

# Teacher Resource Guide

## Testimony: African American Artists Collective

June 5, 2021—March 27, 2022



Najee Dorsey, American (b. 1973). *Love of a Lifetime*, 2020. Mixed media on canvas, 48 x 36 inches. Courtesy of the artist. | Kim Alexis Newton, American (b. 1972). *Embraced Promises*, 2020. Cotton, Indonesian Batik cotton, fabric fusing, and quilting, 54 x 44 inches. Courtesy of Anne Devereaux-Mills and David Mills. | JT Daniels, American (b. 1985). *Untitled (B@ng!N' Hair-do #7)*, 2017. Acrylic, spray paint, and acrylic paint marker on canvas, 49 x 49 inches. Courtesy of the artist. | Juliette Hemingway, American (b. 1966). *#*, 2021. Digital, mixed media, and augmented reality, 60 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

### EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

*Testimony: African American Artists Collective* features the work of 35 artists who engage with a range of artforms and media, including painting, sculpture, poetry, photography, illustration, jewelry design, textiles, dance, and music. The participating artists, all members of Kansas City's African American Artists Collective, express themselves using diverse styles and themes. Through their art and through their own words, these artists invite us to stand in witness to their testimonies. Together, this work of telling and receiving truths lays the foundation for community.

### ABOUT THE AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTISTS COLLECTIVE

The Nelson-Atkins was honored to invite the African American Artists Collective to collaborate on this exhibition. Formed in 2014, the AAAC is committed to increasing the visibility of African American and Black artists throughout Kansas City and beyond. With a roster of more than 150 members, the AAAC advances professional development, builds networks, provides mentorship, and engages in social justice. Learn more about the group and the member artists showing their work in *Testimony* by visiting the AAAC website, [aaackc.org](http://aaackc.org).

### USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to support educators in sharing *Testimony* with their students, either through an onsite museum visit or by viewing images and label text online. Inside you'll find activity ideas, discussion questions, and suggested resources. The content of the guide is adaptable to different grade levels but is especially relevant to middle and high school grades.

**For use in the classroom or a remote learning environment, images of the works included in *Testimony* are viewable at: [tinyurl.com/TestimonyA](http://tinyurl.com/TestimonyA) and [tinyurl.com/TestimonyB](http://tinyurl.com/TestimonyB).**

Interested in bringing students to view *Testimony* at the museum? Find the latest information on scheduling and capacity guidelines at [nelson-atkins.org/tours](http://nelson-atkins.org/tours). Please note that onsite visits may not be available due to evolving public health considerations.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will explore the plurality of perspectives and artistic approaches in African American and Black art.
- Students will recognize the importance of bearing witness to someone's testimony and of sharing their own truths.
- Students will consider how art can be used for self-expression.

## WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE EXHIBITION

*Testimony* is on view at the Nelson-Atkins in Gallery L8. Each of the 35 participating artists has one work included in the exhibition. Most of the visual works (including paintings, textiles, photographs, jewelry, sculpture, and visual poetry) are large enough to be viewed by a few people at once. Audio and video components are also present in the exhibition; these may be more easily experienced by one person at a time. Each work is accompanied by a label featuring the artist's own written perspective. For educators accessing the exhibition works online, this label information is included with each image.

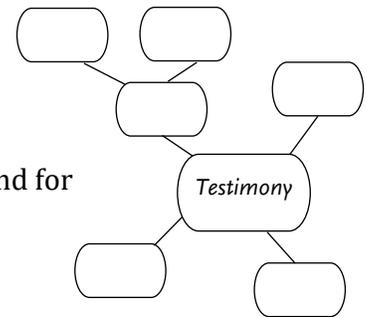


View of *Testimony* exhibition space

## BEFORE VIEWING THE EXHIBITION

### **Discuss: What is a Testimony?**

The title of this exhibition was chosen to reflect the importance of offering and receiving truths. As a class, discuss the meaning of the word *testimony*. Where have students encountered that word before? What does it call to mind for them? You might create a mind map to capture students' ideas in one place.



### **Reflect on Sharing a Testimony**

Encourage students to write about a time they shared their truth with another person or bore witness to someone else's testimony. In their writing, students might address:

- What was that experience like? What emotions or thoughts arose for them in the moment?
- How did the experience ultimately affect them? How did it affect their relationship with the other person involved in the exchange?
- Did anyone's perspective change as a result? If so, how?

