

## Opinion Writing: *I PUT A SPELL ON YOU*, Jeffrey Gibson, 2015

### Overview

Students will use images of art from the exhibition *Southern Accent Seeking the American South in Contemporary Art* as a prompt for opinion writing.

Begin by leading the class in a visual discussion of *I PUT A SPELL ON YOU*, 2015 by Jeffrey Gibson. Focus the conversation into creating a list of everything you see in the image. Consider objects, materials, colors, shapes and more. A full list should include at least fifteen items.

#### Materials include:

Re-purposed punching bag, glass beads, artificial sinew, and steel



Jeffrey Gibson, *I PUT A SPELL ON YOU*, 2015. Re-purposed punching bag, glass beads, artificial sinew, and steel; 40 x 14 x 14 inches (101.6 x 35.6 x 35.6 cm). Collection of the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Museum purchase, 2015.11.1. © Jeffrey Gibson Studio. Photo by Peter Paul Geoffrion.

Next, encourage the students to list the possible broad topics they think the image addresses. Ask them to identify the specific details that connect to these issues.

Then, continue the discussion with questions such as:

- Does an object like this belong in a museum?  
What does the title, *I PUT A SPELL ON YOU* suggest?
- Does it say anything about American Indians?
- Jeffrey Gibson is a Choctaw-Cherokee painter and sculptor. Do students think his is proud of his identity? Why or why not?
- How would it feel to hit this punching bag?
- Would hitting the bag be an assault on Native American culture?

Gibson's title comes from a 1956 song by Jay Hawkins. In his alterations, Gibson decorates and "feminizes" the punching bag. He also defuses its functionality.

**Next, ask each student to write a sentence that delivers an opinion about one of the topics discussed. After a few minutes, have 2 or 3 students share their sentence and lead the class in a short discussion of the process.**

**Finally, have students consider a third artwork from *Southern Accent* and respond to it independently through a piece of opinion writing.**

## **Opinion Writing: *Unraveling*, 2015 - present, Sonya Clark**

### **Overview**

**Students will use images of art from the exhibition *Southern Accent Seeking the American South in Contemporary Art* as a prompt for opinion writing.**

### **Activity:**

**First, ask students to share with the group what they see. Teachers should remind their students that, at this point, they are only offering observations based on the artwork, not opinions.**

**Next, share contextual information about the art work with the class.**

- **Artist works in textiles.**
- **Clark says her interest in sewing and textiles comes from her grandmother, who used to have Sonya practice sewing while she listened to her stories.**
- **This is a performance piece – thus it is not just a static object but part of an interaction by the artist with others present.**
- **Clark slowly unravels a Confederate flag, often with the help of her audience.**
- **She can unravel about a half inch per hour – thus it is slow going.**
- **The performance becomes a metaphor for the difficulty of unraveling the legacy of the Confederate South..**
- **The unraveled piles of thread are separated by color (red, white and blue) and potentially provide the raw material for the creation of something else.**



Sonya Clark, *Unraveling*, 2015–present. Cotton Confederate battle flag and unraveled threads, edition 2/10; 70 x 36 x 7 inches (177.8 x 91.4 x 17.8 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Sonya Clark. Photo by Taylor Dabney.

- **Clark started this performance shortly before the June 2015 massacre of nine black Americans at a church study group by a 21-year-old white man.**

**Next, review the key components to opinion writing – an introduction, an opinion, reasons that support the opinion, linking words that connect the opinion to the reasons, and a concluding statement.**

**Finally, have each student respond to Clark’s artwork through a piece of opinion writing.**

### **Extension Activity**

**Have a discussion about Civil War symbols and how they are/are not perpetuating acts of violence/hate.**