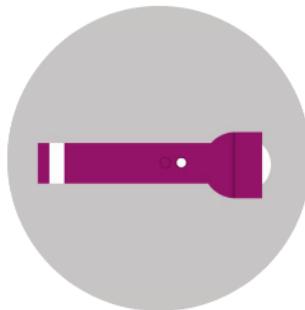


Renwick Gallery
Smithsonian American Art Museum

Thinking Through Craft

**Uncovering
Hidden Stories**





Uncovering Hidden Stories

Unit Overview

Grades

Middle School-Upper School

Unit Goal

This unit uses artwork to help students develop the skill of seeking the context (side story) and what is not stated or visible (the hidden story) in order to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of topics, events, phenomenon, and issues.

Curricular Connections

Historical or literary narratives often have a particular focus, often based on the author's chosen perspective or due to a lack of research. The disposition to uncover hidden stories invites students to see history as a multi-faceted puzzle and challenges them to fill in any missing pieces. Consider using this unit as an entry point to studying the development of civilizations or any complex historical narrative.

Essential Questions

- How can looking at the context and seeking what is not visible deepen our understanding of issues, events, and people?
- What is a main story?
- What is a side story?
- What is a hidden story?
- How does exploring all three stories deepen our understanding of issues, events, and people?

Duration

This unit requires an estimated 75 minutes, plus optional metacognitive breaks. These breaks provide students an opportunity to reflect upon their thinking (metacognition) in order to better understand that thinking pattern and transfer it to other content areas and to the world outside of school.

Artworks

This guide focuses on Nick Cave's *Soundsuit* but—with some adaptations—several artworks from the Renwick Gallery can be used to support this unit, including:

- Margarita Cabrera's *Black and Grey Toaster*
- Sebastian Martorana's *Impressions*
- Karen LaMonte's *Reclining Dress Impression with Drapery*

Arc of Learning

Step 1 → Introduction (5 minutes)

Students will examine a box provided by the teacher to discern what kinds of information can be gained by looking closely. What information requires deeper digging?

Step 2 → What Is Visible (The Main Story) (10 minutes)

Students will look closely at an artwork to further exercise their skills with a more ornate, less familiar object. When we talk about issues or events, what kinds of information is easy to acquire? In this exercise, the main story is the information that is readily apparent in any type of text. Feel free to substitute any appropriate term that appears in your curriculum.

Step 3 → What Is the Artwork About? (10 minutes)

Based on what they have observed of the artwork and the information they have conjectured, students will interpret the artwork. What might have motivated the artist to create this artwork? What message might the artist be trying to convey?

Step 4 → Considering the Context (The Side Story) (15 minutes)

Based on their own experience, then extending into conjecture, students will consider the experience of wearing the artwork in order to better understand its use. In this exercise, the side story is the context in which a story takes place, the time period, the environment, the values, etc. Instead of "side story," feel free to substitute any appropriate term that appears in your curriculum.

Step 5 → What Remains Unknown (Hidden Story)? (10 minutes)

What remains hidden or unknown about the artwork? What might be the value of seeking out the hidden story? In this exercise, the hidden story is what is not known publicly about the story. Instead of "hidden story," feel free to substitute any appropriate term that appears in your curriculum.

Step 6 → I Used To Think... Now I Think... (10 minutes)

Students will read an excerpt about the artist and artwork. They will then reinterpret the artwork using the information provided. They will compare their earlier interpretation with the more recent one and reflect on what influenced the change.

Step 7 → Reflection (10 minutes)

Students will consider what new insights they gained about main, side, and hidden stories from engaging with the artwork. In what ways does considering all three grow and deepen understanding of issues, events, and people? Why might it be important to seek all of the stories?





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Student Edition

Essential Questions

- How can looking at the context and seeking what is not visible deepen our understanding of issues, events, and people?
- What is the main story?
- What is a side story?
- What is a hidden story?
- How does exploring all three stories deepen our understanding of issues, events, and people?



Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 2009

Mixed media, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the James Renwick Alliance and museum purchase through the Luisita L. and Franz H. Denghausen Endowment, 2012.34A-B, © 2009, Nick Cave. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo by James Prinz Photography



Step 1 ✤ An Introduction

Carefully study the box on display carefully, then document your observations below.

