

# Rhythms of Joy: Exploring Self-Identity Through Music and Self-Portraiture

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This lesson explores and expresses cultural identity through self-portraiture, inspired by the joy of one's musical heritage. It offers students a unique opportunity to reflect on their personal experiences and heritage while also gaining insight into the cultures and histories of others.

## Close Looking: Think, Puzzle, Explore

Help the students take a closer look at *Records on Repeat* by Riley Holloway by using the "Think, Puzzle, Explore" [Artful Thinking Routine](#) created by Harvard's Project Zero. Project the image large enough so that everyone can see. Allow students time to think about and/or write down their answers to these questions. Then, allow for a whole group share-out.

- Look at the image.
- What do you think you know about this artwork?
- What questions or puzzles do you have about this artwork?
- What does this artwork make you want to explore?



## Questions to Dig Deeper

- What emotions do you feel when you listen to music from your own culture?
- Can you identify specific elements in the music that activate these feelings?
- How does your personal identity influence your music choices?
- Have you ever used music to manage your emotions? Provide an example of a time when a song helped you deal with a tough situation.
- Discuss how music can bring people together. Have you experienced a moment when music helped you connect with someone else?
- How can sharing music with others improve your relationships or help resolve conflicts?

## Listening Activity

Play either "Move On Up" by Curtis Mayfield (recommended for upper elementary–middle school students) or "Got to Give It Up" by Marvin Gaye (recommended for high school students) while displaying *Records on Repeat*. Select one or two questions below and explain that while listening to the song, students will think about the questions.

1. What immediate emotions do you feel when listening to the song? How does looking at the painting affect those emotions?
2. What elements in the song or painting stand out and evoke a strong emotional response?
3. How do the rhythm and tempo of the song compare to the visual rhythm you see in the painting? Do they create a similar mood or atmosphere? Why or why not?
4. Look at the expressions and poses of the figures in the painting. How do these elements align with the vibe or energy of the song?

When the song ends, allow students to share their responses to the questions.

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## Optional Activity: Musical Self-Portraits

Students will create self-portraits. They will explore and choose a song that they feel best represents their identity and evokes a sense of pride and joy. Encourage experimentation with color, expression, and symbolic elements that represent their chosen song.

**Suggested Supplies** • Paper • Pencils, colored pencils • Markers • Paint (optional) • Oil pastels (optional)

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## Contextual Information: Riley Holloway

Regarding this artwork, the artist explained: "The painting is of my dad and I on Christmas morning at my grandmother's house in Los Angeles. The list of artists written below the title are the ones my mom would have playing on repeat and still does! The overall image presents a vibe that continues in my own household now. My house has become the place for family get togethers, so it's a look at how traditions carry on."

Riley Holloway was born in Los Angeles, California, in 1989. Growing up, he developed an early interest in art, learning from his mother, who is an artist herself. He attended the Art Institute of Dallas and the Florence Academy of Art.

Holloway is best known for his dynamic work and fresh look at figurative art. His images are often accompanied by text and personal references embedded within the work.

He uses a traditional oil painting technique and bold lines to create depth within the portraits. There is a wonderful counterbalance of softness and masculinity in his works.

Holloway's aesthetics create familiar spaces that are imbued with storytelling, free from constraints, and true to his subjects. His content is rich in drama, history, and intimacy.

Source: <https://www.rileyholloway.com/about>

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## Contextual Information: Music Selections

"Got to Give It Up," by Marvin Gaye: Gaye is one of the most influential musical artists of the 20th century. He had a profound impact on African American culture through his groundbreaking contributions to music and his reflections on social justice issues.

"Move On Up," by Curtis Mayfield: Mayfield was a singer-songwriter, guitarist, and record producer, and one of the most influential musicians behind soul and politically conscious African American music.

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## Additional Resources

"Artist Spotlight: Riley Holloway," KERA Arts

"How artists explore identity," The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Image: *Records on Repeat*, 2023. Riley Holloway. Oil on canvas. Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas Art Fair Foundation Acquisition Fund, 2023.51. © Riley Holloway.