

# PEOPLE LIKE US

BY JEFFREY GIBSON

ACTIVATING ART

PMA CLASSROOM  
BEST FOR  
Late Elementary (3-5)  
Middle School



## THEMES

- Creative play
- Culture and tradition
- Sensory exploration
- Sound and movement
- Collaboration
- Identity

Jeffrey Gibson (United States, born 1972), *PEOPLE LIKE US*, 2018, Glass and plastic beads, tin, copper and gold-finished jingles, artificial sinew, quartz crystal, silver-coated copper wire, druzy crystal, nylon thread, nylon fringe, acrylic felt, acrylic paint, repurposed wool blanket, recycled jersey stuffing, rawhide, 60 1/2 x 24 1/2 x 14 inches. Gift of Crewe Foundation and Family. © Courtesy of the artist and Roberts Projects, Los Angeles, CA; Photo Peter Mauney

## CONTENT AREAS AND STANDARDS MET

### Visual Art

#### **B3. Making Meaning**

Students create artworks that communicate ideas, feelings, and meanings and demonstrate skill in the use of media, tools, techniques, and processes.

#### **E5. Interpersonal Skills**

Students identify and demonstrate the positive interpersonal skills necessary to get along with others and participate in the arts.

#### **D1. Aesthetics & Criticism**

Students describe and compare art forms.

## SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCIES

### **Responsible Decision Making**

Reflecting

### **Social Awareness**

Considering other points of view, respecting others

### **Relationship Skills**

Working collaboratively with others

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How can we activate artwork?

What roles do music and dance play in our own celebrations and cultures?

## OBJECTIVES

- Students will envision how the sculpture could come alive.
- Students will imagine what characteristics the sculpture could have.
- Students will explore the artwork using their senses.
- Students will collaborate to create dance and music inspired by the artwork.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

*For the Collaborative Music and Movement activity*

- You (and any other people: friends, family, classmates)
- Space to move around
- Optional: any noisemakers or instruments on hand
- Optional handmade instruments: toilet paper rolls, 4" x 4" wax paper square (two per instrument), rubber bands (two per instrument), dried beans

*For the Writing with the Sense or Character Short Story activity*

- Writing utensil
- Blank piece of paper

## INSTRUCTIONS

### Look

Take a few minutes to look at the artwork. If at the PMA, be sure to walk around the sculpture while viewing.

### Respond

After you view PEOPLE LIKE US, engage in conversation about artwork. Pair and share (pair students up and have them share with their partner) is recommended if applicable.

- How does this sculpture make you feel?
- What moods or emotions do you think the sculpture is feeling? What are you seeing that makes you think that?
- What colors, textures, or patterns can you find?
- What else do you notice?

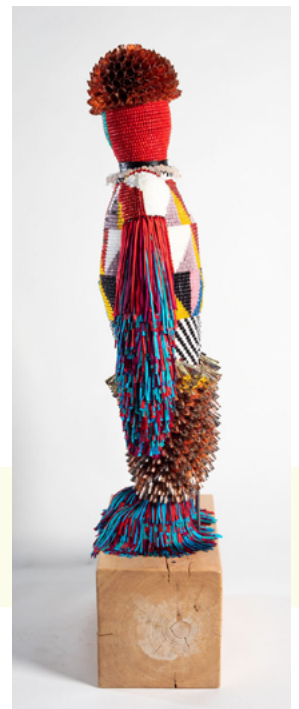
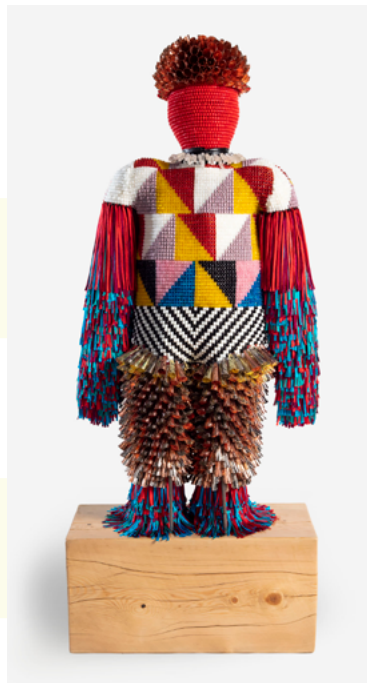
## LEARN

Jeffrey Gibson, born in 1972, is a New York based painter and sculptor of Mississippi Choctaw-Cherokee heritage. Gibson explores his own identity through his art practice that combines elements of traditional Native American art and some modern elements of interest, like pop music and modern dance. In the artwork *PEOPLE LIKE US*, many of the materials, like the beads and rawhide, are common in traditional Native American art. The abstract patterns and bold colors are common in contemporary art and pop culture. What other materials can you find in this artwork? How else have you seen that material being used?

Gibson is interested in celebrations and traditions across cultures. The artwork references Jingle Dress dances, celebratory powwows, and dance clubs. The artwork embodies a certain energy that is suggestive of music and dance. With the slightest breeze, the blue and red fringe on the arms and feet

would awaken, and the bells on the legs would jingle. Do you think this sculpture wants to move? What movements do you think it would make?

