

A MONUMENTAL JOURNEY: Educational Resource Proposal

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Artist: Kerry James Marshall Title: A Monumental Journey

Artist Kerry James Marshall has created a striking physical monument representing 12 brave Des Moines-area African American attorneys who formed the National Bar Association in 1925. At that time, Black Americans were denied membership to national legal associations like the American Bar Association, and these 12 attorneys wanted to form an association of support, power, and acceptance.

The sculptural shape of *A Monumental Journey* was inspired by West African talking drums. African drummers utilize complex drumming patterns by varying pitch and tone to mimic speech patterns. These messages can then be heard and communicated over long distances. This ambitious large-scale piece evokes ideas of working towards balance in an unbalanced system, while maintaining communication across cultures.

Past retrospectives of Kerry James Marshall have been on view at the Met Breuer, MOCA Los Angeles, and MOCA Chicago. His installations, public projects, and paintings have travelled globally, with stops at the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen in Belgium (2013) and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid (2014).

Get your students excited for their trip with PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES:

- ***Make a Talking Drum***

[K-8] Introduce this activity by watching a musical performance of a [Talking Drum Ensemble](#) on [youtube.com](#). Then, make a talking drum out of common materials, encouraging students to make varying-sized drums. Use items like funnels, paper/plastic cups, rubber bands, elastic wire, coffee bean containers, and soup cans.

Resources to help with construction include:

- [Make a Talking Drum Out of Funnels](#), by Barbmakesmusic; [instructables.com](#)
- [How to Make a Talking Drum](#), by Sylvie Branch, [mademan.com](#)



Have students create their own drumming music patterns. Bring the drums with you to visit the sculpture and have the group play each students' drum pattern! [Art, Music]

- **Talking Drum Sound Experiment**

[4-8] Make drums of varying sizes using the approaches above. Then, go outside and have students form small groups (4-5) with drums of different sizes. Since talking drums are infamous for being heard from long distances, have students take turns standing several feet apart and explore the following: Whose drum can be heard from farther away? Does the size and/or material of each drum effect how far away the sound can be heard? If possible, bring measuring tape so students can measure these distances and make a data table during the experiment.

- After this experiment, have students survey the data table regarding the materials their talking drums were made of and their material:sound/distance ratios. In small groups, have students write these observations and any correlations or connections to answer this question: What materials make the best talking drum to hear from long distances? [Math, Science]
- [Iowa Core Science Standards Addressed: 4-PS3-2; 3-5-ETS1-2; MS-ETS1-3]
- [Iowa Core Math Standards Addressed: 4.MD.B; 5.MD.B; 7.RP.A]

- **Create a Timeline**

[6-12] Using [the timeline of the National Bar Association's history](#), older students can create a physical or digital timeline with images to represent these major events. Physical timelines should include illustrations; digital timelines can include videos, photos, and articles involving key figures and events of each decade. [ELA, Social Sciences, Technology, Art]

- Selection of Iowa Core Social Studies Standards Addressed: SS.6.3; SS.6.20; SS.7.3; SS.7.11; SS.8.4; SS.8.23; SS.9-12.3; SS-Gov.9-12.22; SS-US.9-12.18; SS-US.9-12.27
- Selection of Iowa Core Literacy Standards Addressed: RI.6.2; RI.6.7; RI.7.1; RI.7.3; RI.8.2; RI.11-12.1; RI.9-10.2; RI.6.10 - RI.11-12.10; RI.11-12.7; W.6.2- W.11-12.2; W.6.8 -W.11-12.8, DOK 1,2,3,4

Discussion Questions at the sculpture site:

- What are your first thoughts when seeing this work? Do any initial words or phrases come to mind?
- How would you describe this work to someone who could not see it? Use as many sensory details as possible.

- Why do you think the artist chose to use these specific materials and colors for this sculpture?
- How do you think the artist got the two large pieces to balance?
- The artist created this sculpture to honor the 12 African American attorneys who started the National Bar Association after being barred from admittance to the American Bar Association. How does this sculpture evoke this history?

Continue your study or wrap-up your visit with POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES:

- ***Invite a Speaker***

[K-12] Invite a member of your local [National Bar Association Affiliate Chapter](#) in to the classroom to speak about why the association is important to them, and how they benefit from the association today. Speakers can also talk hold a discussion with students about how life has changed (or stayed the same) for black Americans from 1925 to 2017.

