

The Abyss of the Ocean

Cuban Women Photographers, Migrations, and the Question of Race



AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



ABOUT CCCADI:

The Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute (CCCADI), is an arts, culture, education and media organization that advances cultural equity, racial and social justice for African descendant communities.

CCCADI's programs serve children/youth, families, young professionals, elders, local and international artists, and practitioners of African-based spiritual traditions. Through our work CCCADI offers a collective space where African descendants honor the contributions of the global African Diaspora through exhibitions, performances, conferences, educational programs and international exchanges.

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Greetings Families, Educators, and Students,

Welcome to the Education Guide for *The Abyss of the Ocean: Cuban Women Photographers, Migrations & the Question of Race* exhibition. This guide is intended to support your viewing, comprehension, and exploration of the [exhibition](#). Before approaching the guide, it is recommended to view the full exhibition first, [click here](#). To spark critical thinking and highlight the common thread that runs throughout all of the featured artwork, the following education guide will explore the works in a different order than the exhibition. We hope that you enjoy *The Abyss of the Ocean* and our Education Guide.

Thank you for your participation,
The CCCADI Team

INTRODUCTION:

The Abyss of the Ocean: Cuban Women Photographers, Migrations & the Question of Race

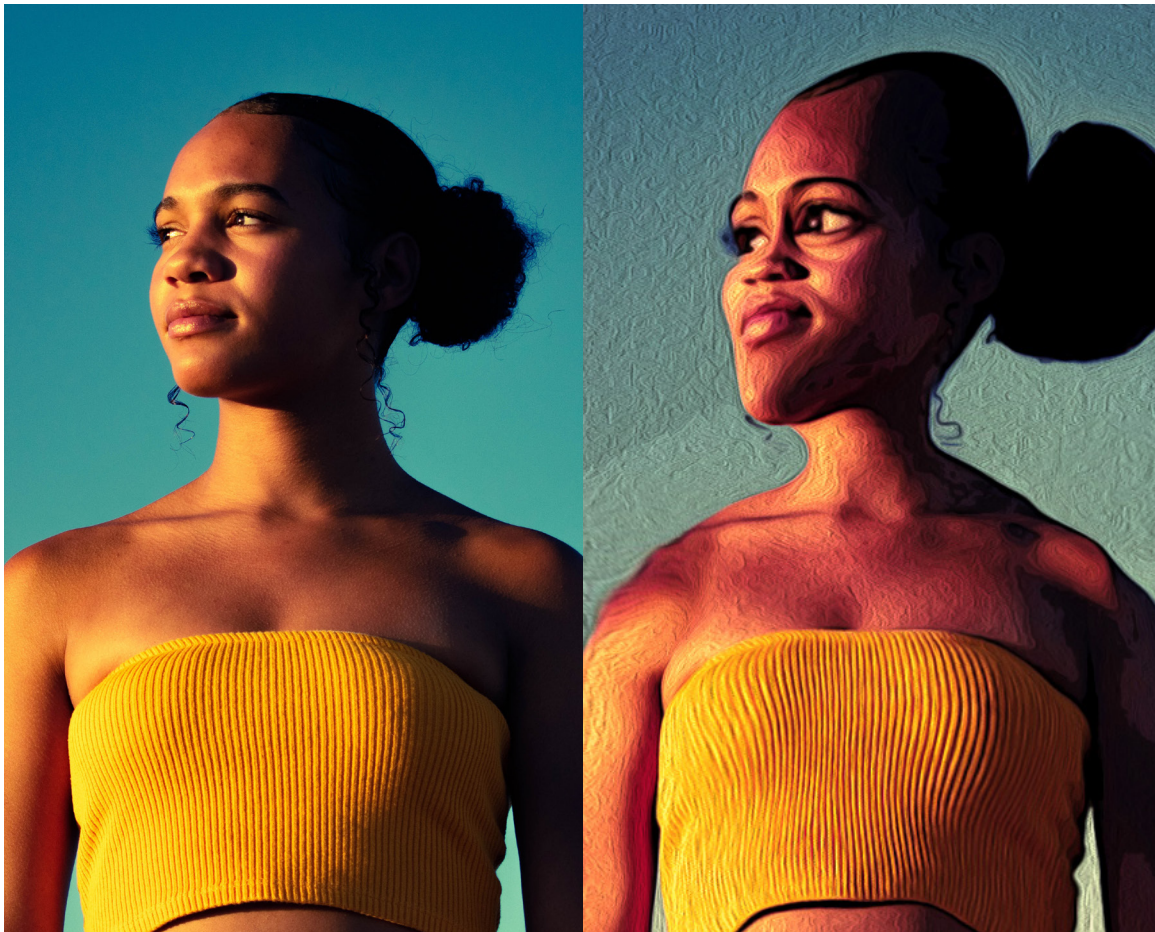
Our identities are fluid, multifaceted, and ever-changing. Who we are in one person's company is not the same as when we are in the company of another. Who we were just moments ago is not who we are today nor who we will be tomorrow. When we are true to who we are, we embrace all of our parts in our wholeness.

