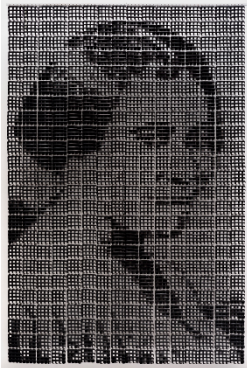


Close Study: Close Viewing

Sonya Clark

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



Work: Sonya Clark, *Madam C. J. Walker*, 2008; Plastic combs, 122 x 87 in.; Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin, Purchase through the generosity of Marilyn D. Johnson; Beverly Dale; Buckingham Foundation, Inc.; Jeanne and Michael Klein; Fredericka and David Middleton; H-E-B; Joseph and Tam Hawkins; Carmel and Gregory Fennes; The National Council of Negro Women (Austin Section); Lone Star (TX) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated; Town Lake (TX) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated; National Society of Black Engineers-Austin Professionals; Greater Austin Black Chamber of Commerce; National Black MBA Association Austin Chapter; and other donors; © Sonya Clark; Image courtesy of Blanton Museum of Art

About the Artwork: This portrait depicts [Madam C. J. Walker](#), born Sarah Breedlove in 1867 in Delta, Louisiana. She developed hair care products for African American hair and achieved extraordinary professional and financial success prior to women's suffrage and long before the Civil Rights Movement. Walker was also a philanthropist and an activist. She financially supported schools, churches, community organizations, and historical sites (e.g. [Frederick Douglass's Anacostia house](#) in Washington, D.C.) that served Black communities and honored Black history. Walker also worked with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other likeminded organizations to fight for equal rights.

Clark used 3,840 pocket combs to assemble this image based on a 1912 portrait of Walker by Washington, D.C., based African American photographer [Addison Scurlock](#). "Together, the thousands of combs become a monumental tapestry, signifying Walker's magnitude and success despite her humble beginnings," Clark says.

Target grade range: K–2

DCPS Curricular Unit: A View From Above

DCPS Curricular Arc: Interaction/Contrast

DCPS Curricular Theme: Materials and process of art making and viewing, empathy

DCPS Social Studies Standards Connections: Grade 2: Living, Learning, and Working Now and a Long Time Ago: Civic Values: 2.4. Students understand the importance of individual action and character, and they explain, from examining biographies, how people who have acted righteously

have made a difference in others' lives and have achieved the status of heroes in the remote and recent past.

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 see in 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: **How do you think Sonya Clark made this artwork?**

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 do you think this is made of? How can you tell?"** 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: **How might Sonya Clark's choice of materials relate to the sitter (person portrayed)? How do the materials help tell the story of the sitter?**

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: ***Madam C. J. Walker* is nearly 21 times bigger than its inspiration photograph by Addison N. Scurlock. It is as tall as a basketball hoop and almost as wide as a car parking spot. Scurlock's photograph of Walker is about the height and width of a novel. *Obama and Lincoln (Penny Portrait)* (2011) is a larger-than-life portrait composed (made up) of thousands of images of pennies that the artist digitally enlarged (made bigger) and reduced (made smaller).**

Why do you think Sonya Clark plays with scale? How do you respond to artwork that is small enough to hold in your hand? To artwork that is taller and larger than you?

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 Works:

- Addison N. Scurlock, *Madam C. J. Walker*, ca. 1912; Silver and photographic gelatin on photographic paper, 5 15/16 x 3 15/16 in.; Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift of A'Lelia Bundles/Madam Walker Family Archives; Photo accessed from https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2013.153.8
 - **About the Artwork:** One of the most successful African American entrepreneurs of the early twentieth century, Madam C. J. Walker created a line of phenomenally popular hair care and beauty products that fueled a business empire. In 1905, after devising a restorative formula that was used in combination with her improved steel hot comb to treat thinning and damaged hair, she began marketing her products and beauty regimen to the black community. During a troubled period in the history of race relations in America, Walker built a lucrative enterprise that employed thousands in the manufacture and sale of her beauty aids. By the time of her death, she was reputed to be the first self-made female African American millionaire. The *Guinness Book of World Records* also recognizes her as "the first woman to earn a personal fortune of more than \$1 million." This portrait, by famed African American photographer Addison N. Scurlock, became Walker's trademark image. It was featured on her product packaging and used extensively in her advertising. (Source: https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.2008.20)

