Artist Barbara Chase-Riboud is known for work that explores topics such as identity, historical narratives, and notions of power. Chase-Riboud’s 1973 sculpture *Le Manteau (The Cape)* provides educators with an opportunity to explore contemporary art and its relationship to history and culture.

The mixed-media sculpture provides a basis for discussion of symbols, storytelling, and tradition. The art-making process will engage students with experience in designing individual symbols, layering materials and concepts, and working collaboratively to complete a collective piece.
Objective
Students will explore how symbols might be used as a form of language and expression in order to communicate ideas about power. Inspired by Le Manteau (The Cape), each student will design his or her own symbol of power on gold paper that will be joined together to form a collective “power cape” for the class.

Essential Question
How is understanding culture and society informed by art and language?

Vocabulary
Symbol
An action, object, event, etc., that represents a particular idea or quality.

Symbolism
The practice or art of using symbols.

Power
The ability to control or influence things or people.

Collection
A group of objects brought together for show or study.

Materials
Gold paper/ Assorted metallic paper
Construction paper
Hole punchers
Twine
Markers (gold and black permanent markers)
Scissors
Glue or glue stick
Pencils

Preparation
1. Display an image of Le Manteau (The Cape) and discuss the artwork with visual inquiry.
2. Introduce vocabulary words and discuss the meaning of symbols, symbolism, power, and collection with the class.
3. Distribute scrap paper and pencils for the students to use to brainstorm ideas.
4. Set out construction paper, glue, twine, scissors, markers, permanent makers and hole punch to provide students a variety of options from which to choose.

Methods
1. Create a dialogue with students about power by asking questions. What is power, who holds power, and how is power represented? Brainstorm symbolic shapes and encourage students to invent new shapes that will represent power.
2. Present the materials and allow students time to explore how they might use them to create their symbols. Assorted metallic paper and construction paper can be used to sketch, and collage layers; twine can be glued on to make a design and markers can be used to draw.
3. Once they have decided their final designs, students can create their symbols on the gold paper. Discuss how shapes, colors, and placement of the designs all add symbolic meanings to their ideas.
4. Allow the designs to dry. Once dry, use the hole punch and twine to connect students’ work in a creative shape inspired by Chase-Riboud’s sculpture. Encourage students to braid the twine to each other’s work, as seen in the artwork.
5. After the artworks are connected, display them to show all the symbolic power designs.

Reflection
1. Ask students to explain their design processes and decisions.
2. Discuss how symbolism is found throughout the artwork, individually and collectively.
3. Invite students to share what they learned from making their designs and connecting the pieces together.
Barbara Chase-Riboud
*Le Manteau (The Cape) or Cleopatra’s Cape*, 1973
Bronze, hemp rope, copper, 99 1/2 × 84 × 72 in.
The Studio Museum in Harlem; Gift of the Lannan Foundation 1998.7.4
Photo: Adam Reich
Barbara Chase-Riboud
*Le Manteau (The Cape) or Cleopatra’s Cape (detail)*, 1973
Bronze, hemp rope, copper, 99½ × 84 × 72 in.
The Studio Museum in Harlem; Gift of the Lannan Foundation 1998.7.4
Photo: Adam Reich