

Concepts in Art

We can express complex concepts in portraits

In this 3-part inquiry trail, students:

- explore portraiture as a way of conveying concepts
- see how the juxtaposition of two art images can bring out the concepts imbedded in the works
- create portraits of real or imagined people that convey a concept

Generative Questions: (Questions that address big ideas and can spark thinking)

- How can a portrait be more than a literal depiction of a person?
- How can a portrait convey an idea or concept?

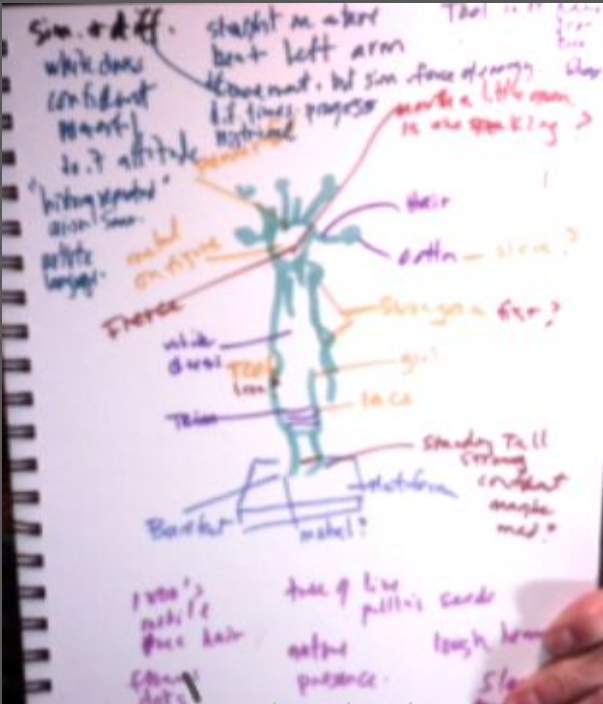
Alison Saar's *Topsy*

- In your sketchbook, sketch Topsy in the middle of the paper
- Then Concept Map, writing and drawing your associations, thoughts, connections, feelings, all around.

