

Free To Be Me: Exploring Identity



Skewered

The protagonists of **Deborah Roberts'** collages are eight to ten-year-old black girls — subjects who rarely find themselves in the spotlight of art history. Often wearing polka dots, striped skirts, bows, and barrettes, these knobby-kneed pre-teenagers remind us of the vulnerable age when kids (and especially girls) begin to possess a kind of self-consciousness that often devolves into insecurity, especially if they do not adhere to societal standards of beauty and behavior.

In *Skewered*, a pile of matches form the bun on the top of her head and hint at the volatile events that inspired this portrait: the 2017 acquittal of the Minnesota police officer who killed Philando Castile. Castile was shot to death after being stopped for having a broken tail light, as his girlfriend and her four-year-old daughter watched. The police officer stated that his “broad nose” matched the description of a recent robbery suspect. Roberts places a mask of a white person in the girl's hand, explaining that “if she puts that in front of her, maybe she will survive.”

Roberts elaborates: “I need the collages to break ties as well as heal them; to be both powerful and vulnerable, fragile and fashionable, narrative and non-realistic, but most importantly I want them to challenge the notion that beauty is simply black and white, or only this and not that, and to challenge the notion that we should dehumanize others to feel superior.”



Action Projects

After engaging your students in discussions about the artwork and the theme of 'Identity' the next step will be the Action Projects! Consider how we can raise awareness about diverse identities and how we engage with them.

AT HOME: Take pictures of symbols that represent a community you identify with (*think: what do people in this community value?*). Write a letter to a young person with positive messages to help them get through life when they might feel torn or conflicted about their identities (*think: race, age, ethnicity, gender, status...*). Give them the letter.

Thank you act: Reach out to someone that has supported or inspired you to better understand yourself. Call them on the phone or write them a letter/email to say "thank you" and share with them how they were helpful. Do it!

IN SCHOOL: Have your class create art posters that show their diverse identities. Invite the school to view your gallery. Draw a family or community tree that includes all of your strengths (e.g. creativity, bravery, persistence). Consider where they come from and how they are reinforced at school and home. On your own or with a group create a dramatic/spoken word/or visual piece that responds to this artwork and your class' identities and strengths.

IN THE COMMUNITY: Create a public awareness campaign on social media that responds to this artwork and the class' identities and strengths. Brainstorm ideas of things that could change so that people do not feel so torn about who they are or who they should be, and include pictures and descriptions of things that are "helping." (*think: what is working, what gives you hope?*). Have students conduct a survey about the issue of identity in various community groups (sports, band, church, etc.). How might colorism impact the results?

				
ESTEEM	RESILIENCE	GROWTH	COMMUNITY	CHANGE
Feel Better	Do Better	Be Better	Better Belonging	Better Conditions

Note: As you work through this guide, notice these **five dimensions**, which reflect how art captures our ongoing efforts at improvement and growth. More specifically, these dimensions often reflect how we feel, what we do, how we want to be and be seen, the groups we belong to, and how conditions in society can be better. Research suggests that the more aware we are of our circumstances, the better we are able to self-regulate, make healthy decisions, relate to others, and work toward longer-term, functional goals — even in the face of adversity.

The Individual and Community Empowerment Framework includes the dimensions of esteem, resilience, and growth (for individual empowerment), and community and change (for community empowerment). The framework and table are adapted from Travis & Deepak (2011) and Travis (2013), the CREATE Lab, and FlowStory.

TALK

*Look at the artwork *Skewered* by Deborah Roberts. Look for a full minute. Turn to a friend and discuss what you see.*

What feelings come up for you while viewing this artwork? Collect some one-word responses, phrases or ideas on chart paper.






