PORTRAITS IN CONVERSATION

THE INQUIRY PATH

Observe → Interpret → Add Context → Compare → Connect → Reflect

REPRESENTATION AND VOICE

George Catlin and Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

Who has the authority to tell a people's story?



George Catlin
Mew-Hew-She-Kaw, The White Cloud, Chief of the Ioways, date unknown



Jaune Quick-to-See Smith
I See Red: Ban Dancing, 1998

Grade and subject	Time	Theme
Grade 8; adaptable for secondary U.S. History / Social Studies	60–90 minutes One or two lessons	Representation, voice, and cultural survival

ARTWORKS AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Catlin portrays an Ioway leader through a non-Native artist's choices. Smith uses paint, collage, and symbols to challenge the suppression of Native cultures. Students compare the works, add historical context, and explain how perspectives shape a story. Catlin's portrait is a primary source showing how a 19th-century painter represented an Ioway leader. Smith's 1998 work is a primary source for her interpretation and critique of history.

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Removal, representation, and continuing Native sovereignty

EXPANSION AND DISPOSSESSION

After 1815, U.S. expansion placed growing pressure on Native homelands. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 authorized the federal government to negotiate removal treaties. The policy was implemented through coercive negotiations, military force, and forced relocation. Native nations responded through diplomacy, resistance, and adaptation.

Catlin traveled west beginning in 1830 to live with Native tribes and document their cultures. He created and presented an "Indian Gallery" to audiences in the U.S. and Europe. In 1844–45, White Cloud and Ioway people traveled with Catlin in Europe to perform in exhibitions associated with him. The Native participants had their own aims, but unequal power shaped the exhibitions and who profited from them.

THE GHOST DANCE AND VIOLENCE

In the late nineteenth century, federal authorities sought to suppress many Native ceremonies. Wovoka, a Paiute spiritual leader, offered hope of renewal and reunion with ancestors and a peaceful life if followers lived righteously and performed the Ghost Dance. Various communities adapted the movement in different ways, and it was not a single practice shared by all Native peoples.

Authorities treated the movement as a threat. On December 29, 1890, U.S. soldiers killed hundreds of Lakota people, including women and children, at the Wounded Knee Massacre. Smith's painting recalls the suppression of the Ghost Dance and broader attacks on Indigenous cultures. There is no evidence that the painting depicts the massacre directly.

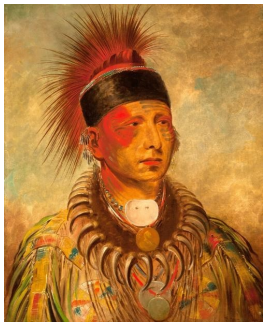
WHY THIS MATTERS FOR THE PAIRING

The "vanishing Indian" idea promoted by George Catlin wrongly cast Native disappearance as inevitable. It concealed the choices and policies causing dispossession and overlooked Native survival. Indigenous peoples continue to retain sovereignty as they govern themselves, teach languages, sustain cultural knowledge, and create art.

Smith was a citizen of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation in Montana, which was formed by the 1855 Hellgate Treaty. Salish history, Paiute teachings, and Lakota experiences at Wounded Knee are connected to U.S. expansion but must not be treated as interchangeable.

Use Native-authored and tribal sources alongside museum interpretations. A non-Native viewpoint is not automatically without value, and one Native artist does not speak for every Native nation. Ask whose knowledge a source offers, what it omits, and what additional evidence is needed.

ARTISTS & ART



GEORGE CATLIN · 1796–1872

Mew-Hew-She-Kaw, The White Cloud, Chief of the Ioways, date unknown

Pennsylvania-born Catlin left law for painting. During western travels, he made hundreds of images of Native people and places. He described his project as preservation, influenced by the mistaken belief that Native people and cultures would disappear.

The portrait names an Ioway leader and emphasizes his face, bearing, clothing, and ornaments. These choices can convey individuality and status. The picture does not reveal the sitter's full life, his words about the encounter, or all the political pressures his community faced.

LOOK FOR Gaze • pose • feathered headdress • necklace • clothing • painted background



JAUNE QUICK-TO-SEE SMITH · 1940–2025

I See Red: Ban Dancing, 1998

Smith was born on Montana's Flathead Reservation and was a citizen of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. An artist, educator, and activist, she used humor, satire, text, and abstraction to challenge stereotypes and examine American history from a Native worldview.

I See Red: Ban Dancing combines a shirt-like outline, newspaper collage, a tepee, a figure, and sweeping paint. The museum connects the work to the Ghost Dance and its suppression. *Red* may invite interpretations related to anger or racial labeling; treat these as interpretations to test against the title, visual details, artist statements, and historical sources.

LOOK FOR Layered text • shirt outline • red paint • figure • tepee • overlapping forms

PAIRING LENS

Catlin depicts an individual; for this lesson, Smith's work is discussed as a cultural portrait because it engages collective history and identity, not because it represents every Native person or nation. Compare what each artist makes visible and how the work directs a viewer's attention. The pairing is an inquiry tool, not evidence that Smith made her painting as a direct response to Catlin's portrait.