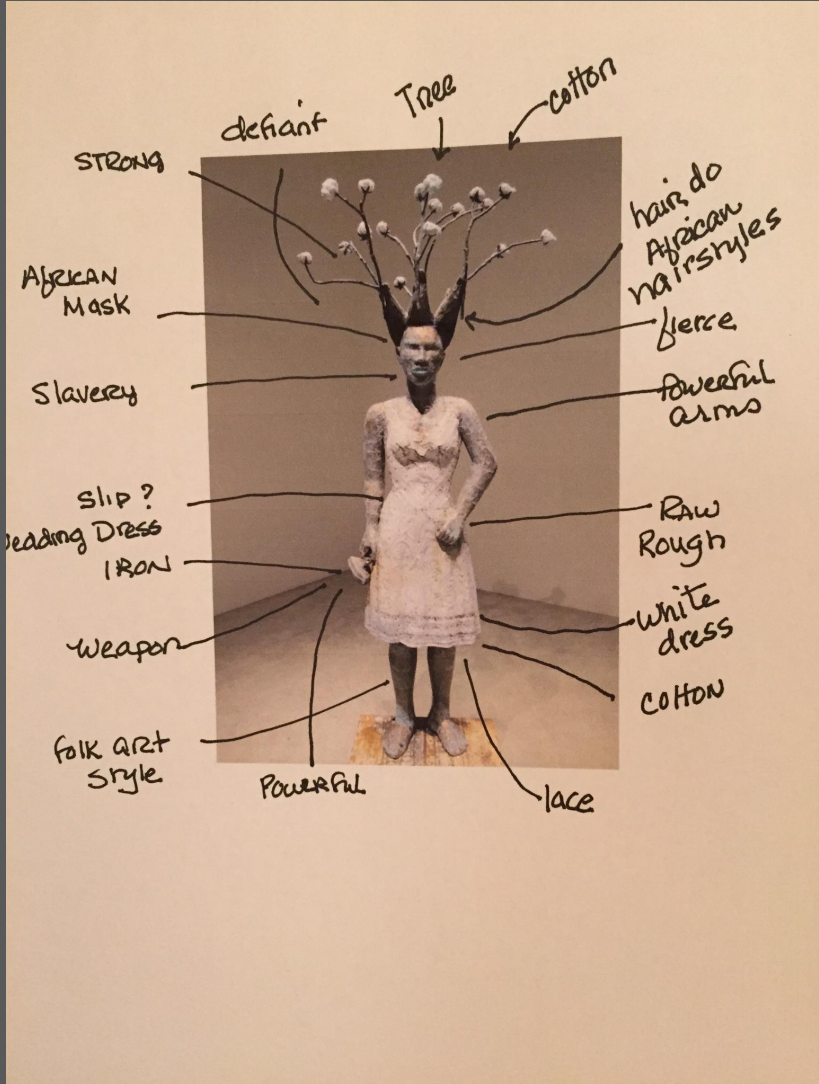


Put down all your thoughts and questions. Dialogue with the image or artist. What do you notice, wonder about, and/or want to know about the art/artist?

Draw arrows, pictures, etc.



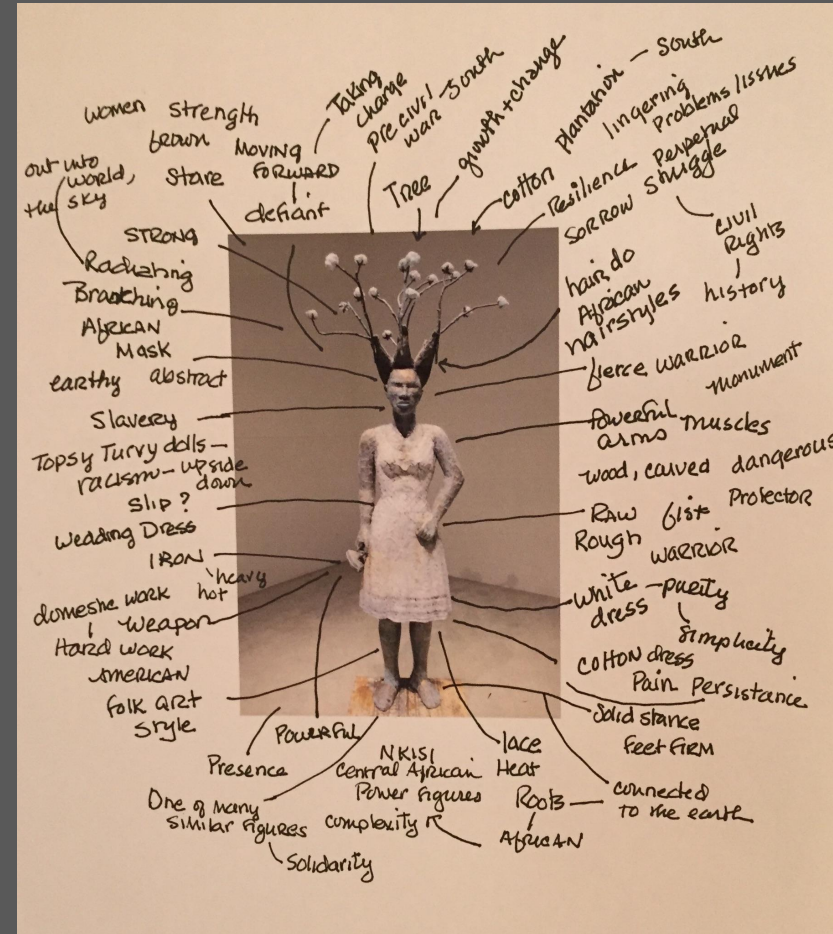
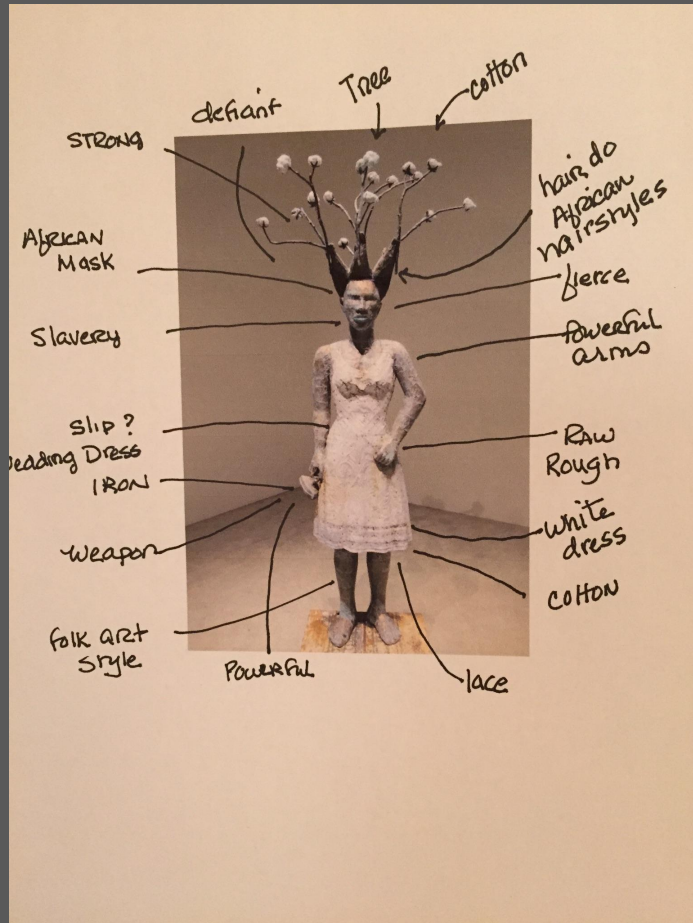
teacher sketch



