



MILDRED HOWARD

PUBLIC ART TEACHER RESOURCE

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CA.

COVER IMAGE: Mildred Howard, *Untitled*, 1975. Photo collage and screen print on paper. Courtesy of The Mildred Howard Archive, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

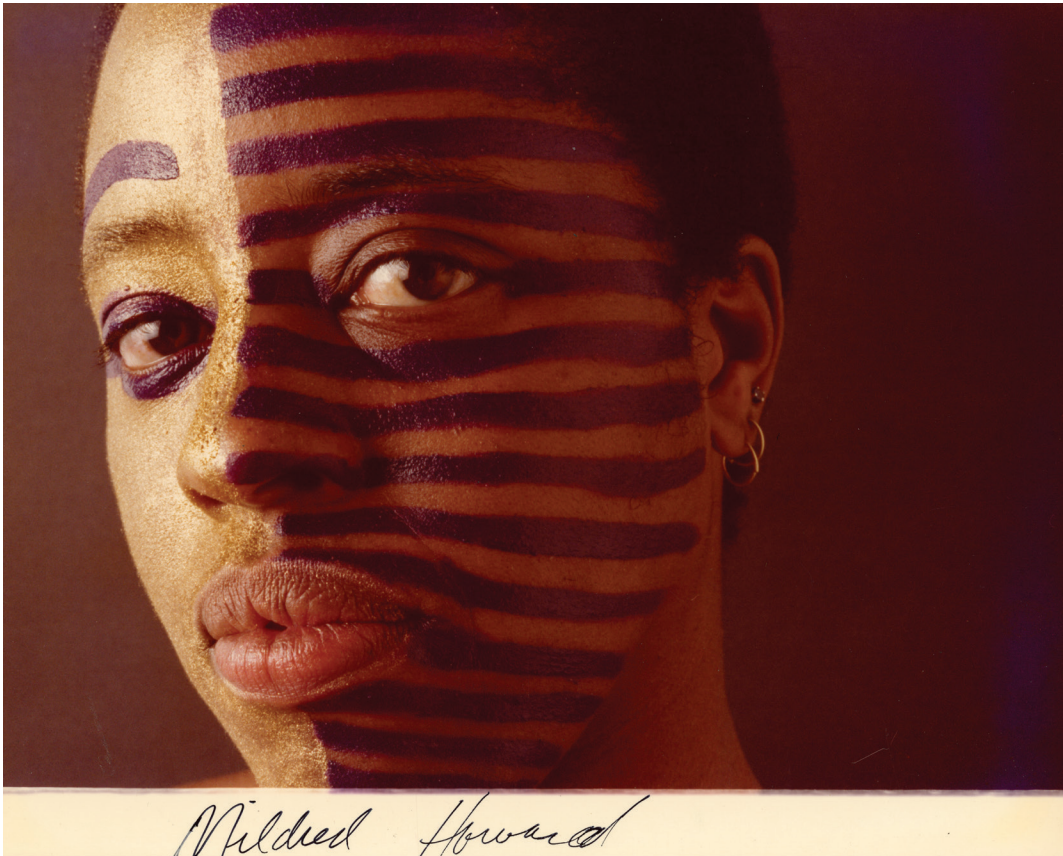


IMAGE: Mildred Howard, *Untitled* (self portrait), circa 1979. Color photograph. © Mildred Howard. Courtesy of The Mildred Howard Archive, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

MILDRED HOWARD is a Bay Area artist whose work explores memory, identity, community, and history. Born in San Francisco in 1945 and raised in South Berkeley, Howard began taking art and dance classes at age three and attended local Berkeley schools before studying Fashion Design. She learned that everyday objects carry stories from her parents who were antique dealers.

Using personal memories, family histories, and the African American experience, Howard transforms found and familiar objects into powerful artworks that connect personal stories to larger community histories.