### **Learn About African American and Black Artists**

The artists featured in *Testimony* are part of a rich artistic tradition in the Kansas City area. Students can explore web-based resources to learn about the ongoing contributions of African American and Black artists to the Kansas City community and beyond. Challenge students to research an African American visual artist, performing artist, or writer who has ties to Kansas City. What stands out to them about that person's life and creative legacy? See the "Suggested Resources" section of this guide for ideas on where to find information.

## WHILE VIEWING THE EXHIBITION

### ***Look Closely at One Artist's Testimony***

Invite students to choose a work of visual art in the exhibition and answer the following questions in writing or in discussion with a classmate:

- How has the artist used colors, textures, lines, and shapes in this work?
- Describe the composition (how things are arranged within the image). Where do you see balance, rhythm, or contrast? What is your eye drawn to? How does the artist draw your attention there?
- What symbols has the artist used? What do those symbols call to mind for you? What might they mean within this work of art?
- What is the overall mood or impression you get from this work?

Follow-up discussion for the class: How did this process of looking closely impact your understanding of the work? Why is it important to pay close attention when someone is sharing their perspective with you?

### ***Bring the Artist into the Conversation***

Now that students have considered the meaning of the work they chose, encourage them to read the artist's accompanying label and reflect on the additional insight it brings by discussing the following questions:

- How is the artist's perspective on the work similar to or different from the way you initially understood it?
- When looking at the work, where do you see evidence of the words, feelings, or ideas that the artist expressed in their written statement?
- Does the artist's statement help you see anything new in the work that you didn't notice before?

Follow-up discussion for the class: How is the process of interpreting a work of art like having a conversation? Why is it important to give people the opportunity to share their truths in their own words?

### ***Respond to What You Witness***

Invite each student to select an exhibition work (in any medium) that they feel drawn toward, and have them write a letter to the artist. Some possible topics to include in their letters are:

- What strikes you most about the work?
- What questions would you want to ask the artist?
- Does anything in the work resemble your own experiences or perspective?
- What would you want the artist to know about your reaction to their work?
- What will you take away from the work and put to use in your life?

Follow-up discussion for the class: What has the experience of viewing *Testimony* been like for you? What happens to us when we bear witness to someone else's truth?

## EXTENDING YOUR LEARNING

### Share Your Own Testimony

After viewing the works in the exhibition, invite students to create their own individual or collective testimonies. This could be done through visual art, writing, music, or any other format and medium that best suits your teaching goals and students' interests. What would they want to share with the world?

If you would like to share your students' work with the Nelson-Atkins, you can send photographs or other media files to the Educator Resource Center at [erc@nelson-atkins.org](mailto:erc@nelson-atkins.org). We would love to see the creative ways your students respond to the exhibition!

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

The activities described in this guide can engage students with the following curriculum standards:

### National Core Arts Standards

Anchor Standard #7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Anchor Standard #8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Anchor Standard #11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

## EDUCATOR RESOURCE CENTER

This guide was produced by the Educator Resource Center at the Nelson-Atkins. The ERC is available to support educators through a variety of programs and resources. If you are interested in learning more about ways to link museum works with classroom learning, we invite you to connect with the ERC to access:

- Curriculum consultations
- Circulating resources
- Professional development workshops

Visit [nelson-atkins.org/educators](http://nelson-atkins.org/educators) for more info.



The ERC

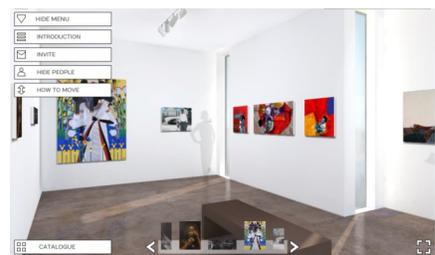
## SUGGESTED RESOURCES

### Virtual Testimony Programming [nelson-atkins.org/exhibitions/testimony](http://nelson-atkins.org/exhibitions/testimony)

Visit the Nelson-Atkins' website for information about artist talks and other virtual events connected with the exhibition.

### African American Artists Collective [aaackc.org](http://aaackc.org)

Learn more about the AAAC, read member bios, view a virtual exhibition with works by *Testimony* artists, and discover programs hosted by the AAAC tied to *Testimony*.



Screenshot of virtual companion exhibition

### Kansas City Black History [kclinc.org/blackhistory](http://kclinc.org/blackhistory)

Find downloadable posters and booklets that introduce important figures from Kansas City Black History, including artists, musicians, and performers.