

Close Study: Close Viewing

Sonya Clark

Artist: [Sonya Clark](#) (b. 1967, Washington, D.C.)



Work: Sonya Clark, *Gold Coast Journey*, 2016; 18K gold wire and African ebony, 1 3/4 x 1 1/4 x 1 1/4 in.; On loan from the artist; © Sonya Clark; Photo by Taylor Dabney

About the Artwork: 5,242 inches of gold wire comprise the thread wound tightly around this hand-carved African ebony spool. The length equals the distance in miles between Cape Coast, Ghana

(once known as the Gold Coast), and Richmond, Virginia, the second-largest port for human trafficking at the height of the transatlantic slave trade.

Target grade range: 6–8

DCPS Curricular Unit: To Know a Place

DCPS Curricular Arc: Language/Medium

DCPS Curricular Theme: Abstraction and representation in art

Note: Annotation is a key feature of Close Study, ensuring that students are engaged in the process of evidence gathering. Annotation can take a range of forms across grade levels and disciplines. Annotation can provide assessment information as to each student's depth of comprehension. Additionally, it can be a useful tool for launching critical discussions. Encourage students to annotate this work physically or virtually.

Round 1

Type of Question: General Understanding/Responses

Sample Question: **What do you notice about this artwork?**

Guidance: The goal of this conversation is to generate a range of student responses to the work. There is no wrong answer, but rather the idea is to open the conversation and create an environment in which students see the value of both their own opinion and the possible range of opinions.

Round 2

Type of Question: Key Details

Sample Question: **What materials did Sonya Clark use to create this artwork? Why do you think she chose these materials?**

Guidance: The conversation should focus on gathering evidence from the image; formal and technical evidence, as well as evidence based on the imagery. Student responses should include discussion of specific visual aspects of the work. You may ask guiding questions such as, **“What ideas or objects do you associate with gold and/or ebony?”** OR **“How would you describe the texture(s) of this piece?”** OR **“How large/small do you think this artwork is?”** AND **“How heavy/light do you think it is?”** pushing students to focus on the visual aspects of the work and how they might begin to support the responses discussed in Round 1.

Round 3

Type of Question: Structure

Sample Question: **Why do you think Sonya Clark made this work resemble the shape and approximate size of a real spool of thread?**

Guidance: This discussion should focus more specifically on how the structure of the work is supporting the students' interpretations of the work. This conversation might be around compositional strategies, the use of evocative visual designs, or the inclusion of distinct features.

Round 4

Type of Question: Intent/Inferences

Sample Question: **Sonya Clark, who lived and worked in Richmond, Virginia, at the time she made this piece, identifies as an artist of African American, Caribbean, and Scottish heritage. She traces her African ancestry to Ghana, a country known for its gold resources and from which many Africans, including her mother's forebears, had been forcibly removed as part of the slave trade. *Gold Coast Journey* is one of several works that Clark has created that measure unfathomable multitudes (of people enslaved), amounts (of money), and distances (in time and space). She says, “Numbers help us understand things we cannot understand in other ways.” (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTn9N8rsm-M>)**

The title of this work is *Gold Coast Journey*. Does knowing the title of the work change the way you think about it? Why or why not? What do you think the artist is trying to communicate to us?

Guidance: Unlike the intentional omission of information in other rounds, prior to asking students to respond to this question, the teacher should provide some context for the work. This context

should come in the form of another visual work. The nature of the context should promote the goals of the overall lesson or unit. This work might be:

- Another work by the same artist
- A work that serves a similar purpose in a more familiar context
- Another work from the same school, movement, or genre

Possible Contextual Works:

- Sonya Clark, *Skein*, 2016; Human hair, 5 x 5 x 8 in.; On loan from the artist; © Sonya Clark; Photo by Taylor Dabney
 - **About the Artwork:** More than 80,000 individual hairs from the heads of anonymous Black women come together in this dreadlocked skein. This number represents the approximate number of Africans forcibly migrated as chattel slaves in just one year at the height of the transatlantic slave trade. Through her work, Clark often unravels complex racial, social, and cultural issues. While this skein is tightly wound, a loose end emerges—an invitation to viewers to begin the difficult but necessary work of unwinding these issues alongside the artist.
- Rosângela Rennó, Selected images from *United States (Mexican Series)*, 1999; Iris prints on Somerset paper, 17 x 23 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of the Heather and Tony Podesta Collection; © Rosângela Rennó; Photo by Lee Stalsworth
 - **About the Artwork:** This suite of photographs documents a public art project first displayed in shop windows in Tijuana and San Diego. Rennó photographed people who had journeyed to Tijuana from the sixteen states of Mexico. She portrayed each person in their place of work, while the map indicates the individuals' places of origin. The work's title deliberately and ironically alludes to the long-standing conflict surrounding migration and policing of the U.S.–Mexico border.
- Mwangi Hutter, *Static Drift*, 2001; Two chromogenic prints on aluminum, 29 1/2 x 40 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of the Tony Podesta Collection, Washington, DC; Photo by Lee Stalsworth
 - **About the Artwork:** Conceptual artists Ingrid Mwangi and Robert Hutter merged their names and identities to work as Mwangi Hutter. This diptych shows Mwangi's skin after she covered it with stencils cut into the shapes of maps of Africa and Germany, the two lands the artist identifies with as a biracial woman. The exposed parts of Mwangi's skin tanned with sunlight, inscribing the shape of each location and accompanying texts onto her body. Mwangi Hutter's art communicates the complexities of living in places where one was not born and, more specifically, in which one does not resemble the majority of inhabitants.

