveals the breadth and expansive growth of the Studio Museum’s permanent collection and includes iconic pieces by artists such as Barkley Hendricks, Faith Ringgold, Lorna Simpson, Alma Thomas, and James VanDerZee, as well as Seattle’s own Jacob Lawrence and Noah Davis, among many others.

The Studio Museum in Harlem has served as a nexus for artists of African descent locally, nationally, and internationally since its founding in 1968—a watershed year that saw the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, major demonstrations against the Vietnam War, and Tommie Smith and John Carlos's Black Power salute at the Summer Olympics. The Museum's founders were a diverse group of artists, activists, and philanthropists, all committed to creating a working space for artists and a forum in which communities could view and interpret art in Harlem. At the same time, they sought to foreground the work of Black artists amid larger discussions of exclusionary practices in cultural institutions across the United States.

The Studio Museum's Artist-in-Residence program—providing the “Studio” in the Museum's name—was established as an opportunity for emerging artists to create new work in the heart of Harlem, a neighborhood historically associated with Black cultural production. The program has supported many distinguished creators at decisive stages in their careers, including Chakaia Booker, Jordan Casteel, David Hammons, Kerry James Marshall, Wangechi Mutu, Mickalene Thomas, and Kehinde Wiley, all of whom have work included in the exhibition. *Black Refractions* will allow audiences across the country to engage more deeply with this important collection and provide additional contexts in which we can understand its powerful works.

## ACTIVITY

Through close-looking and open-ended discussion, students will spend time with *how i got over* by Henry Taylor from the exhibition *Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem*. Students will then learn the basics of how to depict bodies in motion.

### Materials

- Image of *how i got over* by Henry Taylor
- Multiple pre-cut 1"x1" squares, 2"x1" rectangles, and 1" x 1/2" rectangles (either printer paper or newsprint work well)
- Glue stick
- Oil pastels

### Instructions

1. Spend the first 15 minutes or so exploring the painting with your students before providing any information. Using the provided guiding questions to help them observe and connect with the artwork on a personal level. Before discussing the painting, ask your students to quietly look at this painting for a few moments on their own.
2. Encourage students to consider different body movements and how each limb is positioned. Invite a student to demonstrate different motions to provide a visual reference for the group. (Approximately 5 minutes)
  - What does your body look like when you move on the playground or during P.E.?
  - From the painting we just looked at, how do we know Alice Coachman is not standing still? How did artist Henry Taylor show that she's jumping?
  - How are our arms and legs able to bend? What do our arms and legs have that give us the ability to move? (Name the joints on the body: shoulders, elbows, wrists, hips, knees, and ankles.)
3. Demonstrate how to create a figure in action with the pre-cut squares and rectangles. Hands, feet, and necks can be depicted with additional small rectangles. They can also be drawn directly on the paper later. Make sure to leave room between the head and the body. (Approximately 5 minutes)
  - How might you create a figure using these pre-cut squares and rectangles? Which one might you use for the head? The body? Arms and legs?
  - When you are standing still, where does your hand touch your body? (This is to demonstrate the need for two rectangles to create one arm.)
  - Without bending, folding, or cutting these rectangles, how might you create the joints for the arms and legs in order to show movement? How many of these skinny rectangles do you need for each limb?
  - How might you position these rectangles to show the figure is [insert a specific activity]?
4. Before students start working on their collage, ask them to consider the following:
  - What might your figures be doing?
  - How many figures might you create?
  - Would your figures be in the same or different poses?
  - Would your figures be interacting with each other? If so, how?

5. Students should lay out their figures in action. Encourage them to explore multiple movements. Provide them some time to do so before handing out the glue sticks. (Approximately 5 minutes)
6. Once students glue down the pieces, hand out oil pastels and invite students to add details to their figures. (Approximately 10-15 minutes)
  - What might your figures be wearing? What accessories might you include?
  - What are the skin colors of your figures?
  - What type of settings are your figures in?
  - What are some other details might you also include?
7. Have students clean up and share out. (Approximately 5-10 minutes)
  - What's going on in your artwork? Describe the activities your figures are doing and the movements they are making.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Alice Coachman

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/coachman-alice-marie-1923/> (featuring photo that inspired the artwork)

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/tuskegee-university-1881/>

### Henry Taylor

[https://www.blumandpoe.com/artists/henry\\_taylor](https://www.blumandpoe.com/artists/henry_taylor)

### Narrative Arc

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-are-the-elements-of-a-narrative-arc-and-how-do-you-create-one-in-writing#what-is-the-difference-between-narrative-arc-and-plot>

<https://www.aerogrammestudio.com/2013/06/05/back-to-the-story-spine/>

<https://www.curiographic.com/blog/2017/2/18/jumpstart-your-story-with-the-story-spine>

Visit [fryefromhome.blog](#) for more activities and inspiration.

## STANDARDS

### National Core Arts Standards

#### CREATING

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.

#### PRESENTING

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

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

#### RESPONDING

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

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

#### CONNECTING

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

### Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

### Washington Social Studies Learning Standards, Grades K-5

H2: Understands and analyzes causal factors that have shaped major events in history.

H3: Understands that there are multiple perspectives and interpretations of historical events.

H4: Understands how historical events inform analysis of contemporary issues and events.

Support for this resource is provided in part by Art Bridges. Additional support is provided by the Frye Foundation and Frye Members.



*Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem* is organized by the American Federation of Arts and The Studio Museum in Harlem. This exhibition is curated by Connie H. Choi, Associate Curator of the Permanent Collection at The Studio Museum in Harlem. The presentation at the Frye Art Museum is coordinated by Amanda Donnan, Chief Curator, with David Strand, Associate Curator.



Major support for *Black Refractions: Highlights from The Studio Museum in Harlem* is provided by Art Bridges. Sponsorship for the national tour provided in part by PURE. Support for the accompanying publication provided by Furthermore: a program of the J.M. Kaplan Fund.



Generous support for the installation at the Frye Art Museum is provided by the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture, Hotel Sorrento, the Frye Foundation, and the Board of Trustees: Rhoda Altom, Mike Doherty, Gail Goralski, Jan Hendrickson, James Miles, Jennifer Potter, and Stuart Williams. News media sponsorship is provided by The Seattle Times. Broadcast media sponsorship is provided by KCTS 9.

