

Close Study: Close Viewing

Sonya Clark

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



Work: Sonya Clark, *Triad*, from the “Wig Series,” 1998; Cloth and thread, 4 x 8 x 8 in.; Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Purchase through the Rudolph and Louise Langer Fund; © Sonya Clark; Image courtesy of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art

About the Artwork: To demonstrate the connection between fiber art processes and hairdressing, Clark used dark thread as a stand-in for hair in the “Wig Series.” For this work, “The scalp is divided into three sections. Each section is combed into a braid. The universal trinity: beginning, middle, and end—or past, present, and future—is exemplified in this child’s hairstyle that is ubiquitous throughout the African diaspora.” (Source: http://sonyaclark.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Sonya_Clark-Wig-Series.pdf)

Target grade range: K–2

DCPS Curricular Unit: Wearable Art

DCPS Curricular Arc: Identity/Community

DCPS Curricular Theme: Wearable costumes and performance based on community identity

DCPS Social Studies Standards Connections: Kindergarten through Grade 2: Historical and Social Science Analysis Skills: Chronology and Cause and Effect: 2. Students correctly apply terms related to time (e.g., past, present, future, years, decades, centuries, millennia, epochs, and generations). Grade 2: Living, Learning, and Working Now and a Long Time Ago: Civic Values: 2.5. Students describe the human characteristics of familiar places and varied backgrounds of U.S. citizens and residents in those places. 2.5.1. Distinguish traditional food, customs, sports and games, and music from other countries that can be found in the United States today. 2.5.2. Describe beliefs, customs, ceremonies, and traditions of the varied cultures, drawing from folklore. 2.5.3. Explain the ways in which we are all part of the same community, sharing principles, goals, and traditions despite varied ancestry (*e pluribus unum*).

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 does this artwork remind you of?**

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 would you describe 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 colors do you notice?”** OR **“How many braids do you count?”**, 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: **What steps, and in what order, do you think the artist followed to create this artwork?**

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: ***Triad* is part of a series (group) of wigs Sonya Clark created by bringing distinct threads together—through hairdressing techniques like braiding, twisting, and knotting—to remind viewers that traditions and descendants of Africa are part of and enrich American culture.**

Look closely at the other examples provided from this series. How are these wigs similar to one another? How are they different?

Now consider your favorite wig. What stands out to you more, the individual threads, or the overall design? Why?

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:

- Sonya Clark, *Unum*, from the "Wig Series," 1998; Cloth and thread, 10 x 14 x 14 in.; Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Purchase through the Rudolph and Louise Langer Fund; © Sonya Clark; Image courtesy of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art
 - **About the Artwork:** "The concept 'unity of many into one' is reinforced as all of the threads are wrapped into one form. The antennae is likened to traditional hairstyles that connect one's head and destiny with the power and guidance of ancestors and divine spirits." (Source: http://sonyaclark.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Sonya_Clark-Wig-Series.pdf)
- Sonya Clark, *Spider*, from the "Wig Series," 1998; Cloth and thread, 4 x 8 x 8 in.; Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Purchase through the Rudolph and Louise Langer Fund; © Sonya Clark; Image courtesy of the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art
 - **About the Artwork:** "Only one creature on earth has eight legs. The spider, Ananse, is known as a trickster in Ghanaian stories. These stories crossed the Atlantic and were reinvented with the characters Aunt Nancy or Brer Rabbit." (Source: http://sonyaclark.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Sonya_Clark-Wig-Series.pdf)

- Sonya Clark, *Crown* from the "Wig Series," 1998; Cloth and thread, 5 x 8 x 8 in.; On loan from the artist; Photograph by Tom McInville
 - **About the Artwork:** "Crown is an homage to a statement by [James Baldwin](#). He suggested that as people of African descent in the Americas "we must find our lost crowns and wear them." (Source: http://sonyaclark.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Sonya_Clark-Wig-Series.pdf)

Round 5

Type of Question: Opinion/Application

Sample question: **Sketch your own hairstyle using a pencil and paper. You can create a side view (like the images of Clark's wigs) or a bird's eye view (looking down on the top of your hairstyle). What patterns or symbols might you include? What tools or decorations will you need? Will your style be symmetrical (the same on each side), or asymmetrical (different on each side)? Why did you make those choices?**

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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