

Title

Making the Invisible Visible

Estimated Time for Completion of Lesson

1 class period

Concept/Main Idea of Lesson

This lesson is intended as an introduction to the work of artist Tavares Strachan (pronounced: *strawn*) who explores the notions of invisibility and inclusion.

Intended Grade Levels

Grades 6-12

Infusion/Subject Areas

Visual Arts
Social Studies

Curriculum Standards**Next Generation Sunshine State Standards**

- Visual Arts:

VA.912.C.1.2: Use critical-thinking skills for various contexts to develop, refine, and reflect on an artistic theme.

VA.912.C.1.4: Apply art knowledge and contextual information to analyze how content and ideas are used in works of art.

VA.912.C.3.1: Use descriptive terms and varied approaches in art analysis to explain the meaning or purpose of an artwork.

VA.912.C.3.3: Examine relationships among social, historical, literary, and/or other references to explain how they are assimilated into artworks.

- Social Studies:

SS.912.H.1.6: Analyze how current events are explained by artistic and cultural trends of the past.

SS.912.H.2.5: Describe how historical, social, cultural, and physical settings influence an audience's aesthetic response.

National Standards for Arts Education

Anchor Standard 4: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

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

National Council for the Social Studies

Culture: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

Time, Continuity, and Change: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.

Time, Continuity, & Change: Social Studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time, so that the learner can demonstrate an understanding that different people may describe the same even or situation in diverse ways, citing reasons for the differences in views.

Global Connections: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.

Common Core

VA.912.C.2.2: Assess the works of others, using established or derived criteria, to support conclusions and judgments about artistic progress.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source

LACC.1112.L.3.6: Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.7: Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Instructional Objectives

The student will:

- contemplate how the artist's personal experiences influence his artwork;
- view and analyze selected art works by Tavares Strachan;
- consider the ideas of invisibility and inclusion in history;
- reflect on his/her own personal values and identity.

Pre-Active Teaching

Review the information provided in the “Notes View” of the PPT and then view the PPT in “slide show” mode to become acquainted to the animations embedded.

Learning Activities Sequence

Attention-Getter: Activate the PowerPoint presentation, *Tavares Strachan: The Visible Turn*. Inform students that today they will be learning more about Bahamian-born artist Tavares Strachan who specializes in art installations with socially conscious messages.

Advance to slide 2. Ask students to describe the building --- its features, its setting, possible location and function, and any striking details they note. After students exhaust their ideas, inform them that the building is the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The neon signs are the work of Tavares Strachan for an exhibition at the museum in 2018.

Advance to slide 3 to show students a closer look of the neon signs. Allow volunteers to come closer to the screen to read any words they are able to make out. Ask: *What might these words in neon mean? Why are they in neon?* [Note to art teachers: You might want to quickly address the technology of neon which Tavares uses strategically for effect and emphasis. Some ideas include: color mixing, slowing of the neon effect to emphasize a letter or color, creating gaps or vibrations.]

Slide 4: Show a close-up of one of the signs, “Somphone.” Say: *What words in neon are being partially covered by ‘Somphone’?* (Rembrandt, the famous of Dutch painters; Velázquez, an important painter of Spain’s Golden Age)

What do you think ‘Somphone’ refers to? [Click on the slide to animate Somphone’s photo to be revealed.] Explain that Sombath Somphone was a community activist in Laos, recognized for his work in rural and agricultural development.

Slide 5: He was detained by Laotian police in 2012 and hasn’t been seen since.

Slide 6: Ask: *What is the artist trying to accomplish with his work?* (Explain that of all the names etched on the façade of the Carnegie Museum of Art, not one is a woman or a person of color.) In this work, Strachan sought to bring visibility to people who have been forgotten by history, in his estimation.

Slide 7: Read aloud the quote by Strachan about African American boxer Jack Johnson. Ask: *Why do you think Strachan selected Johnson for inclusion in this work?*

Learning Activities:

Cooperative Learning: Working in dyads, distribute copies of “Encyclopedia of Invisibility” (Handout 1). Tell students that this is a complete list of the individuals included in Strachan’s work. Ask them to:

1. Circle any names they recognize.
2. Put a star next to individuals they would like to learn more about (see Optional Extension Activities).
3. Allow students to discuss their selections with their partners.

