

# *Art and Activism*

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Learn about **Art and Activism** by completing the following sections:

#1

## **Relate**

In this section, learn more about **Art and Activism** by making connections to your own life.

#2

## **Investigate**

In this section, learn more about **Art and Activism** by investigating art that incorporates activism.

#3

## **Create**

In this section, share what you have learned about **Art and Activism** by creating your own art and caption label.







# Art and Activism

#2

**PART 1** – Creating art is a form of activism. Artists have been creating art as a form of activism throughout history. Artists can educate others about the different social issues affecting communities through their art. Let’s analyze art that incorporates activism by noticing the communities and social issues represented in the art. Take a moment to look closely at this lithograph from the Autry Museum of the American West. A lithograph is a work of art made by drawing an image on a plate and then printing multiple copies of that image.



## *Glossary*

**Analyze:** to study or examine carefully

# Art and Activism

#2

**PART 2** – After looking closely at the lithograph, describe what you see in the lithograph. Write the answers to the questions in the chart on a piece of paper or in the space below.

ART ANALYSIS QUESTIONS	YOUR ANSWERS
What colors do you see in the lithograph?	
What figure/s do you see in the lithograph?	
What do you think the figure/s you noticed <b>represents</b> ?	
What word/s do you see in the lithograph?	
What do the word/s you noticed represent?	
What shapes do you see?	
What else do you notice in the lithograph?	

## ***Glossary***

**Represents:** to serve as a sign or symbol



# Art and Activism

#2

**PART 4** – Prove or disprove your hypothesis by reading the object label below. The object label gives more information about the art.

## Object Label

Artwork's title	→	<b><i>Blow Top Blues: The Fire Next Time</i></b>
Date artwork was created	→	1998
Artist's name	→	<b>Betye Saar</b>
Artwork's medium	→	Lithograph
Donor / Collection information	→	Donated by Loren G. Lipson, M.D., Autry Museum of the American West; 2018.45.1
Artwork description	→	Betye Saar uses her art to confront and challenge the racism and discrimination experienced by Black Americans. In this lithograph, Aunt Jemima peers at the visitor from the upper left corner, wearing a bandana featuring the word “LIBERATION” as bright flames shoot out across the rest of the artwork. The character, Aunt Jemima, is a racist stereotype based on the practice of enslaving black women to work as maids and nannies in the homes of their enslavers. The image of Aunt Jemima was used on the packages and advertisements for pancake mixes and pancake syrup beginning in the 19th century. In 2020, companies finally stopped using the character to sell products, acknowledging the harm it has caused by ignoring the <b>historical trauma</b> experienced by generations of Black Americans. In this artwork, Betye Saar frees Aunt Jemima from the harmful stereotypes that kept her down. She is no longer a racist stereotype used to sell breakfast foods. Instead, she is a free and powerful woman with a voice that demands to be heard and respected.

The title, *Blow Top Blues: The Fire Next Time*, comes from a song that has been sung by Billie Holiday and Dinah Washington. In the song, a woman warns us of her new-found freedom:

*I've got bad news baby, and you're the first to know,  
Yes, I've got bad news baby, and you're the first to know,  
I discovered this mornin' that my top is about to go!  
I've been rockin' on my feet and talkin' all out of my head,  
Yes, I've been rockin' on my feet and talkin' all out of my head,  
Yes, and when I get through talkin', can't remember a thing I said!  
Used to be a sharpie, always dressed in the latest styles,  
Now I'm walkin' down Broadway wearin' nothin' but a smile!  
I see all kinds o' little men, although they're never there!  
I try to push the "A" trail and put whisky in my hair!*

*I'm a girl you can't excuse,  
I've got those blow top blues.*

*Last night I was five feet tall, today I'm eight feet ten,  
And every time I fall down stairs I float right up again!  
When someone turned the lights on me, it like to drove me blind,  
I woke up in Belle Vue, but I left my mind behind!  
I'm a gal who blew a fuse,  
I've got those blow top blues.*

## ***Glossary***

**Historical trauma:** an emotional response to a historical event that caused harm and is experienced across multiple generations

# Art and Activism

#2

**PART 5** – Now that you have learned more about the story that the artist is telling through the lithograph, answer the questions in the chart about the art and the object label. Write your answers on a piece of paper or in the space below.

ART ANALYSIS QUESTIONS	MY ANSWERS
What is the title of the artwork? Look for the title in the object label.	
What year was the artwork created? Look for the date in the object label.	
Who is the artist? Look for the artist's name in the object label.	
Who is represented in the lithograph? Look in the object label.	
What does the figure in the lithograph represent? Look in the object label.	
Do you think there is a connection between the lithograph and the lyrics of the song? Look in the object label and the song lyrics.	
Which social issues are represented in the art and object label?	

# Art and Activism

#3

**PART 1** – Now it is your turn to become involved in activism through art. Using materials found in your home and in nature, make a work of art that educates others about the social issues that affect your communities. Plan your artwork before creating it by answering the questions in the chart. Write your answers on a piece of paper or in the space below.

ARTWORK QUESTIONS	ANSWER EXAMPLES	MY PLAN
What materials will you use to create your artwork?	Crayons/markers Markers Glue Paint Paper Pencils Pens Tape Other materials	
Which community/communities will you represent in your artwork? Pick from the list of communities that you created in <b>Section 1</b> .		
Which social issues that affect your community/communities will you represent in your artwork? Pick from the list of social issues that you created in <b>Section 1</b> .		
What animals, people, places, plants, shapes, and/or things will you include in your artwork? Which colors will you use in your artwork? What will the colors represent?		
Which colors will you use in your art? What will the colors represent?		

# Art and Activism



**PART 2** – Create your artwork using your plan.

**PART 3** – After you create your artwork, write a caption label that gives detailed information about your artwork using the object label format below. You can also look at the *Blow Top Blues: The Fire Next Time* object label to help you write your own object label. Then explain what your artwork is about on a piece of paper or in the space below.

## Object Label Format

*Title of your artwork*

Date my artwork was created

Your name

Materials used to create the artwork

Write a summary explaining the artwork.

## My Object Label

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# Resources

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This activity was inspired by the Autry Classroom Curators partnership with Sonia Hanson of Maywood Center for Enriched Studies.

## Images

Betye Saar (born 1926), *Blow Top Blues: The Fire Next Time*, 1998, lithograph. Autry Museum of the American West; 2018.45.1

## Texts

Leonard Feather and Jane Feather. First recording December 29, 1944. *Blow Top Blues*. Etta Jones with Barney Bigard and his Orchestra. T-918.221.642-8. February 1945. Vinyl.

**Do you want to see the artwork you created on our  
Instagram or Twitter?**

Then send a photograph of the artwork you made along with some basic information (your name, your age, artwork title, materials used to make the artwork, etc.) to [outreach@theautry.org](mailto:outreach@theautry.org) for a chance to be featured on our social media!