

# BLACK on BLACK

## Lesson Plan

Suggested for  
early childhood–1st grade



**Artist Glenn Ligon (born 1960) is known for work that explores race, language, history, and identity. He often uses text to unpack these themes by incorporating excerpts from the writing of African-American literary figures such as Zora Neale Hurston and James Baldwin.**

Glenn Ligon  
*Untitled (Speech/Crowd) #3, 2000*

In *Untitled (Speech/Crowd) #3*, Glenn Ligon layers coal dust and text on top of an enlarged news photograph of the 1995 Million Man March in Washington, D.C. The march was intended to encourage black unity and informed by earlier marches such as the 1963 March on Washington where Martin Luther King Jr. gave his “I Have A Dream” speech. As Ligon enlarged news images and layered them with ink and coal dust, both the images and the text become unclear. Ligon uses the act of obscuring to unpack the experience of interacting with history through media, image, and text.

While creating this series Ligon included text from James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* and “Stranger in the Village” in addition to excerpts from the speeches at the 1995 march.

During this lesson students will create a mixed-media work of art. This process will provide students the opportunity to explore the use of text in art making. Layering the composition with exclusively black materials will allow students to consider color, lightness, and darkness in new ways.

### **Objective**

Students will begin to explore the use of text in artwork using an exclusively black palette. They will consider how color influences composition by referencing Glenn Ligon's *Untitled (Speech/Crowd) #3*.

### **Essential Question**

How might we explore composition using only the color black?

### **Vocabulary**

#### *Color*

How someone sees an object based on how light is reflected or released.

#### *Shade*

The amount of lightness or darkness a color has.

#### *Composition*

How things are put together in space; the formation or construction of objects in space.

#### *Light*

A natural or illuminating element such as the sun or a lamp that stimulates sight and makes things visible.

### **Materials**

Smocks  
Drop cloths  
Craft cups  
Glue sticks  
Foam letter stickers  
Black sand  
Black acrylic paint  
Book: *The Black Book of Colors* by Menena Cottin  
Large cardboard squares  
Large paint brushes

### **Preparation**

1. Display an image of *Untitled (Speech/Crowd) #3* to be used in visual inquiry discussion.
2. Portion a small amount of black acrylic paint in craft cups (one per student) and set them aside.
3. Portion a small amount of black sand into craft cups (one per student) and set them aside.
4. Set out cardboard squares and glue sticks (one per student) and sprinkle foam letter stickers on tables for easy access.

### **Methods**

1. Engage in visual inquiry around Ligon's work focusing on the key vocabulary as you introduce the idea of using text in visual art.
2. While reading *The Black Book of Colors* by Menena Cottin ask students to consider how using only the color black impacts a composition or a story.
3. Have students explore placement of text by positioning the foam letter stickers on their cardboard square.
4. Once they have created a composition, introduce the black paint and have them cover the surface of their composition.
5. Have students then use the black sand to add texture and dimension to their artwork, sprinkling it onto the surface.

### **Reflection**

1. Ask students to share about their process of making their artwork by asking questions such as, "Tell me about your artwork."
2. Ask students to share what they enjoyed most about their art making.
3. Invite students to share what they enjoy about each other's works of art.



Glenn Ligon

*Untitled (Speech/Crowd) #3, 2000*

Silkscreen, coal dust, oil stick, and glue on paper

46 × 60 × 1 1/2 in.

The Studio Museum in Harlem; Museum purchase made possible by gifts from Gayle G. Greenhill, The Ehrenkranz Family Foundation, The Susan and Elihu Rose Foundation, Inc., and an anonymous donor in honor of Raymond J. McGuire

2001.5