LEARN MORE / SOURCES

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ioway Cultural Institute – History, People, and Ioways Today

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes – Who We Are

CSKT – Tribal Civics Study Guides

National Park Service – Black Elk; Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee

ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

NBMAA – Catlin, Mew-Hew-She-Kaw, The White Cloud, Chief of the Ioways

Oil on canvas; broad catalog date 1816–1872. Private Collection, 1995.05T.

NBMAA – Smith, I See Red: Ban Dancing, 1998

Mixed media on canvas. General Purchase Fund and William and Bette Batchelor Memorial Acquisition Fund, 2021.25. Interpretation: NBMAA Winter 2022 Newsletter, p. 11.

NBMAA Winter 2022 Newsletter, p. 11

National Museum of Women in the Arts – Jaune Quick-to-See Smith

Smith – Raising Indigenous Voices Throughout Her Art (video, 4:58)

Brooklyn Museum – Ghost Dance Dress

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

John P. Bowes, Exiles and Pioneers (2007)

George Catlin, Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians (1859 edition)

Vine Deloria Jr., Custer Died for Your Sins (2018 edition)

Brian W. Dippie, The Vanishing American (1982).

Anne Dreesbach, "Colonial Exhibitions, Völkerschauen and the Display of the Other" (2012)

Sherry L. Smith, The View from Officers' Row (1990)

William E. Whittaker, ed., Frontier Forts of Iowa (2009)

National Park Service, Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.

TEACHER TOOLKIT

Plan the inquiry, select evidence, and assess student thinking

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Analyze works of art as primary sources and the perspectives they represent.
- Compare how different artists portray the identities and experiences of distinct Native peoples and nations.
- Use visual evidence to support interpretations.
- Explain how point of view can shape understanding.
- Connect historical events to contemporary discussions about representation.

STANDARDS FOCUS

NCSS: Culture
How do artworks represent identity, cultural knowledge, and experience?

NCSS: Time, Continuity and Change
How do artists represent and reinterpret the past?

NCSS: Power, Authority and Governance
How do federal policies and Native sovereignty inform the histories these artworks address?

C3 PRACTICES

Question, use evidence, compare sources, and communicate conclusions.

C3 Indicators	Evidence
D2.His.6.6-8: Analyze how people's perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created.	Handouts 1-2: Explain how each artist's choices and perspective shape what viewers see.
D2.His.10.6-8: Detect possible limitations in the historical record based on evidence collected from different kinds of historical sources.	Handout 2: Identify what remains unknown and a source that could add information.
D4.1.6-8: Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of the arguments.	Handout 4: Construct a claim using both artworks and at least one historical, artist, or tribal source; explain how the evidence supports the claim and identify a limitation.

VOCABULARY

Ceremony	Formal, sacred actions performed during a special cultural or religious event, such as a traditional dance
Collage	An artwork made by attaching different materials, such as photographs, fabric, newspaper clippings, onto a surface to create the work
Cultural portrait	A classroom term for artwork that represents the unique identity, traditions, values, or lifestyle of a specific group or person within a culture
Federal policy	Acts, regulations, or laws created by the federal government to determine how people or lands are managed
Historical narrative	The story or interpretation told about the past
Historical visibility	How much we can see and learn about a person or group in the historical record
Interpretation	An explanation based on evidence
Perspective	A particular point of view
Portrait	A representation of a particular individual, usually intended to capture their likeness or personality. (MoMA)
Primary source	Original documents and objects that were created at the time under study. They differ from secondary sources, accounts that retell, analyze, or interpret events, usually from a distance in time or place. (Library of Congress)
Sovereignty	A Native nation's inherent authority to govern itself and its relations, lands, and community
Symbolism	The use of an object, color, or image to represent a deeper, more abstract meaning

FACILITATION NOTE

Use nation-specific names and present-tense examples of Native life. Do not ask students to imitate ceremonies, make sacred regalia, or speak for a Native nation. Discuss museum choices without turning a people's rights or survival into a classroom debate.

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

Select prompts and handouts, if desired, to fit your goals and available time.

VISUAL INQUIRY
Handout 1
Separate observation from inference; cite details.

HISTORICAL COMPARISON
Handout 2
Compare perspectives, historical visibility, and source limitations.

DISCUSSION
Handout 3
Support a response with visual or historical evidence; consider another interpretation.

CER OPTION
Handout 4
Make a claim; support it with visual/historical evidence.

REFLECTION
Handout 5
Explain how an interpretation changed or deepened; identify what helped to change thinking.

PERFORMANCE OPTIONS
Communicate a clear idea with accurate evidence and context. Examples: museum label, collage, artist statement.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENT OPTION

Students create a mixed-media collage on a topic, place, experience, or perspective of their choice and interpret their choices through artwork, a presentation, or an essay. They may choose a personal topic or a researched topic and are not required to disclose personal or family experiences. Students should demonstrate their own perspective without claiming to represent an entire group.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

- A claim that answers the inquiry question.
- Accurate evidence from the required sources.
- Reasoning explaining how the evidence supports the claim.
- Recognition of a source limitation.

SIX-STEP PORTRAIT PAIRING PROTOCOL

Across all work, students explain how evidence supports their interpretations.

