

Witness: The Art of Jerry Pinkney Teacher Resource

WEB SECTION #1:

Introduction to Jerry Pinkney

“I’ve found it interesting to trace how the chapters of my life have knitted themselves into my art.” —Jerry Pinkney

In its purest sense, the act of artistic creation is a bit like looking at oneself in the mirror and leaving one’s reflection behind. All that an artist is, all that he believes, and all the many things he has witnessed in his time, become one with his art.

Across his fifty-year journey as an illustrator, Jerry Pinkney has cast a warm, curious eye on our world to create transcendent images that reflect his passion for life, his love of family and community, and his deep and abiding engagement with the rich complexities of history.

Born in Philadelphia in 1939, Pinkney studied at the Philadelphia College of Art. He began his career as a graphic designer in 1960 and has been illustrating children’s books since 1964. His art has appeared in more than one hundred books, garnering Pinkney well-deserved acclaim as the recipient of a Caldecott Medal and multiple Caldecott Honor Medals and Coretta Scott King Awards. In addition to his work in children’s books, Pinkney has created illustrations for a wide variety of clients, including the U.S. Postal Service, National Park Service, and *National Geographic*.

Whether recreating history or breathing new life into classic tales, this master watercolorist is always about much more than just the appearance of things. The exhibition explores this gifted creator’s legacy through powerful images that offer insights into where we have been, who we are, and who we might become.

WEB SECTION #2:

Graphic Change: The Designer as Illustrator

“I found myself solving design problems through drawing.” —Jerry Pinkney

As a child, Jerry Pinkney loved to draw but never imagined that a career in art might be possible. Though visits to museums and galleries were not a part of his life as a child, storytelling was a treasured oral tradition at home. Life in Philadelphia provided a tapestry of visual interest for the young artist, who sketched window displays and observed passers-by between sales at the newspaper stand where he worked. In high school, Pinkney immersed himself in the commercial art program and made time to attend evening life drawing sessions. In 1957 he was accepted at the Philadelphia School of Art as a design student and a scholarship recipient.

A talented designer with an emerging interest in the art of illustration, Pinkney took his first professional step in 1960 at The Rust Craft Greeting Card Company in Dedham, Massachusetts. In the years that followed, Pinkney further explored the art of illustration at Boston’s Barker-Black Studio, creating images for advertising, annual reports, text books, and the first of many picture books to come—*The Adventures of Spider: West African Folk Tales*, published in 1964. In 1967, he made the bold decision to launch a career as a freelance artist.

WEB SECTION #4:

Art of Enchantment: Bringing Classic Stories & Folk Tales to Life

“I am a storyteller at heart.” —Jerry Pinkney

During his childhood, Jerry Pinkney’s parents, who migrated to Philadelphia from the South, read and retold classic folk tales in rhythmic cadences that captured his imagination, providing a sense of cultural belonging. The legend of John Henry and Uncle Remus’s adventures of Brer Rabbit, both later illustrated by the artist, were among his favorites. Helen Bannerman’s *The Story of Little Black Sambo* was treasured among the books in his family’s library, despite its critical reevaluation. “The story of a small boy of color who exhibited courage and wit, and triumphed over something much larger than himself,” was both appealing and affirming for him.

As Pinkney’s interests turned toward the relationship of imagery to literature, the wonders of narrative storytelling were brought to life by encounters with the work of legendary illustrators. The work of N.C. Wyeth captured his attention and studying Wyeth’s paintings up-close proved inspirational. Gifts of books like *The Wonder Clock* by Howard Pyle, *Aesop’s Fables* and *The Wind in the Willows*, both illustrated by Arthur Rackham, sparked his imagination. They instilled in him a desire to create expressive pictures for stories inspired by literature and classic folk tales reflecting traditions and stories from diverse cultures.

WEB SECTION #5:

Time Travel: Revisiting History

“I’ve been privileged to be the voice that others might not have had.” —Jerry Pinkney

Jerry Pinkney has always had a deep and abiding interest in the rich complexities of history. During his early years as an illustrator, and as a father seeking meaningful cultural representations to share, he became acutely aware of the scarcity of published art reflecting the African American experience, whether historical or contemporary. By the time he moved from Boston to New York in 1970, he had already received professional accolades and public recognition. At the time, there was growing demand for a more inclusive approach to children’s literature and to published art in general, and many clients engaged his talents to bring the full breadth of American history to life for the first time.

Powerful and extensively researched, *Escape from Slavery: The Underground Railroad* and *The Cruellest Commerce: The African American Slave Trade from Ghana to Brazil* for *National Geographic*, among others, are unblinking visual documents that have established cultural understanding. “These projects became vehicles to address the issues of being an African American, and the importance of African American contributions to society,” Pinkney said. Always rooting for the underdog, he continues to make images that bear witness to his underlying belief that all things are possible.

