

Learn with MoMA



STOP
ACTIVE
SHOOTER
CADET
AUTIE
CUSTER

POTS
RUGS
KOKOPELLI
FOR THE
CLASS
ELITE

POINT
OF
SWORD
WHO
OWNS
HISTORY

BUILT
THREE
FORTS
INDIAN
NEVER
SAFE

BULLETS
ARE
RAPID
FLESH
IS
SOFT

IS
IT
EVERY
ONES
PAIN

NAVAJO
DONT YOU
KNOW
LOVE
YOU
SO

HANDS
ON YOUR
HEAD
OR
TRIGGER
OF
GUN

SURE
ALONE
CAN
DAMAGE
THE
LIVER

Note: This lesson includes topics such as gun violence, discrimination, and racial conflict. We acknowledge that this content may be difficult for you or your students, and we encourage you to take any necessary steps to ensure that you and your students feel safe and supported as you engage with this lesson.

Step 1

Look closely

1. Choose one sheet from the detailed image on page 2 and read the six words or phrases aloud. What images or emotions do these words evoke for you?
2. How do the background colors affect the way you read and interpret the words in this artwork?

Watch the artist talk about the ways his poetic process of wordplay and printmaking pays homage to “the ghosts of a whole culture.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnZX5KHn67k>

Step 2

Learn

The artist, Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds (Cheyenne and Arapaho Nation) has worked as an artist, activist, and teacher in Oklahoma City and on tribal land where he immersed himself in the community. His artworks confront repressed or unacknowledged histories of violence against Native communities in the United States by the American government and settlers. In this work, titled *Surviving Active Shooter Custer*, he uses the modern term “active shooter” to describe perpetrators of massacres committed by United States troops against Native Americans in the 1800s. Each of the panels contains six lines of text that refer to this country’s history of violence as well as ongoing acts of oppression against Indigenous communities.

“The real mission of my art is to reset history, to be truthful about what happened to Native people. ... I see protecting Indigenous people around the world as a big part of my job as an artist. ... I used to make little notes to myself, with a few words or short phrases. I hung these notes on the wall, and later I realized I could make bigger pieces out of them in pencil and pastel,” says Heap of Birds. “For me I give the audience a lot of credit. I would be more explicit if I wanted to be totally understood. I have six words to work with and I limit myself to these six words. And I hope to bring resonance from my life—what I want to do is to combine it with someone else’s life.”

Step 3

Activity: Write a six-word message

Materials: paper and a writing utensil

1. Look at the image on page 2 and select one word from Edgar Heap of Birds's work that resonates with you.
2. Why did the word resonate with you? Think of five other words that express your response to the artist's message.
3. Write your words on a piece of paper, using one word for each line. Remember to use only six words!
4. Try to experiment with how you write the words: small/cursive/all caps. You can also use different colored papers or writing utensils.
5. Optional: Combine your message with messages from a group of friends or classmates. Are there any words or themes that more than one person used?

Step 4

Share!

Share your six-word message with a friend or family member. Or you can email a photo of it to us at MoMA:

schoolprograms@moma.org.

Teaching Tip: If you are interested in some additional resources that you might find useful for engaging your students about Native American history and culture, The Smithsonian Institution's [Native Knowledge 360°](#) is designed for use in K-12 classrooms and provides support for having respectful and culturally responsive conversations with your students.



Volkswagen of America is proud to be MoMA's lead partner of learning and engagement.

Generous support for School and Teacher Programs is provided by the Carroll and Milton Petrie Education Program Endowment, the William Randolph Hearst Endowment Fund, and the Mimi and Peter Haas Endowment Fund for Elementary School Programs.

Additional funding is provided by the Ducommun and Gross Family Foundation and by the Annual Education Fund.

Image: Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds. *Surviving Active Shooter Custer*. 2018. Monotype on forty-eight sheets. Publisher: Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds. Printer: Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds. Edition: Unique. Acquired through the generosity of Agnes Gund, Marlene Hess and James D. Zirin, the Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art, Kathy and Richard S. Fuld, Jr., Linda Goldstein, Maud I. Welles and Marnie Pillsbury. © Hock E Aye Vi Edgar Heap of Birds. Courtesy of the artist