Her sculptures, installations, and public artworks can be found in libraries, transit stations, streets, and community spaces throughout the Bay Area, inviting people to reflect on how places, objects, and shared experiences shape who we are and what we remember.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Whether you choose to visit a public artwork or explore them through photos and videos in the classroom, these activities offer opportunities to learn about the life and work of acclaimed Bay Area artist Mildred Howard.

Pre-Visit Preview: Use this welcoming activity to introduce students to the artwork of Mildred Howard before exploring one of her public artworks. Students watch a [short educational video](#) featuring seven local public sculptures and consider how Howard uses art to tell stories about people, history, memory, and place.

Exploring a Mildred Howard Public Artwork: Use these activities to help students explore Mildred Howard's Bay Area sculptures and installations or other public art through observation, discussion, and inquiry activities. These activities can also be used to explore Mildred Howard's artworks using images and videos in the classroom.

Response Activities: After visiting or exploring a Mildred Howard public artwork, students consider the stories, people, places, and histories connected to artworks and create their own inspired by place, identity, and community.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

HOW CAN ART HELP US SHARE PERSONAL
AND COMMUNITY MEMORIES?

TEACHING & LEARNING GOALS

Through these learning activities, students will:

- Explore how artists use art to share ideas about memory, place, identity, community, and history.
- Discover how everyday and found objects can be turned into meaningful works of art that tell stories and express ideas.
- Learn how public art can celebrate, preserve, and share the stories of people and communities.
- Understand how Mildred Howard's artwork reflects the experiences, histories, and contributions of African Americans, Bay Area residents, and local communities.
- Feel inspired to create art that shares their own experiences, ideas, and connections to identity, community and the places that matter to them.

KEY TERMS

ASSEMBLAGE

Artwork made by combining found or everyday objects.

MIXED MEDIA

Artwork that uses more than one material (paint, fabric, objects, etc.).

INSTALLATION ART

Large-scale artwork that transforms a space and surrounds the viewer.

FOUND OBJECTS

Everyday items used in art to create meaning.

MEMORY

Personal or shared experiences from the past.

IDENTITY

How a person or group understands and defines themselves.

PLACE

Specific locations or environments.

REPURPOSE

To transform an object from its original use into an artwork with a new meaning, purpose, or story.

PROMISSORY NOTE

A written promise that someone will pay a specific amount of money to another person in the future.

PUBLIC ART

Artwork created for public spaces and community access.

MILDRED HOWARD

POETICS OF MEMORY



IMAGE: Installation view of *Mildred Howard: Poetics of Memory*, 2026. Photo by Christine Cueto.

**On view at OMCA
June 12–October 18, 2026**

The exhibition, *Mildred Howard: Poetics of Memory*, highlights the work of Bay Area artist Mildred Howard. The exhibition brings together major installations, public artworks, and smaller studio works that reflect the full range of her artistic practice over five decades.

While inspired by the exhibition, these teacher resources do not require viewing the exhibition. The suggested activities can be used with Mildred Howard's public artworks, viewed in person or online.

PUBLIC ARTWORKS

Poetics of Memory includes an OMCA-produced video featuring footage of seven of Mildred Howard's public artworks around the Bay Area.



Frame

2015

Hunters Point Shipyard neighborhood

Frame is a 22-by-20-foot bronze structure that resembles the frame of an artwork situated in San Francisco's Hunters Point Naval Shipyard.



Locks and Keys for Harry Bridges

2001

Stevenson Street, San Francisco

Locks and Keys for Harry Bridges is a series of large bronze key and lock sculptures dedicated to Harry Bridges, a legendary California labor leader.

PUBLIC ARTWORKS (CONT.)



The Music of Language

2008

Glide Memorial Church Family Housing, San Francisco

Mildred worked with the poet Janice Mirikitani on this permanent text art installation on the side of the Glide Memorial Church Family Housing building. The text art reads:

“Music of language. Grace, kindness, caring, wonderful, magnificent, splendor, amazing, beauty. Music falls like rain. The pouring of goodness and all that many need to hear when faced with challenges.”



Promissory Notes

2022

Southeast Community Center, San Francisco

Promissory Notes is a large bronze sculpture that takes its inspiration from West African currency.