Iowa Core Social Studies Standards Addressed: SS.K.17; SS.1.23; SS.3.28; SS.4.10; SS.5.22; SS.5.26; SS.6.11

- ***Balance and Harmony***

[3-8] Conceptually, this sculpture represents balance in an object that does not necessarily look balanced. Using two items of similar weight create your own sculpture that doesn't look balanced, but stays upright. At what point will the top half of your sculpture tip over? Does this work with light objects as well as heavy objects? Lower elementary students can compare and contrast whether light objects work better than heavy objects. Upper elementary – high school students, at appropriate levels, can record their scientific observations using the weight, length, and densities of the objects in finding stacked balance. [Science]

- ***Inspired Sculpting***

[7-12] After visiting A Monumental Journey and studying its shape up close, have students use clay (or any other pliable medium) to emulate its shape. Use metal picks, tooth picks, or other sharp-cornered objects to create the brick patterns. Have students pay special attention to balancing the two pieces. Advancing students can be challenged to use Marshall's sculpture as inspiration for a new shape that represents his idea of working towards balance.

Stamp your local Cultural Passport:

- [State Historical Museum of Iowa](#)

Explore our state's legacy by reading, viewing, and interacting with over 1500 objects at any time at this local Des Moines museum. While there, stop by the [Wall of Iowans](#) to view other remarkable African Americans from Iowa who have impacted the history of our state, nation, and world.

- [African American Museum of Iowa](#)

Continue your studies into local African American history by visiting this Cedar Rapids museum. Past traveling exhibits have explored black American inventors; The Underground Railroad in Iowa; and a study of African American military heroes. Their permanent exhibition, "[Endless Possibilities](#)", traces this history from "its origins in western Africa to the present." Spot a few talking drums while there!

Stamp your national Cultural Passport:

- [Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago](#)

MCA Chicago has hosted many past exhibits of Kerry James Russell's works, with several paintings in their permanent collection. Take a chance and visit this museum to see if any of these are on display! [View a 7.5 minute documentary](#) of Marshall describing his thoughts on blacks in art, being a black artist, and his own work in his traveling exhibition, *Mastry*. [Additional online resources](#) can be incorporated into your own classroom exploration into Kerry James Marshall. MCA Chicago hosts images of past paintings, collections, exhibitions, and blog posts online relating to Mr. Marshall.

- [Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum](#)

Visit the [Dun Dun Talking Drum](#) at this Smithsonian Museum reflecting local Anacostia neighborhood and national ethnic social issues.

- [National Museum of African American History and Culture](#)

Celebrate national African American culture, community, and history at our country's newest Smithsonian museum. [Explore the collection](#) virtually online by using the keywords "Justice", "Law", "Social Reform", and "Civil Rights" to find art and historical objects that can put *A Monumental Journey* in context.



- Of particular note, listen to the [John Jacob Oliver Oral History Interview](#)

“In this oral history interview John Jacob Oliver gives a narrative of what it was like to grow-up in the Murphy family, which has published the AFRO-American newspaper since 1892... and his later studies for a law degree from Columbia University. He recounts his work as a lawyer, before returning to the family business at the AFRO-American.”

(<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/collection>)

Literature Resources:

- Uzo Unobagha. [Off to the Sweet Shores of Africa: and Other Talking Drum Rhymes](#). San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000.
Beautiful illustrations accompany a collection of African-inspired rhymes celebrating West African village life. A glossary of West African nomenclature is included.
- Walker, Kim, and Faegre Baker Daniels. [“A History of the National Bar Association.”](#) *The Iowa Lawyer*, 2016, pp. 6–9 (Hyperlinked directly to complete issue).
This magazine article includes a background on the history of the National Bar Association and a brief biography of each founding member, along with a cover-photo of the artist and his architectural concept.
- J. Clay Smith, Jr. [“The Black Bar Association and Civil Rights.”](#) *Creighton Law Review*, 1985, pp. 651-679. (Hyperlinked directly to complete article).
A thorough exploration into the National Bar Association’s inception and history, this article is best used with older high school students thanks to its academic nature.
- Montrew Dunham. [Thurgood Marshall \(Childhood of Famous Americans\)](#). New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1998.
Take elementary students on a journey through the history of first African American U.S. Supreme Court Judge Thurgood Marshall, from his tribulations and triumphs of growing up, to his rise to the Supreme Court.

Internet Resources:

- [Classroom Compass: The Rhythm of Mathematics](#)

A comprehensive, 10-page resource for music and math integration. Addresses multiple intelligences, and cultural knowledge; includes additional resources and opportunities.

- YouTube video: [From Ralph to Varnum: The Development of Iowans Civil Rights through Key Laws and Legal Battles](#)

A presentation for educators from the Iowa Civil Rights Commission to aid in planning and presenting civil rights curriculum. (Credit to <https://iowaculture.gov/history/education/educator-resources>)

- [**IPTV Pathways: Laws and African-American Iowans**](#)

Brief histories, links to Media Artifacts, and related web sites hosting Primary Sources. If you are visiting *A Monumental Journey* as part of a larger Civil Rights study in your classroom, this website will provide a great deal of holistic support.

- [**San Francisco Museum of Modern Art**](#)

A number of of videos featuring Kerry James Marshall discussing his own works and inspirations, as well as Artcast interviews with Marshall, and online images of past works, are hosted online at the museum's website.