



HBO ORIGINAL

## A CHOICE OF WEAPONS

### INTRODUCTION

# GORDON PARKS INSPIRING US TODAY

#### **Lesson One: Becoming an Artist**

*An Introduction to Gordon Parks*

#### **Lesson Two: The Image and Agency**

*Making People Be Seen*

#### **Lesson Three: The Image and Close Observation**

*The More You Observe*

#### **Lesson Four: The Image and Relationships**

*Who Tells What Stories*

#### **Lesson Five: The Camera as a Weapon Against Injustice**

*Art as an Instrument for Social Change*

#### **Lesson Six: Telling New Stories**

*The Moving Image*

Gordon Parks (1912–2006) was one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century. Known widely for his photography, especially the images he created during two decades as the first Black staff photographer for *Life* magazine, Parks was also an author, filmmaker, and composer. As a young man he applied his artistic talents to support and express himself and soon discovered that his creative outlets were a powerful tool he could use to shift mindsets and contribute to cultural and political change. From the 1940s up through the 2000s, Parks' individual still images, photo essays, books, and feature films told the stories of everyday individuals, the social injustices they experienced, and the dignity they maintained.

This unit of six lessons for middle and high school students takes inspiration from his extraordinary body of work. Each lesson focuses on an artistic technique or practice Gordon Parks used in his photography and discussed in the documentary *A Choice of Weapons: Inspired by Gordon Parks*. Offering plenty of flexibility in scope and sequence, educators can select individual lessons to align with and be incorporated into other areas being studied or use the six lessons as a full unit of study. Curated film excerpts and interview segments produced in the making of the film offer helpful background and context to Parks' work and provide a jumping-off point for understanding how his vision and work continue to inspire artists working today. The lessons also incorporate skills emphasizing the value of observation, building authentic relationships and developing empathy, looking at visual images with a critical media literacy lens, listening to different points of view, exploring original source materials, and engaging in activities modeled on aspects of Gordon Parks' artistic and journalistic practices. Of these many varied assets incorporated into the lessons, please note that the "Film Clips" and "Interviews" are hosted on the KFF website, and the images and photographs are embedded within the PDFs.

At the end of each lesson students will put their learning into practice by completing a photography project based on the lesson topic and write a brief artist statement on their work. As a culminating project, students will choose one photograph and artist statement to reflect how they have been "Inspired by Gordon Parks."

Used together, these lessons give students a relevant, engaging, and visually rich landscape to discover the power of art and of photography to change narratives, uplift communities, and empower individuals to make the change they want to see.



## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

After completing the six lessons, students will be able to respond to these questions:

- What do we learn from Gordon Parks that informs our understanding of ourselves and America, past and present?
- How did Gordon Parks' creative process inspire a new generation of artists?
- How do these artists and ideas inform and inspire my own art and activism?



## TIME

Depending upon your class schedule (40–50 minute or block periods), the time spent on each lesson will vary considerably. Each lesson will take approximately two 50-minute class periods plus extra time outside of class for students to complete their own photography work for their portfolio. You may consider assigning elements of the lessons, such as viewing film clips or interview threads, as homework to preserve instructional time.



## MATERIALS

- Equipment for viewing film clips and for projecting high-resolution photographs
- A shared online space where students can access additional resources
- Camera (phone, digital/DSLR, or 35mm) for student photography assignments
- Access to computers and the internet for research

All photographs by Gordon Parks courtesy and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation.



## STANDARDS

What makes Gordon Parks' body of work so relevant today is that it traverses so many aspects of the human experience. For this reason, these lessons will be highly relevant in middle and high school Visual Arts courses and units in U.S. History and African American History.

### [National Core Arts Standards – Visual Arts \(VA\)](#)

Creating: 8th VA: Cr1 – Cr3.1; HS VA: Proficient, Accomplished, Advanced: Cr1 – Cr 3.1 (IIIa)

Presenting: 8th VA Pr4 – Pr6; HS Pr: Proficient, Accomplished, Advanced: Pr4.1 – Pr6 (IIIa)

Responding: 8th VA: Re 7.1 – 9.1; HS Pr: Proficient, Accomplished, Advanced: Re 7.1 – 9.1 (IIIa)

Connecting: 8th VA: Cn 10.1 – 11.1; HS Cn Proficient, Accomplished, Advanced: Cn 10.1 – 11.1 (IIIa)

Common Core State Standards in Literacy, History/Social Studies and English/Language Arts. As Common Core remains a state-led effort, consult your [state guidelines](#) for the most current framework.

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To request the full film for an educational screening, visit [www.kunhardtfilmfoundation.org](http://www.kunhardtfilmfoundation.org)