

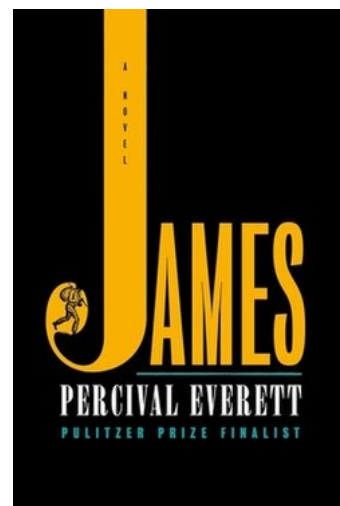


Chazen Museum of Art

Chazen Museum of Art Teaching Guide

Go Big Read 2025-2026:
James, by Percival Everett

The [Chazen Museum of Art](#) invites UW-Madison instructors and members of the community to teach and consider the [2025-2026 Go Big Read](#), *James* by Percival Everett, through engagement with our collection. This teaching guide presents a selection of artworks with strong thematic ties to the novel, such as identity, empowerment, and narrative. Brief contextual statements and prompts for engagement highlight literary connections and support object-centered, interdisciplinary learning. Supplemental artworks and additional resources are provided at the end of the guide.



Book and
plan your
class/group
visit online:



[https://chazen.wisc.edu/learn/
resources-bookings/](https://chazen.wisc.edu/learn/resources-bookings/)

SHARED THEMES

- Identity (performance and protection, empowerment)
- Identity (constructing identity, narrative, humor)
- Family, alliance, and loyalty
- Race and discrimination
- Slavery and the Antebellum South
- Sexual violence
- Connection to the natural world

Contact visit@chazen.wisc.edu with questions.

Chazen Museum of Art

Open daily. Always free.

Mon–Fri, 10 a.m.–7 p.m.

Sat–Sun, 11 a.m.–5 p.m.

University of Wisconsin

750 University Avenue

Madison, WI 53706

608-263-2246

OBJECT-CENTERED LEARNING

As the largest, most inclusive arts classroom on the UW–Madison campus, the Chazen seeks to encourage expression and inquiry, foster critical thinking skills, and promote new ways of learning. Object-centered learning is an interdisciplinary mode of inquiry which complements traditional classroom methodologies. Some approaches to teaching with art objects include:

- **Primary source analysis:** Analyze objects as primary sources of specific cultural contexts. Helps students to build evidence-based arguments.
- **Exploring theme:** Use objects as vehicles to illustrate and discuss course theories and texts. Students can engage with key themes outside of the classroom.
- **Close looking:** Examine an object slowly and carefully. Students practice skills necessary to perceive and communicate visual information.

SUPPORT & RESOURCES

Chazen staff are eager to ensure class visits to the museum are impactful. Collaboration prior to visits may include identifying artwork related to curriculum, sharing resources and examples, and co-developing activities and other lesson planning materials. Staff co-teaching support during visits may range from sharing object information to leading a class discussion on how to look at and analyze art.

If you are interested in such support, please begin the conversation by submitting the request form (see below). Direct questions to visit@chazen.wisc.edu.

PLAN A VISIT

The Chazen's galleries offer the opportunity to see [special exhibitions](#) and hundreds of objects from the [permanent collection](#). The museum's two study rooms provide access to artworks from the collection when they are not on view to allow teaching, learning, and research that is tailored to an individual curriculum.

Please submit *all* visit requests **at least three weeks prior** to the requested visit date through the online booking form.

ONLINE BOOKING FORM: <https://chazen.wisc.edu/learn/resources-bookings/>

Sanford Biggers (American, b. 1970)

Lifting the Veil, 2023

Marble, antique quilt, and mixed media, 44 ½ x 36 ¼ x 21 ¼ in. overall, Carolyn T. Anderson, Frank and Roa Birch, Eugenie Mayer Bolz, Chazen Museum of Art, Class of 1929 Fund, Walter A. and Dorothy Jones Frautschi, Alice Drews Gladfelter, Frank R. Horlbeck, Walter J. and Cecille Hunt, Harold and Margaret Laun, Stanley J. Lerner, William R. Mitchell, Bertha Ardt Plaenert, and Ruth C. Wallerstein Endowment Funds purchase, [2023.7a-c](#)



Lifting the Veil, a contemporary artwork by Sanford Biggers, incorporates, critiques, and re-imagines Thomas Ball's 1873 commemorative sculpture *Emancipation Group*. In adjusting and adding to the visual details of Ball's sculpture, Biggers creates a new narrative about emancipation, freedom, agency and empowerment.

