

## Archibald Motley: Jazz Age Modernist

*Why should the Negro painter, the Negro sculptor mimic that which the white Man is doing when he has such an enormous colossal field practically all his own; portraying his people historically, dramatically, hilariously, but honestly. And who knows the Negro race, the Negro soul, the Negro heart, better than himself?*

—Archibald Motley Jr.

PAINTER ARCHIBALD J. MOTLEY JR. (1891–1981) CREATED portraits and scenes that reflect the African American experience of his era. Although he was associated with the Harlem Renaissance, a creative flourishing of the literature, art, music, and culture of African Americans, he never lived in New York's Harlem neighborhood nor did he associate with those artists. In fact, he did not feel that the visual arts were as important to the Harlem Renaissance as other art forms. Nevertheless, he is still best known for his portraits and paintings of urban street scenes and jazz cabarets, which visually embody the spirit of that movement.

These materials focus on the exhibition *Archibald Motley: Jazz Age Modernist* (on view through February 1, 2015), which features paintings from throughout the artist's career. Dedicated to exploring the diversity and richness of black culture through naturalistic portraits, and later, stylized genre scenes of everyday life, Motley embraced drama, humor, and honesty. Educators and students will learn about the career of this important artist, who lived during a turbulent and important time in American history, through examples of paintings of African Americans, including his family, friends, and neighbors—and historic events.

### His Life

Motley was born in New Orleans to parents who held some of the most prestigious jobs available to African Americans at the time. His mother was a school-teacher; his father, a porter for Pullman railroad cars. Motley was of African American, Creole, and European descent. His light skin and middle-class status afforded him opportunities that were often out of reach for other African Americans in that period. Because of their Creole or "French Negro" heritage, economic standing, and level of education, the family retained a certain respectability within their community.

Like many African Americans at the time, the Motleys migrated to the "north" in search of better economic opportunities and to escape the South's rampant racism. Motley was two years old when he settled with his family in Englewood, a mostly white, middle-class suburb of Chicago, where Motley attended mostly white primary and middle schools.

Motley attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), a prestigious institution that was one of the first colleges to allow black students. There, he trained in formal, conventional painting techniques including traditional compositions and representational drawing methods. Motley thought that he ought to "abide by principles of true art, as our [white] brethren do." Although mostly accepted by the other students, Motley nevertheless experienced some harassment. A family friend paid for Motley's first year of study. After that, he supported himself with jobs such as dusting sculpture pedestals and working as a janitor. Despite the difficulties of paying his own way through school, Motley earned good grades and won several awards for his artwork.

At SAIC, he met other black artists, as well as artists whose works centered on the modern, urban American experience. These experiences led him to embark on a career that focused on depicting contemporary African American life, which was unusual at the time. Using the traditional techniques he had learned, he painted portraits that depict African Americans in a dignified way, rather than in the stereotypical or caricatured ways that white artists had often portrayed African Americans. Motley wanted to represent the American Negro honestly and sincerely. He said: "I feel that my work is peculiarly American; a sincere personal expression of the age and I hope a contribution to society."

After graduation from SAIC in 1918, Motley had immediate success. He exhibited widely and won many awards, including a prestigious offer to study abroad in Paris, through a 1929 Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1933 he began teaching at Howard University and working for the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (FAP) as part of a New Deal program to give work to unemployed artists during the Great Depression. One of the artworks he completed while working for the FAP, *Arrival at Chickasaw Bayou of the Slaves of President Davis*, is included in this packet.

After a courtship of fourteen years, Motley married his neighborhood friend Edith Granzo. Her family, of German descent, disowned her because of her interracial marriage. Archibald J. Motley III (Archie), Edith and Archibald Jr.'s only son, was born in 1933. Archie later recalled that the family rarely went out together because of constant racial prejudice. It was only in Paris in 1929–30, when Edith joined her husband during his fellowship, that the couple had been able to socialize more freely, since a more tolerant attitude prevailed there.

### **His Times**

Motley came of age during a turbulent and exciting time in American history, and he witnessed developments such as rapid industrialization, the Great Depression, and World War II. He was probably most inspired by the Jazz Age and Harlem Renaissance, both of which peaked in the 1920s.

Although named for a neighborhood in New York City, the Harlem Renaissance extended to other cities such as New Orleans and Chicago. In Chicago, Motley documented African Americans at leisure in "Bronzeville" (a reference to the brown complexions of the people who dominated its streets and boulevards), a neighborhood in the South Side of Chicago where many African American families had settled. The area, about 90 percent black, had a thriving African American business community and music culture, especially that of jazz and blues. Motley studied Chicago's African American community intently, painting its black elites as well as its recently arrived Southern migrants, unseemly slackers, and troublemakers. After a hard week of work, Motley observed African Americans as they danced, drank, and enjoyed the social entertainment offered in "Bronzeville," a place where people of different races, economic circumstances, and social status could come together. As a light-skinned black man living in middle-class Englewood, he was both an insider and an outside observer of his fellow African Americans.