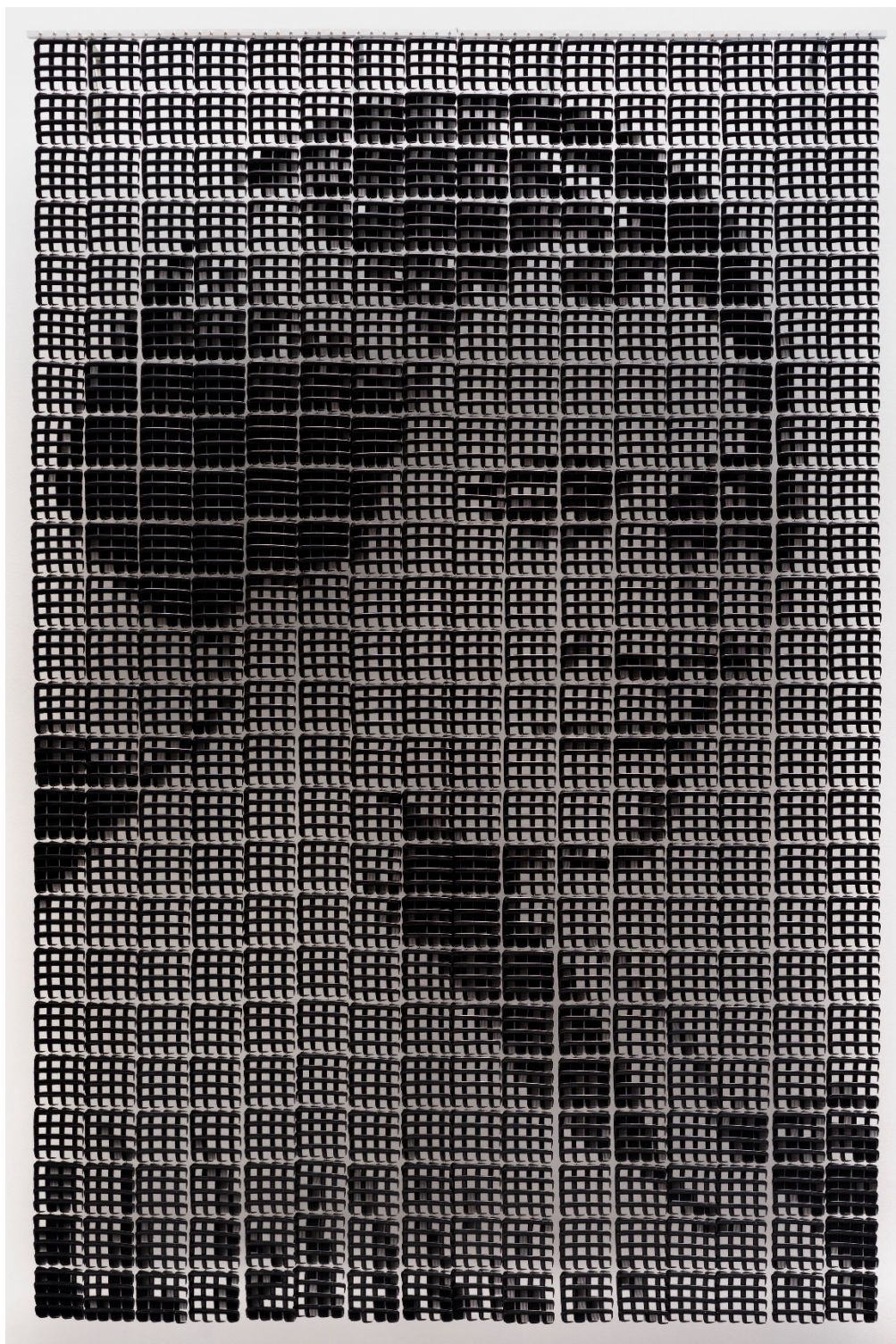
- Sonya Clark, *Obama and Lincoln (Penny Portrait)*, 2011; Inkjet print, 67 x 42 in.; On loan from the artist; © Sonya Clark; Image courtesy of the artist and Lisa Sette Gallery
 - **About the Artwork:** Clark formed this image of President Barack Obama from digital images of the U.S. one-cent coin that features another Illinois statesman, Abraham Lincoln. After issuing the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, which declared the freedom of enslaved people living in the Confederate states, Lincoln became a symbol of African American liberation, paving the way eventually for fuller Black participation in American political life.
- Sonya Clark, *Obama and Lincoln (Penny Portrait)* (detail), 2011; Inkjet print, 67 x 42 in.; On loan from the artist; © Sonya Clark; Image courtesy of the artist and Lisa Sette Gallery

Round 5

Type of Question: Opinion/Application

Sample question: **If you were asked to make a “three-dimensional artwork either significantly larger or smaller than real life” about a hero past or present who “acted righteously and made a difference in others’ lives,” 1) who would you choose, 2) what materials would you use, and 3) what size would you make the artwork? Why?**

