



Kerry James Marshall

FOR YOUR CLASSROOM



Read excerpts from Crystal Bridges' interview with Kerry James Marshall on our website at:

[CrystalBridges.org/get-involved/membership/c-magazine](https://crystalbridges.org/get-involved/membership/c-magazine)

Kerry James Marshall was born in 1955 in Birmingham, Alabama, a center for the Civil Rights Movement through the 1950s and '60s. In 1963 his family moved to the Watts neighborhood in Los Angeles. The Watts riots of 1965 were among L.A.'s worst incidents of civil unrest, lasting six days and costing 34 lives. Experiences in both of these locations helped shape the nature of his art. When speaking about his choice of subject matter, Marshall has said: "With everything that was going on in the streets at the time, how could a black person be concerned with art for art's sake?"

In his work, *Our Town*, Marshall invites us into what at first glance is an idyllic American neighborhood. Upon further inspection, however, we start to see that things aren't as perfect as they seemed. Works like *Our Town* can be used in the classroom to introduce subjects like civil rights, which can be challenging to discuss.

CLASSROOM CONNECTION

One way to open up a conversation about a difficult topic is to use the Silent Conversation. To use this technique, lay a large sheet of paper on a table in your classroom and invite students to add their comments on the topic you wish to converse about.

This could be done at the beginning of one class by having the students respond to a prompt. Use comments from the silent conversation in a future class as the entry way into the theme you want to discuss. Because of the anonymity of the silent conversation, a safe environment exists where students are able to express their true thoughts on the subject under discussion.



Crystal Bridges
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Kerry James Marshall, *Our Town*, 1995, acrylic and collage on canvas, 101 x 143 in. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas. Photography by Vancouver Art Gallery.