Between 1930 and 1949, Motley executed numerous paintings celebrating scenes of everyday life, including depictions of picnics, barbecues (one of which is included in this packet), parades, and urban nightlife. His works from this period reflect the cultural milieu: rhythmic figures, pulsating colors, and animated compositions all suggest the high energy of jazz. Motley used both natural and artificial light to give his figures an unusual intensity—and his vibrant colors became one of the most distinctive features of his work.

### **His Portraits**

Motley sought to improve race relations by dispelling stereotypes through his art, skillfully creating sensitive, nuanced portraits of African Americans. He also wanted to expose his fellow African Americans to the fine arts. He felt compelled to depict a mostly positive image of the black businessmen, cultured women, workers, and family members that surrounded him. He wrote: "I sincerely hope that with the progress the Negro has made, he is deserving to be represented in his true perspective, with dignity, honesty, integrity, intelligence, and understanding."

In many of his portraits, Motley captured his sitters' poise and demeanor, conveying a sense of their achievement, in addition to creating a believable likeness. Motley hoped that if blacks could see themselves in art they would gain an appreciation for their own racial identity. And he hoped that if whites could see the beauty and accomplishments of African Americans, stereotypes and racism might be dispelled.

In one series, Motley depicted African American women with different shades of skin color. He titled his portraits of racially mixed women with the Creole classifications that specified the amount of Negro blood they supposedly had—"mulatto" (half), "quadroon" (one-quarter), and "octoroon" (one-eighth). This was an important distinction at the time because it determined social status and legal rights. Two of his favorite portraits, one of his grandmother, and *The Octoroon Girl*, are included in this packet.

Motley's portraits, although masterfully executed, may suggest that he had complex feelings about race. He sometimes referenced stereotypes that equated physical appearance with social status. The light-skinned octoroon woman is beautiful, but she remains nameless, known only by her racial designation. But, as in the portrait of his grandmother, he also portrayed African Americans as dignified and unique individuals at a time when it was uncommon to make African Americans the subject in a work of traditional fine art.

## His Genre Scenes

Motley spent 1929–30 in Paris on a Guggenheim Fellowship. He went abroad to "study the masterpieces in the Louvre, as to color, composition, drawing, and technique." Similar in structure and spirit to his Chicago paintings (which had already garnered high praise from French art critics as early as 1925), these Parisian canvases extended the geographical boundaries of the Harlem Renaissance. Motley was not the only African American in Jazz Age Paris. Paris experienced "a black cultural uproar" in these years, incited by fellow visual artists, entertainers, intellectuals, and others of African ancestry. *Blues*, included in this packet, is an example of the work he did in Paris and reveals an eclectic fusion of peoples and cultures sharing a favorite pastime.

With his genre painting (scenes from everyday life or of ordinary people at work or play), Motley wanted to alter attitudes toward black culture. He wanted to "bring about better mutual understanding between the white and colored races." He believed that in his work blacks and whites would recognize themselves and their shared experiences as modern, urban Americans.

According to scholar Amy Mooney, Motley often borrowed from the conventions of film, a popular medium most viewers would be familiar with, in order to create his scenes. One might even say that, in his genre scenes, Motley used the techniques and methods of movie making to further social change. He employed cinematic techniques such as close-ups (as seen in *Blues*), panoramas, dramatic lighting, staging, elaborate costumes, and artifice all to dramatic effect. Through his inspiration from film, Motley created a unique, distinctive style; and one of the first series of paintings that depict contemporary black urban folk life in America.

His urban scenes exalt black accomplishments, self-sufficiency, and independence from the white world. They also provide white people a rare opportunity to view this intimate world. Through his paintings, Motley presented black culture as modern, approachable, and concerned with the same universal conditions as other Americans. Figures dominate his work and command the audience's attention; not the subservient figures of the past, they challenge the prevailing racism.

Unlike his portraits, in his genre scenes, figures are rarely shown realistically. He exaggerated facial features to create a cast of stock characters that he sometimes repurposed in other artworks. Scholars have debated the reasons for why he chose to paint caricatures of African Americans when he was so sensitive to the individual in his portraits.

Some speculate that he sought to make his figures familiar and accessible to his viewers. Or, perhaps he may have used these stock characters, with their inherent associations (the bumbling man, the "mammy" figure), as an easier way to communicate his narratives. Or he may have used them simply for comic relief.

