

ADOPT-AN-ARTWORK

2025-2026
SCHOOL YEAR



Teacher's Guide

Adopt-an-Artwork is an educational partnership with schools, teachers and their students to investigate works of art as objects at the center of learning experiences. In its eighth year, Adopt-an-Artwork has welcomed teachers and students from all over the state in Pre-K through high school. The Biggs Museum collaborates with educators to make the museum collection accessible and meaningful to a diverse audience.

Summary

The Biggs Museum of American Art is continuing its commitment to partnering with Delaware's educational institutions through its Adopt-An-Artwork program. Participating teachers will receive a large reproduction of their selected artwork as a tool for instruction, supported by digital content such as informational videos, audio clips, and high-resolution images. Teachers and classes will have the opportunity to visit the Biggs museum to view and learn more about the selected program works on display. Educators will participate in workshops hosted by the Biggs Museum to help develop standards-based curricula in their classrooms. Curricula will be attributed to the author(s) and uploaded to the museum's online library of resources. Teachers who participate in the Adopt-An-Artwork fall curriculum development sessions will receive 12 professional development clock hours through the Delaware Department of Education.

To support the implementation of curricula, the Biggs Museum will supply approximately \$400 in art materials and supplies for each participating classroom. Following instruction, teachers will identify notable examples of their students' work to include in a display at the Biggs Museum of American Art celebrating students' and teachers' participation in the program.

How to Use this Guide

This guide presents all the objects that are proposed for adoption. Each entry includes information about the piece, areas to take notes, places to think about supportive vocabulary, and spaces to consider how that work applies to multiple disciplines. Inside, you will also find lesson and curriculum planning templates. Completed curriculum templates and supply forms will be turned in to the program coordinator on the in-person professional development day for all participants.

The following artworks from the Biggs' collection have been selected for their range in media, topics related to the work, themes in art, styles used, and date of creation. Each of these artworks are available for "adoption". Details about these works will be highlighted over the next few pages.

1. **Lotus Beds on the St. Jones River** • Ethel Pennewill Brown
2. **Spice Chest** • Attributed to Joel Baily
3. **The Prince lay huddled upon the stones of the court** • Elizabeth Shippen Green
4. **Tea Table** • "Big" Tom Burton
5. **Still Life with Strawberries and Cherries**
• Margaretta Angelica Peale

Timeline

SUMMER

Lesson plans from previous year's cohort are uploaded to Biggs Museum website.

FALL

October Statewide Professional Development Day on **October 10, 2025**.

**Teacher sign-up deadline
October 24, 2025.**

Teacher requirements include:

- Attend two virtual check-in sessions on **October 28, 2025** and **December 16, 2025** from 6:30 - 8:00pm.
 - Session 1: Introduction to the program, artworks, and overview of expectations/important dates, etc
 - Session 2: Lesson progress checks, exhibition overview and expectations, essential dates, Give out labels and instructions for art drop off/pickup
- Attend full in-person PD Day held at the Biggs on **November 10, 2025**
 - All completed lesson plans and supply lists will be due by this end of this PD day
 - Supplies and reproductions will be ordered and sent to classrooms the same week
 - Teachers begin implementing lessons

WINTER/SPRING

Teachers continue implementation of lessons in classrooms:

- **February 2 - February 6, 2026** artwork is due at the museum and installed for exhibition
- **February 12, 2026** exhibition opens to the public
- **February 26, 2026** Opening Reception and celebration
- **May 10, 2026** exhibition closes to the public
- **May 14 - May 16, 2026** artwork pickup and program evaluations completed

ADDITIONAL DATES

April 2, 2026 Teacher's Appreciation Happy Hour at The Biggs

Teacher Objectives

1. Utilize object-based learning as a pedagogical tool for engaging students.
2. Support student interaction in a safe and stimulating learning environment through on-site and virtual educational school trips.
3. Plan and implement high-quality curriculum aligned to the state of Delaware's standards for teaching and learning.
4. Participate in professional learning opportunities (sanctioned by the Delaware DOE) with peer teachers for collaboration and curriculum development.

Biggs Museum of American Art Objectives

1. Serve as a unique educational resource for teachers.
2. Increase students' awareness and comfort within a museum setting.
3. Provide teachers with the instructional tools they need to engage their students with art in meaningful ways.
4. Strengthen ties with families, schools and communities.

