



WOMEN ON THE RISE!

TEACHING INSTRUCTIONS: Carrie Mae Weems

THEMES:

- Stereotypes of African Americans
- Representations of African American life
- Photography
- Using archival materials
- Slavery in the United States

FEATURED WORKS:

Kitchen Table Series (1990), Ain't Jokin Series (1987-1988) and From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried (1995).

RESOURCES:

Links to images

- <http://www.artnet.com/artist/17631/carrie-mae-weems.html>
- http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A7177&page_number=1&template_id=1&sort_order=1
- <http://www.fabricworkshopandmuseum.org/collections/weems.php>
- <http://www.flomenhaftgallery.com/lightbox/index.php?module=media&category=gallery/collections&start=81>

Books

- *Carrie Mae Weems* by Andrea Kirsh and Susan Fisher Sterling (1993): National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C.
- *Carrie Mae Weems: Recent Work 1992-1998* by Thomas Piche and Thelma Golden (1998): Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY
- PBS Film for Children: *Behind the Scenes with Carrie Mae Weems*. Available on VHS via Amazon.com

DISCUSSION POINTS AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS:

- Generate questions regarding the depiction of relationships related to the *Kitchen Table Series* images you choose to highlight.
- (Based on *Kitchen Table Series*) Prompt students to think about what kinds of sounds or music would accompany the scenes.
- (Based on *Kitchen Table Series*) Have students pay attention to how the characters are positioned and the objects on the table. How do they change from image to image and contribute to the different moods of the stories?

- (Based on *Kitchen Table Series*) Why do you think an artist would create work featuring such everyday images?
- (Based on *Kitchen Table Series*) Have you experienced or witnessed situations similar to those portrayed?
- Generate questions regarding the use of color and text in the images you choose to highlight in *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995).
- (Based on *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*) Ask students to suggest why Weems chose certain colors to accompany the images and text. Do they have alternative suggestions that would change the meanings/readings of the images?
- Do the characters in the *Ain't Jokin* series seem like they want to be photographed?
- Can Carrie Mae Weems' work affect the way people think about race? How? Would they have more impact if they were displayed in public? What would be some good locations to display them (e.g. laundromats; restaurants)?

MATERIALS FOR HANDS-ON PROJECT: Carrie Mae Weems

Not Your "Type"

The hands-on component for the Carrie Mae Weems lesson is inspired by the *Ain't Jokin* series and *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*. The project focuses on Weems' use of colored overlays on photographs and text. Students will think about how visual representations contribute to the idea of a "type" or label of groups of people/individuals.

You can use images printed from a digital/film camera, photocopied archival images of African Americans, or both (if you would like students to create two works). In the past we have used Polaroids but the equipment has become cost prohibitive and more difficult to find. This link can be used to locate archival images: http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/images_aa19/

Project A

- Sheets of multi-colored cellophane
- Digital or film camera
- Film (if not using digital camera)
- Printer and photo paper (if using digital camera)
- Alphabet stickers (small)
- Scissors
- Clear scotch tape
- Ruler

Project B

- 19th century images of African Americans
- Hinged mat board frames (coordinate frame sizes to photocopy sizes)
- Alphabet stickers (small)
- Scissors
- Clear scotch tape
- Ruler

PROCEDURE FOR HANDS-ON PROJECT:

Project A

- Students will think of a pose that communicates an aspect of their personality (e.g. hands raised enthusiastically in the air; smiling; frowning; holding an object; profile; back of head)
- They will team up in groups of 2 to capture images of their poses with the camera
- (If using digital camera) While the photograph prints they will choose a colored sheet of cellophane that they associate with the image. Some students combine several colored pieces and create designs.
- Students will think of a phrase, word, or series of words that indicate what aspect of their personality is being portrayed or what “label” would fit their image
- Students will cover the photograph with the colored cellophane by wrapping it taut and affixing it to the back of the picture with an adhesive.
- Alphabet stickers will be used to incorporate their text along the bottom portion of the image (using a ruler is helpful)

Project B

- Instructor will create a selection of photocopies of enlarged 19th century archival images of African Americans (can be categorized thematically)
- Students will choose an image (or several, depending on time available)
- Students will select a sheet of colored cellophane (or more than one, as described in Project “A”)
- Students will react to the image and write a phrase, word, poem, or non-narrative grouping of words.
- Students will place the image into to the mat board frame, lay the cellophane over it, and secure the materials with tape along the edge making sure it is not visible.
- Alphabet stickers will be used to apply their text
- The completed work will be framed and installed in the classroom (Students can arrange them as a group for a specific narrative affect. If individual students are using several images each they can be grouped by student.)

APPLICABLE NATIONAL VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS (GRADES 5 -12):

- NA—VA.5-8.1 (9-12.1): Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes
- NA—VA.5-8.3 (9-12.3): Choosing and Evaluating A Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas
- NA—VA.5-8.4 (9-12.4): Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- NA—VA.5-8.6 (9-12.6): Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines [History / Anthropology]



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STUDENT HAND OUT: Carrie Mae Weems

Carrie Mae Weems (b. 1953—Orgeon)

Carrie Mae Weems is a major contemporary artist who uses a camera to create her work. Weems' photography explores family heritage and the legacy of slavery in America. She studied African American history at the University of California in Berkley, which inspired her to visit the Sea Islands located off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. African Americans have lived in the Sea Islands since the 17th century slave trade and have maintained many of their African traditions.

Weems' work also deals with stereotypes of African American women. A stereotype is a category applied to a group of people, and is generally negative. For example, girls are often stereotyped as not being athletic. In works such as *Black Woman With Chicken* (1987-1988), Weems refers to statements often made about African Americans. *Why do you think she chose to make this particular reference to food?*

One of her best-known works is *The Kitchen Table* (1990), a group of photographs that reveal personal moments in the lives of women in an African American household. The scenes that unfold in these photographs tell stories about powerful bonds between mothers, daughters, lovers, and friends.

