

Exploring Your Heritage and Creating a Map

Time: Various

Difficulty level: Medium

Messy level: Low



Hank Willis Thomas, *A Place to Call Home (Africa America Reflection)*, 2020, stainless steel with mirrored finish, edition 1 of 3, with 2 APs. © Hank Willis Thomas. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

To view high-res images from the exhibition *Afro-Atlantic Histories*, visit the [MFAH website](#).

Investigate the Work of Art!

This new cartography by Hank Willis Thomas suggests the strong African presence in South America, as most enslaved Africans arrived in Brazil. It also reminds us of both the connection and detachment that many Black North Americans feel in relation to Africa. “There’s this mythical connection to Africa that is embedded in your identity, but many people go to Africa looking for home and don’t find it because our roots are so diluted there,” the artist explains. “They also never felt at home in the U.S., where they were born. I wanted to make a place where African Americans come from.”

1. What are some differences between this map created by Hank Willis Thomas and a standard world map? Why do you think Thomas made these changes?
2. The artist chose to make the artwork with a reflective material. What do you think these creative decisions are intended to highlight?
3. Thomas speaks about not truly feeling African or American. Do you think a similar feeling may be experienced by additional groups of people in America?

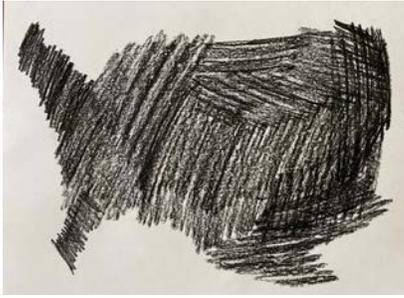
Let’s Make Some Art! Gather These Art Materials

- Printer
- Printer paper
- Red pen
- Charcoal stick
- Multicolor pack of map pins
- Black Sharpie
- Cork board
- Tape

To purchase some of the recommended art materials, visit [dickblick.com](#).

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Step-by-Step Artist Instructions

Every place we live impacts us and helps to shape our identity. For this activity, you will be documenting the places your grandparents, parents, and siblings have lived. This will require the help of an adult and it is best when this is done as a family.

1. Gather supplies.
2. Go online and print out a map. If your family is from multiple countries, print a world map. If they are only from one or two countries, it is fine to print just those locations.
3. Flip your map over and cover the back with a thick layer of charcoal.
4. Transfer the map onto the corkboard by completing the following steps:
 - Place the charcoal side of the map down onto the cork board.
 - Tape the edges down.
 - Use a red pen to trace the lines of the map (the harder you press the darker the lines will be).
5. Remove the printed map.
6. Designate a color pin for each family member group. Example: purple for mom, orange for dad, blue for maternal grandparents, green for paternal grandparents.
7. Create a legend at the bottom so that you can indicate which pin color identifies a particular family group.
8. Collect family pictures and documents to pin around the edges of the board.

This exhibition is co-organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Museu de Arte de São Paulo in collaboration with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Major support provided by:



Family Programs at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, receive generous support from the Junior League of Houston, Inc.

Learning and Interpretation programs receive generous funding from the Jerold B. Katz Foundation; Institute of Museum and Library Services; H-E-B; MD Anderson Cancer Center; The Brown Foundation, Inc.; Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo; Sharon G. Dies; Susan Vaughan Foundation; and additional generous donors.

All Learning and Interpretation programs at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, receive endowment funds provided by Louise Jarrett Moran Bequest; Caroline Wiess Law; Windgate Foundation; the William Randolph Hearst Foundation; Cyvia and Melvyn Wolff; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Fondren Foundation; BMC Software, Inc.; the Wallace Foundation; the Neal Myers and Ken Black Children's Art Fund; Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Ballard; Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Tate; the Eleanor and Frank Freed Foundation; Virginia and Ira Jackson; the Favrot Fund; CFP Foundation; Neiman Marcus Youth Arts Education; gifts in memory of John Wynne; and gifts in honor of Beth Schneider.