	Portrait Pairing Protocol	Personalized for the Catlin / Smith Artworks
1	**OBSERVE** Let students look before giving background. Begin with 30 seconds of quiet observation. **Consider Handout 1**	Ask about each work: What is going on in these works? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find? Notice figures, clothing, color, shapes, text, and placement. Record visible details before interpreting symbols.
2	**INTERPRET** Help students to move from description to possible meanings. Ask them to connect each interpretation to a visible detail and to distinguish between what they observe and what they infer.	After students record initial observations, reveal the artists' names, full artwork titles, and available dates. Explain that the Catlin painting's exact date is unknown. Ask what the title tells us and what it does not establish.
3	**ADD CONTEXT** Introduce the artists, the dates, and concise historical context. Use historical sources to test interpretations. Reinforce that artworks do not provide complete accounts of people or communities. **Ask: What changes when we know more?**	Introduce U.S. expansion and removal, Catlin's preservation claims, Native survival, and Smith's perspective. Explain the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee carefully.
4	**COMPARE** Ask students to study the relationship between the works. Consider: • What connects these portraits? • How do the works approach the theme differently? • How does one portrait affect the way you understand the other? Is there a third story as a result? **Consider Handout 2**	Compare purpose, materials, visual emphasis, and point of view. What do the works share? What differs? What additional story emerges when paired? Avoid assuming a Native artist speaks for every nation or that an outsider's work has no historical value.
5	**CONNECT** Connect students' visual evidence and interpretations to history, civics, geography, economics, culture, and/or contemporary life. Encourage students to test their ideas against additional sources. **Consider Handouts 3 or 4.**	In groups of three, rotate through four discussion stations. Allow about two minutes per station and four minutes to share findings. Ask whose voices a museum label should include. Use an Ioway or CSKT source for an optional extension beyond the pairing.
6	**REFLECT** Ask students to reconsider their thinking and communicate their insights. **Consider Handout 5**	Return to the inquiry question. Students explain what changed, which evidence mattered, and what remains unknown. Collect the exit ticket. Extend with CER writing, a revised museum label, or a collage about students' own experiences.

HANDOUT 1

OBSERVE + INTERPRET

Look Closely and Interpret

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Directions: Record visible details first. Then explain what those details suggest. Separate what you see from what you infer; do not assume every symbol has one meaning.

APPROACH: ☐ Whole Class ☐ Small Group ☐ Pairs ☐ Alone

VISUAL ELEMENT	CATLIN / WHITE CLOUD	SMITH / I SEE RED
Figures / shapes		
Clothing / objects		
Pose / presentation		
Color / materials		
Background/ placement		
Text / symbols		

EVIDENCE CHECK

Choose one detail from each artwork. What might each detail suggest? What source or additional information might help you test your interpretation?

HANDOUT 2

COMPARE

Perspectives in Conversation

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Directions: Use visual details and historical context. Compare differences and shared features without assuming either artist represents every Native person's experience.

APPROACH: ☐ **Whole Class** ☐ **Small Group** ☐ **Pairs** ☐ **Alone**

WHAT TO COMPARE	CATLIN / WHITE CLOUD	SMITH / I SEE RED
Artist's position / perspective		
History made visible		
What remains unknown		
A source that could deepen or complicate your interpretation		

COMPARE FINDINGS

What do these works share? What new questions do you have when you see them together?

HANDOUT 3

CONNECT

Discussion Stations

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Directions: Work in groups of three. At each station, discuss the question and record a response supported by one visual detail or historical fact. Share and revise after the rotation.

1 How does Catlin present White Cloud's identity or status? What can the portrait tell us, and what remains unknown?

2 How does Smith address Native history or cultural survival? Connect one detail to the historical context.

3 How do the artists communicate different messages? What does each work contribute to the pairing?

4 What might the color red suggest in Smith's work? Use the title, visual evidence, and context. Whose voice could help test your interpretation?

HANDOUT 4

CER WRITING

Who Shapes the Story?

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Directions: How do an artist's background, purpose, and choices influence the representation of cultural history? Use both artworks and discuss symbolism. Recognize that one person cannot speak for every community.

CLAIM

State a clear answer about how perspective shapes representation.

EVIDENCE

Use at least three specific pieces of evidence: one visual detail from each artwork and one detail from a historical, artist, or tribal source. Identify each source.

REASONING

Explain how your evidence supports the claim. Discuss one symbol as an interpretation, not a fact unless a source supports it. Identify one strength and one limitation of the evidence supporting your interpretation and state what remains unknown.

HANDOUT 5

REFLECT

Reflection / Exit Ticket

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Directions: Return to your first impressions. Use evidence from the artworks, historical context, a source, or class discussion.

LOOK AGAIN

What were your first thoughts about Catlin's portrait and Smith's cultural portrait? What do you think now?

WHAT CHANGED

Which detail or source most changed or deepened your thinking about how Catlin represents White Cloud or how Smith addresses Native history? Name the evidence and explain what it helped you to understand.

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

What is the value of studying multiple perspectives? Use one specific detail from today's lesson to support your answer.

KEEP ASKING

One question I still have is…