Lotus Beds on the St. Jones River

Ethel Pennewill Brown Leach (1878-1959)

1931 · Oil on canvas

20 x 30 1/8 in. (50.8 x 76.5 cm)

Gift of Amelia Sloan, 1995.3





Ethel Pennewill Brown Leach grew up in Wilmington, where she studied under Howard Pyle and worked as an illustrator. After his death, she turned to easel painting and journeyed to Paris. There, she exhibited at the Paris Salon and was accepted into the International Union of Beaux-Arts and Letters. However, she eventually returned to the U.S. and settled back in Delaware, establishing a winter home in the village of Frederica on the Murderkill and a summer cottage and studio in Rehoboth Beach. Her artistic legacy became deeply tied to familiar scenes of southern Delaware: its villages, architecture, local inhabitants, and natural treasures. Her love for floral subjects and Delaware history drew her to the lotus beds near Dover, where she had spent time as a child.

In 1931, Leach noted in her diary: “Will [her husband, artist William Leach, 1872-1957] & I took lunch and went up to the lotus beds— painted there most of the day. No mosquitoes & it was wonderful. Like some tropical place. Had a lovely day.” She and Will painted several versions of this subject. In this painting, she employed an elevated horizon line to draw the viewer’s eye into the blossoms and lotus plants growing out of the water, much as a boat would navigate through the bed. This close-up technique had been advocated by impressionist John Henry Twachtman (1853-1902), with whom she had studied, and who had urged direct treatment of nature in his plein air studies of his floral gardens in Cos Cob, Connecticut. As was often Leach’s practice, on the reverse of this canvas, she noted that her subject had been painted “from nature.”

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, poems and articles celebrated the sight of the lotus on the St. Jones River. According to one source, the annual lotus bloom was “a local attraction ... visited by picnic groups in boats who made special jaunts during the third week in August each year to snip some of the precious blooms.” While local legends claimed the lotuses were exotic flowers that had been mysteriously relocated from either Egypt, China, or India, they were, in fact, American Lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*), a species native to the Americas (but still rare in Delaware).

Leach was likely motivated to document the increasingly rare lotus beds in part due to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ decision to straighten and deepen the river channel in the 1920s. These alterations, intended to enhance navigability, also increased salinity as water from Delaware Bay flowed

upstream. This, in turn, ultimately killed off the St. Jones River lotuses. During construction, the engineer in charge of the project had ordered his workers to transfer some of the rivers’ lotuses to the lakes near his cottage in Sussex County. The back of a related painting identifies the location of these transplanted lotus beds as Silver Lake in Rehoboth Beach. On September 27, 1951, Leach wrote in her diary that she was concerned about men cutting down the “flowers” on Silver Lake. Unfortunately, no trace of these lotuses remains at the resort today.

American Lotus has now almost entirely vanished from the state. *Lotus Beds on the St. Jones River* thus represents an important record of Delaware environmental history and a testament to Leach’s love and concern for the state’s natural treasures.

TOPIC TIE-INS

- Botany
- Ecology
- Wetlands and watersheds
- Environmental conservation and policy
- Lotus as a literary theme
- Statistics on plant growth and water quality
- Symmetry and patterns in nature
- Delaware history

ARTISTIC LANGUAGE

- Oil painting
- Composition
- Landscape painting

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Why do you think the artist chose the St. Jones River and lotus beds as a subject?
- How might this painting reflect attitudes toward nature and the environment during that time?
- How might this landscape have changed in the last 100 years?
- How are color and light used to depict the natural environment?
- How does this painting compare to other American landscape paintings from the same era?

Spice Chest

(Made in Chester County, Pennsylvania)

Attributed to Joel Baily (1697-1775)

1748 · Walnut

20 ¼ x 15 ½ x 11 ¼ in. (51.4 x 39.4 x 28.6 cm)

Museum Purchase, 2018.0004



The Pennsylvania spice box is a distinctive regional furniture form from the 18th century, produced primarily in Chester County, Pennsylvania. The earliest use of this type of furniture in Continental Europe was specifically for the storage of rare and valuable imported spices. However, it soon became used to store a variety of other small valuables as well, such as jewelry and gold buttons. Still, the name stuck, and indeed, nutmeg, allspice, cloves, ginger, and other imported spices that were used for scent, medicine, and cooking remained among the items kept in its drawers. England's East India Company established trade routes and distributed spices to the American colonies. As a port city, Philadelphia was a hub for this trade.

