

# Social Justice

# USING YOUR VOICE

A collaboration between the Anti-Defamation League, Austin ISD, and the Blanton Museum of Art



# *The Strangest Fruit*

**Vincent Valdez**

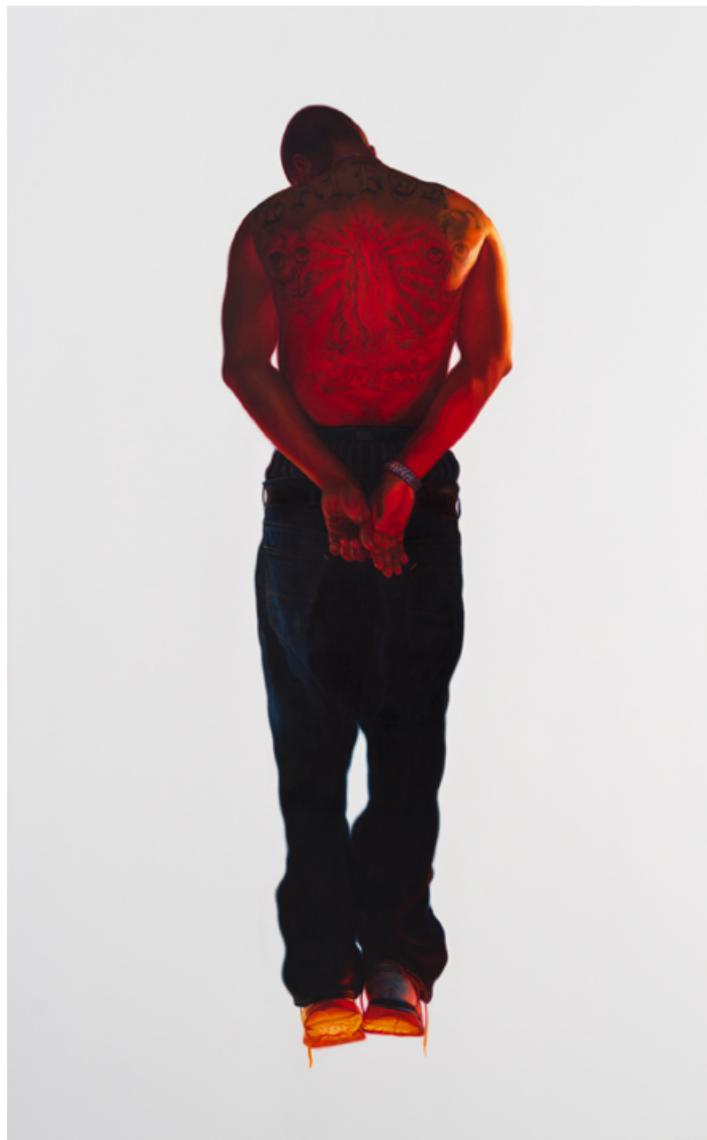
***Untitled, from The Strangest Fruit, 2013***

Oil on canvas, 92 in. x 55 in.

Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Promised gift of Jeanne and Michael Klein, 2016

The title of this series of paintings, *The Strangest Fruit*, hints at the history that inspired them. In 1939 Billie Holiday recorded “Strange Fruit,” a haunting song about the lynching of African Americans in the United States. Vincent Valdez painted the series of ten life-size Latino men after extensively researching what he refers to as the “erased” history of the lynchings of Mexican immigrants in Texas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Valdez isolates his subjects against stark white backdrops and deliberately does not include nooses around their necks. Rather than directly summon difficult images from the past, he depicts this history in the present tense, underscoring the continued persecution and struggles that immigrants and minorities face in the United States today. He explains, “Presenting this historical subject in a contemporary context enables me to present the noose as a metaphor and to suggest that the threat of the noose still looms over the heads of the young Latino males in American society.”





## LOOK

Take a full minute to look at this painting by San Antonio native, Vincent Valdez. Notice your first reactions and questions. Take another minute to make some notes about these initial thoughts.

