

# The Senses of Memory

A Curricular Encounter by Juliann Dorff

# TEXTURES

THE HISTORY AND ART OF BLACK HAIR



— THE KSU —  
MUSEUM

[www.kent.edu/museum](http://www.kent.edu/museum)

# The Senses of Memory

Section: Community and Memory

Author: Juliann Dorff

*Grade Level:* 7 – 12

*Expected Length:* 5 – 7 class periods

All our memories are stored in our minds ready to be brought to the forefront when we are triggered by our senses. It could be the stanza from a song, a fragrance in the air or a particular shade of color and we are instantly transported to a place, a time and with people long forgotten. We will explore how our senses hold the keys to our memories providing the basis for pencil, pen and collaged works.

## Artworks/Artifacts

**Mary Sibande, *Sophie Velucia in Conversation with Madam C. J. Walker*, 2009** (Pages 60-61)

The artist has created a body cast of herself and an alter-ego named Sophie. The mannequin is dressed in a royal blue gown with a contrasting white sash tied in an oversized bow in the back. The gown is reminiscent of plantation garb but the color, the vibrant blue, refers back to her childhood in South Africa where three generations of women in her family were domestic servants required to wear a uniform of this blue hue. The figure leans forward holding strands of synthetic black hair. These strands attach to the wall and are woven to form a portrait of Madam C. J. Walker who, as recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records, was the first female self-made millionaire in the United States.

**Joseph Eze, *Stella Pomade #3*, 2018** (page 62)

Contemporary Nigerian artist, Joseph Eze created mixed media portraits often from mundane materials. In the work *Stella Pomade #3*, Eze creates a portrait of his mother with a canister of *Stella Pomade* on her head using newspaper and acrylic paint. The pomade was a ubiquitous product in Nigerian households until recently when it was replaced by imported products and was known for its range of scents. It was designed to make the skin of the user luminous which is clearly seen in the work. As the model balances the canister on her head, we are drawn to the meticulously painted coils of hair that have been created using a method called threading. The canister itself is painted in warm, rich color detailing the label and alluding to the fragrance within.

**Augusta Savage, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, 1939** (page 149)

This sculpture was originally commissioned for the New York World's Fair of 1939. The original was designed to be 16 feet tall and was destroyed after the Fair closed. Inspired by the poem (later turned into a song) by James Weldon Johnson, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, often referred to as the Black Anthem, represents a harp created out of twelve Black singers as the strings, the hand of God as the sounding board and a kneeling man holding a plaque of the title as the foot

pedal. An artist involved with the Harlem Renaissance; Savage was also an art teacher as well as a noted sculptor.



Visit the Community Renewal Society website at <https://www.communityrenewalsociety.org/blog/lift-every-voice> for *more information about Augusta Savage's Lift Every Voice and Sing.*

## Lift Every Voice and Sing by James Weldon Johnson

Lift every voice and sing  
'Til earth and heaven ring,  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise  
High as the listening skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.  
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us,  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun  
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chastening rod,  
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;  
Yet with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet  
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,  
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,  
Out from the gloomy past,  
Till now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.  
God of our weary years,  
God of our silent tears,  
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;  
Thou who has by Thy might Led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.  
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,  
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,  
May we forever stand.  
True to our God,  
True to our native land.

Visit YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DS60luWpBe0> for a performance of *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, sung by Alicia Keys.

## Key Vocabulary

**Text and Image-** The interaction between image and text to enhance the meaning of an artwork.

**Apartheid-** A policy of racial segregation and discrimination enforced by the South African government from 1948 to the early 1990's.

**Pomade-** A hair care product that gives the hair a slick appearance. Today pomade products continue to be used with a do-rag/du-rag to create brush waves in the hair of African Americans.

**Balanced Composition-** the overall layout of a work resulting in a consistent visual weight as created by objects and imagery.

## Objectives

### Critical Inquiry:

Students will discover the universal power of our senses to store our memories through the examination of Mary Sibande's *Sophie Velucia in conversation with Madam C. J. Walker*, Joseph Eze's *Stella Pomade #3* and Augusta Savage's *Lift Every Voice and Sing* along with the audio version of the song by the same name.