It is important to note that this was not a piece of kitchen furniture. Rather, records indicate it was usually housed in the parlor on the first floor. This was the room that contained the best furniture in the house, serving as a master bedroom and living room. The boxes were owned and used by both men and women and often shared by married couples. Owning a spice box implied wealth and suggested a particular formality of lifestyle. Expertly crafted by skilled cabinetmakers out of high-quality wood and often ornamented with inlay, a spice box was as prized by its owners as the valuables it secured within.

This spice box was made for Quaker couple Robert and Anne Lamborn (m. 1746) of London Grove Township, Chester County, in 1748. It is one of only six known examples of personalized spice boxes from the first half of the eighteenth century, with the couple's initials and date in decorative inlay on the front. All were made for Quaker couples from the London Grove and Concord Meetings in the 1740s. Documentary evidence suggests these may have been the work of Joel Baily (1697-1775), a cabinetmaker who was both known to be working in southern Chester County in the 1740s and active in the local Quaker community, including attending the London Grove Meeting.

The box is constructed of walnut, as were most Pennsylvania spice boxes. A fine wood prized by local cabinetmakers, walnut was plentiful in the state and became one of Philadelphia's chief exports to London. The box's blending of traditional and modern construction also expresses the fashion of the local community. Spice boxes persisted in this region throughout the 18th century, long after they had gone out of style elsewhere, reflecting the general conservatism of the Quaker community. However, there was still a desire for some contemporary style, so makers added stylistic details to match current trends. This box reflects the Queen Anne style of 1730-60 with its arched raised panel bracket and scalloped skirt.

The box has another noteworthy feature: a secret compartment with four additional drawers, hidden behind the dove holes under the chest's top. Such compartments were common in Pennsylvania spice boxes, often secured with a special "Quaker lock" system. This was constructed out of a thin wooden splint, which had to be released with a nail or finger. The presence of such additional hidden compartments is further evidence of these boxes' use as storage for valuable items. In the 18th century, these could still include certain spices whose cost could rival that of the furniture itself.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Who might have owned an object like this, and what does that suggest about their social or economic status?
- How might this chest be connected to Colonial economies, including labor and slavery?
- What role did spices play in medicine, food, and culture during the 18th century?
- How does the design of the chest reflect both function and beauty?
- In what ways does the chest show evidence of skilled craftsmanship?



TOPIC TIE-INS

- Trade and historic commerce
- Wealth and status symbols
- Slavery
- Spice routes
- Botany and medicine
- Craftsmanship
- Decorative arts

ARTISTIC LANGUAGE

- Woodworking/ carpentry
- Decorative arts
- Joinery
- Cabinet making
- Form and function
- Utilitarian

“The Prince lay huddled upon the stones of the court”

(Illustration for Justus Miles Forman’s
“The Love Match” in Harper’s Monthly,
August 1907)

Elizabeth Shippen Green (1871-1954)

1907 · Watercolor on illustration board

15 ¼ x 14 in. (38.7 x 35.6 cm)

Gift of Aldos and Susan Barefoot Family Fund, 2024.12.2





Elizabeth Shippen Green was an illustrator for publications such as *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. In 1901, she signed an exclusive contract with *Harper's Magazine* and became the first woman to join their staff of illustrators. Her tenure there lasted over two decades and included projects like this illustration for "The Love Match," a short story by novelist Justus Miles Forman published in the magazine in 1907. In this scene, the Princess discovers that her husband has been shot and is critically wounded. She nurses him back to health and the process strengthens their relationship with each other.

Green's father, Jasper Green, had been an engraver, illustrator, and Civil War correspondent and had encouraged her childhood interest in art. Green enrolled at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1887, studying with the painters Thomas Pollock Anshutz, Thomas Eakins, and Robert Vonnoh. She began publishing professionally before the age of 18. By the time she enrolled in Howard Pyle's illustration class at the Drexel Institute in 1894, she was already working for multiple publications.

