



AT HOME WITH JACOB LAWRENCE

Artist Jacob Lawrence created colorful paintings about African American life in the 20th century. His themes still resonate today as they celebrate stories of family, community, and finding hope even during challenging times.

IN THIS PACKET

Engage in these activities at home based on Lawrence's *Migration Series*:

MY LIFE IS MY ART

Use your imagination to find inspiration from your everyday life

SHAPES OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Explore different kinds of shapes to create your own neighborhood scene

COLOR, COLOR, REPEAT

Discover Lawrence's unique process for applying color, and try it yourself by creating a storyboard about an important life event

Do these activities as a family, on your own, or in the classroom—try one, some, or all!

Suggested Ages: 8+ (or 6+ with assistance)



1600 21st Street, NW | Washington, DC | [PhillipsCollection.org](https://www.phillipscollection.org) |



WHAT'S THE STORY?

Starting about 100 years ago, millions of African Americans migrated from the South to the North in the United States. This became known as the Great Migration.

Why did they move?

When living in the South, African Americans were not treated well. Laws made it so that people could treat them unfairly. They had to work difficult farming jobs and were paid poorly.

What happened when they moved?

Thousands upon thousands of African Americans moved North in search of better living and working conditions. After long journeys on trains to move North, they often found jobs in factories. Housing in Northern cities quickly became crowded. Many African Americans created their own communities within cities, such as in Harlem in New York City, where they could celebrate African American culture.

Why *The Migration Series*?

Since Jacob Lawrence's family had migrated North during the Great Migration, he decided to show his family's story and the story of other African Americans through his art. He shows us their hopes, but also the real challenges that African Americans faced.

MIGRATION

What does it mean to migrate?

Animals often move each year to warmer climates for the winter time, and then return home. *What are some animals that migrate each year?*

Humans move from one place to another to settle in a new location. *What are some examples of people migrating? What are some reasons why people might migrate?*



Panel no. 35: They left the South in great numbers. They arrived in the North in great numbers.

MY LIFE IS MY ART

Materials

- Magazines or newspapers
- Scissors
- Glue or tape
- Markers or crayons
- Paper, construction paper, or cardboard

Background Information

Artists, including Jacob Lawrence, often express their life experiences through their art. Lawrence's parents migrated from the rural South to find a better life in the North. Lawrence was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and moved to Harlem when he was 13.

The largest concentration of African Americans who migrated during the Great Migration moved to Harlem in New York City. Harlem became a hub of African American culture, with an explosion of literature, music, theater, and the arts. This period, between 1918 to the mid-1930s, became known as the Harlem Renaissance.

LOOK CLOSELY

Imagine you stepped inside Jacob Lawrence's painting *This is Harlem*.

- What sounds do you *hear*?
- What things do you *see*?
- What do you *smell*?
- What do you *taste*?
- What can you reach out and *touch*?



Roger Smith, New York, New York. Street musicians in Harlem, 1943, Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC



Jacob Lawrence, *This is Harlem*, 1943, Gouache and pencil on paper, 15 5/16 × 22 5/8 in., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966

MAKE ART: EVERYDAY PINBOARD

1. Brainstorm: Think about what inspires you every day.

Write a list or draw small pictures of some things that inspire you every day, for example, when you're on a walk, in the car, in nature, at home, or with people.

2. Create: Make a pinboard or collage of things that inspire you every day.

A pinboard is a collection of images, ideas, styles, words, clippings, etc., that represent a certain theme. Artists, like Jacob Lawrence, engage in processes like this to plan their artwork.

Find words and images from magazines, newspapers, photographs, or anything else, to create your pinboard.

Arrange your words and images on a piece of paper, construction paper, or cardboard. Then, tape or glue them down.



Example of an Everyday Pinboard—yours might look very different. Try making a pinboard that is unique to your everyday experiences.

REFLECT

What thing from your everyday experiences inspires you the most?

What things from Jacob Lawrence's everyday experiences inspired him?

How can finding inspiration from your everyday life help you through difficult times?

SHAPES OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Materials

- Construction paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Markers or crayons
- Shape hole punchers (optional)

Background Information

In *The Migration Series*, Jacob Lawrence used lots of shapes and lines to show the everyday things he saw: people, buildings, doors, windows, hats, and luggage. He used flat shapes of color to create a sense of pattern and rhythm. To make his art look as if it was moving, he used many shapes with diagonal lines (like triangles). By placing light and dark colors next to each other, the shapes stand out and look brighter. This process helped to express the mood and story throughout the panels.

