

Communities Co-Create

Ages: 8+ (Grades 3–12)

Duration: Open-ended

Materials Needed: Cardstock or thick paper for collage base; construction paper; scissors; pencils/colored pencils; glue or tape.

Inspiration: Jacob Lawrence (American, 1917–2000). *Community (study for a mural in Jamaica NY)*, 1986. Gouache on paper. Collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Transfer from the General Services Administration, Art-in-Architecture Program, 1990.36. On view in *African American Art in the 20th Century*.



Introduction

Urban, or city, communities and neighborhoods are packed with buildings, businesses, vehicles, workers, people, and activity. Artists will often take advantage of walls and other flat cement surfaces in these communities to create murals, or public artworks that can be seen by anyone walking or driving by. Let's explore plans for a mural by artist Jacob Lawrence, for the neighborhood of Jamaica, Queens, in New York City, in more detail.

Look

- What's going on in this painting?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can you find?

Think

- What emotions do you feel when looking at this image? Why?
- What do you notice about how the figures are positioned in this work?
- What do you notice about Jacob Lawrence's use of color in this work?
- Do you notice any geometric shapes and lines in this work? How do they affect the overall composition?

Connect

Jacob Lawrence was a well-known artist and teacher who worked throughout the twentieth century in New York, Seattle, and other urban areas. His work is known for having been inspired by the places and people he encountered in his everyday life, as well as by the historical experiences of African Americans. He is well known for using bright, vivid colors, and dynamic shapes and forms in his work, and he was especially inspired by the shapes and colors of Harlem, a neighborhood he moved to as a child, and the place where he first formally studied and made art.

Do

1. First, brainstorm about the communities of which you are a part. Maybe you are a student in a classroom, a member of a sports team, a participant in an art class, a family member, a friend, or a neighbor.
2. Focus on one of these communities. Where do you gather to be together? Is this space inside or outside? What are some of the visual details of this location? What kind of activities take place there?

3. You can sketch some of the basic outlines of this space and the members of this community on your cardstock or collage base. Don't worry about how it looks; soon it will be covered! This step is known as an under-drawing or under-painting.
4. Using construction paper, experiment with filling out your sketch with a combination of cut paper (with straight lines and geometric shapes) and torn paper shapes and pieces. Torn paper often is not as defined as cut shapes. That's okay!
5. Your challenge is to complete your composition only using this combination of cut and torn paper in a collage. You can experiment with the layout before finalizing your design with glue or tape.
6. Once your collage pieces are attached, you can add small details to figures and other elements of your scene using colored pencils or markers.

Reflect

What was the process of choosing paper pieces as you composed your scene? What adjustments did you make in your process to help you get to your final composition? How does being a part of a community make you feel? How does interacting with other people toward a shared goal or in a shared space affect your life? What connections can you make between the act of putting multiple pieces together in a collage to form a whole, and all of the elements that might be part of your chosen community or communities?

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