## TALK

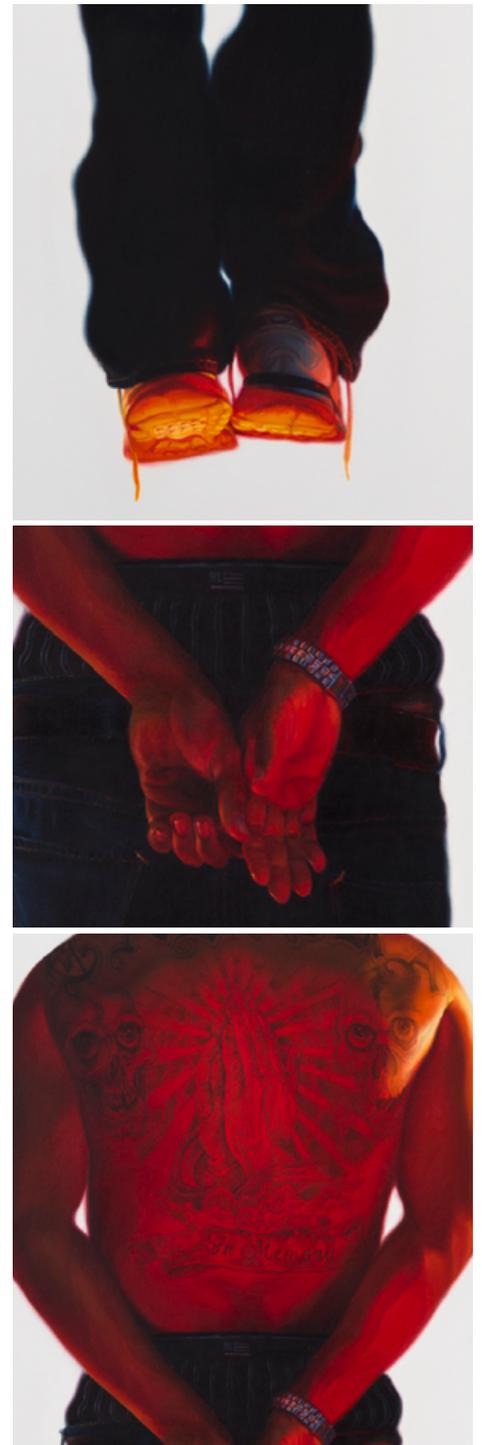
- What's going on in this picture?
- What details pique your curiosity?
- Why do you think the artist uses a white background?
- What do you feel as you look at this person?

## READ

Vincent Valdez was doing research in the University of Texas libraries, when he came across an [early 20th century photograph](#) of Mexican-Americans being lynched in south Texas. Upset because his own classes in Texas history had not included this information, Valdez decided to use his skills as a painter to raise awareness of this suppressed history. He painted a series of eleven life-sized images of contemporary Chicanos against a white background. Lynching was a popular way of inflicting punishment in the 1800s and early 1900s. The practice was not legal, but people were allowed to take the law into their own hands by inflicting fatal punishment for crimes, actual or alleged. Lynching occurred beyond the reach of courts and legal proceedings at the hands of everyday American citizens.

According to the Texas State Historical Association, “of the 468 [lynching] victims in Texas between 1885 and 1942, 339 were black, 77 white, 53 Hispanic, and 1 [indigenous].”

John R. Ross, “Lynching,” Handbook of Texas Online, accessed October 06, 2020, [tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/lynching](http://tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/lynching). Published by the Texas State Historical Association.



## READ

Use your research skills to find out more about the history of lynching in Texas. How do your findings compare to information presented by the Texas Historical Commission or high school textbooks?

## TALK

- How is Valdez's painting different from the 20th century photograph that stimulated his series?
- Why do you think the artist chose to represent contemporary men for this series?
- What feelings come up as you view this piece?
- What is Valdez's intended message to the viewer?

## USE YOUR VOICE

- What kinds of constraints—metaphorical “nooses”—are in place for people of color today?
- Consider what the [Pyramid of Hate](#) tells us about how bias can lead to discrimination and acts of violence.
- Work with your group to learn more about the historical and contemporary impacts of discrimination in the areas of employment, medical care, criminal justice, housing, and education.
- Inspired by Vincent Valdez's active response to discovering how a painful history had been suppressed, identify an important issue that you think has been overlooked or actively suppressed. How will you use your voice to raise awareness and move to action?



# Resource Guide

ADL's No Place for Hate®, the Blanton Museum of Art, and AISD have teamed up to bring anti-bias education and object based learning to our schools. This resource is one in a series featuring a work of art from the Blanton selected to foster important conversations and inspire students to act! The theme for this series is **Using Your Voice**, and considering this work of art should inspire students to use their voices to confront injustice in our world.

