

M

Art, Theater, and Beyond

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STUDENT HANDOUT

RED LEVEL

GO DEEPER

Seeing in Silhouette

Grades 5–8 · Art



ADMIT ONE

NAME	DATE	CLASS

Critical frame: Art historian Amy Helene Kirschke argues that Aaron Douglas “created a visual language for a people.” Every formal choice Douglas made was both aesthetic and political. Analyze three works using the five technique dimensions, then write a critical interpretation of what his visual choices argue about Black identity and history.

ACTIVITY 1

Three-work formal analysis



ON THE SCREEN

Song of the Towers

Aaron Douglas, 1934



ON THE SCREEN

The Creation

Aaron Douglas, 1935



ON THE SCREEN

Harriet Tubman

Aaron Douglas

DIMENSION	SONG OF THE TOWERS	THE CREATION	HARRIET TUBMAN
Silhouette use			
Circle / light			
Color palette + meaning			
African influence			
Narrative / argument			

ACTIVITY 2 · CRITICAL INTERPRETATION

What Does Douglas Argue?

Write a two-paragraph critical interpretation. **Paragraph 1:** What visual argument does Douglas make about Black history and identity across all three works? **Paragraph 2:** How do his formal choices (silhouette, circle, color, geometry) make that argument more powerful than if he had painted realistically?

ACTIVITY 3

The collaboration



ON THE SCREEN

Aspects of Negro Life: The Negro in an African Setting

Aaron Douglas, 1934. Note the concentric circles, silhouettes, and African imagery.

Douglas and Langston Hughes worked together closely — Douglas illustrated Hughes’s books and magazines. Look at this Douglas image and the Hughes poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (1921). What visual and verbal techniques do they share? What does each medium do that the other cannot?

CRITICAL QUESTION

Douglas removed facial features from his figures, making them archetypes rather than individuals. Some critics argued this dehumanized his subjects. How would you defend Douglas’s choice against this criticism?

MINI MUSEUM CONNECTION

Deep dive: Douglas trained in European techniques but deliberately departed from them. Research *Aspects of Negro Life* (1934) — the four-panel mural at the Schomburg Center in Harlem. How does the narrative across four panels function differently from a single painting? What does sequence add to the argument?

minimuseumproject.org/exhibitions/harlem-renaissance