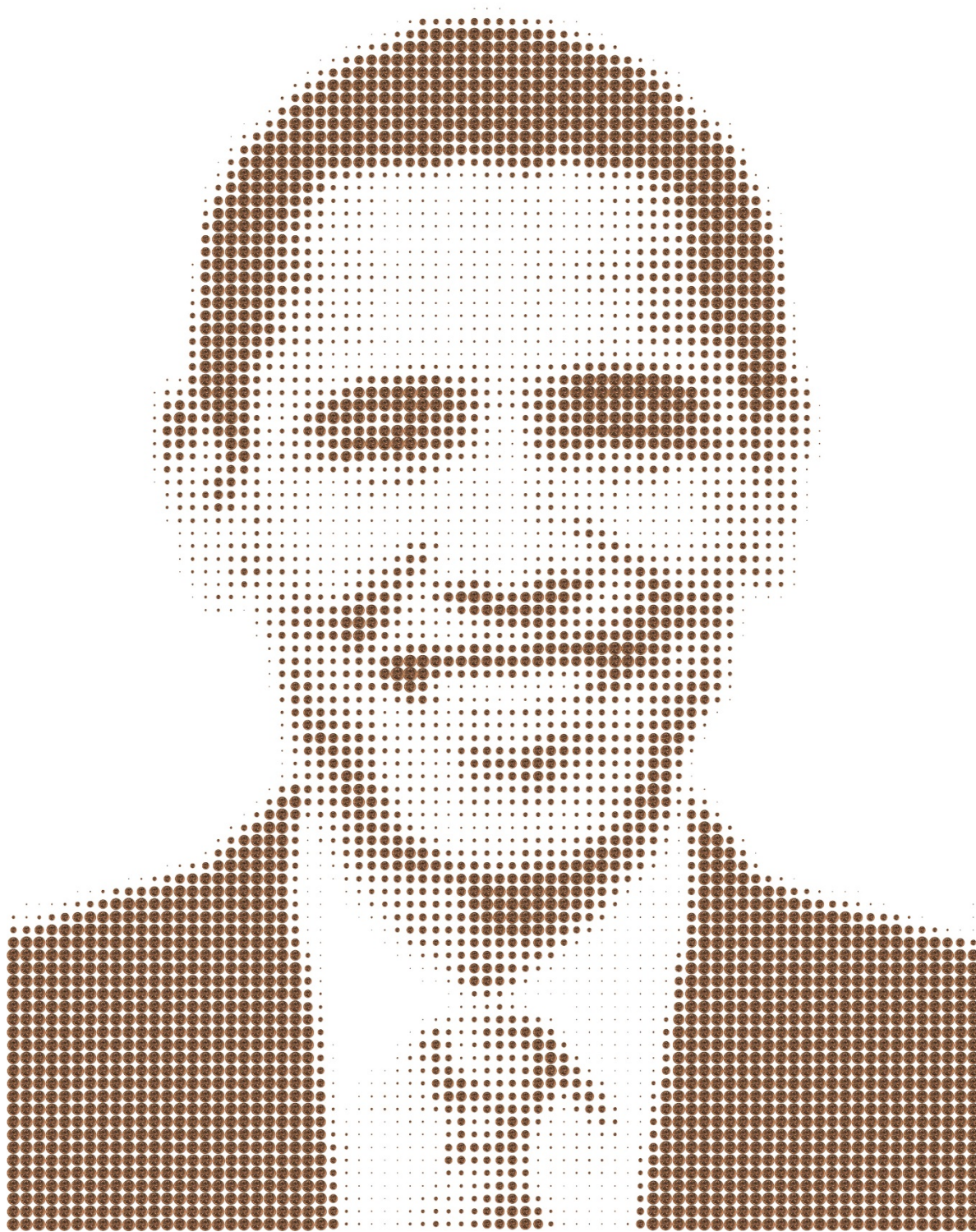
Guidance: This round is asking students to internalize the knowledge and information built in the previous rounds by using the concepts generated to visualize a work that applies to a personal goal of communication. The direction of this question is directly related to the broader thematic goal of the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