WEB SECTION #6:

Burial Ground Interpretive Center

In 2008, Pinkney created a series of powerful life-size figures of documented northern slaves at the African Burial Ground Interpretive Center in New York City. Portraits of his subjects were not extant, so likenesses were inspired by those of others who came as slaves from similar regions in Africa. “My role was to individualize the people who were buried there, to give a face to history.”

WEB SECTION #7:

Sweethearts of Rhythm

Marilyn Nelson’s syncopated poetry jives perfectly with Pinkney’s watercolors in this story about the Sweethearts of Rhythm, a popular interracial all-girl swing band that toured nationally during the Second World War. Pinkney collaged brightly colored papers printed with big band music over his watercolors to make his paintings reflect the layered climate of the World War II and swing band eras. “This gave me a chance to bring something new to my work. We were dealing with an aspect of American history that is somewhat abstract—music, and what music did for this country.”

WEB SECTION #8 - Activities and lesson plan ideas (part 1):

General Activity Suggestions and Discussions for Your Students

The Lion and the Mouse Activity (for younger children)

Wordless books provide a terrific chance for children to tell a tale in their own words. Ask children to 'read' *The Lion and the Mouse* to you, offering their version of what is happening in the book. Sometimes adults need to ask questions to help draw children to the details of the story. If children need help, plan a question to ask on each page. At the heart of this story is the idea that somebody little can help somebody big. After children have read the story, talk about kindness and how it can come back to you. Ask the children if they ever did something nice for somebody who did something nice back.

Folktales, Fables and Legends Activity

General Information

A **folktale** is a story which is pure fiction and which does not have a particular time or space. It is usually a symbolic way of presenting the way human beings cope with the world where they live.

A **legend** is a story from the past about a historical individual. These stories are concerned with people, places, and events in history.

A **fable** is short fictitious story; *especially* one intended to teach a lesson and in which animals speak and act like human beings

WEB SECTION #8 - Activities and lesson plan ideas (part 2):

Character + Setting Activity

Using any of Jerry Pinkney's books as inspiration, ask students to decide what genre of literature (fable, legend, or folktale) he/she is going to write. Then ask students to decide what part they'd like to illustrate using any medium.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Build Your Character!

Choose a character from your selected book/story and decide these facts about him or her:

Character's Name: _____

Character's Age: _____

Job: _____

Personal Interests or Hobbies: _____

Favorite Color: _____

Write three adjectives to describe her/his *appearance*:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Write three adjectives to describe her/his *personality*:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Looking at your book/story, what *setting* is your character in?

What can you *infer* from the setting that tells you more about who your character is?

Are there other people or objects in the book/story? What do these things tell us about your character's life?

Before your character walked into the book/story, what was she or he doing?

Why was your character doing that?

When your character walks out of the book/story, where will they go and what will they do?

Why will your character do that?

WEB SECTION #8 - Activities and lesson plan ideas (part 2):

Remember When: Memoirs Activity

Use *Childtimes: A Three Generation Memoir* as inspiration for this activity.

A memoir is a narrative composed from personal experience.

- Discuss with students what a memoir is.
- Ask students to think about what in their lives they might choose to tell in their memoir.
- Ask students to write their memoir or a page from their memoir depending on the grade level.
- If you choose, use this template to attach a photo or a drawing of one aspect of their memoir.

Ideas from which to choose:

Experiences	Birthdate, place
Name and meaning of name	Family members
Places live or lived	Major events
Travel	Friends
Jobs	Clothes
School	

List some of the great experiences you've had

Think of a significant experience you've had and write down a few words or a phrase that will remind you about the story. Some phrases that might inspire you include:

The time I...
How I learned...
Why I don't...
Where I found...
How I met...

Carry this worksheet with you all day today. Whenever you think of one of your experiences, jot down a few words to remind you what it was. Don't try to write about the experience, just make a list. There is no limit.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

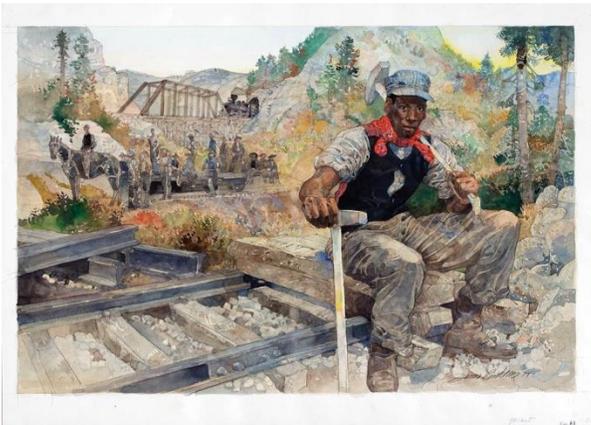
WEB SECTION #8 - Activities and lesson plan ideas (part 3):

Artful Thinking Routine Activities*

**Strategies for looking at and talking about art developed by Harvard's Graduate School of Education's Project Zero.*

Looking: Five Times Two (or Ten Times Two for older students)

Use this image or another one for this activity. Project this image for the students to view.