PUBLIC ARTWORKS (CONT.)



Delivered, Mable's Promissory Note
2024

Outside the Ashby BART station, Berkeley

Delivered, Mable's Promissory Note is a large metal sculpture honoring Mildred Howard's mother. She led the 1960s movement to underground the Berkeley BART line in order to avoid dividing the largely Black neighborhood in South Berkeley.



Curiosity
2021

San Leandro Main Public Library

Curiosity is a bronze question mark and quote featuring a poem written by Quincy Troupe:

"Curiosity: the shape of curiosity is a curving question mark with a hooked tail stamped on the wall of a library, a metaphor inviting all to enter to discover a rich world of books."

PUBLIC ARTWORKS (CONT.)



Moving Richmond
2014
Richmond BART station

Moving Richmond is two massive 12-by-40-foot weathering-steel billboards that incorporate the poetry of local writer Ishmael Reed:

“Rosie the riveter repaired liberty ships. Richmonders of today repair souls like the old timers sewed the meshes of fishing nets. Richmond is the city of second chance. Richmond is the bounce back city. The city of the port sized heart. The city of friends, family and churches. Where new horizons arrive each day, like the fresh baked pastries they once baked at Rubicon’s.”

ALL “PUBLIC ARTWORKS” IMAGES:

PUBLIC SCULPTURES: © Mildred Howard. Images courtesy of Oakland Museum of California, Oakland.
Photos by Johwell Saint-Cilien.

PRE-VISIT PREVIEW

GOAL

This pre-visit experience helps students become familiar with Mildred Howard's public artworks and prepares them to think about how art can reflect community stories, personal memories, and shared histories before encountering or viewing the artwork in person.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Community Story Mapping: Students draw a map of their neighborhood or community and identify places that hold memories, stories, or special meaning for them.

Public Art Brainstorm: Students imagine a public artwork they would create. What story, experience, or issue would it highlight? Where would it be located and why?



[Watch this short educational video](#) exploring seven of Mildred Howard's Bay Area public sculptures.

While watching: Invite students to notice how Howard uses art to tell stories about people, history, memory, and place.

After viewing: Students participate in Notice, Wonder, Connect by sharing one thing they noticed, one question they have, and one connection they can make to their own community.

EXPLORING A MILDRED HOWARD PUBLIC ARTWORK

GOAL

During a visit to one of Mildred Howard's public artworks or through showing photos and videos in the classroom, students closely observe, question, and respond to Mildred Howard's public artwork while exploring how personal stories, place, history, and community shape its meaning. Through discussion and creative responses, students practice observation, interpretation, and making personal connections.

"Objects have history, and they have meaning. But how do you take something that's used for one thing and repurpose it into an artwork of an entirely different meaning? How can you expand your imagination and create a different way of looking? I wanted to challenge myself to see how that could be."

—Mildred Howard

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

See–Think–Wonder (Public Art Viewing): This activity supports students in closely observing and reflecting on public artworks. Students begin by describing what they see in the artwork (shapes, materials, colors, details). Next, they share what they *think* might be happening or what the artwork could mean, using evidence from their observations. Finally, students ask what they *wonder* about the artwork, including questions about the artist's choices, materials, meaning, or purpose. This routine encourages careful observation, interpretation, and curiosity while engaging with public art.

Live Wire Response (Sculpture Viewing): This activity asks students to respond to a sculpture they are viewing by using wire to create simple shapes and forms. Students use the wire to create a shape, line, or form that they notice in the sculpture. This approach encourages close looking and helps students practice translating visual details into three-dimensional forms.

Photo Challenge: This activity invites students to use photography to explore what they notice, wonder, feel, or connect to in the sculpture. Using a camera, students take photos that highlight their personal perspective on the artwork. They might take a human-scale photo that includes themselves or a classmate to show the sculpture's size, zoom in on interesting textures and patterns, or experiment with angles and framing.