PPT-Guided Presentation: Share brief biography (slides 8-10) of Strachan with students, emphasizing the point about his childhood and relying on printed encyclopedias for knowledge about the outside world. Removed by distance from any direct access to the masterpieces of the Western art, as a child Strachan admittedly gained much of his knowledge of the outside world, including art, through several highly edited, currently anachronistic printed encyclopedias—such as the *World Book Encyclopedia* and the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Tavares remembers having to wear white gloves when he read his grandmother’s encyclopedias. As a child, he wondered who gave the writers of these books the authority to be the final say on the contents, and thus decided to make his own.

Slides 11-14: Show images from *The Encyclopedia of Invisibility*, pausing to allow students to examine the images and read the quote by Strachan on slide 14. Ask: *Why do you think Strachan calls an encyclopedia a “paradox”?*

Slides 15-17: Show images from the *Constellation Experiment*, pausing to explain who Henson was and why Strachan selected him for inclusion. Point out that no actual images of Henson were used --- the portrait is a collage constructed from aspects of his life (such as, his family, house, dog sleds, arctic tools for hunting, and personal experiences during his time in the Arctic). Allow students to come closer to the screen to examine the individual elements of the piece in the detail of the work on slide 16.

Slide 18: Ask students if they recognize the image on the left (DNA’s double-helix structure). Explain that although Francis Crick and James Watson won the Nobel Prize in 1962 for its discovery, the equally important work of Rosalind Franklin is often overlooked. Show slides 19-20 from *The Invisibles* series that honors Franklin’s contribution.

Reading: Distribute copies of the reading (Handout 2), “Tavares Strachan edits history.” Direct students to read silently, highlighting or underlining key points in the article as they read. Then project slide 21 and ask students to answer the questions on the back of their reading or in their notebooks.

Discussion: Go over the questions and students' responses as a whole class. Ask each student to share one of their ideas for Question #6.

Closure: Advance to slide 22. One art critic (Winstead, 2015) who reviewed Strachan's work said:

“We've got to find our own way of putting the pieces together, deciding what's important and what will, inevitably, be left out.”

Say to students: *If you were to make a list of 10 things, events, places, and/or people that define who you are and what you hold dear, what would they be?* Allow students sufficient time to compose their list in writing, or assign as homework. Allow volunteers to share items from their lists and explain why the items were selected for inclusion.

Evaluation

Classroom engagement, comprehension of reading, creation of list of 10 items.

Optional Extension Activities

1. Allow students to look up other works by Strachan such as *Prospect*, *3*, *Polar Eclipse*, or *Seen/Unseen*.
2. Ask students to conduct research on one or more of the “invisible” persons that Strachan selected for inclusion in his art installation (*Encyclopedia of Invisibility*) at the Carnegie Art Museum.
3. Show the 5:39 video clip of an interview with Strachan at the Venice Art Biennale 2013: <https://pitt.libguides.com/c.php?g=833820&p=5958480>.

Materials and Resources

- Computer
- Projector
- Screen
- PowerPoint presentation: *Tavares Strachan: The Visible Turn*
- Copies (1 per student dyad) of “Encyclopedia of Invisibility” (Handout 1)
- Copies (1 per student) of the reading (Handout 2), “Tavares Strachan edits history by placing Tupac Shakur's name on the Carnegie Museum of Art”
- Pencils or pens for writing

References

Binlot, A. (2018). Tavares Strachan edits history by placing Tupac Shakur's name on the Carnegie Museum of Art. *Document*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.documentjournal.com/2018/10/tavares-strachan-edits-history-by-placing-tupac-shakurs-name-on-the-carnegie-museum-of-art/>.

Cascone, S. (2018). Why the world's top scientists are clamoring to collaborate with conceptual artist Tavares Strachan. *Artnet News*. Retrieved from:

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/tavares-strachan-allen-institute-spacex-lacma-1218743>.

Strachan, T. (2018). Tavares Strachan. *TooPics*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.toopics.com/tavaresstrachan>.

Strachan, T. (2019, Jan. 11). *The Visible Turn: Artist Talk*. Tampa, FL: USF Contemporary Art Museum.

Viveros-Fauné, C. Tavares Strachan. *Art Review*. Retrieved from:

https://artreview.com/features/feature_tavares_strachan_interview.

Winstead, E. (2015). Tavares Strachan: The breaking is the fixing. *Guernica*. Retrieved from: <https://www.guernicamag.com/tavares-strachan-the-breaking-is-the-fixing>.