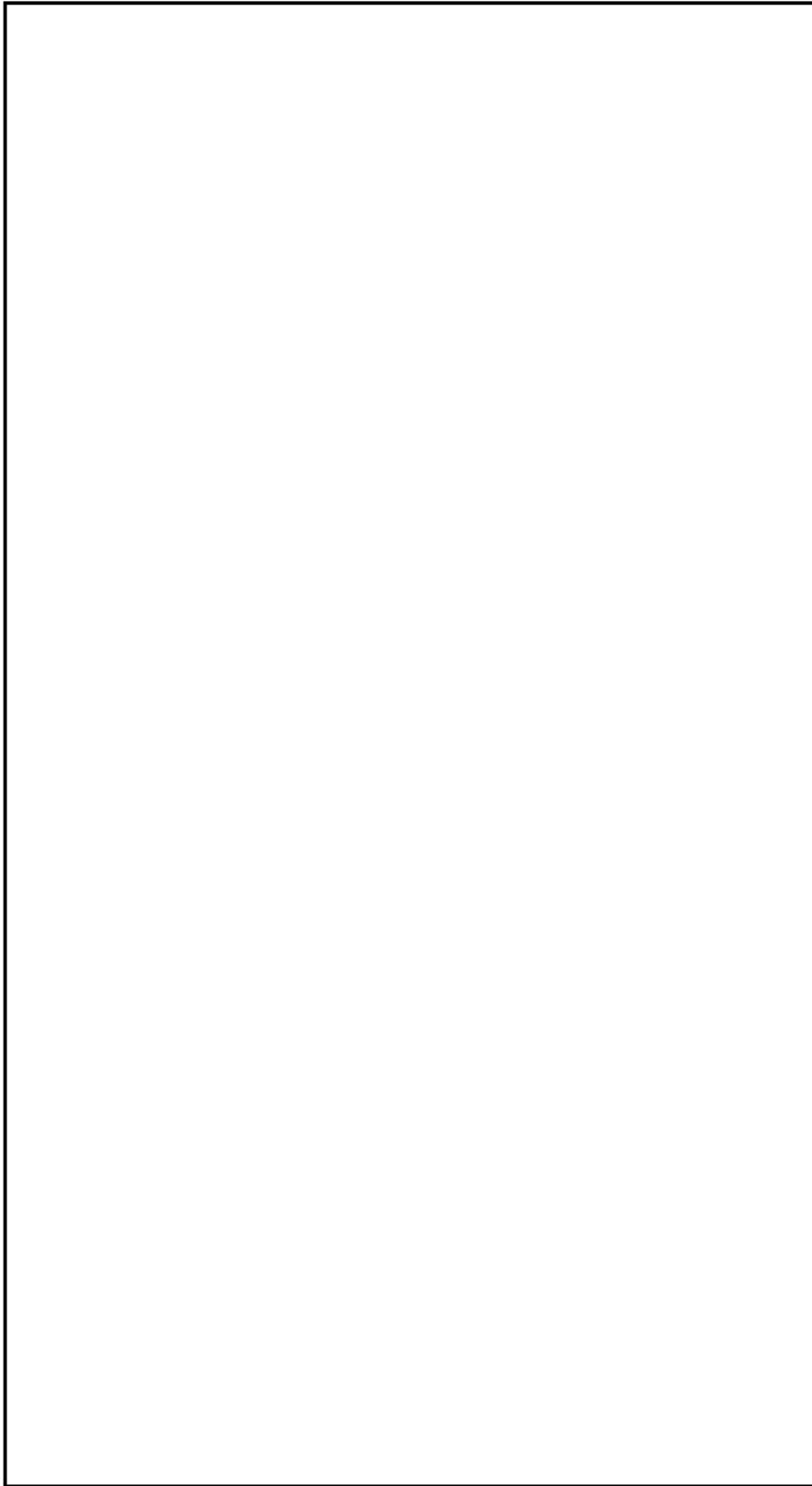
What can you see?	What do you not see?
<p>Besides opening it, how else might you figure out what is inside the box? What questions might you ask to help you figure out what is inside?</p>	
<p>Why might you want to discover what is inside? What could you learn from seeing the contents?</p>	



Step 2 ✦ What Is Visible (The Main Story)

Follow the directions provided below to sketch the artwork.