Sketch & Notice: This activity focuses on quick sketching from observation, with attention to shapes, textures, patterns, and small details that are often overlooked. Students are given a shared object and are asked to focus on one specific part of it before sketching. It is powerful to see how different students notice and interpret different details from the same object, and how this shapes what they draw and why.

This activity can be extended to strengthen observational skills and connect to scientific observation. Students practice looking closely, noticing details, and documenting what they see. Extensions might include focusing on specific elements such as texture, shape, color, or pattern, observing the artwork from different viewpoints, or creating written reflections.

RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

GOAL

Students reflect on and respond to Mildred Howard's artwork through writing, discussion, and artmaking. By using their observations and personal experiences, students explore how objects, places, memories, and stories can communicate meaning, spread awareness, and express identity, community, and connection.



IMAGE: Mildred Howard, *A Salute to Sojourner, Still Water Run Deep* (detail), 2001. Mixed media sculpture. Courtesy of parrasch heijnen, Los Angeles. Photo by Ed Mumford.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

More Than a Thing Story (Object-Based Narrative Summary): Students choose an everyday object and write a short paragraph explaining how it carries a memory, story, or part of their identity. In their writing, students practice summarizing the story of the object by describing what it is, what it represents, and why it matters. Students include specific details as evidence to support the meaning they are describing.

Place Poem (Informational Summary from Place): Students write from the perspective of a neighborhood, street, or public space, creating an informational summary paragraph that captures the essence of the place. Students begin with a topic sentence that describes the overall character or feeling of the place. They include observational evidence (sounds, sights, movement, or activity happening there). Students then finish with an explanation that connects those observations to what the place represents.

Memory Box Assemblage: Inspired by Mildred Howard's use of everyday objects in her artwork, students create an assemblage inside a small box that tells a story about their identity, memory, family tradition, neighborhood, or an important life experience. Students combine found objects, images, text, fabric, and other materials to communicate meaning through composition and symbolism. This activity can also serve as a community-building project at the beginning of the school year, with students adding to their boxes over time and sharing them with classmates to build connections through personal stories and shared experiences.

Migration & Journey Suitcase Project: Students create a suitcase-inspired assemblage exploring themes of movement, migration, place, and community. Using paper or cardboard, they construct a box filled with drawings, symbols, maps, photos, words, and found objects that represent their own stories, family history, lived experiences, dreams, and future goals. Inspired by Mildred Howard's use of everyday materials, students transform ordinary objects into meaningful artworks that share personal and collective stories.

RESOURCES

MAP OF MILDRED HOWARD PUBLIC ARTWORKS

[Mildred Howard Poetics of Memory Public Sculptures Google Map](#)
[Mildred Howard Poetics of Memory Public Art Poster](#)

MAPS OF OTHER BAY AREA PUBLIC ART

[Oakland Murals And Street Art Map](#)
[San Francisco Public Art Map](#)



IMAGE: Installation view of *Mildred Howard: Poetics of Memory*, 2026. Photo by Christine Cueto.

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

[OMCA Mildred Howard: Poetics of Memory](#): On view from June 12–October 18, 2026, the exhibition spans five decades of her work and includes new artworks alongside materials from her Oakland studio.

[Mildred Howard Bay Area Public Sculptures Video](#): An OMCA-created educational video exploring seven of Mildred Howard's Bay Area public sculptures.

[Mildred Howard Explores History Through Art](#): 2026 *East Bay Express* article on the first major retrospective of the Oakland-based artist.

[Artist Mildred Howard Changes Landscapes](#): An interview with Mildred Howard from the San José Museum of Art celebrating her recognition as the 2022 Gala Honoree.

[Mildred Howard Interview with Lori Fogarty—Voices of Contemporary Art \(video\) 2020](#): In this conversation, OMCA's Executive Director and CEO Lori Fogarty speaks with Mildred Howard about her life, artistic journey, and the experiences that have shaped her work.

[Mildred Howard on Art, Race, and Memory—Richmond Art Center exhibition](#): In a conversation with *Radio Free Richmond*, Howard reflects on art, race, and how her work connects personal and collective memory through found materials and symbolic imagery.