This guide has everything you need to create successful discussions and a No Place for Hate Action Project.

## Here you will find:

- No Place for Hate guidelines for Action Projects
- Information about the artist and artwork
- Guiding questions for initial discussion and making
- Suggested community action projects



As this guide reaches multiple schools, we hope it will inspire students to work together to create action projects that can be shared and celebrated.

Please share your projects to [Austin@adl.org](mailto:Austin@adl.org), [Education@blantonmuseum.org](mailto:Education@blantonmuseum.org) and [Cultural.Proficiency@austinisd.org](mailto:Cultural.Proficiency@austinisd.org)

# No Place For Hate®

No Place for Hate® is a self-directed framework helping educators and students take the lead on improving and maintaining a school climate where all students thrive. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) offers resources to ensure that anti-bias and diversity education are an integral part of the school curriculum. No Place for Hate® also helps create and sustain inclusive school environments where all students feel valued and have the opportunity to succeed by promoting respect for individual difference while challenging bigotry and prejudice. Launched in Austin schools in the fall of 2004, the popular campaign has been embraced by hundreds of campuses throughout the Central Texas region. Austin ISD is the largest No Place for Hate® school district in the United States.

## The Need for Discussion

The success of No Place for Hate® relies on the assurance that all members of school communities have a central voice in creating a plan that will lead to lasting change. The foundation for creating that change is a strong coalition of school leaders — students, educators, and family members — who have a stake in the outcomes of that plan.

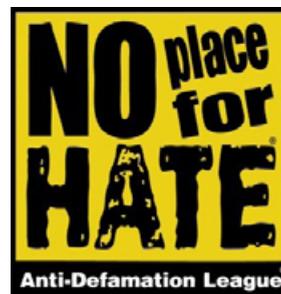
There is no more obvious stakeholder than a student. Too often, adults assume they know what is needed to support youth, but without engaging students in the process, change can be elusive. No Place for Hate® Committees create activities that amplify students' voices and give them opportunities to be active participants.

All qualifying activities must be consistent with the No Place for Hate® mission by challenging bigotry, bias and bullying; exposing young people to diverse identity groups, backgrounds and points of view; promoting respect for individual and group differences; and providing opportunities for community-building within the school. Projects should challenge students to think critically, instill a sense of empathy, and empower students to become allies for one another.

## No Place For Hate® Activities Should:

- Involve all students in active learning
- Involve all students in discussion and debriefing of activities
- Address school-based issues
- Have a school-wide impact
- Take place throughout the school year, with three or more activities spread out over time
- Focus on inclusivity and community

For more information visit [austin.adl.org/noplacementforhate](http://austin.adl.org/noplacementforhate).



# Blanton School Programs

During the temporary pause in the Blanton Museum of Art's gallery teaching program, the education team has designed a robust program of digital content for the semester, outlined below. We will be rolling out the content on a staggered basis. All digital resources can be accessed at [bit.ly/BlantonEducation](https://bit.ly/BlantonEducation).

Each lesson will feature works of art from the museum's permanent collection. All lessons are designed both for asynchronous learning and to stimulate classroom conversation; many lessons can be broken down into smaller units for greater flexibility.

- **Social Justice [Grades 3–5, 6–8, 9–12]:** Downloadable art images with discussion prompts to engage issues of equity and inclusion.
- **#ArtWhereYouAre Studio [all ages]:** Video series led by a museum educator featuring easy, make-at-home art activities inspired by works in the museum collection.
- **SEL (Social-Emotional Learning) [Grades 4–7]:** Short video-based lessons that lead students through a close-looking activity, followed by journaling prompts.
- **STEAM [Grades 3–5]:** Longer video-based lessons that can be broken down into shorter lessons. All lessons include an art-making activity and connections to science and/or math TEKS.
- **Early Literacy [Grades PK–2]:** Short video-based lessons that give younger students the opportunity to engage with a picture book and works of art from the museum collection. Lessons include a video of a museum educator reading the selected book, as well as related activities.

Gallery educators are temporarily not available for online or in-person teaching. The galleries are open for individual visitors and families, but not for group tours. Please check our website for policies and updates regarding visits at [blantonmuseum.org](https://blantonmuseum.org).

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