Throughout Latin American history, European colonizers have reduced Black and Indigenous people from the complexities of their beings to bits and parts. *The Abyss of the Ocean* explores and challenges how the concept of "Latinidad" has fit Black women, in particular, into stereotypes and rigid roles. Each artist uses her photography to expose and expand these limiting perceptions of Black women.

In the activities that follow, you will learn how art is used to explore, analyze, and challenge traditional history and narratives. You will also explore, analyze, and challenge the traditional histories and narratives of the cultures and communities to which you belong.

WHO IS ANITA ROSARIO? A REFLECTION OF IDENTITY.

The photographers in this exhibition use their lens to challenge limiting perceptions about race, women and labels. Before diving into the exhibition's exploration of identity, consider your own identity as you read through this reflective exercise. Think about the ways you too may see yourself or may be seen differently depending on the lens through which you are viewed.



[Photo by Ernest Brillo]

Anita Rosario.

16 year old.

Puerto Rican.

High school student.

What does it mean for Anita to be 16, Puerto Rican, a high school student, and a young woman all at once?

To her younger sister, Anita is almost an old person.

To her father, Anita is still a child.

To older women, Anita is just a girl.

To boys her age, Anita is already a woman.

To non-Puerto Ricans, Anita is too Latina.

To her Puerto Rican family, Anita is not Puerto Rican enough.

To her mother, Anita is too quiet.

To her cousin, Anita is loud and funny.

To her abuela, Anita is the one who loves novelas.

To her best friend, Anita is the anime fan.

Is Anita only how her mother sees her?

Does Anita's cousin know the real Anita?

Could Anita be loud and funny and quiet all at once?

Does Anita keep the true Anita hidden?

Or is Anita all of these Anita's all at once?

ACTIVITY 1: PEOPLE AS AND THROUGH OBJECTS



[Juana Valdés. *Imperial China*, 2017.]

ESSENTIAL VOCABULARY

objectify/objectification - to degrade a person to the status of a mere object

personify/personification - to give human qualities to an object

Engaging with the Art

What is the difference between seeing a person as a person and seeing them as an object? People are complicated: we have emotions, dreams, relationships, personalities, and identities that are constantly changing. Objects, on the other hand, are believed to have no emotions or other human qualities. They are often reduced to economic value (how much can they be traded for, how much profit can they make, etc.); objects are produced, sold, discarded, and purchased again.

When we objectify a person, we take away the human part of them. We see them as a “thing” without feelings rather than as a person with a heart. Since the beginning of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Latin America has often seen Black women in this same way: it has denied Black women’s humanity and treated them as objects to be sold for profit.

Juana Valdés explores this history in her piece *Imperial China*. Look at the piece and consider the following questions:

1. What details and/or patterns do you notice in the piece?
2. Does the piece evoke any emotions within you?
3. How does Juana Valdés explore the idea of objectification in *Imperial China*?
4. How can *Imperial China* be compared to the objectification of Black women in Latin America?

ACTIVITY 1: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE

If turning a person into an object removes their humanity, could turning an object into a person create humanity?

Personification is a popular literary device among writers that gets us to reconsider what makes us human. For example, a writer could **personify** the support beam of a building and give it a voice. What could a support beam teach us about keeping it together under pressure? How does a support beam feel to have everyone depend on her?

For this activity, you are going to write a poem and use **personification** to explore people's stories and share their humanity.

