

50/50 SILHOUETTES

#NBMAAatHome



Example project addressing gender stereotypes.

Inspired by Kara Walker's use of the silhouette as a metaphor for the stereotype, create a juxtaposed silhouette to convey the damaging nature of stereotypes and labels.

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Kara Walker, *Alabama Loyalists Greeting from the Federal Gun-Boats*, from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*, 2005, Offset lithography and silkscreen on Somerset Textured paper, 39 x 53 in., Stephen B. Lawrence and Bette Batchelor Memorial Acquisition Funds.

Kara Walker is a contemporary artist whose work focuses on ideas of race, discrimination, power, and identity. In her series of prints titled *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*, Walker overlays her large, dark silhouettes onto historical illustrations of the Civil War to demonstrate how experiences of racism towards African Americans that were left out of the original drawings.

This lesson's focus is on the silhouette, which is an essential element in Kara Walker's artwork. Walker uses the silhouette as a metaphor for the stereotype. The silhouette only portrays the outline or shadow of a figure, excluding any features on its interior. For this reason, Walker states, "the silhouette says a lot with very little information, but that's also what the stereotype does."

Contemporary art: Art and culture that is current and created in the present time.

Metaphor: Something that is representative or symbolic of something else.

Silhouette: The outline of a figure or object that is filled-in with a solid color, usually black on a white ground. The silhouette does not include details or features in its interior.

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1. Before beginning the art activity, take a few minutes to discuss the following questions with a family member:

- What is a stereotype?
- Why are stereotypes used?
- Are stereotypes positive or negative? Can they be both?
- What are some stereotypes you have heard or experienced?
- Why are stereotypes dangerous or harmful?
- How might a silhouette reproduce stereotypes? For reference, you can look at Walker's artwork in this PDF or on the NBMAA's emuseum.
- How can you confront or challenge stereotypes and the use of stereotypes in your life?

2. Collect your materials

*This is a suggested list only, you can use whichever objects and materials you have available to you for this project!

- Plain, white paper
- Black construction paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Black marker
- Colored markers
- White pencils or crayons (optional)



3. Ask yourself these questions in preparation for your artwork:

- What stereotype do I want to portray in my work?
- How will I draw the outline of my silhouette to either mimic or challenge that stereotype?
- What words or images are associated with that stereotype?
- What words or images challenge or combat that stereotype?

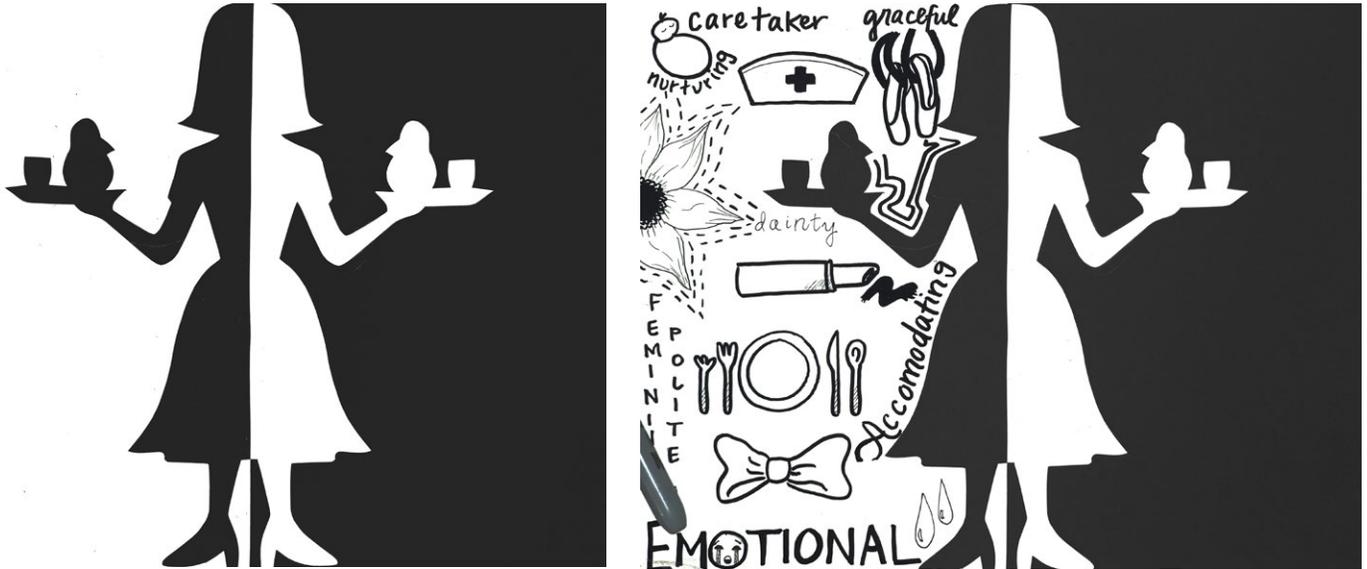
4. Start creating!

- Fold the black piece of paper in half and draw half of the silhouette figure on one side of the folded crease.
- Next, keep the black paper folded and cut out the figure. Only cut on the lines you drew so that the figure and the excess paper around it remain intact rather than in several pieces—you will need both to complete the activity.
- Once the figure is cut out, cut the figure in half on the crease line. Keep the left half of the silhouette.





- Then, open up the black paper. It should have a big hole in it from where you cut out the silhouette figure. Cut it in half on the crease lines. Keep the right half.
- Find the center of your white paper. Glue the left half of the silhouette to the left side of the white paper.
- Glue the right side of your black paper to the right side of the white paper.
- In the white space outside the silhouette on the left side of your paper, write and draw words and symbols that represent assumptions or labels associated with the stereotype you chose for the activity.
- On the right side, in the white space inside your figure, write and draw words and symbols that counteract the stereotype. These are characteristics that the silhouette itself cannot convey. Think about words that describe someone's personality, intellect, family, interests or hobbies. You can also write and draw on the black paper with a white pencil or crayon.



5. Take a picture of your creation and share it with the Museum using #NBMAAatHome



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