LOOK CLOSELY

Examine Panels no. 31 and 9:

What do you notice about the lines? What do you notice about the shapes?

Compare Panels no. 31 and 9:

How are the lines and shapes similar in each panel? How are they different?

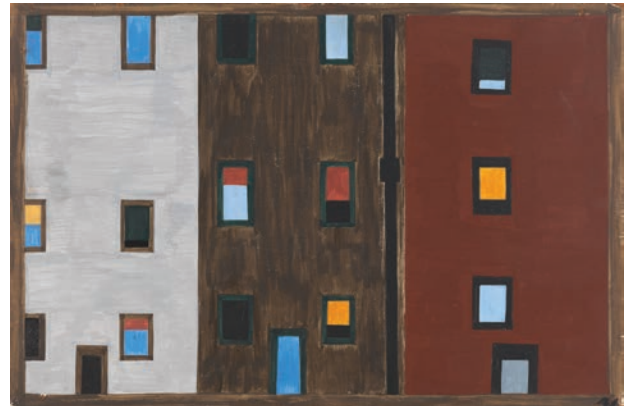
Understand:

Geometric shapes are shapes such as triangles, squares, rectangles, circles, trapezoids. We don't often see them in the natural world. They have straight lines and angles.

Biomorphic shapes are shapes that we see in nature like flowers, animals, and clouds. They have curved lines and irregular angles.

Study Panel no. 45:

When does Lawrence use geometric shapes?
When does Lawrence use biomorphic shapes?



ABOVE: Panel no. 31: The migrants found improved housing when they arrived north.



LEFT: Panel no. 9: They left because the boll weevil had ravaged the cotton crop.



BELOW: Panel no. 45: The migrants arrived in Pittsburgh, one of the great industrial centers of the North.

MAKE ART: SHAPE COLLAGE

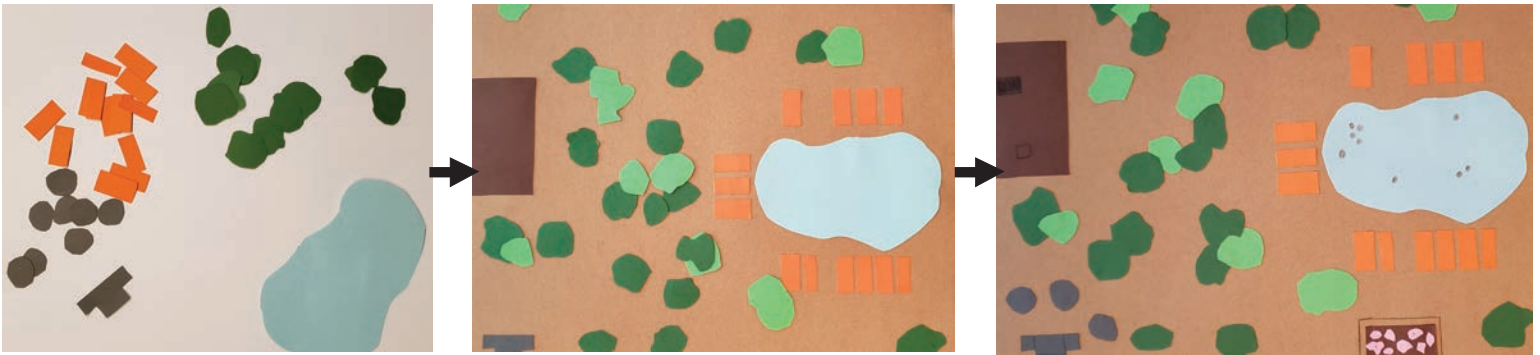
Create your own scene of everyday life using different kinds of shapes.

Select something you see in your neighborhood every day.

- For example: apartment buildings, houses, cars, buildings, gardens or plants, bus stops

Create your neighborhood scene using geometric and biomorphic shapes.

1. Cut out biomorphic and geometric shapes from construction paper. Make sure you have at least 3 shapes for both kinds.
2. Using those shapes, lay out the neighborhood scene you identified.
3. Glue down your shapes.
4. Use markers or crayons to fill in any additional details to complete your neighborhood scene.



REFLECT

Where did you find biomorphic and geometric shapes in your neighborhood?

Biomorphic shapes: _____

Geometric shapes: _____

Neighborhoods can come in many shapes and sizes. What makes your neighborhood special?

Neighborhoods can be one form of community. What is important to you about your community? How does your community help to support you during both happy and difficult times?

