



Lewis Latimer House Museum

Lesson Plan: Home/Land Exhibition-Art Inquiry Program

Grades 7-12

60 minutes

Learning Objective: Students will learn about migration stories in order to understand the strength, hope, and resilience of humanity.

Learning Outcome: Students will show connections between the characteristics that make them strong and the strengths of Lewis Latimer and the stories conveyed through the artworks discussed.

Introduction

Consider having students watch the Lewis Latimer video before beginning this lesson [Insert link to video]

- What does the word *Home* make you think of?
- What might a person's or family's home tell us about the people who live there?
- What does the word *Land* make you think of?
- What *is* land? (It is the ground, earth, soil, the plants that grow in the soil).
- We know homes belong to people. What about land?
- Why might people travel across land (migrate) in search of a new home?

Lewis Latimer's parents traveled from Virginia to Massachusetts, a very dangerous trip for them to make, to escape slavery. Today, we are going to look at artwork that looks at these themes: The right to have a home and to feel safe and secure in your home, as well as to understand why people move to new countries and what characteristics they might have in order to migrate to a new country, on new land, in search of a new home. We will think about what characteristics and values we may share with those who have migrated and with the artists who believe everyone has the right to feel safe and secure in their home, no matter on what land that home might be.



Art Based Inquiry

Students will consider the artist statements as primary documents as they spend time reading the artists words and observing the artwork. The artworks can be looked at and discussed as a class using the discussion questions as a guide or students can be assigned one or two artworks to consider individually. Discussion can be had as a group or you can select some questions for students submit written responses to or assign the suggested essay question.

Lorena Molina, *Building a Home out of Dirt*



Lorena Molina

Building a Home out of Dirt, 2018

Video

Click the link to view this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0sCgxrhg0g>

Artist Statement:

Through the use of photography, video, performance art, and artist's books, I explore intimacy, identity, pain, and how we perceive the suffering of others. My work interrogate relationships and the formation of relationships as political acts that are guided by negotiations of power and privilege.

At the core of my work is an exploration of spatial inequalities and the challenges that oppressed groups face in constructing place and establishing a sense of belonging. My work is driven by a deep sense of displacement experienced after a 12 year old civil war forced my family and I to migrate to the United States. Most of my work stems from a need to find and build community. It deals with the atrocities of war, dislocation,



otherness, and white washing caused by the process of making home in the unwelcoming.

Ultimately, my work is always asking for witnesses. To witness is to open oneself up to difference. To witness is to acknowledge that, although difficult to understand, unfamiliar experiences and often silenced stories are an essential part of our collective narrative.

Questions for discussion:

- What is this woman doing? (the literal observation not symbolic)
- Where is she? (tell them to look for clues in her surroundings.)
- What else do you notice about the woman and her surroundings? (her cotton dress, bare feet, the repetitive motion.)

The artist is from El Salvador and moved to NY because of the civil war.

The corn field represents her new home in NY

- If she is building a home out of dirt what characteristics might she have? (determination, dedication, fear, concern, strength)
- Do you think she succeeds? (Lorena is a working artist living in Ohio. She is able to communicate her life's challenges through her art.)
- What does she have in common with Lewis Latimer?

Essay Question: The video is titled Building a Home out of Dirt. What might this mean for the artist and her story? In what ways does she use the land as a metaphor for her relationship with homemaking. How might this depiction of building a home connect with the broader experience of assimilating to American culture?

Additional Context:

Building a Home out of Dirt is part of the *Nothing Hurts like Home* Series, which explores my complicated relationship with homemaking as someone who has experienced displacement because of war. This work was influenced by my move to rural central NY as I simultaneously became a US citizen before the 2016 election. The landscape of Corn fields connected my homeland and Central New York. In the video, I enter the field to try to build a home. Because the dirt has been overworked, it is crumbly and unstable. My labor is repetitive, intensive, yet futile, as every home I try to build crumbles down. This act is a visual metaphor of my experience as an immigrant trying to build a home in the unwelcoming.

Peter Hoffmeister, *Scrub*



Peter Hoffmeister

Scrub, 2020

Sound

To access this piece, dial 929-277-1848. Once the recording begins, have students listen for a moment before reading further.

Artist Statement:

Hoffmeister creates work that challenges dominant cultural narratives in the United States, often using historical events, places, and documents as a lens through which to understand the present. Many of his works are site-specific in nature, informed by extensive research, and fostered by a holistic approach to the use of materials and modes of display. Hoffmeister currently has a solo exhibition of site-specific works installed in the period rooms of the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum in upper Manhattan. He has also created site-specific works for various locations including: Bill(board), a billboard in Washington Heights, Unpacked, a solo exhibition in the period rooms of Morris-Jumel Mansion, and various work for The Church of St. Paul the Apostle.