1. Look at the image quietly for 30 seconds. Let your eyes wander.
2. List or say 5 words or phrases about any aspect of the artwork.
3. Repeat 1 and 2: Look at the image again and try to add 5 more words or phrases to your list.
4. Discuss.

I See/I Think/I Wonder

Use this image or another one for this activity. Project this image for the students to view.



1. What do you see?

2. What do you think about that?
3. What does it make you wonder?
4. Discuss.

Beginning/Middle/End (upper elementary)

Use this image or another one for this activity. Project this image for the students to view.

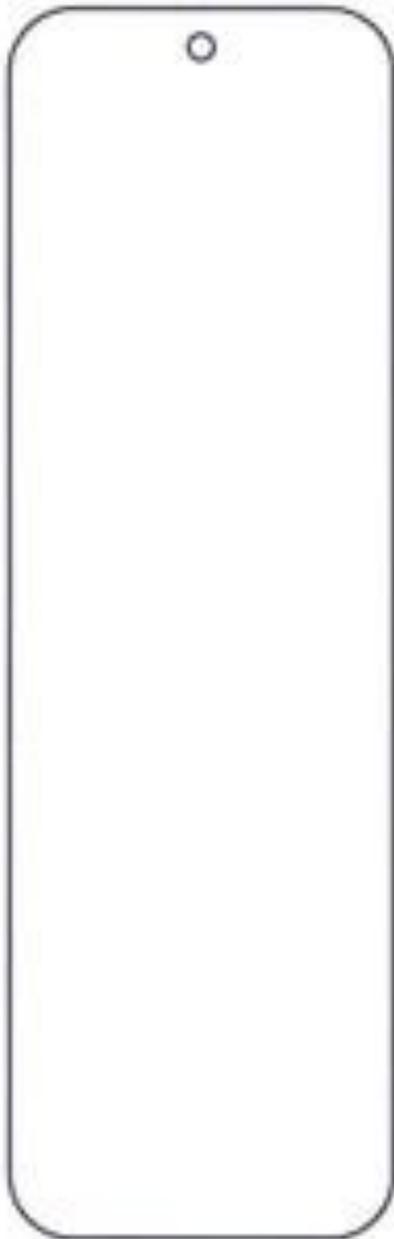


- If this artwork is the beginning of a story, what might happen next?
- If this artwork is the middle of a story, what might have happened before? What might be about to happen?
- If this artwork is the end of a story, what might the story be?
- Discuss.

WEB SECTION #8 - Activities and lesson plan ideas (part 4):

Design Your Own Bookmark

Use the following template and ask students to decorate using markers and/or colored pencils.



WEB SECTION #9

Jerry Pinkney Resources

WEBSITES

- **Jerry Pinkney's Website:**
<http://www.jerrypinkneystudio.com/>
- **Overview of the exhibition** (from Norman Rockwell Museum):
<http://www.nrm.org/2011/01/witness-the-art-of-jerry-pinkney-2/>
- **Information about Jerry Pinkney's life and his studio** (from Hudson River Museum):
http://www.hrm.org/exhibits/Pinkney/Pinkney.html?utm_source=FY+13+Education+Brochure&utm_campaign=Education&utm_medium=email

VIDEOS

- ***Witness: The Art of Jerry Pinkney:***
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9K0sVOShSns>
- **J. Pinkney leads a tour** (at Norman Rockwell Museum) :
Tour 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FknKcmsZPzQ>
Tour 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItERJunSxWc>
- **2010 National Book Festival:**
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSIO0eEXQ_A
- **Jerry Pinkney describes The Lion and the Mouse:**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iptWPwWbwgM>
- **Jerry Pinkney discusses Three Little Kittens:**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yk9ht42Dh3g>
- **10-part video tour podcast** (towards bottom of the page):
<http://www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/787.html>

ARTICLES

- **Philadelphia Daily News article on the exhibition/Jerry's Philadelphia roots:**
http://articles.philly.com/2013-06-26/news/40187676_1_jerry-pinkney-perelman-building-art-museum
- **New York Times article on *Witness: The Art of Jerry Pinkney:***
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/16/nyregion/jerry-pinkneys-work-to-be-on-exhibit-in-yonkers.html?_r=0