



## AMERICAN ART | Grades 5-8

### Colonial Social Structure and American Persona

#### ABOUT THIS TOOLBOX

This toolbox provides educators with hands-on activities and discussions relating to the Detroit Institute of Arts' collection into the classroom. Offering students the opportunity to closely examine and touch replica artworks, the toolbox helps them better understand the messages, materials, and methods of art production and design.



#### LEARNING TARGET

Students will explore the concept of social class in colonial and early American art through household goods, portraits, fabrics, and other material culture. Students will be able to explain how social station was communicated through visual mediums as well as synthesize hypotheses about what motivated early Americans to portray their own social station in certain ways. Students will also evaluate the role of slavery in the early American social class system and analyze the inequalities in early American society through its arts and artifacts.

#### STUDENT OUTCOMES

Students will...

- compare living conditions, clothing, and household items from different social classes in early America.
- analyze how wealth and social class were shown in portraits of early Americans.
- evaluate the types and amounts of labor needed to produce art objects in pre-industrial America.

*This educational resource was developed by teacher Elisabeth Wood-Wallace in collaboration with the Education Programs and Curatorial departments at the Detroit Institute of Arts.*

*This DIA Delivered resource is supported by the Ford Motor Company Fund.*

## TOOLBOX OBJECTS

All toolkit objects, except for the plastic needles, are contemporary reproductions made in the style of items from the colonial and early American periods.

1. Handblown glass cup
2. Wooden mug
3. Porcelain teacup from China
4. Stoneware mug
5. Jicara drinking gourd
6. Handmade lace samples
7. Fabric samples
8. Plastic needles

## CONSUMABLE ARTMAKING SUPPLIES

1. Yarn
2. Burlap

## STUDENT BOOKS

Cooper, Afua. *My Name Is Phillis Wheatley: A Story of Slavery and Freedom*. Kids Can Press, 2009.

Haskins, Jim, et al. *Black Stars of Colonial and Revolutionary Times*. Wiley, 2003.

McDonald, Megan. *Shadows in the Glasshouse*. American Girl Publishing, 2000.

McGill, Alice. *Molly Bannaky*. HMH Books for Young Readers, 2009.

Raum, Elizabeth. *The Dreadful, Smelly Colonies: The Disgusting Details About Life in Colonial America (Disgusting History)*. Capstone Press, 2011.

## VIRTUAL TIPS

Share photos of the Toolbox Objects and copies of the graphic organizers through a Learning Management System (LMS).

Conduct an online meeting to showcase the Toolbox Objects in order for students to investigate the objects.

Post the Student Activities on a LMS for quick, easy-to-use, student-centered directions requiring little teacher instruction.

## 21ST CENTURY STANDARDS

Collaborate  
Communicate  
Creativity

## CURRICULUM STANDARDS

### Grade 5

#### Michigan Social Studies

5 – U2.2.2 Describe the lives of enslaved Africans and free Africans, including fugitive and escaped slaves in the American colonies.

5 – U2.3.3 Describe colonial life in America from the perspectives of at least three different groups of people.

Examples may include but are not limited to: perspectives of wealthy landowners, farmers, merchants, indentured servants, laborers, the poor, women, enslaved people, free Africans, and Indigenous Peoples.

5 – U2.3.4 Describe the development of the emerging labor force in the colonies.

Examples may include but are not limited to: cash-crop farming, slavery, indentured servants.

#### Michigan Merit Curriculum

ART.VA.IV.5.2 Compare and contrast works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times, and places.

ART.VA.IV.5.3 Demonstrate how history, culture, and the visual arts interrelate in making and studying works of art.

ART.VA.V.5.1 Explain how visual arts have inherent relationships to everyday life.

### Grade 8

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

#### Michigan Social Studies

8 – U4.2.1 Comparing the Northeast and the South—compare and contrast the social and economic systems of the Northeast, the South, and the Western Frontier (Kentucky, Ohio Valley, etc.) with respect to geography, climate, and the development of: • agriculture, including changes in productivity, technology, supply and demand, and price; • industry, including the entrepreneurial development of new industries, such as textiles; • the labor force, including labor incentives and changes in labor forces; • transportation,

## DIA COLLECTION CONNECTIONS



- A. Joseph Jonathan Blackburn (American, 1700–80), [Mrs. James Pitts](#), 1757, oil on canvas, unframed: 50 1/8 × 40 in. (127.3 × 101.6 cm); framed: 57 5/8 × 47 1/2 × 2 7/8 in. (146.4 × 120.7 × 7.3 cm). Founders Society Purchase, Gibbs-Williams Fund. 58.356



