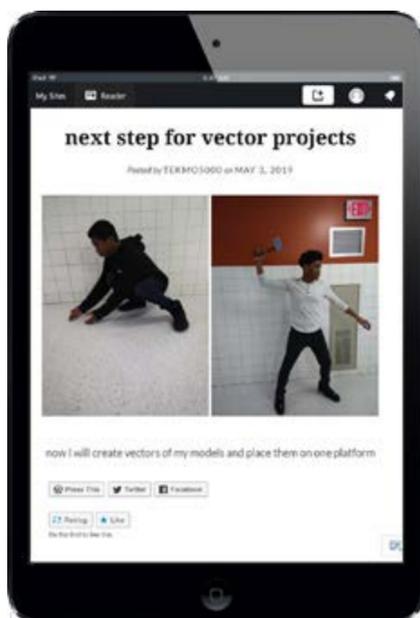


# Media Conceptual Silhouettes

KARA WALKER INSPIRED

In this lesson, students created vector silhouettes with Adobe Illustrator to illustrate a social issue of their choice. Students were introduced to Kara Walker, and discussed how she traditionally proper Victorian medium of the silhouette to draw attention to racial and gender inequity. Students modeled for one another as they took reference photos or created reference sketches in Sharpie, then vectorized these references with the pen tool in Adobe Illustrator. We displayed the final artworks next to the student-written artist statements during our 11th grade show.



**Above:** Student blog posts documenting ideation phase of project;  
**Below:** Finished student silhouette project and accompanying artist statement



My artwork was inspired by the concern for the plant life that is constantly being reduced and how I feel that it's a problem for the future of the planet's health. My artwork is about showing the negative effects of deforestation but also showing how there are people who are trying to plant new trees to help reverse the harmful effects of human consumption. I would like for people to view my work as a sign of awareness for the deforestation that is harming the planet and what we can do to change the effects of it. My artwork shows a man who is chopping down a tree. There are stumps behind him to show that he has chopped down previous trees. Next to him, a man is planting a tree to try to reverse the effects of the woodsman's actions. I have placed a sapling in between the planter and the woodsman to show that there are people willing to help replant the earth at the same time that others attempt to destroy that progress. I had my models pose the way they did to convey the motion of a woodsman chopping down a tree as well as a planter planting a sapling to show that he cares for the earth. The finished product could be better if I redid the stumps, but everything else came out pretty good and I think that it conveys my original idea.



The interaction of humans, and the assumptions, set forth by age, and societal pressures, play a crucial role in the way we live. This piece expresses the social issue of homelessness, and the juxtaposition between the assumptions of an adult, and how those assumptions don't exist as a child. The adults are all on the same level, except for the homeless woman bound in place by the weight of unfortunate circumstances. The adults have their own preconceived notions of society and ignore the homeless woman. The girl, on the other hand, is on the same level as the homeless woman. The little girl has no preconceived notions; just a basic understanding of the world, and sees that a person (regardless of labels) is hurt, and in need of help. The juxtaposition between the adults' ignorance, and the curiosity and compassion from the little girl, culminate into a sounding narrative that speaks to how society has shaped our understanding, and created false bias.

From sketchbook to Adobe Illustrator this project was a smooth ride. The concept came relatively quickly and from the start I knew that this would turn into an animation. Due to time constraints this final project isn't an animation yet, but that will soon be fully realized and entered into my portfolio.



I wanted to display the idea of depression and show how it gets a hold on a person, and the scars it leaves in its wake. The body language of the subject shows a sense of hopelessness and the need for escape. It is actually kind of a personal concept, as I struggle with my own form of depression. The feeling of helplessness is something that I feel and what many people feel, with and without depression. The scars on the girl's arms are there to represent the scars that may come to someone struggling.

Doing the project about the topic of depression has made this both easy and hard. The concept of the silhouette was easy to create and execute but the internal thoughts made some things difficult. Subjects like this made me think about my own struggles more than usual. Next time I work with the vector tool, I need to work on the edges of the art. I had to go back in and clean the edges up, which prolonged the project.

**Left:** Finished student silhouettes and accompanying artist statements;  
**Right:** Blog post introducing the assignment and the art of Kara Walker

## New Project: Conceptual Vector Silhouette Inspired by Kara Walker

Posted on November 7, 2023

Today we will introduce our next project, Conceptual Vector Silhouettes Inspired by Kara Walker. We will use Adobe Illustrator to communicate a message about a social issue of our choice.



Kara Walker is best known for exploring the raw intersection of race, gender, and sexuality through her iconic, silhouetted figures. Walker reinvents the traditionally proper Victorian medium of the silhouette directly onto the walls of the gallery, creating a theatrical space in which her unmythical paper characters inflict physical and emotional violence on one another (PBS's *Art 21*). More background information on Kara Walker is available through [ThinkCasts](#).

Read about Kara Walker's recent statements regarding the current political climate in the *NY Times* and *Quartz*.

Here are some examples of Kara Walker's artwork:



### Project Requirements:

- Vector black and white silhouette imagery created in Adobe Illustrator
- 12x14, 14x14, or 12x18 (depending on desired dimensions)
- Illustrates the complexity of a social issue of your choice
- Balance of positive and negative space
- Choice of one of the following:
  - One detailed scene with figures and an environment
  - Triptych (three artworks that should be displayed together) of simpler silhouettes

### Today we will:

- Brainstorm project ideas for our conceptual vector silhouette project
- Create a new blog post with the following: this will count as a 20-point homework grade, so be sure to fulfill all requirements!
  - A written description of your concept, but save what to write? Start by answering these questions, but make sure your final blog post is written in paragraphs for us:
    - What social issue will you illustrate?
    - If this is currently a contentious issue, what subargument of this issue will your artwork portray?
    - What imagery (figures, environment, props/accessories) will your artwork contain?
    - What will be happening in your artwork?
  - A sketch of your planned design (you will later trace over this in Illustrator, so be sure to add the appropriate amount of detail)

If you do not finish all the elements of your planning blog post this class, post what you have in order to receive a participation grade for the day.