



Jeffrey Gibson, *THE FUTURE IS PRESENT*, 2019. Courtesy of Jeffrey Gibson Studio, Kavi Gupta Gallery, Roberts Projects, Sikkema Jenkins & Co. and Stephen Friedman Gallery

# Educator Resource

Recommended Age: Grade 6 and up

Jeffrey Gibson,  
*I AM YOUR RELATIVE*

co-commissioned with the Toronto Biennial of Art  
March 10, 2022—July 31, 2022

Museum  
Of  
**Contemporary  
Art**  
Toronto Canada



Jeffrey Gibson, *SHE KNOWS OTHER WORLDS*, 2019. Courtesy of Jeffrey Gibson Studio, Kavi Gupta Gallery, Roberts Projects, Sikkema Jenkins & Co. and Stephen Friedman Gallery

## Overview

Jeffrey Gibson (Mississippi Choctaw/Cherokee) is an interdisciplinary artist based in Hudson, New York. His artworks make reference to various aesthetic and material histories rooted in Indigenous cultures of the Americas, and in modern and contemporary subcultures.

*I AM YOUR RELATIVE* (co-commissioned with the [Toronto Biennial of Art](#)) consists of 15 brightly coloured stages that can be moved and reconfigured to create nooks of space for spontaneous gatherings by the public as well as a series of readings, talks and performances. The walls of the ground floor and the surfaces of the stages are adorned with posters, textiles and stickers created by Gibson. Their geometric patterns incorporate song lyrics, quotes and images sourced from artworks and texts he has created over the past 10 years, local historical archives and from the public. These words and images celebrate Indigenous individuals, forms, aesthetics and materials.

Housed within the stages is a library of locally acquired and donated children's books, giving each stage the ability to double as a reading nook. The books, much like Gibson's installation, highlight the voices and experiences of diverse authors and illustrators and touch on topics like migration, environment, queerness and imagination.

As a whole, this visual archive, which prioritizes Indigenous, Black, Brown and queer voices, speaks to strategies of story-telling, place-making and to what histories are remembered and how.

## Ontario Curriculum Connections

### **Language, Grade 6 – 8**

Oral Communication, Reading, Writing

### **Social Studies, Grade 6**

A. Heritage And Identity: Communities In Canada, Past and Present

### **English, Grade 9 – 12**

Oral Communication, Reading and Literature, Writing

### **History, Grade 10**

E: Canada, 1982 to the Present

### **Contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Issues and Perspectives, Grade 11**

B. Cultural Identity And Cultural Continuity  
C. Community Perspectives  
D. National And Regional Perspectives  
E. The Global Context

### **Visual Arts**

*Grade 6 – 8*

D1. Creating and Presenting  
D2. Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing  
D3. Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts

*Grade 9 – 12*

A. Creating and Presenting  
B. Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing  
C. Foundations





Jeffrey Gibson, *Migration / A Time For Change*, 2022. Courtesy of Jeffrey Gibson Studio, Kavi Gupta Gallery, Roberts Projects, Sikkema Jenkins & Co. and Stephen Friedman Gallery

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

For *I AM YOUR RELATIVE*, Gibson worked with the rich and colourful range of images he and his studio has created over the years to create posters, stickers and textiles that cover both the walls and stages on MOCA's ground floor. **How do the images, text and use of colour as a whole make you feel? Are there phrases, images, or patterns that stick out to you or that you are drawn to? Take note of them.**

**What does the work tell you about the place you are in right now? Who is being represented and how?**

Many of the elements in Gibson's installation are also things that we use. For instance the walls are covered in posters and stickers and the sculptures are also stages and reading nooks that have a small collection of books. **Keeping this in mind can you imagine some of the uses for the stickers, posters and stages? How does this make the work different from typical artworks you are not meant to touch or interact with?**

## Key Ideas

Storytelling, Abstraction, Indigeneity, Archive, Empowerment

## Glossary

**Archive:** a collection of historical documents and records that provide information about people, institutions, places, and/or events

**Geometric Abstraction:** a type of abstract art based on geometric forms, often in compositions with no recognizable subject matters





Jeffrey Gibson, *I AM YOUR RELATIVE*, 2022, installation MOCA Toronto. Photographer: Toni Hafkensheid.

## Discussion | Grade 9 – 12

Historically geometric abstraction in art is seen as purely formal in European traditions, that is to say shapes, colours and patterns are not meant to carry stories or specific meanings. For Jeffrey Gibson—drawing from how these elements have been used in his own cultural backgrounds, and broader histories of Indigenous design, as well as diverse subcultures—colours, shapes, patterns and abstraction have specificity and carry intentional meaning.

**How do elements that make up *I AM YOUR RELATIVE* like the text, the posters, stickers and stages – use abstraction in a way that is not simply decorative or formal? What do these elements as a whole communicate?**

**Can you think of uses of visual material in your day to day life that communicate your connection to other people? Are there images, colours, patterns or even objects that you associate with home, your friendships or with the communities you are part of? How do these shape how you see yourself and your community?**

## Activity | Grade 6 – 12

The stages in *I AM YOUR RELATIVE* also double as reading nooks and are filled with a collection of picture books that celebrate diverse cultural backgrounds, identities and lived experiences much like Gibson's work. Spend some time looking through the selection of picture books and find one that speaks to you. **What do you like about it? Are there ways that you feel it speaks to your own experience?**

Materials: pencils, crayons, collage material, scissors, glue sticks and paper

Scenario: You are invited to create a picture book to be included in Gibson's exhibition. **What would this book be about? What would it be called?**

Write down a short description of the book, its title and draw the cover of the book you imagine.

Extension: Share your drawing with a partner and tell them about the story you created and the inspiration behind it. **What similarities and differences are there between your books?**