COLOR, COLOR, REPEAT

Materials

- Pencil
- Markers or colored pencils
- Storyboard template (included)

Background Information

Jacob Lawrence drew all 60 panels of *The Migration Series* before beginning to paint. He then painted the panels all at once, color by color—starting with ivory, black, and brown, and then moving to red, orange, and yellow. The limited colors and Lawrence’s technique of applying colors one at a time across the series create unity.

LOOK CLOSELY

Examine Panels no. 23, 57, and 59:

- Count how many colors Lawrence uses in the paintings.
- What colors does Lawrence use in his paintings?
- Which colors appear most often? Least often?
- What else do you notice about the colors in the paintings?



Panel no. 59: In the North they had the freedom to vote.



Panel no. 23: The migration spread.

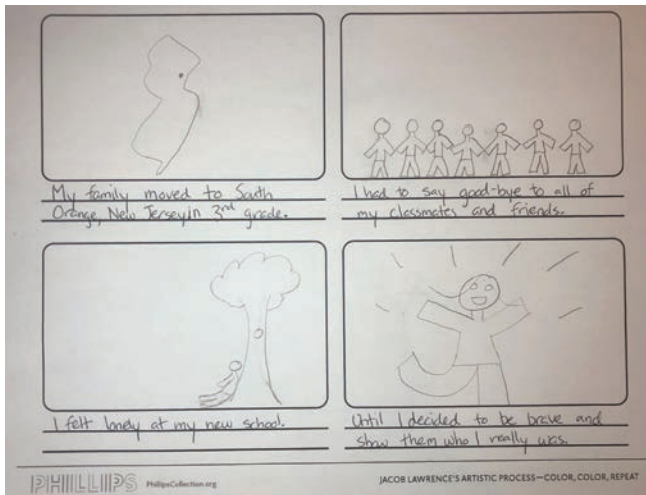


Panel no. 57: The women were the last to leave.

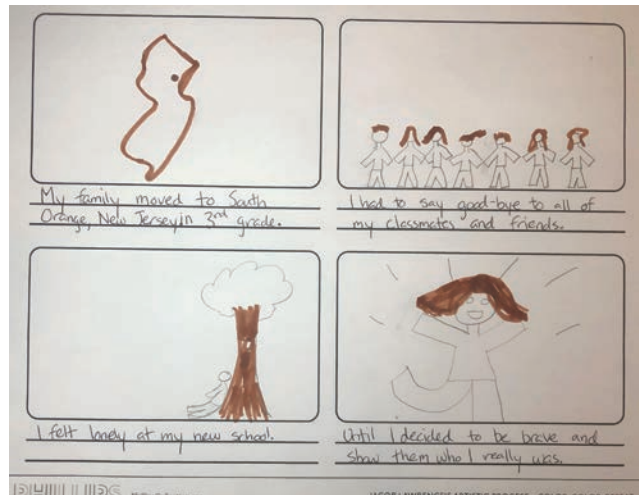
MAKE ART: STORYBOARDS

Create your own art series inspired by Lawrence’s way of applying color, using the storyboard template.

1. **Identify** an important event in your life. For example: a new sibling, a move to a new home or city, a birthday, first day of school, a field trip.
2. **Write** a sentence for each part of the event on the storyboard template. Include what happened at the beginning, middle, and end—writing each sentence beneath a different box.
3. **Sketch** a picture for each part of the event that you wrote in pencil.
4. **Select** 3-5 colors. Decide with which color you want to begin.
5. **Color** in your picture. Use only one color at a time: color in all of your scenes with that one color, before moving on the next color, like Jacob Lawrence did.



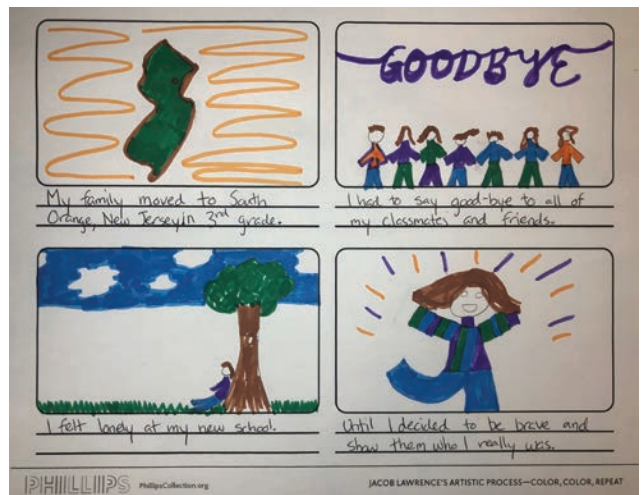
Storyboard filled in with sentences and sketches