- B. Joseph Jonathan Blackburn (American, 1700–80), [James Pitts](#), 1757, oil on canvas, unframed: 50 1/8 × 40 in. (127.3 × 101.6 cm); framed: 57 3/4 × 47 5/8 × 3 in. (146.7 × 121 × 7.6 cm). Founders Society Purchase, Gibbs-Williams Fund. 58.357



- C. John Smibert (American, 1688–1751), [Mrs. James Pitts](#), 1735, oil on canvas, unframed: 36 1/2 × 28 1/8 in. (92.7 × 71.4 cm); framed: 43 3/4 × 35 1/2 × 3 7/8 in. (111.1 × 90.2 × 9.8 cm). Founders Society Purchase, Gibbs-Williams Fund. 58.352



- D. Joseph Badger (American, 1708–65), [James Bowdoin](#), 1746 or 1747, oil on canvas, unframed: 51 1/8 × 50 1/8 in. (129.9 × 127.3 cm); framed: 56 3/4 × 46 7/8 × 2 5/8 in. (144.1 × 119.1 × 6.7 cm). Founders Society Purchase, Gibbs-Williams Fund. 58.354



- E. John Singleton Copley (American, 1738–1815). [Head of a Man](#), 1777 or 1778, oil on canvas, unframed: 21 × 16 1/4 in. (53.3 × 41.3 cm); framed: 27 × 23 3/4 × 2 1/2 in. (68.6 × 60.3 × 6.4 cm). Founders Society Purchase, Gibbs-Williams Fund. 52.118



- F. John Singleton Copley (American, 1738–1815), [Watson and the Shark](#), 1782, oil on canvas, unframed: 36 × 30 1/2 in. (91.4 × 77.5 cm); framed: 45 3/16 × 39 × 2 1/2 in. (114.8 × 99.1 × 6.4 cm). Founders Society Purchase, Dexter M. Ferry, Jr. Fund. 46.310



- G. George Bright (American, 1726–1805). [Secretary](#). Between 1770 and 1785. Mahogany, white pine, mirrors, gilt and brass, overall: 102 1/2 × 42 1/2 × 24 inches (260.4 × 108 × 61 cm). Founders Society Purchase, General Membership Fund, Robert H. Tannahill Foundation Fund, Gibbs-Williams Fund, and funds from Louis Hamburger. 66.13



- H. Nathan Bowen (American, 1752–1837), [Chest on Chest](#), 1774, mahogany, white pine, and brass, overall: 90 1/2 × 45 1/2 × 23 1/2 in. (229.9 × 115.6 × 59.7 cm). Founders Society Purchase, Gibbs-Williams Fund. 48.274



- I. Paul Revere II (American, 1734–1818), [Sugar Basket](#), about 1780, silver, overall: 7 3/4 × 6 3/4 × 4 13/16 in. (19.7 × 17.1 × 12.2 cm). Founders Society Purchase, Gibbs-Williams Fund. 35.40



- J. Paul Revere II (American, 1734–1818), [Mug](#), about 1780, silver, overall: 5 3/8 × 4 1/4 × 5 3/4 in. (13.7 × 10.8 × 14.6 cm). Gift of Robert H. Tannahill in memory of Mrs. William Clay. 44.197



- K. Paul Revere II (American, 1734–1818), [Teapot](#), between 1790 and 1795, silver and ebony, overall: 5 3/4 × 3 1/2 in. (14.6 × 8.9 cm). Founders Society Purchase, Gibbs-Williams Fund. 37.92



- L. Paul Revere II (American, 1734–1818), [Creamer](#), about 1780, silver, overall: 6 9/16 × 2 7/16 × 4 11/16 in. (16.7 × 6.2 × 11.9 cm). Founders Society Purchase, Gibbs-Williams Fund. 35.41



- M. Chinese export, Chinese, [Punch Bowl](#), between 1785 and 1800, white porcelain, grey-green glaze with polychrome decoration, overall: 4 1/2 × 10 1/8 in. (11.4 × 25.7 cm). 46.111



- N. Chinese export, Chinese, [Punch Bowl](#), between 1785 and 1800, porcelain, overall: 6 15/16 × 15 3/4 in. (17.6 × 40 cm). Gift of Robert H. Tannahill. 55.516

## PORTRAITS | Old-School Storytelling through the Self(ie)

### TOOLBOX OBJECTS

*Claim, Support, Question* handout

### DIA Collection Connections: A-F

### DESCRIPTION

In this activity, students make observations, comparisons, and draw conclusions about class, gender, age, and race by examining portraits created in the 1700s.

