

# ***"I Know a Man ... Ashley Bryan* Resource and Activity Guide for Educators** **Grades 7-12 Social Studies**

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## **Introduction**

"Ashley Bryan is a gentle activist, and I believe that history will remember him as one of the more important humanitarians of our time."

— Mary Laury, Schoodic Arts for All, Executive Director

***"I Know a Man... Ashley Bryan"*** paints a tender portrait of a uniquely American life. A moving exploration of the work and philosophy of 94-year-old artist Ashley Bryan, this short film showcases the exuberance of this "creative wonder." Bryan has written and illustrated over 50 children's books, fought in World War II in an all-Black battalion, and dedicates his life to beauty and joy through his art. By providing ideas for framing thematic **discussions**, creative classroom **activities**, and supplemental **resources** for students and teachers, this Educator Guide serves as a springboard for deeper learning in response to the film's topics and themes.

Through the lens of Ashley Bryan's prolific career, the film asks us to consider

### **Essential Questions:**

- What do we owe our country? What does our country owe us?
- Why does man choose war?

Each activity in this Guide can stand alone or be done together in any order. Activities come complete with helpful additions such as essential questions, extension possibilities, material suggestions, and relevant core curriculum standards. Since you know your students and classroom best, we encourage you to adapt activities to best serve your needs.

## **Pre-Viewing Discussion Questions**

Time required: 5-10 minutes

*Common Core State Standards: SL.9.1* (Note: The standards are benchmarked using 9th grade; however, the standards can be adjusted to fit the grade level appropriate within the 7th-12th grade band)

Before showing the film to your class, spend a few minutes getting them thinking about the Essential Questions. Possible student responses and additional information are included in italics. Try one or two of the following prompts:

1. Ashley Bryan was born in 1923, in Harlem, New York, and served in World War II. What do we know already about this time period? (*This question is designed to elicit students' background knowledge, so it is fine if there is some unfamiliarity before watching the film*);
2. What does it mean to be an American? Does this definition of "American" change across time and people? How? (*Students' responses might include: different across race, class, geography, age or generation, or that the definition does not change*);
3. When we study history, how do we know what happened? What are the pieces of history? (*If students are stuck, offer examples like: personal narratives, cultural traditions, national events, local events, written records, photographs, artifacts, etc*).

### Student Glossary

*Common Core State Standards: RI.9.4; RH.9.4*

This section provides students with context for perhaps unfamiliar vocabulary in the film. Several of the words have multiple meanings, such as **portfolio** and **draft**, so students may come with previous understandings of the words outside of this context of this guide. In the spirit of Ashley Bryan, encourage students to demonstrate their understanding of each term visually and artistically with illustrations. After viewing, students could compare illustrations with classmates. How are their representations similar and different?

**Portfolio:** A set of pieces of creative work intended to demonstrate a person's ability to a potential employer.

(<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/portfolio>)

**Cooper Union:** A private college in New York City that was founded in 1859. Unlike most institutions at the time, the school accepted all people, regardless of gender, race or class. The Cooper Union offers degrees in art, architecture and engineering, as well as courses in the humanities and social sciences. (<https://cooper.edu/about/history>)

**The draft:** Mandatory recruitment into the military.

(<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/draft>)

**World War Two:** A war (1939–45) in which the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) were defeated by an alliance eventually including the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, and the United States.

([https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/second\\_world\\_war](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/second_world_war))

**Hiroshima and Nagasaki:** Two cities on the south and west coasts of Japan, respectively. Hiroshima was the target of the first atom bomb, which was dropped by the United States on 6 August 1945 and resulted in the deaths of about one third of the city's population of 300,000. Together with a second attack on Nagasaki three days later, this led to Japan's surrender and the end of the Second World War.

(<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hiroshima>)

### Post-Viewing Discussion Questions

Time required: 5-10 minutes

*Common Core State Standards: RI.9.3; SL.9.1*

To effectively process the most complex and thought-provoking aspects of the film, engage students in discussion as soon as possible after viewing. Use the questions below for an informal conversation as a whole class, or split students into small groups,

assigning them each a different question. Possible student responses are included in italics. If time allows, encourage students to represent their answers creatively, in both written and visual or performance form. (Ideas: posters, murals, paper sculptures, songs, or dances.)