Directions:

1. Identify a group of people in your community or within your culture that is often neglected or ignored.
2. Identify an object that is commonly used by that group of people.
3. Write a personification poem from the point of view of that object and explore the following questions: *What moments has this object shared with this group of people? What does this object get to see about that group of people that is not often seen or discussed?*

USE THIS SPACE PROVIDED TO COMPLETE THE ASSIGNMENT.

ACTIVITY 1: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE:

EXAMPLE ASSIGNMENT

1. Neglected group of people in Puerto Rican culture: elderly Puerto Rican women.
2. Object commonly used by the group of people: a pilón (mortar and pestle).
3. The student writes a poem in which the pilon talks about the moments when elderly Puerto Rican women cook alone, singing to themselves and talking about the dreams they had before they married.

USE THIS SPACE PROVIDED TO COMPLETE THE ASSIGNMENT.



[Gertrudis Rivalta. *I (Yo)*. 2000.]

ACTIVITY 2: MORE THAN A SEX OBJECT

[*"I (Yo)"* by Gertrudis Rivalta and *"Paquita y Chata se arrebatan"* by Coco Fusco in collaboration with Nao Bustamante]

ESSENTIAL VOCABULARY

sexualization - to attribute sexual meaning to something or someone

sexual objectification - to degrade someone to the status of a sexual object

Engaging with the Art

Another form of objectification is **sexual objectification**: instead of seeing a person's wholeness, we see them only as objects of sexual pleasure. While sexuality is certainly part of our nature as humans, it is not all that we are. However, in the advertisements we see, the media we watch, and the music we listen to, our culture normalizes sexual objectification and often hides people behind sexual appeal.

This has been a particularly difficult issue for Black women in Latin America. In past and contemporary media, Afro-Latina women have been portrayed as exotic sex objects. Stereotypes of the sexy mulata/negra and the spicy, passionate Latina have kept both Black and non-Black Latinas restricted to limiting roles. Again, this neglects the wholeness of their being. Who are Black women outside of these sexual roles? Are they artists? Philosophers? Activists? Friends? Individuals?

Artists Gertrudis Rivalta, Coco Fusco, and Nao Bustamante explore the sexualization of Latina women in their respective pieces *"I (Yo)"* and *"Paquita y Chata se arrebatan."*

1. What details and/or patterns do you notice in the pieces?
2. Do the pieces evoke any emotions within you?
3. How do the pieces *"I (Yo)"* and *"Paquita y Chata se arrebatan"* either expose or challenge the sexualization of Latina women?
4. Do these pieces attempt to present a fuller picture of Latina women? If so, how?

ACTIVITY 2: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE

As photographers, each artist in *Abyss of the Ocean* uses their camera lens to focus on a particular part of a subject or scene. Can you imagine, however, everything that is outside the focus of the lens? For example, if you were to take a picture of the ocean, what about the shore and the land behind you?

If sexual objectification focuses its lens on the sexual aspect of a person, in this assignment, you will try to focus your lens on what is not seen. Complete the following assignment and add wholeness to an overly sexualized cultural figure, group of people, or individual in your culture, in your community, or in the media.

Directions:

1. Identify a cultural figure, group of people, or individual who is often sexualized. Like Gertrudis Rivera's piece "I(Yo)," it could be as broad as Black women in general, or, like Coco Fusco's and Nao Bustamante's piece "Paquita y Chata se arrebatan," it could be a doll, a cartoon character, or another type of cultural figure. The person could also be a celebrity such as a musician or an actor.
 - Go online and research this cultural figure, group of people, or individual. Pay attention to how they are usually portrayed. How are they sexualized?
 - Research parts of their lives that are not well-known. What were their dreams? Where did they grow up? Did they have a favorite hobby? Outside of their sexualization, who were they as people?
 - *If your individual is a fictional character, you can invent and imagine other aspects of their lives that are not sexual.
2. Organize this information on the T-Chart below.
3. Create an art piece that "turns the lens," so to speak, on the other aspects of their lives. Highlight the parts of them that show their wholeness as people. You can do this in a drawing, a painting, or a photo collage.

ACTIVITY 2: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE: T-CHART

CULTURAL FIGURE, GROUP OF PEOPLE, OR INDIVIDUAL	

How They Were/Are Sexualized	Unknown Parts of their Lives

ACTIVITY 2: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE: EXAMPLE ASSIGNMENT

1. Identified person: **Betty Boop**

2.

