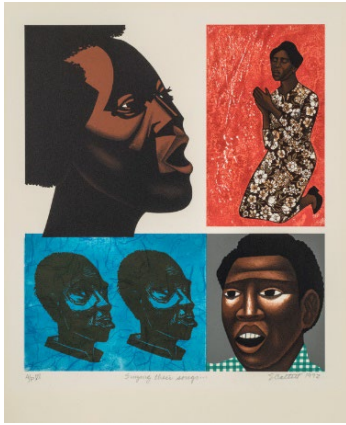


Close Study: Close Viewing

Elizabeth Catlett

Artist: [Elizabeth Catlett](#) (1915, Washington, D.C.–2012, Cuernavaca, Mexico)



Work: Elizabeth Catlett, *Singing Their Songs*, 1992; Lithograph on paper, 23 x 18 1/2 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, purchased with funds donated in memory of Florence Davis by her family, friends, and the Women's Committee of the National Museum of Women in the Arts; © Estate of Elizabeth Catlett/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Target grade range: 6–8

DCPS Curricular Unit: Multiples in Art

DCPS Curricular Arc: Creation/Process

DCPS Curricular Theme: Appropriation

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: **Imagine you could step inside this image. What would you hear? What would you feel? What do you see that makes you think that?**

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: **In what ways are the depicted figures similar? In what ways are they different?**

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, **“Consider how each head is positioned (e.g., facing front, in profile, or a 3/4 view) and how much of each body you see. How does this impact your view of the figures?”** OR **“What forms repeat?”**, 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: **Take a closer look at the background. What area drew your eye first? How might a single background color change your experience with this artwork? In what ways does the background divide and/or unify the overall image?**

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: **Elizabeth Catlett created this print and five others to illustrate a special, limited-edition publication of the poem “For My People,” written by her friend Margaret Walker (1915–1998). Take a moment to read the [poem](#), particularly the first stanza (section). Then, return to the image. How does this added context impact your view of the artwork? What details from the first stanza did Catlett depict directly? Indirectly? What, if anything, did she omit?**

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:

- ["For My People"](#), Margaret Walker from *For My People*. Yale University Press, 1942. By permission of the University of Georgia Press.
- Elizabeth Catlett, *A Second Generation*, 1992; Lithograph on paper, 23 x 18 3/4 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Purchased with funds donated in memory of Florence Davis by her family, friends, and the NMWA Women's Committee; © Estate of Elizabeth Catlett/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
 - **About the Artwork:** This print is from a portfolio published by Catlett and writer Margaret Walker (1915–1998) based on Walker's 1937 poem "For My People." The poem recounts African American history through the early twentieth century and calls for a social and moral awakening. Catlett's prints illuminate themes that Walker's poem describes.
- [Lorna Simpson](#), *Wigs*, edition 13/15, 1994; Waterless lithographs on industrial wool felt, overall 72 x 162 in.; Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer; © Lorna Simpson, Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth; Photo by James Wang
 - **About the Artwork:** *Wigs* features twenty-one images and seventeen text panels. By suggesting personhood in the arrangement of wigs on display, Simpson allows the viewer to construct a narrative around the identities that each type of hair might signify. The absence of a body allows for questioning assumptions about race and gender. The text brings in stories about constructing identity based on gender and sexuality.
- [Faith Ringgold](#), *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, 2008; Serigraph print, 15 3/4 in x 13 1/8 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Faith Ringgold
 - **About the Artwork:** This print is from a portfolio published by [The Limited Editions Club](#) based on Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 ["Letter from Birmingham City Jail."](#) For the portfolio, Ringgold wrote an introduction and created eight prints illustrating moments that Dr. King describes, in this case, "For more than two centuries our forebears labored in this country without wages; they made cotton king; they built the homes of their masters while suffering gross injustice and shameful humiliation—and yet out of a bottomless vitality they continued to thrive and develop." (Source: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-government-and-civics/us-gov-civil-liberties-and-civil-rights/us-gov-social-movements-and-equal-protection/a/letter-from-birmingham-jail>)

Round 5

Type of Question: Opinion/Application

Sample question: **Consider an existing work of art (visual, musical, literary, or performance) that is meaningful to you. If you were to celebrate it visually, what materials would you use? Are there elements of the original work that you would appropriate (use without transforming)? In what ways would you reference the original indirectly? How could you incorporate new techniques or ideas to amplify the original message?**

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.



Elizabeth Catlett, *Singing Their Songs*, 1992; Lithograph on paper, 23 x 18 1/2 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, purchased with funds donated in memory of Florence Davis by her family, friends, and the Women's Committee of the National Museum of Women in the Arts; © Estate of Elizabeth Catlett/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Elizabeth Catlett, *A Second Generation*, 1992; Lithograph on paper, 23 x 18 3/4 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Purchased with funds donated in memory of Florence Davis by her family, friends, and the NMWA Women's Committee; © Estate of Elizabeth Catlett/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Faith Ringgold, *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, 2008; Serigraph print, 15 3/4 in x 13 1/8 in.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Faith Ringgold



Lorna Simpson, *Wigs*, edition 13/15, 1994; Waterless lithographs on industrial wool felt, overall 72 x 162 in.; Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer; © Lorna Simpson, Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth; Photo by James Wang