1. What challenges did Ashley Bryan face as he pursued a career as an artist? *(growing up in poverty, segregation and racism when applying to college, getting drafted for WWII in his last year of college, fighting at D-Day, Hiroshima and Nagasaki)*
2. What was Ashley Bryan's experience before and after he served in the war? *(he was drafted, had no choice to be there, used art as an escape, was profoundly impacted by the atomic bombs)*
3. Ashley Bryan's website describes him as a "humanitarian," defined as "a person who seeks to promote human welfare." Do you agree? Why or why not? *(This question could be asked again after the activities, to see how students' understandings change)*

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**Activity: Gordon Parks *American Gothic***

"The unexamined life is not worth living."  
-Socrates

Time required: 30-45 minutes

Common Core State Standards: RH.9.1; RH.9.6; RH.9.9; RI.9.2; RI.9.6; RI.9.9

**Essential Questions:** What does it mean to be "American"? How does that definition shift across time and people?

**Materials:**

- Gordon Park's photograph *Government Charwoman* (as seen at 1:40 in *I Know a Man...Ashley Bryan*) (<https://iconicphotos.wordpress.com/2014/05/08/american-gothic-gordon-parks/>)
- Grant Wood's painting *American Gothic* (<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/6565/american-gothic>)
- Jacob Lawrence's painting panel 57 from *The Great Migration* series (<https://lawrencemigration.phillipscollection.org/>)
- Paper, pencils

**Activity:**

When describing his father's immigrant experience, Ashley Bryan says they "gave him the mop and the broom" (1:40), a reference to Gordon Park's famous photograph, *Government Charwoman*. This activity has students compare the photograph to a panel in Jacob Lawrence's series *The Great Migration* and Grant Wood's painting *American Gothic*, and then moves into a discussion of how the experience and definition of being an "American" changes across time and people. As much of this activity is discussion-based, think about which questions would be best whole group, in partners, or small group break-outs to keep engagement strong. Use of structured protocols may be helpful in providing an effective framework for students to access the three images; included in the "Additional Resources" section is a link for Thinking Routines from Harvard's Project Zero, with specific routines listed that are most relevant.

1. Rewatch the section of the film from 1:39-1:52, where Bryan talks about his father's immigrant experience.
2. Show the image of Gordon Park's photograph. Ask students what they notice (*students may mention that it's from 1942, that the woman is holding a mop and broom, standing in front of a flag, it's a photograph, in black and white*).
3. Show panel 57 from Jacob Lawrence's *The Great Migration* series. Tell students this was a painting Gordon Parks was probably familiar with (shown in 1941). Ask students what they notice (it is a painting, limited colors, has a woman holding a broom in the center).
4. Show students image of Grant Wood's painting, American Gothic. Tell students that Gordon Parks eventually changed the title of his photograph from "Government Charwoman" to "American Gothic." Ask students what they notice (*students may notice it's from 1930, is a painting, is a white couple, man holding a pitchfork, standing in front of a barn*).
5. Have students discuss what they think each artist was trying to say. Do the two works have different effects on us? How?
6. Remind students of Ashley Bryan's quote, about how they gave his dad the mop and broom when he arrived in America. What is Ashley Bryan saying about his father's experience as an American? How does this differ from Parks' and Woods' messages?
7. As an extension of this activity, students could illustrate or write what their own message on what being an "American" is.

#### **Additional Resources:**

Thinking Routines (Suggested protocols: See/Think/Wonder, Creative Questions, Perceive/Know/Care About, Headlines, I Used to Think...Now I Think...So I Will..., )

- [http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking\\_html\\_files/03\\_ThinkingRoutines/03c\\_CoreRoutines.html](http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03c_CoreRoutines.html)
- <http://pzartfulthinking.org/>

Exhibition on Gordon Parks from November 2018-February 2019 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

- <https://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2018/gordon-parks-the-new-tide-1940-1950.html>
- [https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/a-national-gallery-show-examines-gordon-parkss-early-years/2018/11/25/eab1e802-ef35-11e8-baac-2a674e91502b\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.3c4ecca2b1b7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/a-national-gallery-show-examines-gordon-parkss-early-years/2018/11/25/eab1e802-ef35-11e8-baac-2a674e91502b_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.3c4ecca2b1b7)

Article discussing talking about race in the classroom

- <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/01/talking-race-suburbs>

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#### **Activity: Double V-Day**

Time required: 60-75 minutes (could also be split across two classes)

*Common Core State Standards: RI.9.6; RI.9.7; RI.9.9; RH.9.1; RH.9.2; SL.9.3*

**Essential Questions:** What do we owe our country? What does our country owe us? How do different people react to the trials of war?