It was in Pyle's class that she met fellow illustrators Violet Oakley and Jessie Willcox Smith. The women moved in together at the Red Rose Inn in Villanova, PA, and became known as the "Red Rose Girls." The trio later relocated to Cogslea, in the Mount Airy neighborhood of Philadelphia. The women challenged social conventions of the time by sharing expenses and supporting their families — including aging parents and various pets — solely through their successful illustration careers, without relying on husbands.

Pyle taught the first class for illustration in the country and, in 1900, relocated to Wilmington, DE, to create his own school. He taught his students to value historical accuracy in details. The Red Rose Girls, like many of his students, collected books, images, and props related to costumes, architecture, and weaponry from different periods to make their illustrations feel authentic. During the late 19th and early 20th century, innovations in printing allowed for cheaper color reproduction and increased circulation of magazines and periodicals, creating a wider audience for richly illustrated stories.



Green did eventually choose to wed, at the age of forty, marrying architecture professor Huger Elliott in 1911. Green subsequently departed Cogslea. However, she continued to work professionally as an illustrator, remaining under contract with Harper's until the mid-1920s. She also collaborated with her husband to illustrate his nonsense verse alphabet project, titled *An Alliterative Alphabet Aimed at Adult Abecedarians* (1947). Green died in 1954; forty years later, in 1994, she was elected posthumously to the Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame.

TOPIC TIE-INS

- Illustration and narrative
- Myth and legend
- Visual storytelling
- Women's roles in society
- Ethics

ARTISTIC LANGUAGE

- Narrative composition
- Mood and atmosphere
- Art Nouveau
- Watercolor
- Dramatic tension
- Romanticism
- Gesture

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What story do you think this image is telling? What happened before or after this moment?
- How does the artist use color, light, and shadow to create mood?
- What details (posture, setting, expressions, textures) help you understand what might be happening?
- How might the time period (1907) influence how this story is portrayed?
- Elizabeth Shippen Green was one of the few prominent female illustrators of her time—how might that affect how we view this work?



Tea Table

(Made in Long Neck,
Sussex County, Delaware)

"Big" Tom Burton

ca. 1865-1900 · Walnut, swamp root, metal
22 x 17 ¼ x 25 ½ in. (55.9 x 43.8 x 64.8 cm)
Museum Purchase, 2009.4

“Big” Tom Burton was an African American sharecropper who was formerly enslaved on the Burton Plantation in southern Sussex County, Delaware. The plantation’s owner, Benjamin Burton, had been the state’s largest slaveholder. Since the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 only applied to states engaged in rebellion against the Union and not border states like Delaware, the state was one of the last to abolish slavery. Emancipation did not occur in Delaware until December 18, 1865, with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Still, Delaware remained the last to officially ratify the amendment, waiting until February 1901 – more than 35 years after the end of the Civil War and after the amendment had already become federal law. The last complete census, conducted in 1860, found 1,900 people living in slavery in Delaware, with the majority in Sussex County.

This table was made by “Big” Tom later in life after he achieved his freedom. The top was repurposed from an 18th-century walnut tea table or candlestand. This already would have been about a century old at the time and was likely broken or discarded furniture. He then joined this with another found element to create a new base – a piece of swamp root, which he burnished to achieve the glossy, smooth surface. He also added a metal foot on one side to ensure a level surface for the top. The table shows signs of everyday use, including cup rings on the surface, indicating it was likely used as household furniture.

It is a rare example of historical furniture created by, and credited to, an African American maker in Delaware. It serves as a lasting testament to the resilience, skill, and ingenuity of its maker.

TOPIC TIE-INS

- Post-Emancipation America
- Labor and skill trades
- Material culture
- Oral history
- Sustainable craft
- Collections erasure
- Black history

ARTISTIC LANGUAGE

- Furniture and functional sculpture
- Metalwork
- Mixed media
- Folk art
- Organic forms
- Vernacular art
- Narrative object

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How might the materials used (walnut, swamp root, metal) reflect the local environment and resourcefulness?
- How do the natural materials influence the design and aesthetic of the table?
- In what ways does the table balance function and beauty?
- How can we use material culture like this table to better understand past lives and societies?
- What can this table tell us about the social and economic status of its maker and owner?



