

June 1–August 25, 2019

30 AMERICANS

Race.
History.
Identity.
Beauty.

Contemporary art by
30 of the most important
African American artists
of the past four decades.



#30AmericansKC |    

30 Americans Conversation Guide

About this Guide

Welcome to The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art! In this conversation guide, you'll find an introduction to the exhibition 30 Americans, several suggested works to visit with children, and questions about the exhibition's themes that can be used with any work of art. A list of related books for children is also included.

No single artist in this exhibition presents the definitive view on race, identity, history, or beauty. Instead, the exhibition invites visitors of all ages to look at the artworks as a starting point for conversations that explore these concepts on a personal, community, and national level.

As you experience the exhibition, you're invited to make meaning together using the conversation prompts below.

Introduction to the Exhibition

Drawn exclusively from the acclaimed Miami-based Rubell Family Collection, this exhibition features 30 of the most significant African American artists of the past four decades. These artists are major contributors to the complex dialogues that surround this country's past, inform American life today, and shape our collective futures.

Whether overtly or subtly, 30 Americans is about **RACE**.

Although composed of contemporary art, it addresses **HISTORY**.

Its artists explore multifaceted issues of **IDENTITY**.

They embrace and challenge the nuanced concept of **BEAUTY**.

Together, their art resonates with celebration and critique, triumph and tragedy, and reckons with what it means to be American.

The art in this exhibition includes uplifting messages, expressions of pride, and moments of great beauty. Please note that it also contains nudity, references to trauma, and racial epithets. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art welcomes a range of artists' voices and expressions that reflect the diversity of the human experience.

30 AMERICANS

Race. History. Identity. Beauty.

Conversation Starters

Explore the suggested works of art using any of the conversation starters.

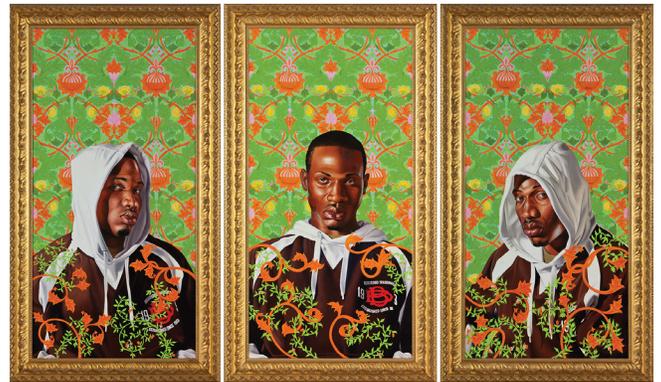
The work is intended to be inclusive and everyone is welcomed, but we live in a world where not everyone believes in equality. The world is my home, too, regardless of my skin color, gender, sexual orientation...

—Kalup Linzy

RACE

The lived experience of race in America is varied and complex, and talking about race can elicit many different responses.

- Find a work of art that expresses an emotion to you.
- How do you feel when you look at it? What makes you feel that way?
- Do the people you are with feel the same emotions when they look at the work? If not, ask others to share their feelings. Do their views change your impression of the work?



Kehinde Wiley, *Triple Portrait of Charles I*, 2007



Kerry James Marshall, *Vignette #10*, 2007.

HISTORY

Some artists are inspired by personal or historical events. We often remember the past through stories and images. Find a work of art that tells a story.

- What is happening in the story?
- Are there characters in the work of art? What might each be saying or thinking?
- What just happened? What might happen next?
- What details of the story would be impossible to know just by looking at this image?

30 AMERICANS

Race. History. Identity. Beauty.

Conversation Starters

Explore the suggested works of art using any of the conversation starters.

By portraying real women with their own unique history, beauty, and background, I'm working to diversify the representations of black women in art.

—Mickalene Thomas

IDENTITY

Art can help us express who we are, where we come from, and what we believe. Choose one work of art to look at more closely. What do you think the artist is telling us about themselves?

Imagine you could ask one of the artists in this exhibition to make a work of art that represents YOU.

- Which artist would you choose, and why?
- What would the work look like?
What materials or objects would be used?
- Would you want the artist to include an image of you, or just use symbols to represent who you are, like Basquiat's portrait of Charlie Parker?



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Bird On Money*, 1981.



Mickalene Thomas, *Baby I Am Ready Now*, 2007.

BEAUTY

Art is often described as being beautiful, but our ideas about beauty are shaped by a variety of factors. Look closely at a work of art that appeals to your sense of beauty.

- What makes the work beautiful to you?
Be specific.
- How do you know if something is beautiful?
- What does “beauty” mean to you?

Keep learning with these books

Books about artists featured in 30 Americans:

Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, Javaka Steptoe

Books about African American artists in the Nelson-Atkins collection:

My Hands Sing the Blues: Romare Bearden's Childhood Journey, Jeanne Walker Harvey

Jake Makes a World: Jacob Lawrence, a Young Artist in Harlem, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts

Henry Ossawa Tanner: His Boyhood Dream Comes True, Faith Ringgold

Gordon Parks: How the Photographer Captured Black and White America, Carole Boston Weatherford

Take a Picture of Me, James VanDerZee!, Andrea J. Loney

Books about African American history:

Freedom Over Me: Eleven Slaves, Their Lives and Dreams Brought to Life, Ashley Bryan

The Undeclared, Kwame Alexander

The Parker Inheritance, Varian Johnson

Websites about talking with children about race:

Teaching Tolerance | teachingtolerance.org

Anti-Defamation League | adl.org

EmbraceRace | embracerace.org

Please find a *30 Americans* reading list on the Kansas City, Kansas Public Library website kckpl.org for kids, teens, and adults.

Image Captions

Kehinde Wiley, *Triple Portrait of Charles I*, 2007
Oil and enamel on canvas, 82 x 125 inches.
Courtesy of Rubell Family Collection, Miami.
Art © Kehinde Wiley.

Kerry James Marshall, *Vignette #10*, 2007.
Acrylic on fiberglass, 74 x 110 inches.
Courtesy of Rubell Family Collection, Miami.
Art © Kerry James Marshall.

Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Bird On Money*, 1981.
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 66 x 90 inches.
Courtesy of Rubell Family Collection, Miami.
Art © The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Mickalene Thomas, *Baby I Am Ready Now*, 2007.
Acrylic, rhinestone and enamel on wooden panel, diptych: 72 x 132 inches.
Courtesy of Rubell Family Collection, Miami.
Art © Mickalene Thomas/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 2008.
Fabric, fiberglass and metal, 102 x 36 x 28 inches.
Courtesy of Rubell Family Collection, Miami.
Art © Nick Cave.



Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 2008.


The
Nelson-Atkins
Museum
of Art