Sketches filled in with color #1



Sketches filled in with color #2 and #3



Sketches filled in with color #4 and #5

REFLECT

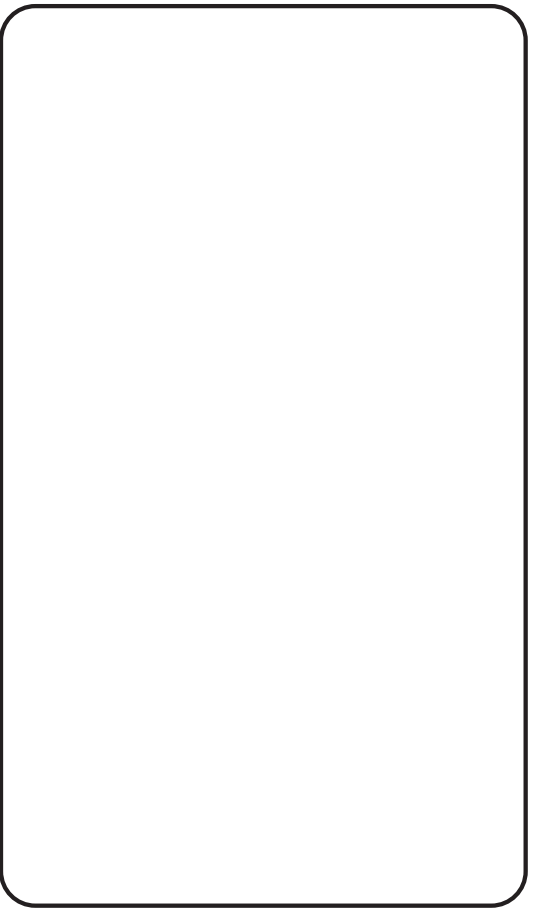
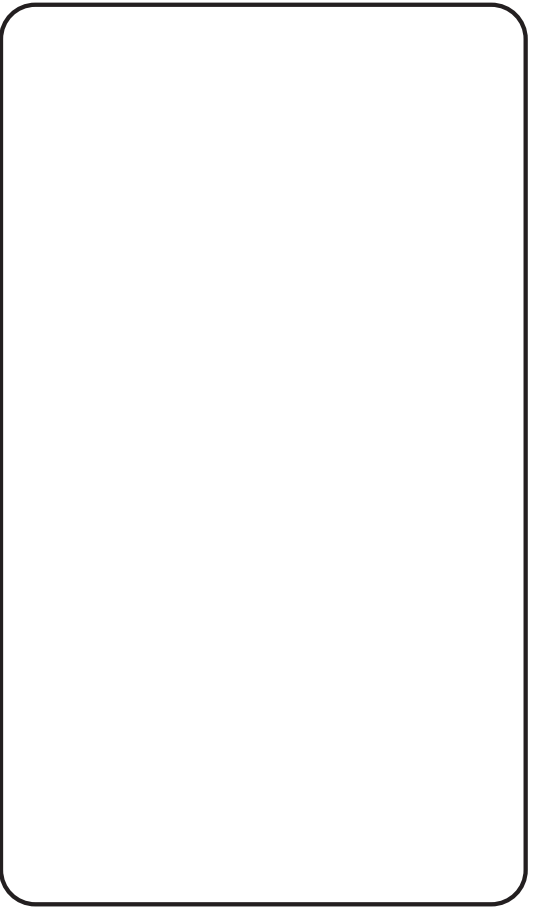
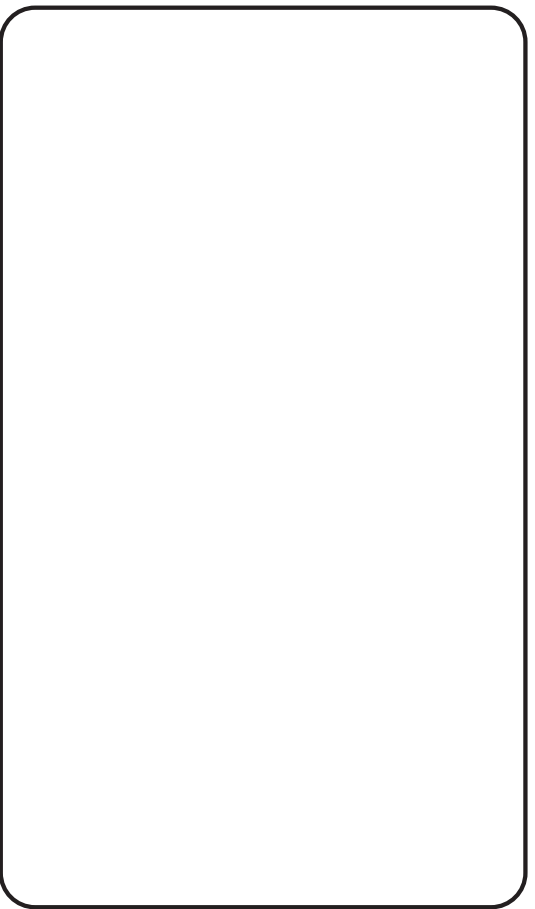
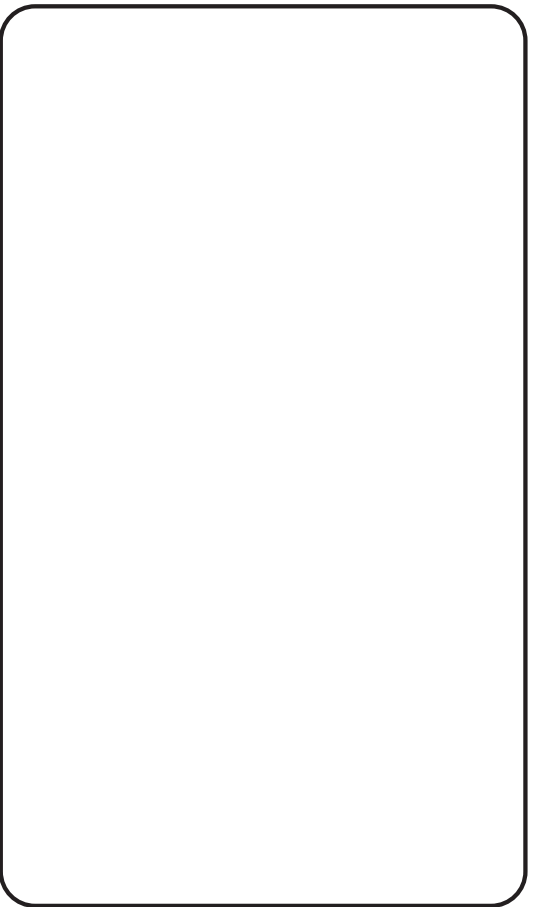
What did you like about this process of coloring with one color at a time?