#### **National Visual Arts Standard:**

**Connecting:** *Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.*

**Anchor Standard:** *Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.*

**Enduring Understanding:** *Through art making, people make meaning by investigating and developing awareness of perceptions, knowledge, and experiences.*

### Art History Inquiry:

Students will investigate the various processes artists use to represent an idea rooted in a sensory memory--Mary Sibande's *Sophie Velucia in conversation with Madam C. J. Walker* through mixed media, Joseph Eze's *Stella Pomade #3* through painting and Augusta Savage's *Lift Every Voice and Sing* through sculpture.

#### **National Visual Arts Standard:**

**Responding:** *Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.*

**Anchor Standard:** *Perceive and analyze artistic work.*

**Enduring Understanding:** *Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.*

### Aesthetic Inquiry:

Students will debate the value of the original version of Savage's *Lift Every Voice and Sing* at 16 feet in height and destroyed after the World's Fair, and whether it is fairly represented by the less than one foot representation now shown.

#### **National Visual Arts Standard:**

**Responding:** *Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.*

**Anchor Standard:** *Perceive and analyze work.*

**Enduring Understanding:** *Individual aesthetic awareness developed through engagement with*

*art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments.*

### Studio Inquiry:

Students will create a pen and pencil drawing of their personal scent memory using a balanced composition and the combination of text and image.

### **National Visual Arts Standard:**

**Creating:** *Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.*

**Anchor Standard:** *Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.*

**Enduring Understanding:** *Artists and designers experiment with forms, structures, materials, concepts, media, and art making approaches.*

### Materials

Lunch bag for each student, each with a different item with a pungent smell, such as a lemon, an orange, cloves, cologne sprayed on a tissue, cinnamon stick, etc.

Quality drawing paper of various sizes plus one minimum 9" X 12" full sheet

Drawing pencils

Erasers (preferably kneaded)

Fine line markers

Glue Sticks

Scissors

### Prepare/Discuss

Pass out the lunch bags with the items in them to the class. Each student should have one. Have the students open the bag and smell the item inside. Encourage them to scratch the surface to really get the scent. This is particularly helpful with the cinnamon and the fruit. Then have them write about the memory they have from this scent. Just a couple of sentences. This becomes an opportunity to experience how our senses can trigger our memories. Encourage students to share what they have written if they would like (this should not be required). Have the students keep their stories.

Select one of the works listed above for engagement with the class. Focus on the senses that are key to unlocking the story of each piece - sight for Sibande's work, sound for Savage's work (be sure to play the song derived from the poem and the inspiration for Savage's interpretation) and smell for Eze's work. Encourage students to either keep the memory they wrote about at the start or select another memory that is triggered by one of their senses and write about that memory. Remember, not all memories are positive ones. Provide students the option of keeping their stories to themselves if they choose not to share. In Sibande's work, she clothes her alter ego in the symbolic blue color of the women in her family who worked as servants for people who would not allow them to pursue education beyond the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and developed a system designed to oppress the Bantu population in South Africa through Apartheid. This is a

painful memory. She chooses to place herself opposite a woman who achieved remarkable success and connect the two of them together through the strands of hair.

As the lesson progresses, introduce each of the works to reinforce the concept of memories being stored by our senses. Questions for each work:

**Sibande:** Begin by sharing the information about the work, particularly the story of Madame C.J. Walker and the reference of the blue in the figure's gown.

*How does the use of the strong blue color in the figure's dress, while representative of the required servitude of her ancestors, change as she becomes a character interacting with a leader in the Black community?*

**Eze:** *If we opened the jar, where would that scent take us? Who in your life is referenced in your mind by the product(s) they use?*

**Savage:** *How important is reading/hearing the poem/song to the message in the sculpture? Imagine standing next to the original 16-foot-tall work. How would the scale of the work change your ideas/perspective about the message of the work?*

To frame this discussion, begin by showing the video of Alicia Keyes performing *Lift Every Voice and Sing*.

**Establish a debate by having students assigned a side: 1) supporting the decision to destroy it, and 2) the argument for having it saved.**

Additional questions: What are the similarities and differences between this destruction and the destruction of *Black Wall Street* in Tulsa in 1921?

## Create

From the memory stories written students select one object/item that reflects the story. This object is then drawn from at least 5 different points of view (from the top, bottom side, different stage, etc.). Each of these drawings is done in pencil with great detail and on different sizes of the drawing paper.