LOOK

Take a minute to look longer and spend some time thinking about the following questions:

- What are some initial impressions of this artwork?
 - What is happening in this artwork?
 - What age might this young person be?
 - How have they been “assembled”? Why have they been “assembled”?
 - Why might the artist have chosen collage as the medium?
 - How do you feel when looking at this artwork?
-

TALK

Self Talk. Reflect or journal on the following core questions:

-  Who am I?
-  What stories about my experiences would I like to tell others, but have not been able to?
-  In what ways am I trying to be better, to be the best version of myself?
-  What groups do I have a strong connection to or belong to? Where do I feel at home?
-  How may societal conditions cause people to feel left out, like they don't belong or are unimportant?

Peer Talk. Turn to a friend and discuss one or two of the core questions above. Talk about the ways people and communities contribute to our sense of self.



Turning back to the art...

- What can we say about the title *Skewered*?
- What can we say about this young person's sense of self?
- What might the artist be asking us to consider about beauty?
- Why has a young person been chosen as the protagonist for this message?
- What potential issues might they be up against?
- What things could change so that this person does not feel unsure about who they are or who they should be?

ACT

First, consider these questions:

How do I identify based on race, age, gender, status, or ethnicity?

How is my identity assembled?

How do I feel about my identity?

How do I show others my identity?

What role does complexion play in my identity?

How can I intentionally get to know myself and those around me?

How do I challenge myself to be better in how I act and view others related to my race, ethnicity, gender, or status?

What can I do to help others feel included, important, and more authentically themselves?

Using Deborah Roberts' method of collage, create a version of this artwork that depicts yourself. How do you want to represent yourself? What joys and struggles do you want to communicate?



Resource Guide

ADL's No Place for Hate[®], the Blanton Museum of Art, AISD, and The CREATE Lab have teamed up to bring anti-bias education and object based learning to our schools. This resource is one in a series featuring a work of art from the Blanton selected to foster important conversations and inspire students to act! The theme for this series is **Identity**, and this work of art should be used to foster curiosity about ourselves and others and raise awareness of our sense of belonging.

This guide has everything you need to create successful discussions and a No Place for Hate Action Project.

Here you will find:

- No Place for Hate guidelines for Action Projects
- Information about the artist and artwork
- Guiding questions for initial discussion and making
- Suggested community action projects



As this guide reaches multiple schools, we hope it will inspire students to work together to create action projects that can be shared and celebrated.

Please share your projects to austin@adl.org, education@blantonmuseum.org and Cultural.Proficiency@austinisd.org



BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

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No Place For Hate®

No Place for Hate® is a self-directed framework helping educators and students take the lead on improving and maintaining a school climate where all students thrive. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) offers resources to ensure that anti-bias and diversity education are an integral part of the school curriculum. No Place for Hate® also helps create and sustain inclusive school environments where all students feel valued and have the opportunity to succeed by promoting respect for individual difference while challenging bigotry and prejudice. Launched in Austin schools in the fall of 2004, the popular campaign has been embraced by hundreds of campuses throughout the Central Texas region. Austin ISD is the largest No Place for Hate® school district in the United States.

The Need for Discussion

The success of No Place for Hate® relies on the assurance that all members of school communities have a central voice in creating a plan that will lead to lasting change. The foundation for creating that change is a strong coalition of school leaders — students, educators, and family members — who have a stake in the outcomes of that plan.

There is no more obvious stakeholder than a student. Too often, adults assume they know what is needed to support youth, but without engaging students in the process, change can be elusive. No Place for Hate® Committees create activities that amplify students' voices and give them opportunities be active participants.

All qualifying activities must be consistent with the No Place for Hate® mission by challenging bigotry, bias and bullying; exposing young people to diverse identity groups, backgrounds and points of view; promoting respect for individual and group differences; and providing opportunities for community-building within the school. Projects should challenge students to think critically, instill a sense of empathy, and empower students to become allies for one another.

No Place For Hate® Activities Should:

- Involve all students in active learning
- Involve all students in discussion and debriefing of activities
- Address school-based issues
- Have a school-wide impact
- Take place throughout the school year, with three or more activities spread out over time
- Focus on inclusivity and community

For more information visit austin.adl.org/noplaceforhate.