What did you find challenging about this coloring process?

Why did you choose this life event?

What people were at this event that made it important?

How has this life event helped to define who you are?

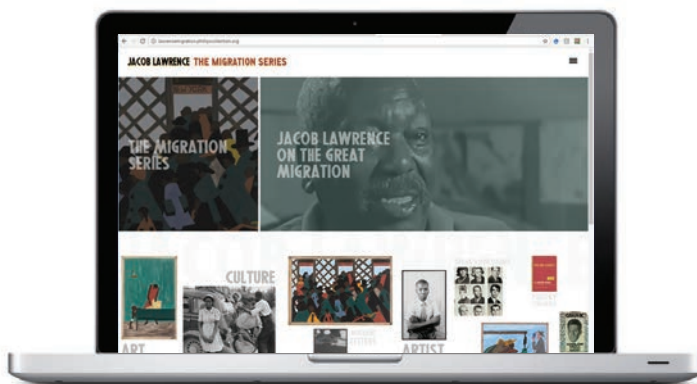


THE MIGRATION SERIES IN DEPTH

Explore the lasting impact of the Great Migration through the life and work of Jacob Lawrence at [LawrenceMigration.PhillipsCollection.org](https://www.lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org)

Watch interviews with the artist, discover images of and information about all 60 panels in the series, look at historic letters and photos from the Great Migration, explore an animated map showing how African Americans migrated from 1910 to 2000, and much more.

Feeling inspired? Share what you imagine #Panel61 of The Migration Series would look like and browse other artworks.



THE GREAT MIGRATION SUGGESTED READING LIST

We recommend the following books to learn more about Jacob Lawrence and the Great Migration:

- *Story Painter: The Life of Jacob Lawrence* by John Duggleby
- *The Great Migration: An American Story* by Jacob Lawrence
- *The Great Migration: Journey to the North* by Eloise Greenfield
- *This is the Rope: A Story from the Great Migration* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *Making Our Way Home: The Great Migration and the Black American Dream* by Blair Imani (recommended for ages 12+)

All of these books are available through the DC Public Library. Visit dclibrary.org/getacard for information on how to sign up for a free library card.