Lesson Title: Clementine Hunter and the South
Grades: 9–12
Time Required: 1–3 class periods
Subject Areas: Visual Art, English Language Arts, Social Studies

Lesson Overview: Students compare the use of repetition in the work of Clementine Hunter and call and response songs, then compare Hunter’s representation of the south with Langston Hughes’ description in his poem The South. NOTE: Hughes’ poem contains strong language. An edited version has been provided along with the original version. Use your discretion when selecting which version to use in this lesson plan.

Common Core Academic Standards
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9–10.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9–10.4
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11–12.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9–10.5

National Core Arts Standards
- VA:Cn11.1.7a
  Analyze how response to art is influenced by understanding the time and place in which it was created, the available resources, and cultural uses.

Learning Objectives:
Students will be able to:
- Understand the work of Clementine Hunter and its historical context
- Connect Hunter’s use of rhythm and repetition to the forms of call and response
- Compare Hunter’s portrayal of the south to the portrayal of the south in Langston Hughes’ poem The South

Artwork in Focus:
Click on the link below to access this image through the Wadsworth’s Public Portal. Once on the portal, click on the image to view the object information. Click on the image again to download a jpeg version of the work. NOTE: Work[s] of art used in this lesson may not currently be on view at the museum.

Clementine Hunter, Cotton Picking, c.1940

Materials:
- Image of Cotton Picking by Clementine Hunter
- Projector and screen/SMART board, or equivalent
- Access to the internet/speakers to play “Hoe Emma Hoe”
- Copies of The South worksheet [included in this lesson plan]

Lesson Procedures:
Part One: Guided Looking
1. Project the image of Clementine Hunter’s Cotton Picking and lead a class discussion using the following questions:
   - Describe the figures. What angle are we seeing them from? What aspects of the body has the artist emphasized? What parts of the figures has the artist abstracted? Do you get a sense of their personalities? Their thoughts or feelings? Why or why not?
   - How are the figures interacting? What are they doing? What is the relationship with one another?
   - Describe the space. Where are we? How has the artist divided up the canvas? How has she conveyed the climate?
   - What colors do you see? Believe you have the artist’s palette in front of you. What does it look like?
   - What is the overall mood of the painting?
   - When do you think the actions in the painting take place?
   - How does the artist use repetition to help convey her story?
2. Tell students that this painting was made by an African American woman living on a plantation in Louisiana. Clementine Hunter was the granddaughter of two enslaved people. She called her work “memory paintings.” She painted the recollections of people who were once enslaved and of her life on Melrose plantation. Hunter’s artistic career began when an artist left some old paints behind. Instead of throwing the supplies away, Hunter began painting in her 50s, never having learned to read or write. She was completely self-taught, creating thousands of paintings in her lifetime. Optional: read the Hunter quote for the class to hear:

“I tell my stories by marking pictures. The people who lived around here and made the history of this land are remembered in my paintings. I like that. I’m glad the young people of today can look at my paintings and see how easy and uncomplicated things were when we lived off the land. I wanted to tell them. I paint the story of my people. The things that happened to me and the ones I know. My paintings tell how we worked, played and prayed.” — Clementine Hunter

3. Ask students if this information has changed their interpretation of the painting. How so?

Part Two: Link to Call and Response
4. Ask students to recall the use of repetition in Hunter’s painting. Introduce the idea of the “call and response” songs used by enslaved peoples to set the rhythm of plantation work and communicate in code with one another.

5. Play “Hoe Emma Hoe.” Point out the structure: the caller sings the first couple of lines, and the chorus repeats. How does Hunter’s painting relate to the song? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_sLoWRVE-H58

6. Tell students that this painting was made in 1940, almost a hundred years after the abolition of slavery. Hunter was born into a family of sharecroppers and worked for tenant farmer wages. She painted during the time of the Great Migration, when millions of African Americans migrated from the rural South to cities in the North in search of better pay and racial equality.

- How does Hunter’s painting portray life in the South?
- What are some positives? What are the negatives?
- What does Hunter’s painting and life story tell us about the state of African American life at that time?

Part Three: Link to Langston Hughes
7. Divide students into groups of 3 and distribute the worksheet for Langston Hughes’ poem The South. [NOTE: Hughes’ poem contains strong language. An edited version has been provided along with the original version. Use your discretion when selecting which version to use in this lesson plan]. In their groups, have students read the poem, making one list of all adjectives and another list of nouns.

8. As a class, lead a discussion based on the following questions:

- How does Hughes’ poem portray life in the South? How does this compare to the portrayal in the Hunter painting?
- Who is the speaker in this poem? How is the South personified?
- What does the poem suggest is the solution to life in the South?
- What does the poem reveal about life in the North?
- Does this poem change the way you read Hunter’s painting? How so?