### STUDENT OUTCOMES

Students will...

- analyze how wealth and social class were shown in portraits of early Americans.
- explore how one or more of the following concepts was portrayed in early American society: class, gender, age, and race.

### DIRECTIONS

1. Set up stations for students to view and analyze each artwork up close. To help tailor the lesson to a variety of subthemes, review some possible pairings and themes below before setting up your stations.
2. Ask students to compare the idea of a selfie and a portrait. Beyond what is similar and different on the surface, ask students to consider their purposes, mediums, what is required to create a selfie and a portrait, and how much thought might go into their creation.
3. Explain the labor and material costs of creating portraits during the colonial and early American periods. Portraits were expensive luxury goods that required a skilled artist and a significant amount of time to produce. This meant that typically only the wealthy could commission portraits, and the details, mood, and messages in the portraits were considered very carefully.
4. For additional support on the concept of social class, read *Molly Bannaky* by Alice McGill. Explain to students that at the top of the hierarchy were wealthy landowners, in the middle class were merchants and small farm owners, and that the lower class consisted of laborers, indentured servants, and enslaved Africans.
5. Share the essential question with students: How did some early Americans think about social class? Explain that students will examine different portraits as evidence of how colonial and early Americans might have thought about social class (as well as adjacent and overlapping concepts such as gender and race, based on the selections of the teacher).
6. Pass out a copy of the *Claim, Support, Question* handout. Students will visit stations with different prints of portraits and fill out the handout, which asks them to make claims and support them using observations from the paintings. Next, students will write down their questions about the paintings and assess what is still unknown about the subjects.

Note: there are two ways to organize the painting analysis:

- a. Option 1 is to provide multiple copies of the handout for each student. This will allow each student to examine all of the paintings at each station and complete their own comparison of each image set before sharing with the class.
  - b. Alternatively, divide the class into two groups and have each member of the group examine only half of the paintings at each station. This can create an atmosphere of collaboration and may fit better if you have time restrictions.
7. After using the *Claim, Support, Question* handout to guide their initial analysis, facilitate a group discussion regarding student findings.
  8. The Question Bank provides suggestions for building a meaningful discussion.

### QUESTION BANK

Think of the group comparison process as three steps: collection of evidence, building meaning, and answering the essential question.

Collection of evidence and groundwork for understanding	Building more complex meaning	Putting it all together and answering the essential question
What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find?	For the portraits, why do you think this person had their picture painted? What is the artist and/or subject trying to convey about the subject? What do you see that makes you say that? What type of job might the subject(s) have had? What do you see that makes you say that? How do the paintings differ and what conclusions might we come to about why the subjects are painted differently? (See teacher notes for more specific, themed questions.)	How did some early Americans think about social class? What evidence can we find? (See teacher’s notes for further questions and focused themes)

### VIRTUAL TIP

The Gallery Walk and comparison can be done in a virtual classroom. Teachers could share their screen or create a shared PPT that students can click through on their own.

### STANDARDS

5 – U2.2.2

ART.VA.IV.5.3

ART.VA.IV.8.1

5 – U2.3.3

ART.VA.V.5.1

ART.VA.IV.8.2

5 – U2.3.4

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

ART.VA.IV.5.2

8 – U4.2.1

## STATIONS

Theme	Portraits	Teacher Information	Guiding Questions
Station 1 Gender	 <i>Mrs. James Pitts</i> (1757)  <i>James Pitts</i> (1757)	These paintings are of a married couple. They were commissioned at the same time and painted by the same artist.	What can the differences between the portraits tell us about how gender was shown among wealthy early Americans?
Station 2 Age	 <i>Mrs. James Pitts</i> (1735)  <i>Mrs. James Pitts</i> (1757)	These two portraits are of the same woman but were painted more than 20 years apart.	<p>How much does Mrs. Pitts seem to have aged between these two portraits?</p> <p>What can these portraits tell us about how some wealthy, early Americans preferred to show age and aging?</p> <p>How might one's attitude towards aging connect to social class?</p>
Station 3 Class and Race	 <i>James Bowdoin</i> (1746 or 1747)  <i>Head of a Man</i> (1777 or 1778)	These paintings portray one of the wealthiest men in New England and an unidentified Black man. While the portrait of James Bowdoin is a finished work meant for display, <i>Head of a Man</i> is an artist study not intended for display or sale.	<p>What details do you see that indicate James Bowdoin's social class?</p> <p>How does <i>Head of a Man</i> differ from the portrait of James Bowdoin?</p> <p>How might these differences be connected to each sitter's social class and race?</p>
Station 4 Class and Race	 <i>Mrs. James Pitts</i> (1735)  <i>Mrs. James Pitts</i> (1757)  <i>James Pitts</i> (1757)  <i>James Bowdoin</i> (1746 or 1747)  <i>Head of a Man</i> (1777 or 1778)  <i>Watson and the Shark</i> (1782)	This grouping highlights differences between portraits commissioned by wealthy early Americans and portrayals of working-class men.	<p>Which are the portraits of wealthy subjects? What do they have in common?</p> <p>How are the portraits of the wealthy men different than the paintings of the working-class men?</p> <p>What are some reasons for these differences?</p>