The piece suggests the liveliness of traditional powwow celebrations and the way in which these celebrations have evolved over time, possibly influencing modern dance and mainstream culture. In *PEOPLE LIKE US*, Gibson wonders about the future of our celebrations and traditions as a society. What do you like to celebrate with your friends and family? What do you do when you celebrate? Do you change your celebrations from time to time or do you keep them the same?



## ACT

### Collaborative Music and Movement

*This activity is best done with a group of people, preferably in-person, and can be adapted for digital settings.*

After viewing and discussing the artwork, form small groups or work independently.

Find an open space to work in. Be sure to go over safety and spacial awareness if in a classroom or museum setting.

Divide the group into smaller groups of two or three.

Once in smaller groups, create a collaborative music and movement routine that responds to the following prompt: imagine what movements and sounds the sculpture would make if it walked off the platform.

To get groups thinking about this prompt, ask students to consider the following questions and prompts:

- What is the sculpture feeling? Is the figure sad or happy? Excited or scared?
- How can you communicate what the sculpture is feeling through dance and sound?
- Consider using calm dance moves if the sculpture is sad and lively dance moves if the sculpture is excited.
- Is the figure loud or quiet? Use your hands and feet to create sound if instruments are not being used. Consider clapping, stomping, and using your voice.
- Consider adding a variety of sounds and dance moves to make your routine at least 30 seconds or longer in length.
- Have fun and use your imagination!

Once the groups have their music and movement routine ready, ask them to share their routine with the larger group. After each group has shared, ask:

- How are the routines similar or different?
- What feeling or message was communicated through each routine?



## ACT

### Writing with the Senses

*This activity can be done in a group or individual setting, in-person or digital.*

Get out your writing utensil and blank piece of paper. Look at *PEOPLE LIKE US* again, and this time explore the artwork using your senses. You can write about all the senses, choose one or two, or make up your own way of exploring the artwork:

- What are you seeing in this artwork? Look at all angles of the sculpture, and focus on the details. Make a list of everything you see and try to be as descriptive or detailed as possible.
- Imagine that this sculpture could make sounds. Notice all the materials on the sculpture that might make noise. What noises might you hear?
- If you could touch or feel this artwork, what might it feel like? What textures do you notice? What would it feel like to wear this sculpture?

### Character Short Story

*For full instructions for this activity, please visit the PMA's website here:*

[PortlandMuseum.org/magazine/character-short-story](https://portlandmuseum.org/magazine/character-short-story)

Get your writing utensil and piece of paper out. We are going to explore what type of character we think this sculpture might be. Fill out some traits of this character from your perspective:

- Give this figure a name.
- Where is this figure from?
- Why is this figure wearing this outfit?
- What might they be doing, or where might they be going?
- How does this figure communicate? Do they talk? Do they make sound?
- What are their hobbies? What do they like to do most?
- What do they eat?
- What might they celebrate?
- What makes them happy?

Now that you've thought more about who this figure is, write a short story as if you were them.

Imagine you step into this body and become the character you wrote about. Write a three-to-five sentence story or create a drawing. Be creative. Have fun. There are no limits.

Share your story with someone else, or act it out. Imagine all the possibilities.

## ACT: Reflect and Share

### For the Collaborative Music and Movement Activity

Let's reflect on what we just did and the experience we just had engaging with this artwork.

- Was it hard or easy to imagine how an artwork would sound or move? Why?
- What kind of celebration would your collaborative routine be for?
- How did you feel while dancing and making music?
- If this sculpture could celebrate, what do you think it would celebrate?
- After watching the other routines, what similarities did you notice between your routine and the other groups' routines? What about the differences between them?

### For the Senses Activity

- What sense was the easiest to imagine?
- What sense was the most difficult?
- Jeffrey Gibson has asked us to think about putting this artwork on, like an outfit, and imagining what it would feel like. Would it be heavy or light? Hard or soft?
- The artist also challenged us to think about whether we could walk across the room silently wearing this outfit. What do you think?

### For the Character Activity

- Why do you think the artist made this figure?
- Who do you think this sculpture is meant to be? Is this person real or imaginary? Why?
- Look at the text on the artwork. Who do you think the *PEOPLE* refers to? Who do you think the *US* refers to?

The last step in interacting with art is to share your experience with others. Share your movement and music routine or your writing and experiences with the PMA!

Email [Learning@portlandmuseum.org](mailto:Learning@portlandmuseum.org), or share your experience with others in your home or class.

## RESOURCES

[PortlandMuseum.org/magazine/peoplelikeus](https://portlandmuseum.org/magazine/peoplelikeus)

[Vimeo.com/351248558](https://vimeo.com/351248558)

[PortlandMuseum.org/magazine/three-gibson-activities](https://portlandmuseum.org/magazine/three-gibson-activities)

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### **COLLABORATOR NOTE**

This PMA Classroom Activity Guide was created collaboratively by Paige Cherrington and the Portland Museum of Art.

Paige Cherrington is an artist and educator based in Portland, Maine. Paige holds Bachelor of Arts degrees in Studio Art and Global Studies from the University of Vermont and is working toward her Master of Arts in Teaching degree from the Maine College of Art and Design. Paige is passionate about incorporating social emotional learning in the classroom and looks forward to creating a curriculum inspired by contemporary art.