#### **Required Materials:**

- Double V-Day letter to the editor (linked here: [http://www.learner.org/courses/amerhistory/resource\\_archive/resource.php?unitChoice=19&ThemeNum=3&resourceType=2&resourceID=10106](http://www.learner.org/courses/amerhistory/resource_archive/resource.php?unitChoice=19&ThemeNum=3&resourceType=2&resourceID=10106))

- Audio of Ashley Bryan's interviews about his experiences at D-Day (<https://savvypainter.com/podcast/ashley/> and <http://www.thestory.org/stories/2013-06/artist-d-day>) \*Note: While the entire interviews are worth listening to, the following sections are most relevant to the current activity:
  - *Savvy Painter*: 0-2:46 (Introduction and framing of the interview), 11:44-17:55 (Ashley Bryan's wartime experiences).
  - *The Story*: 5:03-9:28 (Ashley Bryan's wartime experiences)
- Pictures of the sketches Bryan completed during his time serving (from <https://savvypainter.com/podcast/ashley/>)
- [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N4R4Owg-4N-MDTOD\\_HfCzq5PEdfwLf6l/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N4R4Owg-4N-MDTOD_HfCzq5PEdfwLf6l/view?usp=sharing) (Reprinted from the May/June 2018 issue of *The Horn Book Magazine* by permission of The Horn Book, Inc. (www.hbook.com) and the Ashley Bryan Center (ashleybryancenter.org).)

### Extension Materials:

- A video or textbook summary of what D-Day was
- Pictures and maps of D-Day
- Timeline of Ashley Bryan's life  
[https://ashleybryancenter.org/index.html#timeline\\_header](https://ashleybryancenter.org/index.html#timeline_header)
- *Courage Has No Color: The True Story of the Triple Nickels, America's First Black Paratroopers* by Tanya Stone (Ashley Bryan wrote the foreword, and some of his artwork is included in the book)
- <https://vimeo.com/57566716> (Book trailer for *Courage Has No Color*)
- *Forgotten: The Untold Story of D-Day's Black Heroes at Home and at War* by Linda Hervieux

### Activity:

This activity is designed to zoom into the experience of war, and the way those experiences shape later actions. As a result of his service, Ashley Bryan's art and philosophy changed. Another perspective considered here is the way fighting in the war inspired activism at home. After listening to interviews with Ashley Bryan about his experiences, students then read a letter to the editor from a soldier 1942, which prompted the "Double-V" campaign to end discrimination for soldiers of color returning home. Students end with a discussion of how war impacts different groups of people, and what the specific context of fighting in WWII as a person of color was like.

1. Frame the activity for students. Explain that this activity focuses on the different experiences of World War II through the lens of African American soldiers (Ashley Bryan and James Thompson). Through their experiences, we can try to understand the impact of war on individuals as well as on society.
2. Have students listen to the interviews with Ashley Bryan linked above, while students record/discuss the following questions: *What were Ashley Bryan's wartime experiences? What does Ashley Bryan believe about art during difficult times? What does it mean to "preserve your humanity"? Why were Ashley Bryan's sketchbooks important to him during the war?*
3. Read James Thompson's letter to the editor, focusing on what Thompson's wartime experience was, and how his service changed him. The language of the letter is fairly accessible, so consider what type of reading will be most engaging for students (whole class read aloud, paired reading, independent reading, etc.).

4. Discuss: Based on these two contexts, what was life like as an African American soldier during World War II? How does the experience of war change individuals and society? (This could be done as a chalk talk, with each question posted on a separate piece of chart paper. Students rotate silently to respond with their ideas as well as offer their reflections on others' ideas. For more on chalk talk procedures: [https://www.nsrharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/chalk\\_talk\\_0.pdf](https://www.nsrharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/chalk_talk_0.pdf))

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