Work statement:

For this piece, Hoffmeister disassembles the triumphant presumptions of the Star-Spangled Banner into a constellation of glitches and hic-ups, disrupting the homogeneity that nationalism tends to encourage. By using visitors' cell phones as a part of the work, Hoffmeister acknowledges Lewis Latimer's involvement with the



patenting of Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, an American invention. The phone becomes a diagnostic tool—one where visitors are confronted with a broken national anthem—suggesting that the ideals of freedom and liberty celebrated in the lyrics have never truly existed for all.

Questions For Discussion:

Describe what you hear.

- Is sound/noise art?
- What does it mean to deconstruct?
- Why might Peter want to deconstruct the national anthem?
- What does the national anthem mean?
- When/ at what occasions have you heard it?

The national anthem is usually considered a proud symbol of America, representing the country and its ideals.

- What other American symbols can you think of?
- How might they have different meanings for different people?
- In what ways might we consider deconstructing them?

Essay Question:

One reason the artist made work that involved phones is because of Latimer's contribution to the invention of the original telephone. He wants us to make the connection and understand what an important historical figure Latimer is.

Scrub as a metaphor for whitewashing. How has history been whitewashed in America? How do Latimer's contributions to science connect to a scrubbing of history?

Additional Context

Scrub (Lewis Latimer House) is a site-responsive audio piece that uses The Star-Spangled Banner as its source. As a sonic structure that encourages patriotic and nationalist sentiment, the lyrics reference the American flag, an emblem meant to condense American-ness into a single abstract image, which further reinforces the symbolism of the song. I disassembled the triumphant presumptions of the anthem into a constellation of glitches and hiccups, achieved by digitally "scrubbing" the official U.S. Army recording of The Star-Spangled Banner. This is my attempt to disrupt the homogeneity and flattening effects of nationalism.

Sheridan MacKnight, *Carlisle Girls*



Sheridan MacKnight

Carlisle Girls, 2018

Ink and gouache on archival watercolor paper

Artist Statement

I think of my relations, the Hunkpapa Lakota and the struggle of the word, "HOME" was the basis of a generational heartbreak. Broken treaties, after broken treaties... my people learned that "Home"...was a place of vague beautiful memories, specifically after relocation.

Through incredibly hard times my great, great Grandfather was able to farm his allotted land, and home became a place of healing. But at the same time in history, many of his leaders, patriots among the people, were either killed or forced to submit to the Governments greed. Even after many generations, we still care for my great, great grandfathers' land in South Dakota, Standing Rock Reservation, a place he called, thiyáta. This is an incredible gift, to have still the land, that represents a sad chapter in history, but also represents a strength and resilience in a people. After my mother passed, the stewardship of 1,000 acres was given me, this is a great responsibility, but a responsibility I hold with reverence... It was and is home to my people.

Questions for discussion

- What do you see/notice in this painting?
 - Three children (Students may not recognize them as girls but may recognize the bows in their hair after looking closely.)
- Why might they be dressed the same?
- Where do children wear uniforms?
- What details in the clothing suggest a time period? (This will be hard, and I am mostly thinking of the large bows and the boots. The clothes do look dated and conservative, so they may pick up on this.)
- What do their different heights tell us? (Age differences, most likely, possibly sisters)

The painting is called Carlisle Girls. The Carlisle School was a boarding school in PA. Does anyone know what a boarding school is?

The Carlisle School's full name was The Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Who is familiar with the word *Industrial*? (If they are too young just tell them it was a place where children took classes but also worked).

- How does hearing the full title help you understand who the girls in the painting are? (They should now understand that they are Indigenous, Sioux to be specific.)

This is a good place in which to share Sheridan Macknight's backstory: her grandmother attended the school, and her family has a difficult time with the concept of



“home” because Native peoples have had their homes taken from them or been taken from their homes, BUT they are resilient and have endured despite this disconnection from home.

- What might these girls have in common with Lewis Latimer? (He was a sibling and was separated from his parents. Despite that, he thrived).

