



## Skin Deep

### Topic of Activity

Color, Painting, Text and Image

### Grades

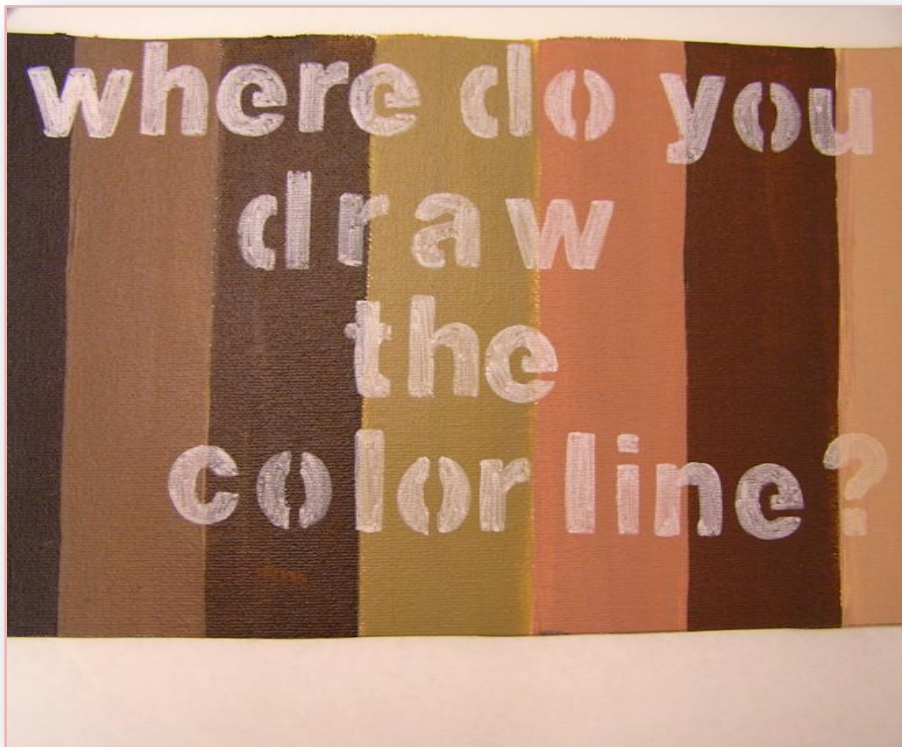
7 – 12

### Overview

Mixing skin tones from a *universal* brown (a combination of the primary colors) starts a conversation about racial politics in contemporary art and society.

### Objective

To explore color as a metaphor for racial stereotypes using image and text.



### Suggestions for Artworks That Complement This Activity

In the exhibition titled *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love* at the Walker Art Center, 2007, Kara Walker probed our assumptions about color, race, and ethnic identity. In one of her works *Endless Conundrum, An African Anonymous Adventures*, 2001, the black silhouettes question our vernacular use of *black* and *white*.

Other artists to include in this discussion are Glenn Ligon and Adrian Piper. In Ligon's work *Untitled (Stranger in the Village #16)*, 2000, he excerpts text from James Baldwin's novel of the same name. Both the artist and writer tackle issues of identity and representation. In addition to the thematic content of the text, Ligon mixes black coal dust into the paint giving the painting a luminous quality and furthers his metaphoric use of the color black. Adrian Piper's black and white photographic and autobiographical work *Mythic Being: I/You (Her)*, 1974, examines identity and gender.



### **Materials Used in Activity**

Acrylic paint – red, yellow, blue, black and white, palette knives, brushes, one strip of canvas for each student and a larger canvas rectangle divided into a grid (the size of this piece depends on the number of students in the class), stencils, and permanent markers.

### **Activity Instructions**

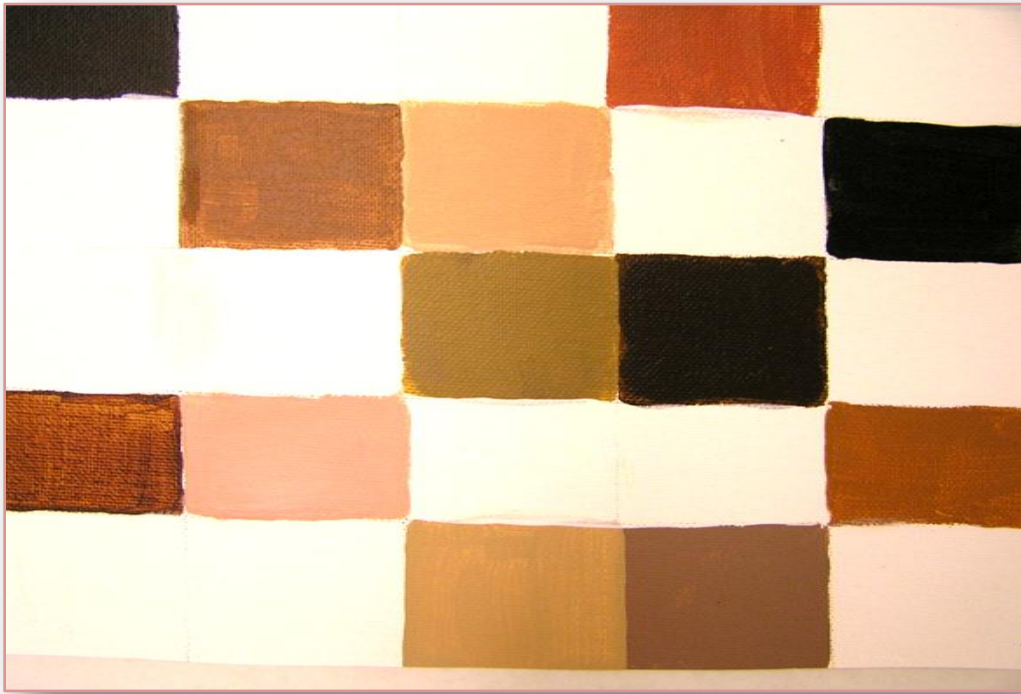
The *universal* brown is mixed by combining the primary colors; starting with red, then adding yellow and blue. Next, a tint or a shade is made by adding some white or black to the brown mixture. Students try to match their own skin tones, and make enough of this color to use for a personal and class project.

#### **For the personal project:**

While mixing these tones, each participant comes up with a statement that responds to the phrase *black and white*. In the meantime, each person's simulated skin tone is painted on a piece of canvas. Then, the statement is stenciled or written on the canvas with permanent markers.

For the class project:

The skin tones are painted on the canvas grid to form a demographic of the class.



### **Some Ways to Reflect on the Activity**

- How are color and identity linked in your work?
- By layering text onto an image, what were you trying to say?
- How is color used in stereotypes?

### **Helpful Tips**

- Encourage students to mix the *universal* brown first
- Experiment with the *amount* of white paint used for tints and black paint for the shades