Through scenes he believed to be accessible, humorous, and engaging, Motley intended his art to deliver a message of the social progress his fellow African Americans had attained in America. His work gave viewers insight into the African American experience, his ultimate objective.

## Conclusion

Whether painting masterfully executed, detailed portraits or caricatured genre scenes, Motley's body of work provides a remarkable view of family, friends, neighbors, and fellow Chicagoans and Parisians during an important time in America's history. Motley always sought recognition for his skill, by viewers of all races. His paintings were not meant to be an objective account of black life in America; rather they were a subjective history seen through the influences, ideas, and imagination of Archibald J. Motley Jr., a talented artist of mixed racial heritage living during Jazz Age America.

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## *Mending Socks*, 1924

Archibald J. Motley

**T**HIS IS ONE OF TWO INSIGHTFUL PORTRAITS ARCHIBALD Motley painted of his paternal grandmother, Emily Sims Motley (1842–1929). Motley’s studio was next to her bedroom in the family’s home, and she played an important part in his life. Born into slavery in Kentucky, Emily and her husband (also named Archibald) spent much of their lives in Assumption Parish, Louisiana, where the artist’s father was born. She lived with her family in Chicago beginning in the 1910s.

Prior to emancipation after the Civil War, E. E. Kittredge owned Emily, her husband, and several other slaves with the surname Motley. Emily’s maiden name, Sims, points to the woman depicted in the oval painting within this painting. She is Emma Kittredge Sims (1847–1911), daughter of E. E. Kittredge and Emily Sims Motley’s “former mistress.”

According to scholars, Motley’s inclusion of the portrait of Emma Kittredge Sims is very revealing; it is abruptly cropped at the center, and the brushwork in her portrait is loose and broadly-treated compared to the meticulous brushwork of his grandmother. By depicting these women so differently, Motley establishes a spatial and historical distance from slavery.

He doesn’t present the harshness of his grandmother’s life as a slave, but instead seems to offer a sentimental memory. The portrait within a portrait also shows his skillful ability to demonstrate different brush styles in one artwork.

Voted “the most liked painting” when displayed in the Newark Museum in 1927, Motley surrounded his octogenarian grandmother with her favorite things: a red shawl fastened with a brooch that had been hand-painted by her daughter; a silver bowl filled with apples, grapes, and bananas; and the family Bible. By including these objects, the artist stated that he hoped to “inject” her personality into the portrait, relating her kindness, piety, and conservatism. His sentimental connection with his grandmother appealed to a broad audience.

### **Discussion Prompts**

Motley surrounded his grandmother with objects that were important to her. Make a list of the objects you see. What do these things suggest about his grandmother?

How do you think Motley felt about his grandmother? What in the painting leads you to believe that?

Object	What can you infer about his grandmother?



*Mending Socks*, 1924  
Archibald J. Motley  
Oil on canvas

Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Burton Emmett Collection 58.1.2801  
© Valerie Gerrard Browne



## *The Octoroon Girl*, 1925

Archibald J. Motley

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"OUTSIDE OF MY GRANDMOTHER'S PORTRAIT," Motley reflected, "[*The Octoroon Girl*] is the best portrait I've painted." With a title referring to someone who supposedly possessed one-eighth of "Negro blood," *The Octoroon Girl* is one of six portraits in which Motley represented women of mixed racial heritage. According to the exhibition curator, these portraits provide viewers with opportunities to contemplate physical variances and what that might mean for social status. "In those days," Motley mused, "[women] wore these little tight hats—she has one of them on, and she has her gloves in her hand." One can extrapolate from Motley's comments that this chic, light-skinned woman—fashionably attired and a little brazen (intuited from the woman's unflinching, doe-eyed gaze)—was, in 1920s jargon, a "New Negro:" a modern, sophisticated type that people encountered in neighborhoods like Chicago's South Side or New York City's Harlem.

In *The Octoroon Girl*, Motley portrayed an elegant young woman seated on a sofa against a maroon wall. Drawing on his academic training, Motley here creates a perfectly balanced composition. The sitter, off center, stares directly at the viewer, offset by the gold frame in the upper left and the table with books on the lower right. Motley demonstrates his mastery of texture in his depiction of her stylish dress, hat, and leather gloves. Her clear, steady gaze conveys a sense of confidence, composure, and dignity. Her elegance, wealth, and privilege are also evidenced by her fine jewelry. Almost indistinguishable from any white American, this woman embodies the ideals of timeless beauty and elegance.