## FORM VS. FUNCTION | What makes something “fancy?”

### TOOLBOX OBJECTS

Handblown glass cup  
Porcelain teacup from China  
Stoneware mug  
Wooden mug  
Jicara drinking gourd

### DIA Collection Connections: G-N

### STUDENT OUTCOMES

Students will...

- Compare living conditions, clothing, and household items of people of different social classes in the colonial and the early American periods.
- Evaluate the likely labor required to make and the cost of each drinking vessel.
- Reflect on the labor required to create objects in a pre-industrialized (or early industrialized) society.
- Connect these labor requirements to expense, social class, and conspicuous consumption.

### DESCRIPTION

Students will examine and hold five different types of drinking vessels similar to those used during the early American period. Students will collaborate to put the vessels in order of estimated cost. Students will work through a thinking routine concerning the production, social expression, and probable user of each vessel.

### DIRECTIONS

1. Set up five stations for students to closely examine and hold the five drinking vessels.
2. Encourage students to guess what materials were used and how each cup was made, based on their observations and prior knowledge.
3. Ask students to work in pairs to answer the following questions:
  - a. Which vessel would have been the most expensive during the early American period? What do you see that makes you say that?
  - b. Which vessel would have been the least expensive during the early American period? What do you see that makes you say that?
  - c. What factors would make a vessel more expensive during this time? List as many as you can. Possible responses include but are not limited to: shipping costs, labor costs, materials, decoration, origin of materials, and skill.
4. Instruct students to collaborate as a class to put the vessels in order of expense during the colonial and early American periods. Ask students to state their reasons for the order.
5. Review each vessel and explain what factors would make one more or less expensive (material, labor costs, shipping, etc.) than another. For example, it cost a lot to import a Chinese porcelain teacup. Though most glass was imported from Europe during the Colonial and early American period, American-made glass, like the cup reproduced in this kit, would have been made locally and was therefore less expensive than porcelain.

6. Show students DIA Collection Connection photographs G–N of objects from the Whitby Hall collection.  
Ask:
  - a. Why do you think the owners of these objects spent so much money to buy them?
  - b. When visitors enter a room like Whitby Hall, what might they think of the owners?
7. Contrast the items in Whitby Hall with the drinking gourd, a vessel used by many members of the poor and working class, but especially associated with enslaved people. Why would someone use a drinking gourd? Return to the list of factors making items more expensive as a comparison point. Explain to students that unlike silver or ceramic, gourds were cheap and available. Enslaved people also had very little time to see to their needs and making a drinking gourd did not require a lot of labor. There is no decoration. There would be no shipping costs as gourds could be grown in most gardens.
8. Explain that the economic success of many wealthy colonists, and indeed the colonies themselves, came at the cost of enslaved people. Whitby Hall was owned by slaveholders. Some advocates for independence from England denied basic rights and freedoms to others.
9. Assessments

Option 1: Write a reflection on why some people choose to surround themselves with expensive objects. Possible themes to consider are power, conspicuous consumption, and inequality.

Option 2: Choose one or two luxury objects from modern society. Why are they considered luxury items and what do they communicate to society about the owners?

Option 3: Are power, wealth, and prestige always built at the cost of others or is there a way to achieve material success without harming other people? What modern examples support either side of the argument?

### **VIRTUAL TIP**

The Gallery Walk and comparison can be done in a virtual classroom. Teachers can share their screen or create a shared PowerPoint that students can click through on their own. Using Padlet or Jamboard might allow students to arrange the drinking vessels in order of expense, as well as explain why they positioned each vessel where they did.

### **STANDARDS**

5 – U2.2.2

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

5 – U2.3.3

8 – U4.2.1

5 – U2.3.4

ART.VA.IV.8.2

ART.VA.V.5.1

## WHAT WE WEAR | Making a Tapestry of Style

### TOOLBOX OBJECTS

Plastic needles  
Colored yarn  
Burlap  
Handmade lace samples  
Fabric samples

**Additional supplies needed:** Scissors

**DIA Collection Connections:** A-D

### STUDENT OUTCOMES

Students will...

