

# Fences, Walls, and Bridges

**Lesson Plan**  
Fences, Walls,  
and Bridges



Elizabeth Catlett  
*Separation*, 1954  
Linocut, 4 11/16 × 5 5/8 in.  
The Studio Museum in Harlem;  
gift of the artist 1972.9.5  
Photo: Adam Reich

Elizabeth Catlett (1915–2012) was a painter, sculptor, and printmaker who combined Mexican art traditions with her own vocabulary for representing African-American history and culture.

The technique used in *Separation* (1954) reflects the artist's time spent in Mexico City, where she was introduced to linoleum cut, a technique often used in social and political art. The black-and-white image features a lone figure staring longingly over a barbed wire

fence. Catlett often used physical barriers and harsh, sharp lines to mirror the bitter reality of segregation.

In this lesson plan students will draw connections between Catlett's work about segregation and contemporary debates about immigration in America.

### **Objective**

In this lesson, students will design their own figurative relief prints based on the immigration or migration story of someone important to them.

### **Essential Question**

How would you tell a complex story with a simple image?

### **Vocabulary**

#### *Figurative art*

Any form of modern art that retains strong references to the real world and particularly to the human figure

#### *Immigration*

The action of moving to live in another country

#### *Migration*

The action of moving to live in one part of a country from another

#### *Negative Space*

The space around and between the subject(s) of an image

#### *Printmaking*

Making pictures or designs by printing them from specially prepared plates or blocks

#### *Relief Printing*

A printmaking technique that involves carving into a flat surface, often wood or linoleum, to create a relief. Ink is then applied to the carved surface and a print is made by pressing the carved surface onto another surface, often paper or fabric

### **Materials**

Styrofoam to-go containers or plates  
Scissors  
Pencils  
Sharpie Markers  
Printmaking Ink  
Brayers  
Scrap paper

### **Preparation**

1. Display Elizabeth Catlett's *Separation*, introduce the vocabulary words, and discuss using visual inquiry.
2. Have students think about a person in their life who has an immigration or migration story.
3. Ask students to interview this person about their immigration or migration experience and take notes.
4. Ask students to create a line drawing that includes only two things from the interview: one person and one object or place.
5. Give each student a test piece of Styrofoam and a variety of tools. Have them experiment with different types of marks to make a test print.

### **Methods**

1. Hand out Styrofoam containers and scissors. Have students cut the containers or plates as needed to create a flat surface.
2. Have students use the tip of a dull pencil, back of a paintbrush, and/or finger to trace over the drawing they created. Remind students that the pressed down areas will end up white and the areas left untouched will be in color.
3. Encourage students to use a variety of tools when tracing their image and to think about the range of marks they can make, referring to their test prints .
4. Have the students apply ink onto their Styrofoam relief plates using the rollers to create several prints.

### **Reflection**

1. Have students compare their prints. How did limiting your composition to one person and one object or place challenge you? Were you able to tell a complex story?
2. Could you have told the story with even less, or do you feel you needed to incorporate more?

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