### Discussion Prompts

- He titled this work not with the woman's name, but a "racial designation." Why do you think he did so? What do you think about the title?
- How would you title this work?
- Based on both of these portraits, the octoroon woman and his grandmother, what can you infer about Motley's attitude toward women?
- Motley felt that these two portraits were the best he had ever done. Search online for other portraits by Motley. Do you agree? Why or why not?



*The Octoroon Girl*, 1925

Archibald J. Motley

Oil on canvas

Courtesy of the Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, LLC, New York, New York

© Valerie Gerrard Browne

## *Barbecue*, 1960

Archibald J. Motley

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**B**ARBECUE IS ARCHIBALD MOTLEY'S SECOND exploration of the theme of outdoor Southern-style gatherings (the first was a 1934 painting). Here, he transformed a modern genre scene into a highly complex composition only remotely tied to reality. Voluptuous women, diners, dancers, and other characters surround a smiling, rotund chef who watches over a brick barbecue grill. Motley's isolated urban witnesses—an attentive dog and a little girl with an ice cream cone—also contribute to *Barbecue*'s otherworldly aura.

Scholars have pointed out that Motley's high-energy genre scenes often include a figure who seems alone or is not partaking in the activities around him or her. The figure often conveys a sense of social isolation or detachment—as the little girl eating the ice cream cone in this painting, for example.

Other figures in his genre scenes seem to resemble stereotyped images that parodied African Americans. Features such as bulging eyes and enlarged lips are not uncommon. There has been much speculation as to why Motley would use racial stereotypes and stock characters. One scholar argues that Motley may have been trying to appeal to a broader audience with images that were immediately recognizable. Or, he may have used them simply for comic effect. Another scholar argues, however, that such types may have reflected Motley's sense of distance from his subjects because he enjoyed greater social status due to his middle-class upbringing, education, and light-skinned complexion.

These genre scenes were a new type of artwork at which Motley excelled: African Americans at leisure in an urban setting, escaping from intense agricultural labor or grinding factory work. White Americans enjoyed similar pursuits in their free time.

### Discussion Prompts

- Motley liked to depict African Americans engaged in leisure activities. Look carefully at this painting. Describe what some of the people are doing. What do you think is happening?
- How would you describe the little girl in the front center of the painting? What is she doing? What is her relation to the other figures?
- Describe a leisure activity you like to do with your family to a partner. Draw the activity. What colors will you use? What details will you include? Try to include one figure that seems to be distant from all the activity surrounding him/her.





*Barbecue*, 1960  
Archibald J. Motley  
Oil on canvas  
Collection of Mara Motley, MD and Valerie Gerrard Browne  
© Valerie Gerrard Browne

## *Blues*, 1929

Archibald J. Motley

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IN 1978 ARCHIBALD MOTLEY RECOUNTED THAT THE "Petit Café" featured in his famous painting *Blues* wasn't very far from Paris's Bois de Boulogne and the Eiffel Tower. Although Motley's "Petit Café" has never been definitively located, the painting's black musicians, multiethnic clientele, and location all point to Le Bal Nègre, a popular West Indian cabaret in those years in the fifteenth arrondissement. Regardless of the nightclub's actual name or address, *Blues* signaled cosmopolitan, Jazz Age Paris—from left to right we see a bottle of red wine, a smoldering cigarette, and a woman's foot wearing a high-heeled shoe.

Painted in 1929, *Blues* became one of Motley's most celebrated works. The tightly-cropped scene portrays the interior of a popular Paris cabaret. On a crowded dance floor, partners embrace, their bodies rhythmically responding to the sounds from the musicians at left. The ambiance is exactly what one might expect of a late 20s jazz club. As America's truly unique music invention, jazz was a popular medium, created for and enjoyed by a broad audience. Like jazz, Motley hoped that this painting would appeal to everyone.

The composition resembles a tightly cropped photograph or a momentary close-up from a movie scene. *Blues* is a feast for the senses: the sounds of the band, bold colors worn by the stylish women, the smell of the cigarette in the center, the different textures of jewelry, instruments, and clothing, and the refreshing taste of the cocktails held by the waiter. The setting, fashions, and casual interactions convey a sense of sophistication and create an atmosphere in which racial identity is not relevant. Motley enjoyed patronizing this café because of the relaxed interaction among the clientele, who hailed from France, Martinique, and Senegal. For him, this painting represented his desire for his audience to enjoy art regardless of "race, color, or creed."

*Blues* is similar to his "Bronzeville" paintings, where there is no social hierarchy visibly established. Through jazz, social restrictions and racial segregation are temporarily suspended. By painting images of black and white people together, he wanted to express the idea that *all* people could enjoy the same kind of amusement and inhabit the same place—that art can be a force for democratization.