Still Life with Strawberries and Cherries

Margaretta Angelica Peale (1795-1882)

1865 · Oil on canvas

8 ¼ x 10 1/8 in. (21 x 25.7 cm)

Gift of the Estate of Sewell C. Biggs, 2004.441





Margaretta Angelica Peale came from the distinguished Peale family of artists. Her father, James Peale (1749-1831), was a still life and miniature painter. Her uncle, Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827), was a noted portraitist and founded the Philadelphia Museum, one of the first museums in the United States. Her cousins — including Raphaelle, Rembrandt, Rubens, Titian, and Angelica Kaufman — were all named for European masters to encourage their pursuit of painting. Her sisters, Anna Claypoole (1791-1878) and Sarah Miriam (1800-1885), became the first women elected academicians of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA).

Margaretta Angelica, on the other hand, was late to join the family business of artmaking. While she likely received some early instruction from her father, she apparently did not start seriously painting until well into her 30s (an age by which her sisters were already established artists). Margaretta's exhibition record at PAFA, one of the few sources documenting her artistic career, indicates that she exhibited several still lifes in 1836 and 1837. Some of these earliest productions were copies after her father's work.

Margaretta then disappears from the record for over three decades, reemerging in the 1860s. As none of Margaretta's siblings in Philadelphia appear to have been painting still life at this time, her interest may have been inspired by the return to Philadelphia of her cousin, Rubens Peale (1784-1865), and his daughter, Mary Jane (1827-1902). After Rubens's wife, Eliza (1795-1864), died in the fall of 1864, he and Mary Jane moved back to the city from their farm near Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania. Both were hard at work on still life in 1864 and 1865, until Rubens died in July.

Most of Margaretta's works from this period are quite small, squarish in format, and intensely focused on a fruit dish placed at the center. In all of them, the supporting ledge appears to tip precariously towards the front. Colors, while rich, are simply applied.

Still Life with Strawberries and Cherries is one of a trio of very similar works by Margaretta. A near replica (private collection) is painted on a slightly

larger canvas. It too is signed and dated 1865, but on the front rather than the back, which suggests that it may have been intended for a public exhibition. *Strawberries and Cherries* (n.d., PAFA) was probably painted in the mid-1860s as well. In it, the strawberries have been regrouped and placed on a saucer; a strawberry has replaced the lone cherry on the tabletop and moved slightly to the left. In this willingness to repeat compositions, she followed the tradition set by her father, James, who created multiples of several of his still-life compositions.

We cannot be certain to what extent Margaretta put these late pictures before the public. By the 1860s, her simple still lifes would have appeared old-fashioned amidst the more lavish compositions prevalent at the time. Still, they would have been strong visual reminders of the long Peale still life tradition in Philadelphia – a legacy still celebrated today.

TOPIC TIE-INS

- Peale Family history
- Female artists in the 19th century
- Symbolism of fruit
- Art and domestic life
- Botany
- Local produce and consumer culture

ARTISTIC LANGUAGE

- Still life
- Realism
- Negative space
- Genre painting

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Why do you think the artist chose to paint fruit instead of people or landscapes?
- How does this still life reflect ideas about domestic life or femininity during the 1800s?
- Who was Margaretta Angelica Peale, and why is her work important?
- What details make the fruit look realistic or lifelike?
- If you were to create a still life painting today, what objects would you choose and why?

Lesson Plan Overview

- **Title**
- *Work of art*
- Teacher, visual arts educator
- School and District
- Grade
- Content

Included in Lesson Plan:

- **LESSON OVERVIEW**
- **TIME REQUIRED**
- **STANDARDS**
- **STUDENT "I CAN" STATEMENTS**
- **MATERIALS**
- **LESSON ACTIVITIES**
- **ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING**
- **VOCABULARY**
- **RESOURCES AND REFERENCES**



