

## Close Study: Close Viewing Sonya Clark

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



**Work:** Sonya Clark, *Pearl of Mother*, 2006; Hair and wood, 1 x 3 x 3 in.; On loan from the artist; © Sonya Clark; Photo by Taylor Dabney

**About the Artwork:** A small hand shaped from the artist's dark hair cradles a miniature pearl of her late mother's white strands in this personal and reverential work. While white hair is often viewed as an undesirable sign of age, for Clark it signals knowledge, peace, and a connection to her ancestors. The title's wordplay on the phrase "pearl of wisdom" elevates her mother's experience and knowledge. The object's minute size and placement make it all the more precious, as if a treasured keepsake.

**Target grade range:** pre-K

**DCPS Curricular Unit:** Sprouting Families

**DCPS Curricular Arc:** Identity/Family

**DCPS Curricular Theme:** Types of families and trees

**DCPS Social Studies Standards Connections:** Prekindergarten: People and How They Live: PK.1. Children demonstrate a sense of self within the context of family. PK.1.2. Identify family members and recognize that families vary. PK.3. Children begin to notice and acknowledge diversity. PK.3.1. Begin to identify similarities and differences among people.

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 shapes, lines, and colors do you see?**

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 texture(s) do you see?**

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, **“How do you think this might feel if we could touch it?”** OR **“What do you think this is made of?”**, 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: **Imagine you are holding a gift a loved one gave you. You want to show that gift to others and protect it. How might you hold that item in one hand? Two hands? Ask students to model how they would hold the gift.**

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 likes to repurpose a variety of materials, even hair in some cases. This artwork is made of Sonya Clark's hair as well as her mother's.**

**Your hair is one of a kind, just like you! And yet, sometimes a person's hair looks and feels like the hair of biological relatives because characteristics are passed down. How is your hair different from and similar to the hair of someone in your family?**

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

Contextual Work:

- Sonya Clark, *Mom's Wisdom or Cotton Candy*, 2011; Photograph, 22 1/4 x 30 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Museum purchase: Members' Acquisition Fund and Belinda de Gaudemar Curatorial Fund; © Sonya Clark; Image courtesy of the artist
  - **About the Artwork:** Clark's ancestors include people of the Yoruba culture in West Africa, who associate the color white with wisdom—and see white hair as an outward sign of knowledge. In this image, the artist's hands cradle her mother's white hair. Clark's mother's forebears were forced from Africa to the Caribbean as part of the slave trade that fueled the sugar industry (sugar being the main ingredient of cotton candy), which flourished in the region from the sixteenth century.

Round 5

Type of Question: Opinion/Application

Sample question: **If you could bring something in for “show and tell” about your family, what would it be?**

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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