- First, sketch the silhouette, or outline, of the artwork.
- Add words in the appropriate spaces on your map: Label your sketch with six things that you see. “Things” could be materials, shapes, colors, anything you could point to.
- What words might you use to describe the colors? Describe the colors in the appropriate space on your sketch.
- What emotion does the artwork give you, at first glance? Write that word down.
- What does the overall shape of the artwork remind you of? Write that word down.
- Based on what you might see, what might this artwork be about?



Step 3 ✦ What Is the Artwork About? (The Main Story)

Now that you have looked closely at the artwork, how might you interpret it? Based on your thoughts and what you have heard, make a claim, support it with evidence, and pose a question in the spaces below.

Claim	Support	Question
Make a claim about your interpretation of the artwork. What is the artwork about? What message does the artwork convey to you?	What do you see that supports the claim you make?	What's left unresolved? What isn't explained? What questions yet remain?



Optional: Metacognitive Break

Reflect on Claim-Support-Question . . .

What is the relationship between making a claim and providing evidence to support that claim?

Why might it be beneficial to create a list of further questions?

In what other situations might you find this pattern of thinking useful?



Step 4 ✤ Considering the Context (The Side Story)



Imagine getting into this *Soundsuit*. Now document what you think you would experience while wearing the garment:

What would it feel like on your skin?

What would you see? What would you not be able to see?

What might be a disadvantage of wearing such a garment?

On the other hand, what might be an advantage of wearing it? What might you be able to do with the garment on?

This *Soundsuit* is one in a series of many *Soundsuits*. They are made of many different materials and have various shapes. In each case, however, the wearer's identity is shrouded. Performers wear these as they dance expressively. Revisit the Claim Support Questions chart to record any changes you might want to make in your interpretation of the artwork.

Consider the surrounding circumstances or the context in which something exists as the "side story." In this case, the "side story" is about how the *Soundsuit* might be used and how wearing a *Soundsuit* might make a person feel.

Think: what might be the "side story" of a news article?



Step 5 ✨ What Remains Unknown (The Hidden Story)

What remains hidden or unknown about the *Soundsuit*?

How might you go about filling these knowledge gaps? What questions or connections might help?

What is not commonly or publicly known about something could be considered the hidden story. When we talk about a news article, what might a "hidden story" be?



Step 6 ✨ I Used to Think . . . Now I Think . . .

Read the text below, then consider whether knowing the hidden story change your interpretation of the artwork.

The Story of the First Soundsuit

Nick Cave has created many *Soundsuits*. However the first one he ever made was made of twigs. The artist made it in response to the Rodney King trial.

Rodney King was an African-American taxi driver who became known internationally as the victim of Los Angeles Police Department brutality. He was arrested late on evening for a minor incident but during the arrest the several police officers beat him brutally. The beating was videotaped by a bystander, who sent it to the local news station KTLA. The footage clearly showed King being beaten repeatedly, and the incident was covered by news media around the world.

However, of the four officers who were tried on charges of use of excessive force; three were totally acquitted, and the jury, which was made up of all white jurors, failed to reach a verdict on one charge for the fourth. Within hours of the acquittals, the 1992 Los Angeles riots started, sparked by outrage among African Americans over the verdicts and long standing social issues. The rioting lasted six days, during which 53 people were killed and more than 2,000 were injured; it ended only after the California National Guard, and the US military provided reinforcements to re-establish control.

It was in response to this incident that Nick Cave created the first *Soundsuit*. "It was a really difficult time for me. As a young Black man, I was really questioning everything, feeling dismissed, discarded, viewed less then. I was trying to process that." "I found myself one day in the park. I looked down and there was this twig on the ground. I looked at that twig as something discarded and just proceeded to collect the twigs in the park. I brought them back to the studio and began to make this sculpture... I had no ideas how the twigs were going to be used, but then I started to build this object, and I realized I could put it on." Nick Cave had created the first *Soundsuit*. He realized that he unconsciously he was building himself a "suit of armor."

I used to think that <i>Soundsuit</i> was about...	Now I think that <i>Soundsuit</i> is about...
(Review your previous thinking. Record an earlier interpretation from page 7 in the space below.)	(What is your new interpretation of the artwork, after hearing from the artist?)

➔ Be prepared to share new ideas about "hidden stories."



Step 7 ✨ Reflection

What is the relationship between main, side, and hidden stories?

Why might it be important to seek all three stories? In what way does considering all three deepen your understanding of issues, events, and peoples?

