**Stories of Our Community**

**Essential Question** How do places shape lives and communities? What inspires people to make art?

**Grade** K–5

**Time** 45–60 minutes

**Art Concepts** abstract, background, collage, composition, foreground, mixed media, realistic, scene, storytelling

**Materials** white card stock, variety of color paints (or markers), mixed-media collage items (photographs, magazine pages, newspaper), pencil, scissors, glue

**Artwork in Focus** [*De Style*](https://collections.lacma.org/node/174700)*,* Kerry James Marshall, 1993

**Talking about Art** This artwork is titled *De Style* and was created by Los Angeles artist Kerry James Marshall in 1993. His identity as a Black American artist has shaped most of his artwork, including this piece. The title is inspired from a barbershop he used to work at called House of Style. Culturally, barbershops are seen as oases for the Black community, so he felt very comfortable and safe in this space. He draws attention to how fun these places are, with colorful backgrounds and elaborate hairstyles. It was important to him that he illustrated that Black urban life has a place in the art world.

This masterwork is also huge, eight by ten feet, which makes the figures almost life-size and life-like—and allows viewers to look into the eyes of every person in the scene.

Marshall’s painting is distinct in that it’s neither realistic nor abstract, and it depicts a common everyday scene. The enormity of the painting reminds us that this place means a lot to this community. The ordinary is extraordinary.

**Making Art** Let’s brainstorm for a little. Think about a time when you felt particularly safe and happy. Where were you? At home? A park? Restaurant? Place of worship? At the movies? Think about who’s around you in that scene and what objects are nearby.

1. Starting with a pencil and paper, lightly draw out the background of your scene. Make sure your composition takes up the whole paper, and try to avoid drawing very small things. Don’t draw any details yet!
2. Now get your paints ready and paint in your background. Make sure to stay inside the lines and be sure to cover the whole paper with paint.
3. While we wait for it to dry, let’s use our mixed-media collage items to make the details of the scene (people, objects). Using your pencil and colored paper, magazines, and newspaper, start drawing out the people and objects you would see in this scene. You can use different materials for different things.
4. Using scissors, let’s carefully cut out the people and objects we drew.
5. Our painting should be dry by now, so first let’s carefully arrange all of our pieces on the painting—but don’t glue them down yet! Move some pieces around and play with the composition. Find out what works best.
6. Once you’ve settled on placement design, go ahead and glue down all the pieces.

**Reflection** Why did you choose to make art about this specific place? What does it mean to you? How did you feel while you were making it? Do you think it looks realistic or abstract?

Look back at Marshall’s artwork, *De Style*. Does your artwork have any similarities to, or differences from, his work?

**Curriculum**

**Connections** Common Core State Standards English Language Arts

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1 Ask and answer such questions as: who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.4 Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace

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