### Discussion Prompts

- How would you describe the facial expressions of the figures? How about the woman in the center?
- One scholar noted that "The sounds of Louis Armstrong or Sidney Bechet's music seem to permeate the room." Listen to the music of each of these jazz musicians. What jazz music do you think best exemplifies this image?
- Is there one location in your community where people from all walks of life congregate? If so, where? What factors are in place to allow people from different races, social classes, and professions to assemble in a harmonious way?
- Do you think that there is one type of music that appeals to various classes? If so, which one?



*Blues*, 1929  
Archibald J. Motley  
Oil on canvas

Collection of Mara Motley, MD, and Valerie Gerrard Browne  
© Valerie Gerrard Browne

## *Arrival at Chickasaw Bayou of the Slaves of President Davis*, c. 1938

Archibald J. Motley

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**T**HIS WORK IS ONE OF ABOUT A DOZEN PAINTINGS Archibald Motley created while under the patronage of the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project. As part of the New Deal (to give people work during the Great Depression), the WPA commissioned artists to create images that celebrated the experiences of the United States and its people, both past and present. Motley based this work on a similar engraving by Frederick B. Schell for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (August 8, 1863; below). Schell illustrated a crucial point in the Civil War—the Confederacy's surrender to the Union army at Vicksburg, Mississippi, and the enslaved people taking advantage of this power shift. Motley, in contrast, accentuated the strange, almost burlesque nature of that moment, imagining it in acidic colors, hobnail-boot fashions, and exaggerated characterizations.

The aim of the Federal Art Project was to make American art more "truly American" and more in "touch with the people." It sought to make art more accessible to the general public by making it part of daily life by placing it in buildings like post offices, courthouses, etc. This notion appealed to Motley, who wanted to make his works both aesthetically engaging and socially conscious.

### Discussion Prompts

- Look closely at both images of the arrival of President Davis' slaves; Motley's painting and Schell's engraving. What are some similarities? What are salient differences?
- Read the account of the surrender of Vicksburg in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*: [www.accessible-archives.com/2013/08/frank-leslies-newspaper-reports-on-the-surrender-of-vicksburg/](http://www.accessible-archives.com/2013/08/frank-leslies-newspaper-reports-on-the-surrender-of-vicksburg/) How does the written account of the slaves of Jefferson Davis coming on to the camp at Vicksburg compare with the visual representations?





*Arrival at Chickasaw Bayou of the Slaves of President Davis, c. 1938*  
 Archibald J. Motley  
 Oil on board  
 Collection of the Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington, DC  
 © Valerie Gerrard Browne



*Arrival at Chickasaw Bayou of Jefferson Davis' Negroes from His Plantation on the Mississippi Below Vicksburg, Mississippi. c. 1863*  
 Frederick B. Schell, American, active 19th century  
 Engraving on paper  
 American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts  
 © Valerie Gerrard Browne



## Classroom Activity

### *Elemental Blues*

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<b>Essential Question</b>	How can music influence and inspire an artist to create visual artworks?
<b>Grades</b>	K–12
<b>Time</b>	One class period
<b>Art Concepts</b>	form, rhythm, composition, color value/tone, abstraction, experimentation
<b>Materials</b>	Acrylic or tempera paint, paint brushes, palettes, sturdy watercolor paper, rinsing containers, stereo system with CD player, CD of music composed and performed by Duke Ellington, recorded circa 1925–1940, "East St. Louis Toodle-oo," "Black and Tan Fantasy," "Mood Indigo," or "Caravan"
<b>Talking about Art</b>	<p>View and discuss the printed image <i>Blues</i> (1929) included in the curriculum. What do you see? What do you notice first about this artwork? How does the artwork make you feel? Why does it make you feel that way?</p> <p>Archibald Motley created many paintings inspired by the music and people in the Jazz and Blues clubs of Chicago and Paris in the 1920's and 1930's. This painting in particular is one of the most celebrated of his works, depicting dancers responding to the sounds from the group of musicians to the left. Motley depicts the scene in a tightly cropped composition. How does that contribute to the overall feeling of the painting? How do the colors contribute to the feeling?</p> <p>Look closely at Motley's painting. How does Motley evoke rhythm, movement, social cultures, and interracial interactions? What are the various meanings that can be discussed in Motley's <i>Blues</i> painting? In what ways can a music selection's melody and rhythm influence the visual art-making process?</p>
<b>Making Art</b>	<p>Begin by listening to one of the music tracks listed under Materials, composed and recorded by Duke Ellington. On a sheet of thick watercolor paper, brush blue paint across the entire page creating a wash. Create your own value/tone of blue; will it be lighter or darker? Add water to the paint to make it lighter and easier to spread across the entire page. Make sure to cover the entire paper.</p> <p>Then, clean your brush in water and choose another paint color, or another value of blue. Think about which color you would like to use. If you use a different color, remember that the colors may mix and blend to make something new. After you have chosen your second color, load your brush up with paint. Listen to the music and follow one of the instruments, the piano for example, then paint by listening and following the notes played by that instrument.</p>

Paint various strokes/elements/shapes/words inspired by the notes of the music, creating a composition that fills the entire paper. Once the music track has stopped, stop painting.