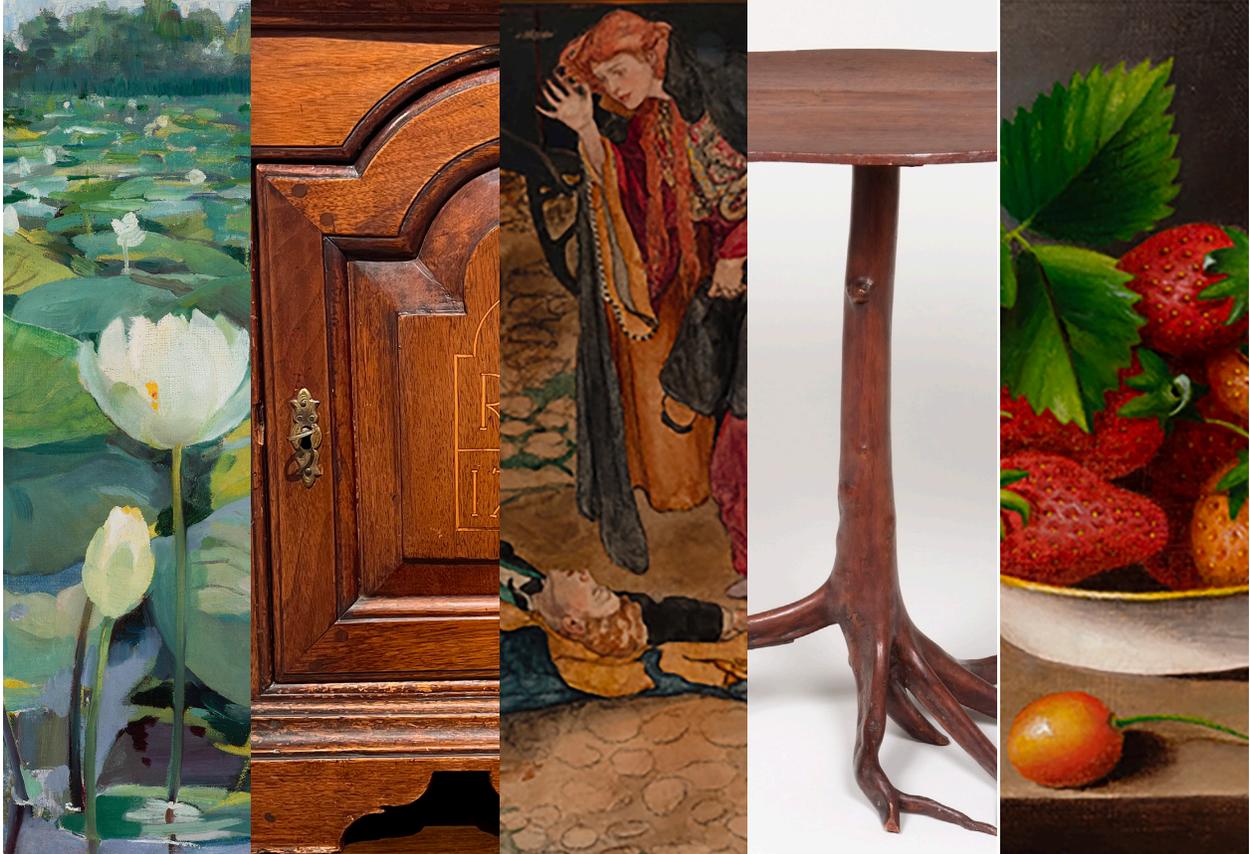
Samples can be found on The Biggs website!

Guided Reflection Worksheet:

To review the 5 artworks

Instructions: Look closely at the 5 featured artworks. Use this worksheet to reflect on each one.

Trust your instincts—go with the pieces that spark curiosity, emotion, or connection. You don't have to love every artwork, but try to see its potential as a learning tool.



Artwork	First Notice?	Emotion/ Feeling?	Subjects you see involved?	Potential teaching challenges
Work 1				
Work 2				
Work 3				
Work 4				
Work 5				

Curriculum Alignment Table

Instructions:

Only do for two works after reflection assignment is complete.

Subject Area			
Grade Level			
	Artwork	Content Standards	Potential Lessons
Work 1			
Work 2			

Reflection Questions:

Which artwork would be most engaging for your students? Why?

Could this artwork launch a larger unit or cross-curricular project?

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Museum Tour & Create your own Museum Activity

Step 1: Choose a Theme (Examples: Identity, Change, Nature & Humans, Power, Memory, etc.)

Step 2: Pick 3-5 Artworks

Step 3: Exhibit Tour Planning Table:

Exhibit Tour Title:	
Theme Explanation (1-2 Sentences):	
Artwork 1:	
Artwork 2:	
Artwork 3:	
Artwork 4:	
Artwork 5:	
Cross-Curricular Lesson Ideas:	
How Students Might Interact With the Exhibit:	



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