What might cause stories to remain hidden?

What skills are needed to seek hidden stories?



Optional Extension: Now Try This!

What Is Your Story?

Imagine that you are writing a character sketch about yourself. A character sketch reveals many facets—from physical appearance to personality traits, internal motivations to historical context—of a real or imagined person.

What is your **main story**?

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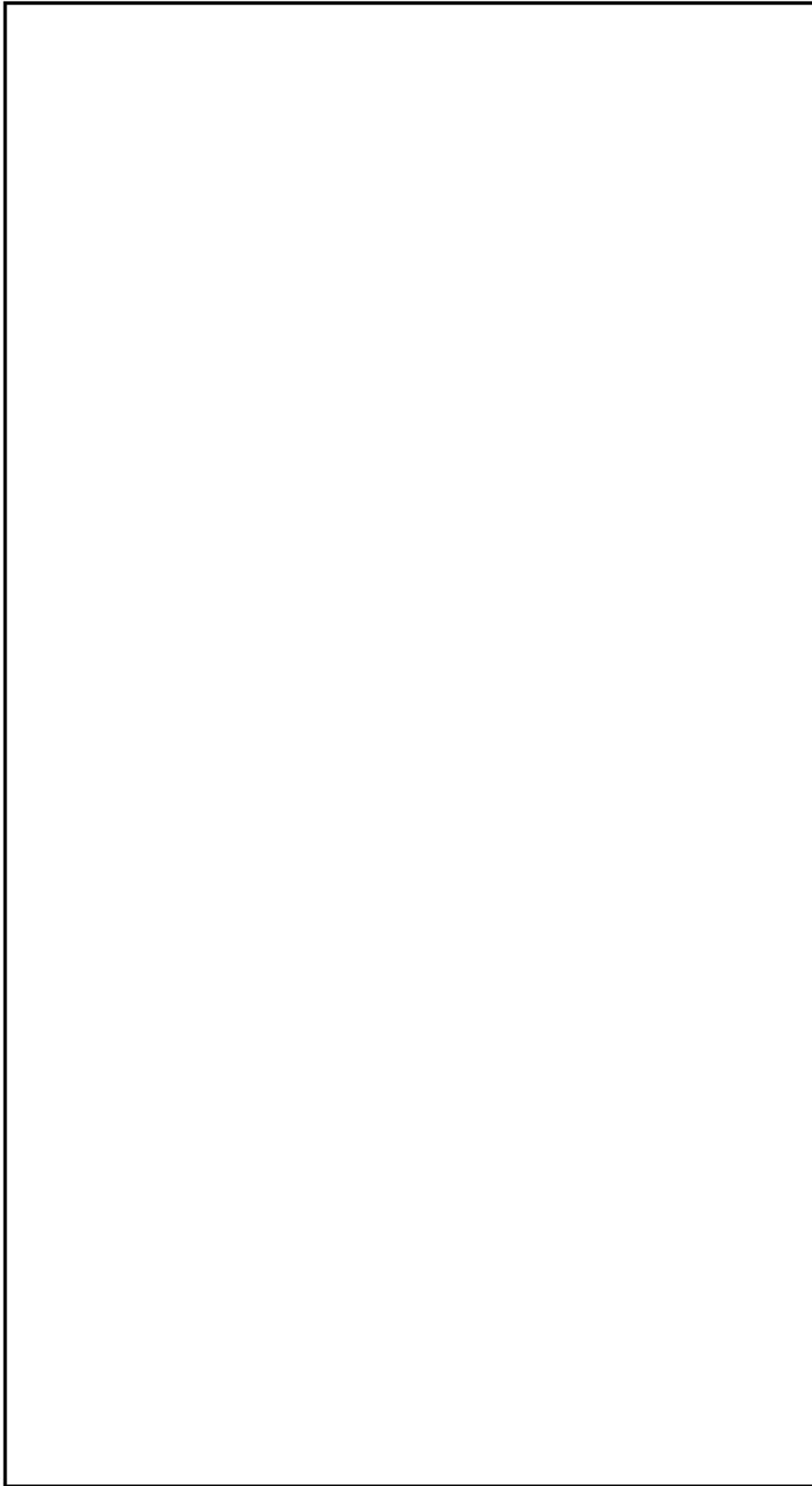
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