Using a new piece of watercolor paper, repeat the entire process. Use the same Duke Ellington track that you used for your first painting but follow a different musical instrument, the saxophone for example. How are the two artworks you made different from one another? How are they similar?

Then, choose a different Duke Ellington track and a different background color. Repeat the entire process again for another pair of paintings. You may want to add in other colors, experiment with different strokes/elements/shapes/words inspired by the notes of the music, and vary the speeds of your painting strokes.

How are the new pair of paintings different from your first set? Did you make strategic decisions in the latter paintings? If so, why? Was it easier to follow the instruments after having practice? Was it harder? Why? Lastly, title your artwork. Think about making a title that connects each pair of paintings and makes a reference to the jazz songs you listened to.

### **Reflection**

Display all completed artworks around the room. Walk around the room and view all the works as a whole. How does each pair of artworks differ? How are they similar? How did the songs affect the artworks? Are there visual rhythms in the artworks?

### **Curriculum Connection**

For younger grades, limit the color palette to primary colors. Have students explore color mixing, turning primary colors into secondary colors. While listening to the music, have students focus on creating lines and textures they can name; straight lines, parallel lines, perpendicular lines, vertical lines, horizontal lines, concentric lines, etc.

## Classroom Activity

### *Talking With Paint*

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<b>Essential Question</b>	How can you paint a portrait of a person while expressing your own personal feelings about them?
<b>Grades</b>	3–9
<b>Time</b>	One–two class periods
<b>Art Concepts</b>	Painting techniques, brushstrokes, expression, color, form, composition, scale, emotion, physicality, imagination, memory
<b>Materials</b>	Acrylic or tempera paint, paint brushes, palettes, painting surface (paper or canvas), rinsing containers, scratch paper, pencils

**Talking about Art** View and discuss the printed images *Mending Socks* (1924) and *Barbecue* (1960) included in the curriculum. What do you see? What can you find that is similar? What is different about the two paintings?

Both of these paintings are made by the same artist. Is that surprising to hear? Archibald Motley was a very skilled painter who was able to use a variety of painting techniques and styles in order to express certain qualities about his subjects. He was able to paint realistically and also in a more simplified style. Motley used these different painting styles to tell stories about the characters in his paintings. He painted the people around him—people he knew and people in his community doing usual, everyday things. Through his portrayal, we can infer what he wanted to say.

*Mending Socks* is a painting of the artist's grandmother. How do you think the artist feels about her? What do you see that makes you say that? Describe the brushstrokes and colors. Does it look like it took a long time to make this painting, or was it done quickly? Scholars have said that it seems like Motley had deep respect and love for his grandmother. The loving care with which he painted the portrait comes through in the final product. Why do you think they see that?

Now let's look at *Barbecue*. What do you see? What is happening in this scene? Motley was known for his paintings of scenes of everyday life around him. Compare this painting to the image of Motley's grandmother; how are they similar? How are they different? Do they look more like caricatures? Why? Do the figures look more flat than the grandmother? Do they seem to have been painted more quickly? What do the bright colors say about what is happening in the scene? Does this painting seem as serious as the other one, or is it more playful? Do you think these people are important to Motley, or do you think he has more of a casual relationship to them? Why?

**Making Art** How can you make two paintings that feel very different from one another? Archibald Motley was able to express feelings and thoughts about people and places by the way that he painted them. Think about

two people you know and would like to paint. Try to choose two people who are very different from each other. Think of the qualities that each person has and how you will communicate them by the way you paint. With scratch paper, draw a line down the middle of the page. At the top of each side, write the subjects name you will paint. Under their name, write three to five words that describe their personality.

When you paint someone from memory, what is the main thing that you remember? Why do you remember it the most? If someone is sleepy, are their eyes closed? If they are happy, are their cheeks bright and rosy?

How do your feelings and thoughts about your subject influence your painting? How does your mood influence the work? If you are feeling happy when thinking about someone, how will that affect the way you apply the paint? Will you dribble it or brush it on carefully? Will you keep the colors separate or will you mix them together? Will you let the paint be thick or will you smooth it out? What does it mean if your brushstrokes are smooth, rounded, straight, scratchy, or thick?

