

Free To Be Me: Exploring Identity

We belong here



We Belong Here



In this work, Bahamian-born artist **Tavares Strachan** offers what may seem like a simple affirmative statement that, upon closer reflection, is abstract, fluid, and multi-dimensional. Strachan states: “As humans, we all struggle with how we fit in and belong...Who gets to determine who belongs where? And where is here? And why does it matter?” Any change to the location or context of this work changes who “we” might be and where “here” is, bringing new nuances to the phrase.

“I have always been fascinated by invisibility,” he explains. Taking forgotten and excluded people and histories as his principal subjects, his art often uses light to make them visible. The welcoming tone struck by this phrase insinuates that perhaps many of us haven’t always felt included. “I wanted to make a work that everyone can own—one that everyone can have...Because as soon as you read it, you say, ‘We belong here,’ and we do belong.”

Tavares Strachan, *We Belong Here*, 2012, blocked-out neon and glass, 24 in. x 61 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Anthony Meier in honor of Jeanne and Michael Klein, 2014

Action Projects

After engaging your students in discussions about the artwork and the theme of 'Identity' the next step will be the Action Projects!

AT HOME: Draw pictures of who, what, and where you can go to for help during difficult times.

Create artwork representing actions you can take to help someone you care about or someone in need feel important and valued (*think: how can I be a positive support?*).

Create a playlist of songs that help you cope when things are difficult.

IN SCHOOL: Explore ideas with your class about ways they can be more welcoming of diverse identities.

Create a visual/dramatic/audio/written representation of things that help promote diverse identities (*think: what gives you hope?*)

How does your school welcome diverse identities? What does that look, sound, and feel like?

IN THE COMMUNITY: Write about how you/others feel "connected" to a group within a larger community (i.e. a sports, academic, or dance team).

Describe something you think is unjust, inequitable, or needs to be better in your communities: (*think: if I had a magic wand, I would use it to _____.*)



ESTEEM

Feel Better



RESILIENCE

Do Better



GROWTH

Be Better



COMMUNITY

Better Belonging



CHANGE

Better Conditions

Note: As you work through this guide, notice these **five dimensions**, which reflect how art captures our ongoing efforts at improvement and growth. More specifically, these dimensions often reflect how we feel, what we do, how we want to be and be seen, the groups we belong to, and how conditions in society can be better. Research suggests that the more aware we are of our circumstances, the better we are able to self-regulate, make healthy decisions, relate to others, and work toward longer-term, functional goals — even in the face of adversity.

The Individual and Community Empowerment Framework includes the dimensions of esteem, resilience, and growth (for individual empowerment), and community and change (for community empowerment). The framework and table are adapted from Travis & Deepak (2011) and Travis (2013), the CREATE Lab, and FlowStory.

TALK

Look at the artwork *We Belong Here* by Tavares Strachan for a full minute. Turn to a friend and discuss what you see.

What feelings come up for you while viewing this artwork? Collect one-word responses, phrases, or ideas on chart paper.

LOOK

Take a minute to look longer and spend some time thinking about the following questions:

- What are some initial impressions of this artwork?
 - Who is 'we' in this artwork?
 - What does 'belong' mean?
 - Why has the artist chosen neon? What might a neon sign suggest?
 - What happens if we turn off this artwork? Who gets to turn this artwork on and off?
 - What might this work show?
-

TALK

Self Talk. Reflect or journal on the following core questions:

-  Who am I?
-  What stories about my experiences would I like to tell others, but have not been able to?
-  In what ways am I trying to be better, to be the best version of myself?
-  How may societal conditions cause people to feel left out, like they don't belong or are unimportant?
-  How may daily experiences cause people to feel left out, like they don't belong or are unimportant?

Peer Talk. Turn to a friend and discuss one or two of the core questions above. Talk about the ways people and communities contribute to our sense of self.



Turning back to the art...

- Who are we in relation to this artwork?
- How might this art be empowering?
- How and why has the artist used his voice to raise awareness?

ACT

First, consider these questions: In what ways does my experience in certain communities change because of membership in multiple groups? (e.g., being Black and a girl, or being poor and an athlete, or being a girl and part of the science club). What do I do to keep from feeling alone, left out, or like I don't fit in? What are the biggest issues or problems faced by members of my community?

Take 10 pictures that show the real you that people might not always see. If you use social media, you may pick 10 pictures that you or someone else shared that you think reflect aspects of your identity/identities.

- How do the pictures reflect your identity/identities?
- Which three pictures are most impactful? Why?
- Share pictures among the group or create a collage and discuss their impact.



Resource Guide

ADL's No Place for Hate[®], the Blanton Museum of Art, AISD, and The CREATE Lab 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 **Identity**, and this work of art should be used to foster curiosity about ourselves and others and raise awareness of our sense of belonging.

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

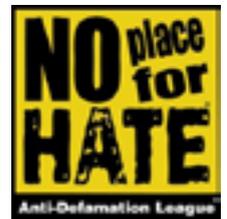
Here you will find:

- 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, education@blantonmuseum.org and Cultural.Proficiency@austinisd.org



BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

Support for School Programs at the Blanton is provided by the Buena Vista Foundation, the Burdine Johnson Foundation, the CFP Foundation, Jeanne and Michael Klein, the Lowe Foundation, the Meinig Family Foundation, and The Powell Foundation, with further support from the Applied Materials Foundation, the Tapestry Foundation, Texas Commission on the Arts, the Susan Mayer Art Enrichment Endowment, and KVUE and the TEGNA Foundation.

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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 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/noplaceforhate.



Blanton Museum of Art School Programs

Interested in visiting the Blanton?

The Blanton provides gallery lessons for Pre-K–12 students that address different styles of learning through engaging conversation, collaborative investigation, and thoughtfully planned gallery activities.

Guided visits invite students to draw connections between art, their lives, and the world around them so they can become more critically engaged citizens. Students are encouraged to use evidential reasoning to construct interpretations about objects of art and develop social and emotional skills. Lessons are designed to support TEKS and English language learners. They reinforce classroom objectives and promote arts integration across the curriculum.

A typical gallery lesson will feature four to six works of art and include some longer interpretive conversations, group activities, and choice-based learning opportunities. The Blanton's talented gallery teaching team expects to customize their plans according to teacher and student needs and interests, as every group is unique.

We are committed to removing financial barriers for schools that demonstrate financial need by offering **free buses and free admission through Art Access funding.**

Schedule a visit

- The Blanton can accommodate up to 75 gallery teacher-led students per hour. Larger groups may be scheduled for back-to-back guided visits.
- Guided visits will discuss 4–6 works of art. They are scheduled on the hour, 50 minutes long, and are available Tuesday–Friday from 10 a.m.– 3 p.m.
- Teachers may elect to bring their students on a self-guided visit, subject to space availability.
- A gallery teacher must lead Pre-K through 3rd-grade students.
- Pre-K–12 groups must bring one adult chaperone for every eight students. Chaperones must stay with the group.
- Guided visits and self-guided visits are \$2 per student, including Thursdays. Required chaperones and teachers accompanying school groups are free. Additional adults pay the regular admission price of \$12.
- To schedule a visit, please fill out our online form at least three weeks in advance.

Information at blantonmuseum.org/k12tours.

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