Thomas Ball (American, 1819-1911)
Emancipation Group,
1873

White Italian marble,
45 ½ x 27 9/16 x 21 ¼ in. overall,
Gift of Dr. Warren E. Gilson, [1976.157](#)



Prompts for Engagement

- o For each sculpture, describe the poses, expressions, actions and dress of the two figures. What do you notice?
- o In what ways do these sculptures visually exemplify or contradict Voltaire's philosophy of equality and its flaws as reasoned by James in his snakebite-induced dream? (p. 49)

Looking closer

Look closely at all sides of both sculptures. Identify and compare the iconography that appears in both.

Percival Everett

"I hope that I have written the novel that Twain did not and also could not have written. I do not view the work as corrective, but rather I see myself in conversation with Twain."

These artworks are on view in the third floor Mezzanine and on our [website](#). Browse more works by [Biggers](#) and [Ball](#). Additional resources are available at the end of this guide.

Kara Walker (American, b. 1969)

The Means to an End... A Shadow Drama in Five Acts, 1995

Etching, 35 ¼ x 23 ¼ in. overall, William R. Mitchell Endowment Fund purchase, [1995.55a-e](#)



Kara Walker's *The Means to an End... A Shadow Drama in Five Acts* confronts the viewer with a dark satire about plantation life in the Antebellum South. Flat, black silhouettes form figures with distinctive, stereotypical appearances. Five panels—The Beginning, The Hunt, The Chase, The Plunge, and The End—illustrate disturbing scenes of racial and gendered violence.

Prompts for Engagement

- o Kara Walker calls silhouette the “medium of avoidance.” How does the use of silhouette affect how you look and think about this artwork?
- o Do you think Walker's use of caricatures upholds or critiques stereotypes? Why? Is there an example of caricature in *James* that functions similarly?
- o What makes this artwork satirical? What abusive power dynamics does Walker challenge through satire? Compare Walker's use of satire to Everett's in *James*.

From *James*

“I saw my Sadie in young Katie's face. I saw my child. I did not look away. I wanted to feel the anger. I was befriending my anger, learning not only how to feel it, but perhaps how to use it” (p. 278).

Looking closer

“Read” the artwork from both left to right and right to left. How does the narrative change?

This artwork is on view in gallery 13 and on our [website](#). Browse more works by Walker [here](#). Additional resources are available at the end of this guide.

Samuel Levi Jones (American, b. 1978)

Joshua, 2016

Mixed media and law book skins on canvas, 61 ½ x 77 in. overall, Chazen Museum of Art General Endowment Fund and Alice Drews Gladfelter Memorial Endowment Fund, [2018.5](#)



Joshua by Samuel Levi Jones is named for Joshua Beal, a 25-year-old Black man fatally shot by two plainclothes Chicago police officers on Nov. 5, 2016, while he walked in a cousin's funeral procession. The officers were not criminally charged. Like quilt patches, Illinois state law book covers—which Jones calls “skins”—are flattened, distressed, stitched together and mounted onto canvas.

Looking closer

Jones leaves a few select words visible on the skins. From top left to bottom right they read: “End / Assault and / Homicide / Criminal / Officers and Public Employees.”

From *James*

“...the judge told the grand jury that it was an act of a multitude and so they couldn't recommend any indictments. So, if enough people do it, it's not a crime” (p. 27).

“You're in Illinois,” the old man said.

“So, I'm in a free state?”

The men laughed. “Boy, you're in America” (p. 85).

Prompts for Engagement

- o What is Jones trying to express or evoke by presenting law books in this way? What commonalities are there between the American legal justice system as depicted in *Joshua* and in *James*?
- o *Joshua* and *James* share similar titles. Why did Jones and Everett choose to title their works in this way. How does the title impact your impressions of *Joshua* and *James*?

This artwork is on view in gallery 17 and on our [website](#). Additional resources are available at the end of this guide.

Truman Lowe (American, Ho-Chunk, 1944-2019)

Feather Tree, 1990

Southern pine, peeled willow sticks, stones, and rawhide, 144 x 104 x 96 in. overall, Alice Drews Gladfelter Memorial Fund Purchase, [2020.44.1a-w](#)

The large wooden sculpture, *Feather Tree* by Truman Lowe, is a memorial to his grandmother, the land she lived on, and her deep knowledge of that land. Surrounded by reeds and river stones, we can imagine this sapling on the banks of the Black River, the geographical and cultural homeland of the Ho-Chunk Nation and where Lowe grew up.

From *James*

"The Mississippi, in fact, seemed like many different rivers. The level was always rising or falling. Sediment got pushed around, changing the locations of bars and shelves. Islands changed shape, sometimes becoming completely submerged while new ones materialized overnight... So, again we hiked, the river on our right, not always in sight" (p. 270).



