

# Horace Pippin

## There Will Be Peace

**Time:** 15 minutes

## Study Guide

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### INTRODUCTION

**Horace Pippin: There Will Be Peace** is a film about an artist whose life was his art. His enticing landscapes, vivid still-lives, intimate interiors and compelling portraits reflect the experiences of an African-American whose vision was shaped by poverty, the everyday experiences of his people, the warmth of family life and the cruelty of war. He depicted each subject exactly the way it is and exactly the way I see it. He painted mainly from memory and imagination.

Pictures just come to my mind, he observed, and then I tell my heart to go ahead. Pippin was self-trained, a grade-school dropout, so severely wounded in World War I that he had to employ unorthodox methods to craft his pictures. His intense colors, simplified forms, flattened perspectives and narrative content caught the eye of an art connoisseur, who arranged for two of his paintings to be shown. Almost overnight, Pippin went from obscurity to national attention and began his successful career as one of America's most treasured artists.

### TO THE TEACHER:

This video is appropriate for students from upper elementary (Grade 3) to adult learners. However, the student guide is targeted for Grades 3 - 8. The objectives of the guide are to:

- stimulate active viewing that engages students' minds;
- provide questions for reflection;
- suggest experiential activities that involve many areas of the curriculum.

The intent is to give students an opportunity to interpret the artist's work, understand the social and historical context of the artist's life and to make connections to their own lives and learning.

### SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT THE ARTIST

*You may want to begin by sharing some information about the artist and his accomplishments with the students. Adapt the language to the appropriate age level of the class.*

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Horace Pippin (1888 - 1946) was born in Westchester, PA, the grandson of slaves and the son of domestic workers. The family moved to Goshen, N.Y., when he was 3. Pippin grew up sketching the world around him and won a prize in a magazine drawing contest when he was 10. He left school at 14 to work at a hotel where his mother had been a maid. His boss was so impressed with a sketch he made of him, that he wanted to send young Horace to art school. But, Horace had to work because his mother was sick. He worked in a coal yard, a feed store, furniture packer and iron molder.

When American entered World War I, Pippin, who was 29, enlisted in the Army. He fought for many months in the frontline trenches in the Argonne Forest with the celebrated black regiment, 369th Infantry, called the Hell Fighters. He recorded his experiences in great detail and added colored-pencil drawings. These vividly document the exposure to cold, rain, gunfire, confusion and death; he was wounded and honorably discharged in 1919. The war shattered Pippin physically and emotionally. He had a steel plate in his shoulder and his right arm was almost paralyzed. He was haunted all of his life by his experiences in the trenches.

In 1920 he married Jennie Giles, a widow four years his senior with a young son. They barely eked out an existence; she took in laundry and he did light work and collected a small disability pension. He was part of the community, singing in the church choir, organizing a Boy Scout troop and serving as commander of the local black American Legion post.

Pippin began experimenting with charcoal drawings and then tried burning images on wood panels by holding a hot poker. He finally devised a method to begin painting, clasping a brush in his immobilized right hand and guiding it with his left. It took him three years to complete his first oil painting called *The End of the War: Starting Home*. His war experiences were the main subjects for his early works. In 1935 he turned to other subjects, including family reunions, biblical stories, scenes from the community, events in the life of John Brown and portraits. This is when his work was discovered.

A major boost for his career was when he acquired an art dealer, who provided quality materials and organized exhibitions. Pippin's first one-man exhibition was in 1940, with the catalog introduction by Dr. Albert Barnes, the famous art collector and founder of the Barnes Foundation. He also purchased several of the works. Barnes believed that given

the opportunity, he will become one of the most important painters of our age. Unfortunately Pippin died nine years after being discovered, but he was able to achieve a great deal in very little time and gains increasing regard from the art world each year.

An excellent book about the artist, Starting Home: The story of Horace Pippin, Painter by Mary E. Lyons (Scharles Scribner s sons: New York, 1993, is recommended for students.