- Evaluate the types and amounts of labor needed to produce art objects in pre-industrial America.
- Analyze what makes a garment or household item prestigious, desirable, or valued.
- Describe how clothes and household items communicate messages.
- Create samplers demonstrating their preferred values, designs, and aesthetics.

### DESCRIPTION

After comparing the aesthetics of modern clothes and those in early American portraiture, students will create patterns and designs to combine in a tapestry that reflects the aesthetics they value in their own lives.

### DIRECTIONS

#### Part I

1. Ahead of time, ask students to wear their favorite outfit for the first lesson. (Schools with strict dress codes or uniforms may wish to ask students to take a selfie or to bring in the item separately.)
2. To introduce this activity, show students a series of designs (patterns, embroidery, logos, etc.). Teachers can select examples of designs from modern sources (such as fashion brands, music logos) or from historical sources (such as traditional embroidery and weaving patterns from around the world), depending on what they feel students will respond to and identify with best. Ask students to describe the impressions they get from the designs. Are some warm? Cool? Sharp? Expensive? Wild? Controlled? Probe student thinking. What design elements (color, line, etc.) bring out these impressions or emotions?
3. In a *Think, Pair, Share*, encourage students to explain why they chose this outfit. What do they like about it? What do they think it says about them and how does it show their personality?
4. Facilitate a class discussion. As a class, build a consensus about why people tend to choose certain clothing. What is valued in clothes? For example: comfort, colors, name brands, humor, expression of personality, etc. Create a master list.
5. Next, students examine DIA Collection Connections A–D, the handmade lace samples, and fabric samples in a gallery walk. Encourage students to look closely at the samples, guessing how much time and skill it would take to make lace and other fine fabrics by hand.

6. Explain to students that portraits took an enormous amount of time to make and cost a lot of money, so it is likely the subjects are shown in their best, or favorite, clothes. Ask: Why do you think the subjects chose these clothes to be painted in? What do you see that makes you say that? Have students make a list.
7. Compare the lists. Did students choose their outfits for similar reasons as the subjects of the portraits? Or are the lists different? Why or why not?
8. Teachers can take this opportunity to explain to students the labor and material investment necessary to make clothes in a pre-industrial society.

## **Part II**

9. Explain to students that they will now design their own image or logo and embroider it onto a burlap square. The squares will later be stitched together to create a class tapestry.
10. Students should identify two or three traits from their favorite outfit that they want to replicate in their project. Next, students sketch out design ideas that recreate those traits.
11. After finalizing their designs, students can begin to embroider their design on their 10" X 10" piece of burlap.
12. Next, ask students to share their traits, design decisions, and process. This can be done as students complete their work.
13. Finally, students who finish early can begin to sew the burlap squares together until all the squares have been joined into one sampler.
14. Optional: students can review the finished sampler together and analyze what traits the class chose to display. Did students choose similar traits to recreate or was there variety? What do these choices show about what the students or modern society value?

## **VIRTUAL TIP**

While the embroidery supplies might be difficult to distribute in a virtual environment, students can still sketch their designs and reflect on those ideas virtually.

## **STANDARDS**

5 – U2.3.3

ART.VA.V.5.1

5 – U2.3.4

ART.VA.IV.8.1

ART.VA.IV.5.2

ART.VA.IV.8.2

ART.VA.IV.5.3

8 – U4.2.1



Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Claim, Support, Question

Claim	Support
<i>What can we tell about the subject of the painting?</i>	<i>What do you see that makes you say that?</i>
<i>Who do you think they were?</i>	<i>What do you see that makes you say that?</i>
<i>Why do you think the subject had their portrait painted?</i>	<i>What do you see that makes you say that?</i>
<i>What do you think the subject wanted people to notice about their portrait?</i>	<i>What do you see that makes you say that?</i>



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## FORM VS. FUNCTION | What makes these vessels fancy or not?

Closely look at the five drinking vessels. With your partner, put them in order of least to most expensive.

*Record three observations about each drinking vessel.*

<i>Handblown glass cup</i>	<i>Wooden mug</i>	<i>Porcelain teacup from China</i>	<i>Stoneware mug</i>	<i>Jicara drinking gourd</i>

*Which vessel would have been the least expensive during the early American period? What do you see that makes you say that?*

*Which vessel would have been the most expensive during the early American period? What do you see that makes you say that?*

*What factors would make a vessel more expensive during this time? List as many factors as you can!*