Looking closer

By Lowe's design, the intersections of the platform quadrants align with the cardinal directions: north, south, east and west.




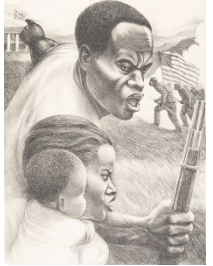
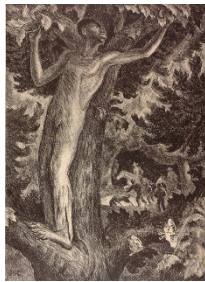

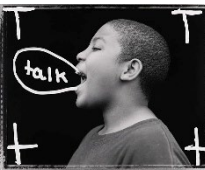



Prompts for Engagement

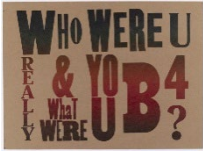

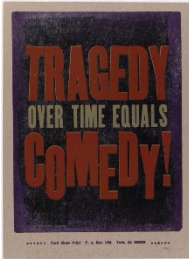


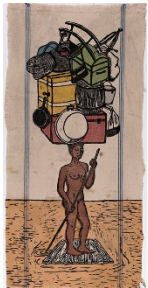


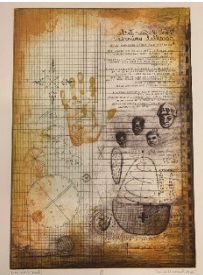

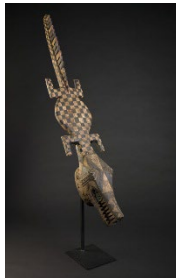
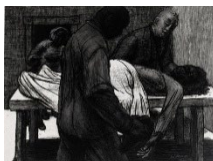
- o Lowe said, "Water is everywhere. Our own lives and basic survival depend upon its presence." What is water's role in *Feather Tree*? Why does Lowe mainly use wood?
- o What details in *Feather Tree* suggest a personal connection between Lowe and his environment? What emotional tone does it convey? Imagine a memorial sculpture created by James. What materials, symbols, and mood would he choose to express his experience with nature?

This artwork is on view in gallery 17 and on our [website](#). Browse more works by Lowe [here](#). Additional resources are available at the end of this guide.

Supplemental Artwork for Further Engagement

alphabetical by artist last name

<p>Ron Adams (American, 1934 - 2020) Neptune Washington, 1996 Lithograph Gift of David Prosser, 2022.38.4</p>		<p>Romare Bearden (American, 1911-1988) Circe, 1977 Collage Colonel Rex W. and Maxine Schuster Radsch Endowment Fund Purchase, 2014.1</p>	
<p>Elizabeth Catlett (American, 1915 - 2012) Survivor, 1983 Linoleum cut Gift of Richard E. Brock, 2012.27.2</p>		<p>H. Collins (American, 20th century) The Fight for Freedom, 1952 Lithograph Gift of David Prosser, 2022.27.7</p>	
<p>John Steuart Curry (American, 1897 - 1946) The Fugitive, 1935 Lithograph University Fund purchase, 48.1.6</p>		<p>Honoré Daumier (French, 1808 - 1879) Yes, I will liberate you . . ., number 21 from the series The Philanthropists of the Day, 1844 Lithograph Gift of Helen Wurdemann, 1985.117</p>	
<p>Wendy Ewald (American, b. 1951) Letter T, from the series An African American Alphabet, 2000 Gelatin silver print Gift of Richard E. Brock, 2015.32.5</p>		<p>Wendy Ewald (American, b. 1951) Letter Q, from the series An African American Alphabet, 2000 Chromogenic print Gift of Richard E. Brock, 2015.32.6</p>	
<p>Barbara Jones-Hogu (American, 1938 - 2017) To Be Free (Know the Past and Prepare for the Future), 1972 Color screen print Walter J. and Cecille Hunt Endowment Fund purchase, 2021.2.2</p>		<p>Peale Museum, Philadelphia (American) Charles and Thomas Swaringin, ca. 1803-1810 Hollow-cut silhouettes and black fabric adhered to embroidered textile stitched to paper Gift of D. Frederick Baker from the Baker/Pisano Collection, 2017.27.42</p>	