Pick a link, do some research, then add more to your concept map with further wonderings, ideas, connections and associations.

- **VIDEO:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGqk5sy-Lm8>
- **Article:**
<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-alison-saar-review-20180409-story.html>
- **VIDEO:** <https://www.facebook.com/moadsanfrancisco/videos/471060330692575>
- **Article:**
<https://hyperallergic.com/440597/i-wanted-to-make-art-that-told-a-story-alison-saar-on-her-eloquent-sculptures>
- **VIDEO (start 14:10-):** <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/04/arts/design/betye-saar.html>

Add to your map with further connections, perceptions, thoughts, wonderings, and associations.



From this to that!



Saar's Topsy and Sherald's Michelle Obama

- Quickly sketch Topsy, and Michelle Obama in the middle of the paper
- Write thoughts that come to mind when you see the two images together



Amy Sherald *Michelle Obama*

These two images are juxtaposed here because they represent such contrasting visions of Black women at different times in American history. The contrast is stark and thought-provoking. The connections are too.

Guiding Questions for Finding the Concepts

- What colors, shapes and images do you see in these portraits?
- What gestures, stances, or postures do you see?
- What facial expressions?
- What other things like clothes and objects do you see?
- Who do you think these people are?
- What are their lives like? What stories could they tell?
- How are these two portraits different? How are these two people different?
- How are they alike? How are their portraits alike?
- Together, what concepts or ideas do they convey?
- What makes you think that?
- What do these two artworks tell us about empowerment and change?

Do you see these concepts in these artworks?



Power
Vitality
Calm
Strength
Resilience
Presence
Persistence
Defiance
Confidence

Duality



Whole class:

- Brainstorm ideas for concepts students would like to convey in a portrait

Each student:

- Choose a concept to convey
- Brainstorm ideas for people (real or imagined) to embody the concept

Research Note: If students want to depict real people, they must go online for photographs or paintings of their subjects.

Art-making

Guiding Questions for Portrait Making

- What person or individual embodies your concept?
- What gestures, facial expressions or posture express your concept?
- What clothes, hairstyle, objects or background express your concept?
- What does your subject do that embodies your concept?
- How can you highlight/exaggerate your subject's physical characteristics to express your concept?
- What other things like symbols and artifacts from your subject's life add to the meaning of your portrait?

Art-making:

- Create a portrait to express your concept.

This can be a drawing, painting and or collage.

- On your paper sketch a 'portrait' that expresses your chosen concept. You can do this several times.
- "Portrait" can be used lightly: it doesn't have to be realistic.
- Consider what media goes best with your concept.
- You can add a background or objects such as clothes, hair, hats, background, patterns, color, or other acouement that you associate with your concept.

-

Concept map your portrait for further ideas.

Reflection:

- What is the concept you conveyed in your portrait?
- Who is the subject of your portrait?
- Why did you choose this person for your portrait?
- How did you make the portrait convey your concept?
- What part or trait of the portrait expresses your concept the best?
- How does placing one image next to another, like when we looked at the artworks, help us to see the concepts they convey?

