

Raven Halfmoon: Flags of Our Mothers (installation view), The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, June 25, 2023 to January 7, 2024. Photo by Jason Mandella.

LESSON PLAN: SECONDARY (GRADES 6–12)

RAVEN HALFMOON: FLAGS OF OUR MOTHERS

OKLAHOMA CONTEMPORARY

SHAPE THE STORY: EXPLORING IDENTITY AND STORYTELLING THROUGH CONTEMPORARY ART

Time: 1–2 class periods
Subjects: Visual Art, English Language Arts, Social Studies, Humanities
Video Resource: *Shape the Story featuring Raven Halfmoon*
Produced by: Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Raven Halfmoon is an artist and sculptor from Norman, Oklahoma. She is a citizen of the Caddo Nation and also Choctaw, Delaware and Otoe Missouria. Working primarily in ceramics, Halfmoon creates monumental sculptures that explore identity, ancestry, gender and personal experience.

Learn more: ravenhalfmoon.com
Explore the exhibition: *Raven Halfmoon: Flags of Our Mothers* | Oklahoma Contemporary

A NOTE FOR EDUCATORS

Native peoples and nations are diverse, contemporary communities with distinct histories, cultures and governments. When discussing Raven Halfmoon's work, center what the artist shares about her own identity and experiences rather than asking students to generalize about Native peoples or Caddo culture.

Encourage students to keep interpretation grounded in evidence. Help students distinguish between **what they observe, what the artist tells us and what they infer.** When discussing Halfmoon's identity, experiences or cultural connections, return to her words, artwork and supporting resources.

The goal is not to make artwork that looks like Halfmoon's work. Instead, students investigate how an artist's experiences, relationships, identity and community can inform creative choices. Encourage students to draw from their own experiences and make intentional choices about how they communicate their ideas rather than imitate culturally specific imagery or traditions.

OKLAHOMA ACADEMIC STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

Visual Art | Grades 6–12

- **VA.CP.3 | Creative Process:** Apply concepts, vocabulary, techniques and skills to make creative choices and practice individual expression.
- **VA.CHP.1 | Cultural and Historical Perspectives:** Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.
- **VA.P.1 | Production:** Utilize a variety of ideas and subject matter in the creation of original works of visual art.
- **VA.P.2.2 | Production:** Explore issues of appropriation, fair use, copyright and the ethical use of imagery.

English Language Arts

- **Standard 1 | Listening and Speaking:** Students listen and speak effectively, contributing ideas and responding to others through collaborative discussion.
- **Standard 7 | Multimodal Literacies:** Students comprehend and communicate ideas through visual, written, spoken, spatial and/or gestural content.
- **Standard 3 | Critical Reading and Writing:** Students apply critical thinking to interpret texts and communicate ideas for different purposes and audiences. Best used when students engage with the artist's written or spoken words as part of the lesson.

Social Studies

- **Social Studies Practices | Sources + Perspectives:** Students analyze visual, oral and written sources, including artwork, to draw conclusions; consider historical and cultural perspectives; and communicate ideas through collaborative discussion.
- **Oklahoma History | Tribal Nations:** Students examine the historical and contemporary experiences of Oklahoma's American Indian Nations, including identity, culture, sovereignty and self-determination.
- **Grade 8 U.S. History | American Indian Nations:** The lesson can support further study of Tribal sovereignty, Indian Removal, resistance and differing Native perspectives within U.S. history.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Analyze how Raven Halfmoon uses material, scale, imagery and personal experience to communicate meaning.
- Examine how identity, family, experience and community can inform an artist's perspective and creative choices.
- Interpret visual and spoken information from the artist, distinguishing observation from inference and supporting ideas with evidence.
- Communicate a story or experience from their own life through intentional visual, written or combined choices.

MATERIALS

- Access to *Shape the Story*
- Student notebooks or journals
- Writing and drawing materials
- Projector or smartboard
- Images of Raven Halfmoon's work

LESSON STEPS

1. Engage | 10 minutes

Before viewing the video, invite students to consider one of the following:

- What are some ways people communicate stories without writing or speaking?
- What parts of your own story connect to a person, place, experience or community?
- What can an object or material communicate about a person or their experiences?

Introduce Raven Halfmoon as a contemporary artist and sculptor from Norman, Oklahoma. Halfmoon is a citizen of the Caddo Nation and also Choctaw, Delaware and Otoe Missouria. Her monumental ceramic sculptures draw from personal experience, ancestry, identity and her perspective as a contemporary artist.