Additional Context

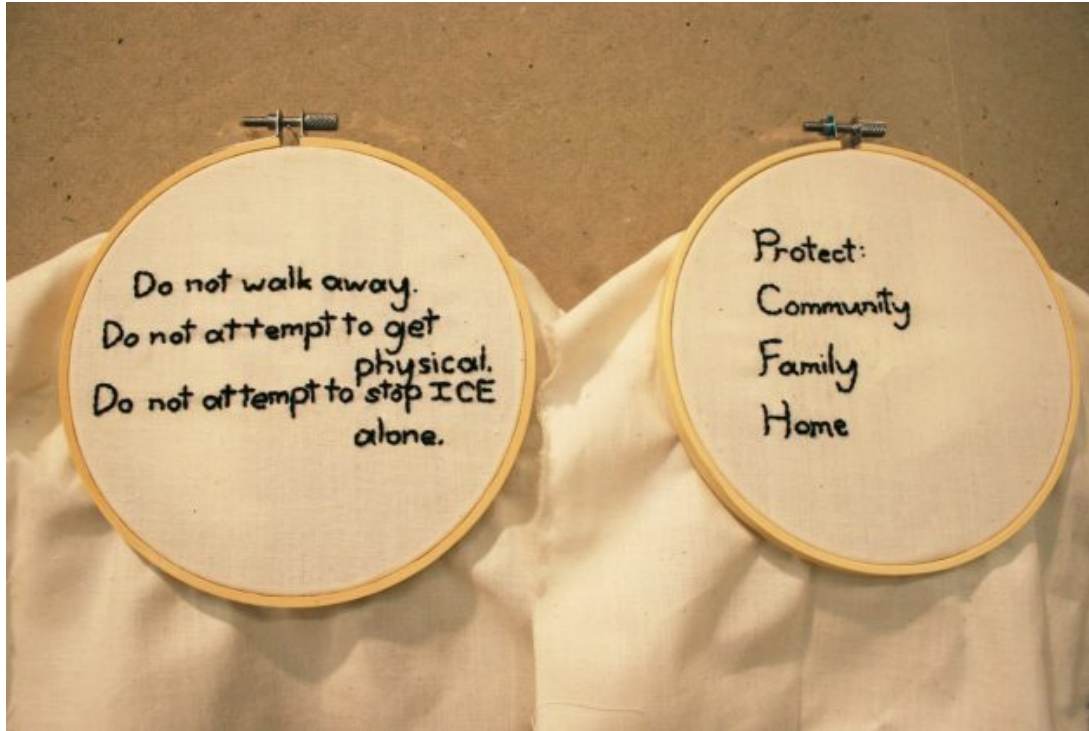
Home in the Lakota language is thiyáta, meaning, at home, homeward.

I think of my relations, the Hunkpapa Lakota and the struggle of the word, "HOME" was the basis of a generational heartbreak.

My family was taken from the lush land of the Black Hills and forced to live in a place so desolate the dirt would only grow sage brush and cactus, The Standing Rock Reservation. After time passed, and the struggles of adjusting were beginning to show some positive effects, many families were forced to abandon their children to boarding schools, where any established feeling of home, was abolished.

-My Grandmother, Eva Flying Earth was forced to attend Carlisle Boarding school, in Carlisle Pennsylvania, early 1900's, 1500 miles from her home in Wakpala, Standing Rock Reservation.

Sejin Park, *Comforts of Home*



Sejin Park
***Comforts of Home*, 2019**
Thread, Cotton Fabric, Wooden embroidery hoops

Artist Statement

In my work, I uplift the aspects of life that society belittles, trivializes, and deprecates. The political climate has created an illusion of fear where we take refuge in our homes and daily schedules. Our avoidance has made our reality monotonous and stagnant. Through art we have the potential to envision, and radically enact change in our everyday lives. By creatively re-imagining a future, we can challenge injustices, paving the path for effectual change.

Questions for discussion

- Can you describe what you see?
- Is this a painting? (some may say yes)
- What is this body of work made out of? Let's discuss the materials the artist chose to use.
- Why might the artist choose embroidery for their art? And why might she have chosen to include the embroidery hoop in the final work?
- Where have you seen embroidery before? What type of images are typically depicted with embroidery?

Additional Context

In the face of ICE targeting the immigrant community, Comforts of Home uses embroidery as its medium, which is typically regarded as a domestic hobby. The text originates from Know Your Rights resources distributed by progressive non-profit organizations in order to raise awareness and empower the immigrant community. Though we assume that home should be a place of stability and comfort, the text on each embroidery hoop reminds us that many do not have the luxury of feeling safe in their homes. That luxury should be a basic human right, but cannot be afforded by the immigrant population who are subject to violence, intimidation, and forcible family separation and detention by our current administration. This crisis represents a regression back to the dire abuse of human rights in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.