Using acrylic or tempera paints, paint two portraits on separate paper or canvas. How will you use color to create mood or meaning? What color represents friendliness to you? What color do you associate with unkindness? If someone is funny, will they be wearing bright or dark colors? If someone is quiet, will they be surrounded by a lot of colors or just one?

You may want to use the background to say some things about your subject, as well. But, keep it simple. If your subject is angry, what color will you make the space around him? Can you make his environment reflect his mood? What does the size of your subject in her environment mean? Is she small or is she large? If she is large, does that mean she is important? If she is small, does that mean that she is young?

## **Reflection**

Place both of your paintings side-by-side. How are they similar? How are they different? Who did you choose to paint? Why did you choose these people? How do you know these people? Do you know them well? What do you think your paintings say about the people you portrayed? Will you give your paintings to the people you painted? Do you think they will like them?

How do you think it might be different if you did not know the person well? What if you painted a famous person instead of someone you knew? What if you painted an imaginary person, like a character in a story? What would you want to say about that person?

## Classroom Activity

### *Extra! Extra! History in Words and Images*

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<b>Essential Question</b>	How can an artist make a personal connection with historical art?
<b>Grades</b>	6–12
<b>Time</b>	One–two class periods
<b>Art Concepts</b>	Composition, space, image and text, subject matter, artistic styles
<b>Academic Concepts</b>	Civil War, reflecting on image and text, synthesizing information and historical events
<b>Materials</b>	pencils, 8½ x 11 drawing paper, colored pencils, newspaper template (included, or create your own)

#### **Talking about Art**

View and discuss the images *Arrival at Chickasaw Bayou of the Slaves of President Davis* (Archibald Motley, 1938) and *Arrival at Chickasaw Bayou of the Slaves of President Davis' Negroes from His Plantation on the Mississippi below Vicksburg, Mississippi* (Frederic B. Schell, 1863) included in the curriculum. How are the two pieces alike? How are they different? What do you wonder about?

First, let's look at the engraving by Frederic B. Schell, who worked as a "special artist" for Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, a weekly newspaper. This image appeared on the August 8, 1863 issue. At a time when photography was still new, the artist tried to capture, through detailed sketches, important moments as they were happening. The image accompanied the following text:

The Slaves of Jefferson Davis coming on to the Camp at Vicksburg. Few incidents have been more curious and instructive than that witnessed some time before the fall of Vicksburg, when the slaves of Jefferson Davis from his plantation on the Mississippi came into camp. It seemed in itself the doom of slavery. . . The President of the Confederate States may call the roll of his slaves at Richmond, at Natchez, or at Niagara, but the answer will not come.

Many consider the defeat of the Confederate army at Vicksburg (July 4, 1863) and Gettysburg (July 3, 1863) by the Union army, the turning point of the US Civil War. How did this artist choose to depict this historic, current event? How does the image add to the context of the text?

Let's turn our attention to Archibald Motley's interpretation of this same event. Motley's paternal grandmother, with whom he lived, was a former slave. Why do you think Motley chose to re-illustrate this scene? Why do you think he chose to show the figures less realistically than Schell?



**Making Art**

After discussing the Schell engraving and Motley's painting, in a group of three, collaboratively create a front page of a newspaper. Using the attached template, work in groups to brainstorm news stories you would like to represent in your newspaper. After collaborating on current events you would like to illustrate (the stories can include events from your personal life, like what you learned in school this week, actual historical events, etc.). Each group should designate an illustrator, an editor, and a reporter.

Using scratch paper, the reporter will write the articles, making sure to address the *who*, *what*, *when*, and *why* of each story. The editor will then review the stories and decide on the best layout of the stories in the attached template (or you can create your own). While the reporter copies the articles onto the final template, the illustrator will think about how to best capture the story through an illustrated image. Using colored pencils, s/he will make a drawing for each of the articles on the group's front page.

**Reflection**

In your group, discuss favorite articles on the front page that you created together. Then, each group will present to the rest of the class their front page, discussing what stories they chose and how the illustrations add to the stories, as well as how they decided on the layout of their front page.

**Curriculum Connection**

To address the History-Social Science Standards: [8.10 Students analyze the multiple causes, key events, and complex consequences of the Civil War.], have students do further research on the US Civil War. Based on their findings, have student groups create the front page of a newspaper depicting key events in the Civil War, including how the war affected combatants, civilians, and the environment.