Students then do tracings of all or part of these drawings using the tracing paper and the fine line sharpie marker.

On the 9" X 12" drawing paper arrange the smaller drawings and tracings overlapping and creating the composition. Before positioning each image permanently with glue, plan the lettering and placement to add the story to the work. Have students consider how it should move through the piece based on the message it holds. For example, a memory based on a smell may best be represented floating through the work as a fragrance would. Students can keep their entire story intact and very readable, or choose to obscure portions that may be too

personal to reveal. After this has been planned use the glue sticks to attach the items to the drawing paper and include the story as the layers develop.

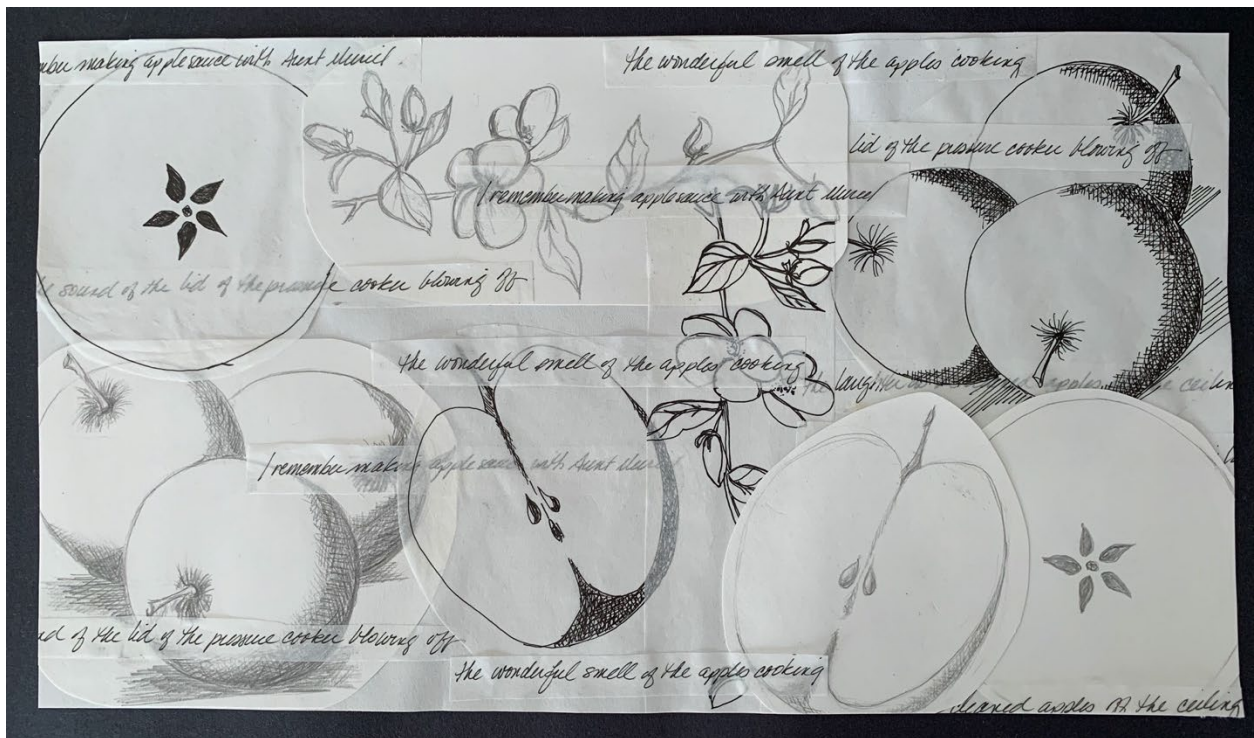
## Reflect

Randomly select 3-5 of the artworks created and divide the class into groups equal to the number of artworks (3 artworks - 3 groups, 5 artworks – 5 groups). Keep each group no larger than 5 students. Provide each group with one of the works making sure that the artist is NOT a member of the group.

Provide each group with the following list of questions:

- What is the memory presented in the work?
- How is this memory depicted through the illustration?
- How is the memory depicted through the story?
- What emotion is being presented through the work?

Each group discusses their responses to the questions and presents the work to the class at large. Pay particular attention to the variety of memories shared and emotions presented.



**Studio Model:** *Applesauce with Aunt Muriel*, by Juliann Dorff