<p>Carl Pope, Jr. (American, b. 1961) Who Were U Really & What Were You B4?, from <i>The Bad Air Smelled of Roses</i>, 2004 - ongoing Letterpress Frank R. Horlbeck Endowment Fund purchase, 2023.5.2</p>		<p>Carl Pope, Jr. (American, b. 1961) When I Gaze at the Sky I Look Between Dem Stars, from <i>The Bad Air Smelled of Roses</i>, 2004 - ongoing Letterpress Frank R. Horlbeck Endowment Fund purchase, 2023.5.4</p>	
<p>Carl Pope, Jr. (American, b. 1961) Tragedy Over Time Equals Comedy! from <i>The Bad Air Smelled of Roses</i> 2004 - ongoing Letterpress Anonymous gift, 2023.5.23</p>		<p>Thomas Rowlandson (English, 1756 - 1827) Sea Stores, 1812 Hand-colored etching Gift of the Louis and Annette Kaufman Trust, 2001.116.22</p>	
<p>Alison Saar (American, b. 1956) Mirror, Mirror; Mulatta Seeking Inner Negress II, 2015 Woodcut Transfer from Tandem Press, 2018.1.61</p>		<p>Alison Saar (American, b. 1956) Breach, 2017 Woodcut on vintage linen seed sacks Transfer from Tandem Press, 2020.8.56</p>	
<p>Mary Sibande (South African, b. 1982) Sower in the Field, 2015 Bronze Sara Guyer and Scott Straus Contemporary African Art Initiative made possible by the Straus Family Foundation, 2022.1</p>		<p>Dr. Charles Smith (American, b. 1940) Lady in Chains, n.d. Concrete, mixed media, and paint with found metal chain Gift of Joyce and Nick Pabst, 2023.11</p>	
<p>Renée Stout (American, b. 1958) What I Saw in the Parallel Universe, 2017 Color etching Gift of Richard E. Brock, 2019.28.14</p>		<p>Swoon (American, b. 1977) George, 2020 Lithograph, screen print, gold leaf, colored silver leaf, metal leaf, hand painting, and collage on wood Transfer from Tandem Press, 2022.28.24</p>	
<p>Unrecorded (Burkinabé, possibly Nuna People) Male Crocodile Mask, early 20th century Wood, pigment, and tree tar J. David and Laura Seefried Horsfall Endowment Fund purchase, 2010.17</p>		<p>John Woodrow Wilson (American, 1922 – 2015) Death of Lulu, from the <i>Richard Wright Suite</i>, 2001 Color etching and aquatint Gift of David Prosser, 2023.38.13</p>	

Additional Resources

Sanford Biggers, **Lifting the Veil** Thomas Ball, **Emancipation Group**

- o *re:mancipation* website: <https://remancipation.org/>
- o Sanford Biggers' website: <https://sanfordbiggers.com/>
- o *re:mancipation* exhibition [webpage](#)
- o *re:mancipation* exhibition [press release](#)
- o *re:mancipation* exhibition [guidebook](#)
- o Craven, Wayne. "Thomas Ball and the Emancipation Group." *Bulletin* 1976-77. Elvehjem Art Center (1977): 43-51. <https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/7L7IMBOIGDKVA8B>.

Kara Elizabeth Walker, **The Means to and End... A Shadow Drama in Five Acts**

- o Kara Walker's website: <https://www.karawalkerstudio.com/>
- o Activism through Art Fall 2020 [Faculty Curriculum](#)
- o *Kara Walker: Cut to the Quick*, MOCA Jacksonville exhibition [guide](#)
- o "Kara Walker: Imagination" SFMOMA [interview](#)
- o "Kara Walker: Narrative" SFMOMA [interview](#)
- o Wickham, Kim. "'I Undo You, Master': Uncomfortable Encounters in the Work of Kara Walker." *The Comparatist* 39 (2015): 335-54. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26254733>.

Samuel Levi Jones, **Joshua**

- o Samuel Levi Jones' website: <https://www.samuellevijones.com/>
- o Activism through Art Fall 2020 [Faculty Curriculum](#)
- o *Samuel Levi Jones* Galerie LeLong [catalogue](#)
- o Fountainhead Artist in Residence [webpage](#)
- o "An Artist Gives Us a Vision of the Future Through Books" *Hyperallergic* [article](#)
- o Raiford, Leigh. "Burning All Illusion: Abstraction, Black Life, and the Unmaking of White Supremacy." *Art Journal* 79, no. 4 (2020): 77-91. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45381189>.

Truman Lowe, **Feather Tree**

- o Ho-Chunk Nation website: <https://ho-chunknation.com/>
- o Art of Sustainability Fall 2020 [Faculty Curriculum](#)
- o "WHVA: Truman Lowe" Museum of Wisconsin Art [interview](#)
- o Discover Wisconsin Truman Lowe Legacy [feature](#)
- o "At Water's Edge" Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters [essay](#)
- o Loew, Patty, "Seventh Generation Earth Ethics: Native Voices of Wisconsin," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* (Autumn 2014), pp. 50-53, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24402716>