Type of Question: Opinion/Application

Sample question: In *Gold Coast Journey*, Sonya Clark evokes a complex narrative through a **deceptively simple object that quantifies the distance between two places that are important both historically and personally. What history(ies) and/or place(s) have particular meaning for you? What forms, materials, and techniques would you use to create an artwork that alludes to that history/place without illustrating it literally?**

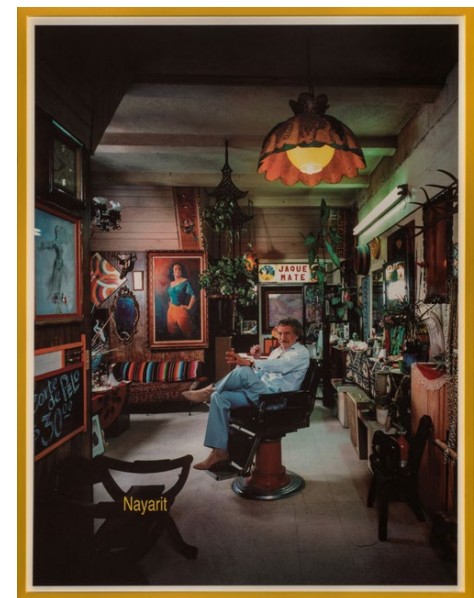
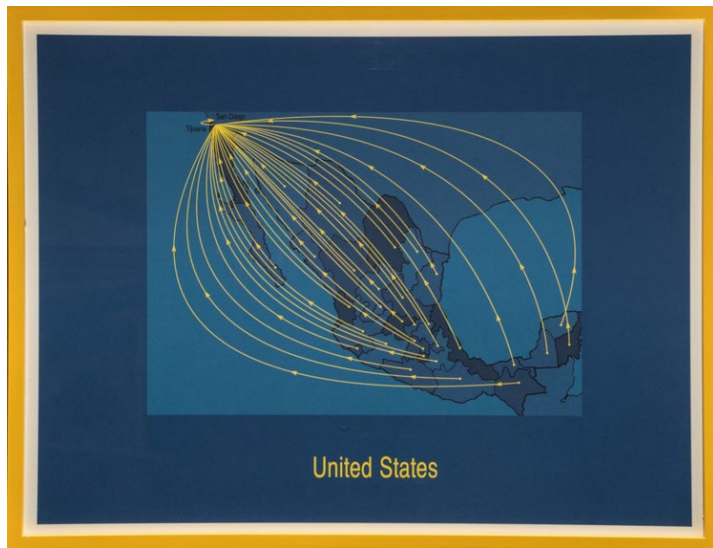
Guidance: This round is asking students to internalize the knowledge and information built in the previous rounds by using the concepts generated to visualize a work that applies to a personal goal of communication. The direction of this question is directly related to the broader thematic goal of the lesson or unit.



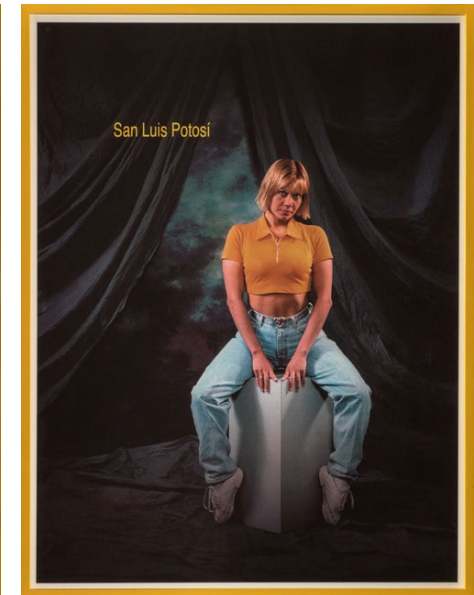
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