Present and Share

- Put your portrait on the Jamboard, or do a Gallery Walk
- Get feedback

Resources:

Thinking Routines

Generative Topics for Art Inquiry

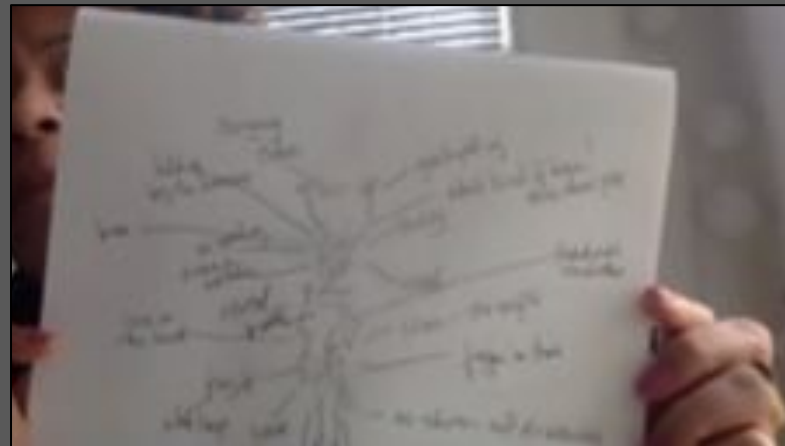
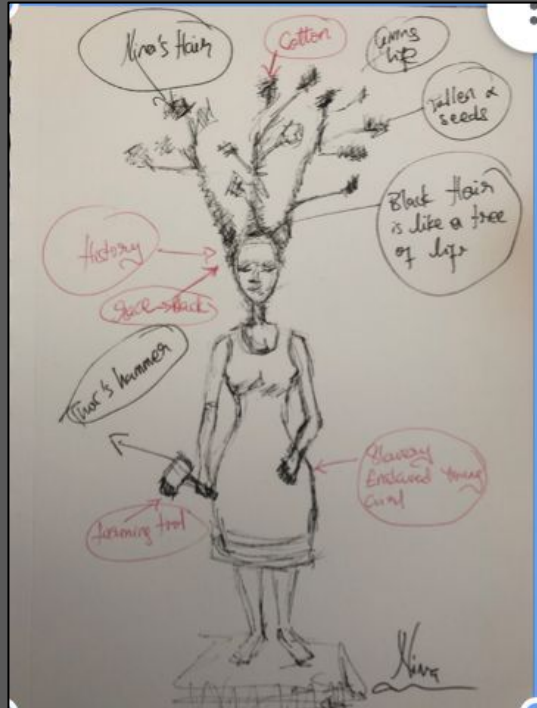
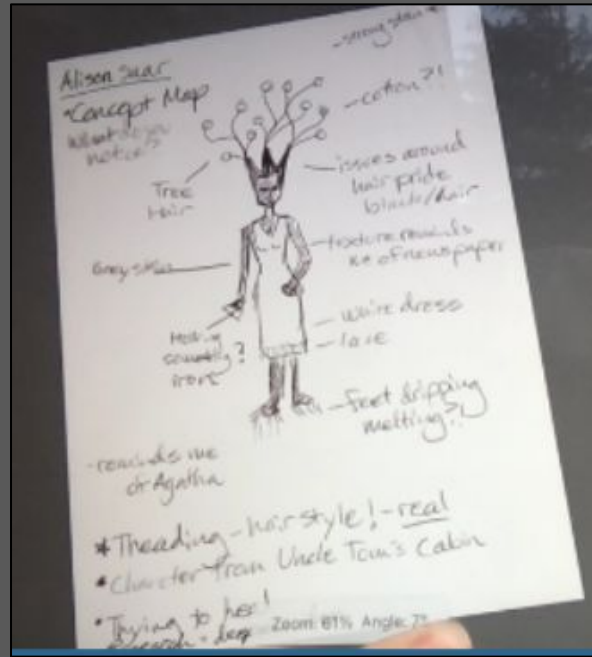
Creative Strategies

The Arts-Based Inquiry Series, 2021:

1. Arts-Based Inquiry and Trails
2. Developing Conceptual Skills
3. Concepts in Images



Nina Fabunmi



Middle School teachers' concept map of Alison Saar's *Topsy*

 [Link to Your Own Copy](#) 

Concepts in Images
with Julia Marshall