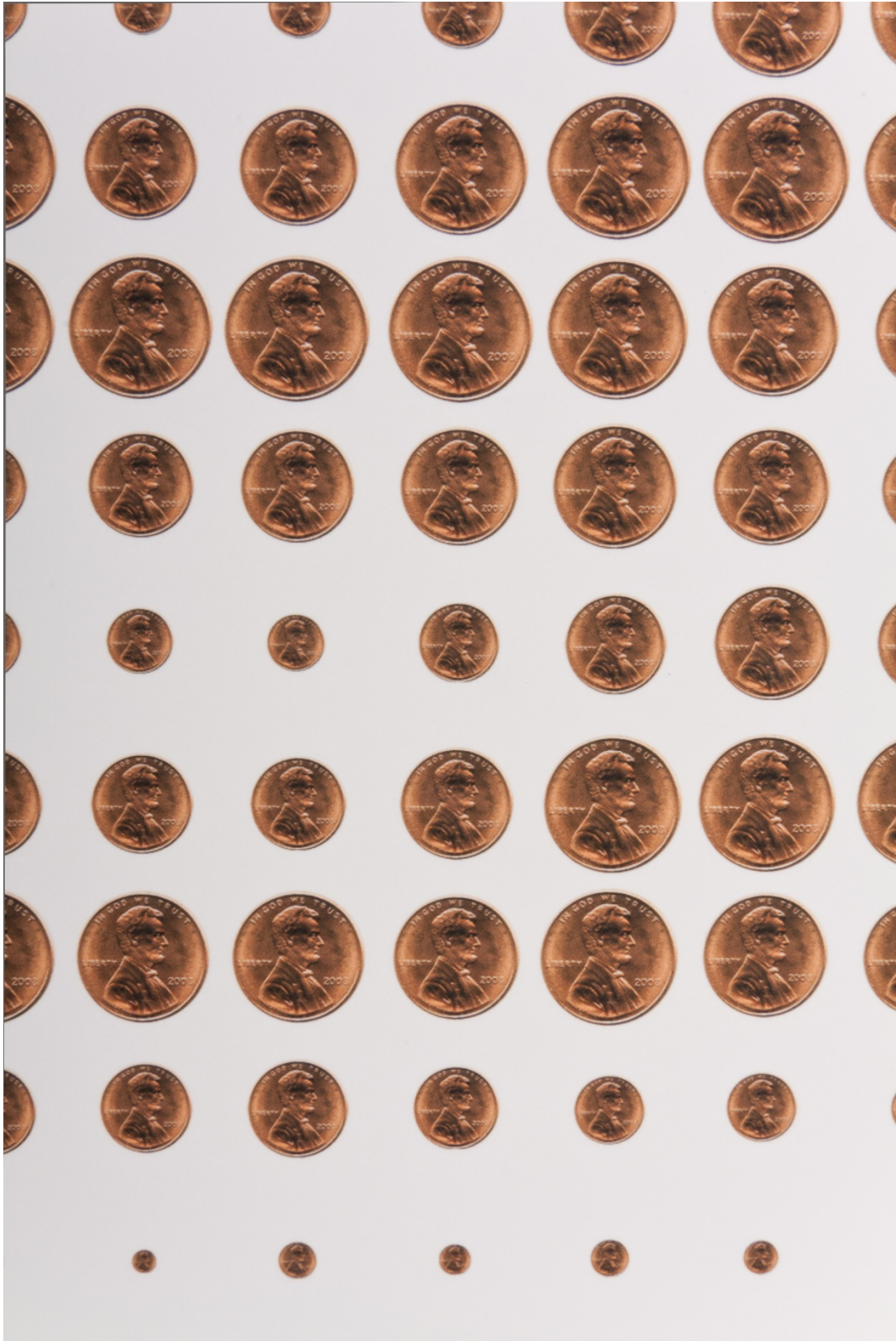
Sonya Clark, *Madam C. J. Walker*, 2008; Plastic combs, 122 x 87 in.; Blanton Museum of Art, University of Texas at Austin, Purchase through the generosity of Marilyn D. Johnson; Beverly Dale; Buckingham Foundation, Inc.; Jeanne and Michael Klein; Fredericka and David Middleton; H-E-B; Joseph and Tam Hawkins; Carmel and Gregory Fenves; The National Council of Negro Women (Austin Section); Lone Star (TX) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated; Town Lake (TX) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated; National Society of Black Engineers-Austin Professionals; Greater Austin Black Chamber of Commerce; National Black MBA Association Austin Chapter; and other donors; © Sonya Clark; Image courtesy of Blanton Museum of Art



Addison N. Scurlock, *Madam C. J. Walker*, ca. 1912; Silver and photographic gelatin on photographic paper, 5 15/16 x 3 15/16 in.; Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift of A'Lelia Bundles / Madam Walker Family Archives; Photo accessed from https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2013.153.8



Sonya Clark, *Obama and Lincoln (Penny Portrait)*, 2011; Inkjet print, 67 x 42 in.; On loan from the artist; © Sonya Clark; Photo by Taylor Dabney



Sonya Clark, *Obama and Lincoln (Penny Portrait)* (detail), 2011; Inkjet print, 67 x 42 in.; On loan from the artist; © Sonya Clark; Photo by Taylor Dabney