



## **Art Masterpiece**

1<sup>st</sup> Grade

**Core knowledge Topics:** Social Studies (Civil Rights)

### **Parade by Jacob Lawrence**

**About the Artist:** Jacob Lawrence was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1917 (died in Washington State, 2000). He was one of the first African American artists to gain recognition in American fine art.

- He grew up in Harlem, New York with his mother and siblings. His Mom worked to support the family so she enrolled him in art classes to keep him out of trouble. He studied art at the Harlem Art Workshop located in the Harlem Public Library. So he had a lot of community support and encouragement.
- He painted bright colored patterns on wrapping paper and made strong papier-mâché masks.
- He would walk 60 blocks to the Metropolitan Museum of Art where he studied the old masters carefully, trying to figure out how they painted such things as a white cloth.
- His first exhibition was at the Harlem YWCA. He liked to paint scenes of everyday life and of historical events featuring African American heroes like Frederick Douglas (escaped slave, self-educated, later a United States Marshall) and Harriet Tubman (former slave from Maryland who escaped but risked her own life again and again helping other slaves escape).
- He married another artist named Gwen Knight and by the time he was 32 he was a very famous artist.
- He was a careful observer of the everyday lives of American blacks.
- Many of his paintings are strong visual comments on how he feels about racial problems.
- He generally painted what he saw around him. A hospital stay became the

subject for 11 paintings.

- He designed the poster for the 1972 Olympics, and several of his murals can be found on public buildings.

- Throughout his career, and particularly during the late 1930s and early 1940s, Jacob Lawrence used a series format to convey narrative content. Lawrence's fascination with movies during the Depression years inspired his approach to storytelling.

**Agenda:** In this session we reviewed the elements of art that we have been learning throughout the year... color, line, shape, and texture as well as concepts such as still life, portrait and landscape. To see many of these ideas in action we looked at the famous work of American artist Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000).

**What are complementary Colors:** These are colors that are directly opposite one another on the color wheel. *Parade* shows lines and shapes that suggest motion. Lawrence often used diagonal lines and triangular forms to show movement in his paintings. The positions of the characters with straight backs, poised heads and bent arms present a state of mind in this lively painting. We thought about what type of music might be playing and the loudness of the scene. The inspiration behind his painting is the Mummer's Parade which takes place every year on New Year's Day in Philadelphia.

We followed this discussion with additional famous prints to see if we could identify which were painted by Jacob Lawrence or not. The children begin to identify the artist's style in this way. It is also interesting to see how Lawrence painted a landscape or a portrait compared to other artists.

**Discuss:** Encourage children to tell, "what's going on in this painting." What time of year is it and what sounds might you hear if you were actually in the painting? How can you tell the boys are moving and who would you want to be in this picture?

**Project Ideas:** Our project was to paint and create our own parade hat to wear and march around the room to lively music. We used the same materials Jacob Lawrence began using in his youth as inspiration.



Jacob Lawrence *Parade*



Jacob Lawrence, *Pool Parlor* 1942