### **WHAT TO WATCH FOR**

*Help students actively view the video by giving them things to watch for and questions to think about, as appropriate for their age and grade level.*

- Watch for the use of simple colors.
- Watch for how the artist says he gets ideas.
- Watch for the process of how the artist works and listen for sound effects.
- Watch for the subject matter of Pippin s work.
- Watch for information about the artist s life and work.
- Watch for how Pippin won a contest and why he couldn t go to school.
- Watch for the painting he made when his mother died.
- Watch for information about Pippin s life when he was in the army in World War I.
- Watch for the portrait of his wife.
- Watch for remembrances of African Americans and their role in the war.

## QUESTION FOR STUDENTS

*Begin by reviewing selected items from What to Watch For as preparation for interpretative questions about Horace Pippin and his work.*

- ? What does Horace Pippin mean when he says pictures come to me in my mind? Has this ever happened to you?
- ? How does Pippin get ideas for his artwork?
- ? How would you describe the artist's style?
- ? Where does he begin in making a painting?
- ? What subjects does he paint?
- ? Does he think it's possible to teach someone art? Why? Do you agree?
- ? His boss at the summer resort wanted to send him to art school. Why didn't he go? What happened that encouraged Pippin to be an artist?
- ? When his mother died, he made a special painting for her, showing himself as Jesus. Does this look like other pictures of Jesus you have seen? What was he trying to say?
- ? What did you notice about the soldiers that were in Company K with Pippin? What were his war time experiences like? How did the war affect him?
- ? Do you think the title of this video, *There Will be Peace* describes how Pippin felt? Why? Describe the painting that expresses his thoughts about peace? (Holy Mountain)
- ? What can you learn from Horace Pippin?

## **EXPERIENCES FOR STUDENTS**

*The following suggestions are designed to help students express ideas and interpretations about the meaning of Horace Pippin's message and work to their own lives. Feel free to select from the curriculum applications that follow or adapt to meet the needs of your students and learning goals.*

1. Think about everyday scenes like Horace Pippin painted. What would your everyday scene be - birthday party, baseball game, picnic, playground, being at home? Write down all the details you could put in a drawing or painting: subject matter (people, places, objects); action; colors, shapes, textures, space; composition, feeling or mood. Start with the background and then work on the middle ground and foreground. Use any media you like.
2. Write a first person narrative of one of Pippin's scenes as if you were in it.
3. Pippin drew pictures of his spelling words. Draw pictures of individual words on your spelling list or make up a story using the words and illustrate it.
4. Horace Pippin had strong feelings about war. Even though people all over the world say they want peace, we still have war today. Can you name some places where there are wars? Draw a picture or write a story about how we can prevent war or what the world would be like if we had real peace.
5. Pause the video at one of Pippin's paintings and look at it very closely. List all of the things you see in the painting and write a description of the artwork and what it means.
6. Research World War I and the role of Negro soldiers. Discuss how they were segregated, the important part they played and how they still met discrimination when they came back.
7. Listen to music from World War I. Compare it to music Pippin heard when he was growing up. What were the similarities/differences? What message did the World War I music give?

8. Look at the portrait that Horace Pippin did of his wife. What object stands out in this artwork? (her glasses) Did it give you an idea of how he felt about her? Do a portrait of someone in your family or a good friend using charcoal or oil pastels. Try to show a certain mood or feeling. Write a short biography of the person to go with the artwork.
  
9. Horace Pippin is considered a folk artist. How is this different than a fine artist? Talk to some artists and art historians about these differences. Is Pippin not a good artist because he is self-taught and didn't have formal instruction? Debate the issue with your class.
  
10. Imagine that you are the artist. Tell the class about your life and your artworks.

## **VIDEO SERIES**

**Horace Pippin: There Will Be Peace**, created and produced by Linda Freeman, is one of a series of videos that provide an intimate look at both the lives and work of famous African American artists. Art history is being made on film, as the artists create right before our eyes. These documentaries profile the personal relationships, joys and struggles of these extraordinary human beings - and give them the recognition they richly deserve. The goal of the series is to teach students about the art-making process and to inspire them to reach their own life goals.

For more information about *Horace Pippin: There Will Be Peace* and the other videos, contact Linda Freeman at L & S Productions, tel: 914-238-9366; fax: 914-238-6324.

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