## Classroom Activity

### *Identity: Portraits through Objects*

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<b>Essential Question</b>	What do objects in a portrait tell us about that person's identity?
<b>Grades</b>	3–12
<b>Time</b>	One period
<b>Art Concepts</b>	Balance, composition, negative and positive space
<b>Academic Concepts</b>	Shape an artistic investigation; hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences
<b>Materials</b>	Pencils, 5x8 inch index cards, black construction paper
<b>Talking about Art</b>	<p>View and discuss the portrait of <i>The Octoroon Girl</i> (Archibald Motley, 1925) included in the curriculum. What words would you use to describe this woman? Describe her expression. Describe her posture. Looking closely at the objects Motley included in this portrait, what do the objects in the painting tell us about this woman? Why do you think the artist has arranged these objects in the way he did? How do the objects around people help define their identity?</p> <p>"Outside of my grandmother's portrait," Motley reflected, "[<i>The Octoroon Girl</i>] is the best portrait I've painted." Referring to someone with an eighth of "Negro blood," <i>The Octoroon Girl</i> joined six other portraits by Motley which represented women of various racial intermixtures. These portraits provide viewers with opportunities to contemplate physical variances and, in conjunction with these differences, varying levels of social status. He titled this work not with the woman's name, but a categorization. Why do you think he did so? What do you think about the title? How would you title this work?</p>
<b>Making Art</b>	<p>Randomly pull out 5–7 things from your pockets or handbags. As a class, discuss art concepts including balance, composition, and positive and negative space. Arrange your items on black construction paper, keeping in mind the elements of art discussed.</p> <p>Take a gallery walk and randomly select a classmate's arrangement. On a 5x8 inch index card, respond to the following: "What can you tell about the person by looking at their objects?" Then, turn the index card over and leave it next to that arrangement. Walk around the gallery of compositions once again and choose another classmate's arrangement. Again, write about what you can infer about the person by looking at their objects on the back of the index card next to the arrangement. Then leave the index card next to the arrangement.</p> <p>After responding to two compositions, return to your collection of objects and read what your two classmates wrote on the index card.</p>

**Reflection**

As a group, discuss the following:

- Based on the feedback of your classmates, do these objects define your identity accurately?
- If someone 100 years from now came across your class's collection of objects, what could they tell about your group?
- What would they learn about the current year?
- What important stories might they be able to tell?

**Curriculum  
Connection**

Analyze other portraits from LACMA's collection and speculate as to why objects were included in the artwork, and what the objects tell us about that person's identity.

In order to address the following Common Core State Standard, write an imaginative narrative about the person, making sure to include details about the objects included in their portrait.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

# Archibald Motley: Jazz Age Modernist

## Selected Resources

### Books for Teachers

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Mooney, Amy M. *Archibald J. Motley Jr.*  
Looking at the work of Motley through the prism of race, this book focuses on his portraits and depictions of the American scene. Dr. Mooney draws upon his paintings, writings, and interviews to examine Motley's work and his contribution to American art.

Powell, Richard J. *Archibald Motley: Jazz Age Modernist*  
This exhibition catalogue offers an introduction to Archibald J. Motley, his world, and his art. Essays by prominent scholars in the field highlight topics related to his portraits, historical context, travels, influences, and the evolution of his art over his long career as a painter. Available in the Museum Shop.

### Online Resources

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*African American Art & Visual Culture in Chicago: Timeline from 1901–2013*  
<http://chicagoblackart.com/>  
Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University  
This timeline of African American art and visual culture in the twentieth century provides historical and visual context for Motley's work.

*Archibald J. Motley Timeline*  
<http://nasher.duke.edu/motley/>  
Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University  
Created in conjunction with the exhibition, this provides an overview of the life and career of Archibald J. Motley.

*The Black Chicago Renaissance*  
<http://www.chicagohistoryfair.org/for-teachers/curriculum/black-chicago-renaissance.html>  
Chicago Metro History Education Center  
Organized into five major topics, this guide covers the Chicago Renaissance, a lesser known offshoot of the Harlem Renaissance.

### Books for Students

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Hill, Laban Carrick. *Harlem Stomp!: A Cultural History of The Harlem Renaissance*  
Intended for Grades 7 and up, this book begins by examining the cause and effects of the great migration of African Americans to the North at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and then proceeds to cover the African American art, music, literature, and culture that flourished as a result.

Dillon, Leo and Diane. *Jazz on a Saturday Night*  
This Coretta Scott King Honor Book uses bright colors and musical patterns to make jazz and its stars come to life. An accompanying CD allows students to hear each instrument play in a jazz song written and recorded for this book.

Gollub, Matthew. *The Jazz Fly*  
Together, its distinctive illustrations and design give this book the feel of jazz, even without musical accompaniment, but the accompanying CD provides a jazzy beat that accentuates the story. This jazz and animal infused book is intended for preschool through 4<sup>th</sup> grade students.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Jazz*  
This picture book combines poems and paintings to evoke and celebrate different forms of jazz.