9. Conclude by discussing the poem and painting in relation to the Great Migration [some background information is given below]. How does each work fit into the history of the Great Migration?
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Clementine Hunter

Clementine Hunter (1886 or 1887–1988) was born in 1886 on Hidden Hill Plantation in Louisiana, the granddaughter of enslaved people. She moved to Melrose Plantation at the age of 14 where she spent the rest of her life. Melrose Plantation was found by a formerly enslaved Creole man in the 18th century. In the 20th century it became an artist’s retreat under Carmelite Garrett Henry. Hunter initially picked cotton on the plantation, before doing domestic work. She married twice and raised five children. She began painting in her 50s—her first painting was on a linen window shade. The artists staying at the plantation encouraged her work, and by the time of her death at 101 Hunter had painted over 4,000 works. She called her works “memory paintings,” documenting everyday life in her world. Her paintings encompass aspects of southern black life not often captured, including work, social, and religious activities.

The Great Migration

The Great Migration was a period in American History (1915–approximately 1970) during which about five million southern blacks moved north and west. The migration happened in waves, the first wave coinciding with World War I, when almost 500,000 black Americans left the south mostly for northern cities like Chicago, Detroit, and New York. By World War II, more people were moving to the west, including Oakland, Los Angeles, and Seattle. The demand for labor in the industrialized cities of the north was high after the loss of millions of men in World War I. In the agriculturally-based economy of the south, rural black Americans often worked as sharecroppers, tenant farmers, or farm laborers with little hope of advancement. Some industries (like railroads) were so desperate for labor that they paid for black Americans to move north. Those who migrated were driven by a combination of economic opportunities and a desire to escape the oppressive racism of the south, including legalized segregation (also known as Jim Crow laws), lynching, and denial of suffrage. It is important to note that although segregation was not legal in the north, racial discrimination was pervasive. The large influx of people also added competition for housing that affected the living conditions of the newly transplanted black Americans. Wages in the north, although paying better than those in the south, were still low, and conditions were often dangerous.¹ Below is a list of resources for further exploration:

Additional Resources on the Great Migration

- Harrison, Alferdeen. Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991);
- Henri, Florette. Black Migration: Movement North, 1900-1920 (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1975);
- Marks, Carol. Farewell—We’re Good and Gone: The Great Migration (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989);

“The South” by Langston Hughes

The lazy, laughing South
With blood on its mouth.
The sunny-faced South,
Beast-strong,
Idiot-brained.
The child-minded South
Scratching in the dead fire’s ashes
For a Negro’s bones.
Cotton and the moon,
Warmth, earth, warmth,
The sky, the sun, the stars,
The magnolia-scented South.
Beautiful, like a woman,
Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,
Passionate, cruel,
Honey-lipped, syphilitic —
That is the South.
And I, who am black, would love her
But she spits in my face.
And I, who am black,
Would give her many rare gifts
But she turns her back upon me.
So now I seek the North —
The cold-faced North,
For she, they say,
Is a kinder mistress,
And in her house my children
May escape the spell of the South.
“The South” by Langston Hughes [edited]

The lazy, laughing South
With blood on its mouth.
The sunny-faced South,
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Idiot-brained.
The child-minded South
Scratching in the dead fire’s ashes
For a Negro’s bones.
Cotton and the moon,
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And I, who am black, would love her
But she spits in my face.
And I, who am black,
Would give her many rare gifts
But she turns her back upon me.
So now I seek the North —
The cold-faced North,
For she, they say,
Is a kinder mistress,
And in her house my children
May escape the spell of the South.
The lazy, laughing South
With blood on its mouth.
The sunny-faced South,
Beast-strong, idiot-brained.
The child-minded South
Scratching in the dead fire's ashes
For a Negro's bones.
Cotton and the moon,
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The sky, the sun, the stars.
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For a Neger's bones.
Scratching in the dead fire's ashes
The child-minded South
Idiot-brained.
Beast-strong.
The sunny-faced South.
With blood on its mouth.
The lazy, laughing South.
May escape the spell of the South.
And in her house my children
Is a kinder mistress."
"For she, they say,
The cold-faced North."
"So now I seek the North—"
But she turns her back upon me.
Would give her many rare gifts
And I who am black, would love her.
That is the South—
Honey-lipped, syphilitic—
Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,
Beautiful, like a woman.
The magnolia-scented South.
The sky, the sun, the stars.
For a Neger's bones.
Scratching in the dead fire's ashes
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Honey-lipped, syphilitic—
That is the South.
And I, who am black, would love her
But she spits in my face.
And I, who am black,
Would give her many rare gifts
But she turns her back upon me.
So now I seek the North—
But she spits in my face.
And I, who am black, would love her
That is the South.

The South, Langston Hughes