Invite students to look closely at one of Halfmoon's works before offering additional interpretation. Ask students to identify **what they notice and what those observations make them wonder.**

2. Watch + Discuss | 15–20 minutes

Play *Shape the Story.* Ask students to record observations, questions and statements from Halfmoon that stand out to them.

After viewing, discuss:

- What experiences, relationships or stories does Halfmoon connect to her work?
- What does Halfmoon tell us about the ways her identity, family and Caddo heritage connect to her practice?
- How do material, scale and surface contribute to the meaning or impact of her sculptures?
- Where do you notice connections between personal experience and larger histories or communities?
- What artistic choices does Halfmoon make to communicate her ideas?
- Which of your interpretations are based on something you observed? Which are supported by something Halfmoon shared?

Encourage students to support their interpretations with evidence from Halfmoon's artwork and words. When an idea is an inference, invite students to identify it as such rather than treating it as a fact about the artist or her cultural background.

3. Create + Reflect | 20–30 minutes

Introduce the central question:

What stories shape who you are?

Invite students to identify a person, place, relationship, experience, memory or community that has shaped part of who they are.

Students choose the format that best communicates their idea:

- **Visual:** Create an original artwork that communicates something about your experiences, relationships, identity or community. Make intentional choices about color, shape, imagery, material, scale, pattern or composition based on what you want to communicate.
- **Written:** Develop a short reflection, poem or personal narrative that communicates a meaningful person, place, experience or story from your life. Consider how structure, language, detail and point of view shape what you communicate.
- **Visual + Written:** Combine artwork and writing, considering what each form communicates and how the two work together to develop your idea.

Encourage students to begin with their own experiences rather than borrowing imagery from Halfmoon's work. The goal is to investigate **how artists make choices to communicate meaning**, not to recreate Halfmoon's visual language.

4. Share + Connect | 10 minutes

Invite students to share with a partner, small group or classroom gallery. Students may choose what they are comfortable sharing about the personal experiences behind their work.

Use prompts such as:

- What choices did you make to communicate your idea?
- How did your choice of format, material, imagery or language affect what you communicated?
- Did making the work change or clarify the way you thought about your story?
- What different approaches do you notice in the ways people communicated their ideas?
- What questions do you have after experiencing someone else's work?
- Return to the central question: **How do stories take shape in our lives and in the art we make?**

ASSESSMENT

Look for evidence that students:

- Observe closely and contribute to discussion.
- Distinguish between observation, artist-provided information and inference.
- Support interpretations with evidence from Halfmoon's artwork or words.
- Make intentional visual and/or written choices to communicate an idea.
- Connect their creative decisions to their own experiences, relationships or communities.
- Reflect on how creative choices shape meaning.

Optional Exit Ticket: Complete the sentence: *A story can take shape through…*

EXTEND THE LEARNING

English Language Arts

- Analyze *Shape the Story* alongside Halfmoon's written or spoken words, considering perspective, point of view and how meaning changes across different forms of communication.
- Develop a personal narrative or poem around family, place, identity, experience or community.
- Compare how artists and writers make choices about what they communicate, what they leave unsaid and how they address an audience.
- Translate an idea from one mode to another, such as turning a written reflection into a visual composition, and discuss what changes in the process.

Social Studies

- Investigate the histories and contemporary experiences of Native nations in Oklahoma, emphasizing that each nation has its own history, government, citizens and cultural traditions.
- Examine the distinction between Native nations as sovereign political entities and broader cultural or geographic identities.
- Research a specific Native nation using sources produced by that nation whenever possible.
- Analyze artwork alongside written, oral or historical sources, distinguishing observation, evidence and inference.
- Consider how individuals and communities communicate identity and experience across generations.

Visual Arts

- Analyze how Halfmoon uses scale, clay, surface, repetition and form to communicate meaning.
- Research contemporary Native and Oklahoma-based artists, identifying artists by their specific nation or community affiliation when relevant.
- Compare how contemporary artists make different choices about material, scale, imagery and personal experience to communicate ideas.
- Investigate appropriation, influence and original expression. Discuss the difference between learning from another artist's creative process and copying culturally specific imagery or visual language.

STEM/STEAM Extension

- Investigate the physical properties of clay and how drying and firing transform the material.
- Explore how scale affects structural and material decisions in ceramic sculpture.
- Examine pattern, texture, repetition and proportion as both artistic and mathematical concepts.



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This exhibition is organized by
The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum
and Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts.

Curated by Amy Smith-Stewart and Rachel Adams.

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