

# Teaching with *Benjamin Harrison Hill* by Simmie Knox



This document is designed to help teachers present, discuss, and teach about Oklahoma history and art literacy through the use of this work of art. The information and exercises here will aid in understanding and learning from this artwork.

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# First Analysis and Criticism

The steps below may be used for group discussion or individual written work.

Before beginning the steps, take two minutes to study the artwork. Look at all the details and subject matter. After studying the artwork in silence, follow these steps:

## **Describe:**

Be specific and descriptive. List only the facts about the objects in the painting or sculpture.

- What things are in the artwork?
- What is happening?
- List what you see (people, animals, clothing, environment, objects, etc.).

## **Analyze:**

- How are the elements of art – line, shape, form, texture, space, and value used?
- How are the principles of design – unity, pattern, rhythm, variety, balance, emphasis, and proportion used?

## **Interpretation:**

Make initial, reasonable inferences.

- What do you think is happening in the artwork?
- Who is doing what?
- What do you think the artist is trying to say to the viewer?

## **Evaluate:**

Express your opinion.

- What do you think about the artwork?
- Is it important?
- How does it help you understand the past?
- Do you like it? Why or why not?

## Overview of the Artwork

Benjamin Harrison Hill, Democrat, was elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives in 1968. A native of Canada, Hill was a longtime Tulsa, Oklahoma civic leader. He served as pastor of the Vernon African Methodist Episcopal Church and was an elementary teacher, principal and journalist. He earned a bachelor's degree from Wilberforce College, a doctorate in divinity from Samuel Payne Theological University and studied at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln University, and Langston University at Langston, Oklahoma.

Dedicated on May 24, 2005, this portrait of Benjamin Harrison Hill was painted by nationally known artist Simmie Knox, Silver Springs, Maryland. Commissioned by the 2003-2005 Oklahoma Legislative Black Caucus, it is one of a series of portraits authorized by the caucus and approved by the Capitol Preservation Commission and directed by the Oklahoma Arts Council.

## About the Artist

Regarding his work, Simmie Knox states, " I think that a good portrait is the most difficult thing for an artist to bring off successfully. Not only must you get an accurate likeness but you must also create a good painting. Somehow you must convey a subject's character, spirit and personality; and everything must communicate the dynamism of the subject." Since 1981, Knox has specialized in portraiture. He earned a Master's of Fine Art from the Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Pennsylvania. Knox was commissioned to paint the official portrait of former President Bill Clinton, resulting in Knox becoming the first African American to ever paint an official portrait of an American president. Knox has painted portraits of U.S. congressmen and state senators, civic leaders, celebrities and religious leaders.

## Details



1. Reverend Benjamin Harrison Hill, a native of Canada, was a longtime Tulsa civic leader.
2. In 1938 he became a minister and served as pastor of the Vernon African Methodist Episcopal Church in Tulsa.
3. Hill was a junior high school principal for many years in Okfuskee County and pioneered the area of special education.
4. From 1951, Hill served as editorial editor and columnist for the Oklahoma Eagle.
5. He was elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives in 1968 as a Democrat.
6. His accomplishments provided a peaceful transition for the community during the racially turbulent sixties.
7. In his 31 years of service as a prominent Tulsa leader, he gained recognition as a progressive thinker, a creative legislator and one who sought practical solutions.

# Final Analysis

After completing the readings and activities, go back and look at the artwork again. Now that the students are more familiar with the subject matter, ask them to write a few paragraphs about their interpretation of the artwork. In their own words, the writing should address the following:

- Description of the artwork and who/what is in it
- How the elements of art and principles of design are used within the artwork
- What feelings, emotions, or information the artwork depicts
- Their opinion of the artwork

# Pass Objectives

## Grade 4- Social Studies

**Standard 5: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the unique features which contributed to the settlement of the state of Oklahoma.**

4. Identify state and local governing bodies (e.g., the state legislature and city councils) and officials (e.g., governor and mayors) that make laws and carry out laws, with an emphasis on civic participation (e.g., the importance of studying the issues and voting).
5. Develop an understanding of and an appreciation for the cultural diversity of his or her community by examining the historical and contemporary racial, ethnic, and cultural groups of the area.

## Grade 4- The Arts

**Standard 2: Visual Art History and Culture - The student will recognize the development of visual art from an historical and cultural perspective.**

1. Describe and place a variety of specific significant art objects by artist, style and historical and cultural context.
2. Identify themes and purposes of works of art and artifacts in history and culture.
3. Demonstrate a basic knowledge of several fields of art such as painting, sculpture, drawing, computer graphics, printmaking, architecture, and fiber arts.
4. Identify how visual art is used in today's world including the popular media of advertising, television, and film.

## High School- Oklahoma History

**Standard 1. The student will demonstrate process skills in social studies.**

1. Identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary sources (e.g., artifacts, diaries, letters, art, music, literature, photographs, documents, newspapers, and contemporary media).

**Standard 7. The student will examine major cultural and ethnic groups represented in Oklahoma.**

1. Identify cultural and ethnic groups in Oklahoma (e.g., African-Americans, Eastern Europeans, Italians, Germans, and Vietnamese) and explore the causes and effects of their immigration and settlement patterns.
2. Trace the cultural, political, and economic contributions of these groups.

**Standard 8. The student will examine factors that contributed to the political, economic, and social history of Oklahoma during the twentieth century.**

1. Identify significant individuals and their contributions (e.g., Jerome Tiger, Frank Phillips, Kate Barnard, Angie Debo, Ada Lois Sipuel, Clara Luper, George Lynn Cross, Ralph Ellison, Robert S. Kerr, Henry Bellmon, and Reba McEntire).

## High School- The Arts

**Standard 1: Language of Visual Art - The student will identify visual art terms (e.g., content, engraving, foreshortening, mosaic, perspective)**

3. Describe exhibitions of original works of art seen in the school or community.

4. Differentiate between art criticism and art reviews, recognizing that criticism is positive as well as negative in its evaluation of a work of art.

**Standard 2: Visual Art History and Culture - The student will recognize the development of visual art from an historical and cultural perspective.**

5. PROFICIENT: Identify major regional, national, and international collections of art.

**Standard 4: Visual Art Appreciation - The student will appreciate visual art as a vehicle of human expression.**

2. Demonstrate respect for their work and the work of others.