CULTURAL FIGURE, GROUP OF PEOPLE, OR INDIVIDUAL
Betty Boop

How They Were/Are Sexualized	Unknown Parts of their Lives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cartoon portrayal Harlem jazz singer Esther Jones• Shown as an object of desire for male characters in the cartoon• Shown in more revealing clothes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Who was Betty as a young girl?- Who was Betty among her friends?- What was Betty's favorite place to be alone?- What was Betty's favorite food?- Did Betty have a pet?

3. The student draws Betty Boop as a young girl, laughing and climbing a tree in a forest with her childhood dog.

ACTIVITY 3: ERASURE

ESSENTIAL VOCABULARY

erasure - to remove a person, their story, and their contributions from view altogether

Engaging with the Art

Imagine that you and three classmates are just about to submit a group project. For you, this project has been particularly difficult: you did extensive research, worked extra hours, and lost sleep to get it done. However, when your classmates go to hand it in, they take your name off of it. How would you feel? Should the teacher know your name and the work you put into it?

In many cases, the image of Afro-Latinas has been distorted into objects of trade or sexual objects; in other cases, the stories of Afro-Latinas have been erased altogether. The erased stories are both inspiring and violent. Many of Black women's artistic, political, and social contributions to Latin American society have been erased and hidden from view; on the other hand, Latin America has also erased stories of violence against Black women. As we study history, it is important that we ask why certain stories are erased and who benefits from their erasure?

In her piece "No son mios," Marta María Pérez Bravo explores erasure in Cuban history. In these photographs, the artist overlays her portrait with images of Black subjects taken from the police archives of the first half of the 20th century in Cuba. These Black people were put on trial for practicing Afro-Cuban religion in a time of extreme racism and religious persecution.



["No son mios" by Marta María Pérez Bravo]

1. What details and/or patterns do you notice in the piece?
2. Does the piece evoke any emotions within you?
3. How does Pérez Bravo's piece challenge the erasure of racism against Black Cubans?
4. Who benefits from this erasure?

ACTIVITY 3: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE

For this assignment, you will take direct inspiration from Marta María Pérez Bravo's piece to explore your own history. Instead of erasing your ancestors from your present day life, you will be remembering and honoring them.

Directions:

1. Choose or take a photograph of yourself that represents your joy, strength, and/or passion.
2. Using online research and family interviews, consider the following question:

Which of your ancestors have helped you arrive at the joy, strength, and/or passion that you show in the photograph? Choose three to remember and honor.

These ancestors could be living or dead, blood-related or cultural (such as artists, politicians, etc.). Was it your mother? Your uncle? Your great grandmother? Indian musicians in Trinidad? Black Abolitionists in the United States? While some of the ancestors might come to your mind quickly, as you go back more generations, it might require some more research. Use the graphic organizer below to gather and record this information.

3. Create a four-box photo collage where you use Pérez Bravo's technique and super impose the images of these ancestors onto your photo.
4. If you would like, choose a special place to hang this collage in your home to remind you who helped you become who you are today.

USE THIS SPACE PROVIDED TO COMPLETE THE ASSIGNMENT.

ACTIVITY 3: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE: T-CHART

Remembering and Honoring Ancestors

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Individual or Group of People</i>	<i>How did they contribute to your joy, strength, and/or passion?</i>
1 Generation Before You		
2 Generations Before You		
3 or More Generations Before You		

ACTIVITY 3: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE: EXAMPLE ASSIGNMENT

Remembering and Honoring Ancestors

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Individual or Group of People</i>	<i>How did they contribute to your joy, strength, and/or passion?</i>
1 Generation Before You	My mother	When I was younger, my mother made sure to have house parties every month. At these house parties, she would put on traditional Puerto Rican music. This showed me how important music and gathering was in our culture and encouraged me to pursue music in the future.
2 Generations Before You	My great-uncle, Tio Luis	Up until the age of 15, I would go to Puerto Rico once a year to visit my family. I didn't know Spanish, so I could only speak to my Tio Luis who spoke English. Tio Luis used to show me his farm, his crops, and the songs he learned to sing in church. When he passed away, I went to his funeral and saw how the musicians and poets of the town sang and recited poetry in celebration of his life. Tio Luis's life and death showed me the importance of connection to nature, connection to cultural traditions, and the power of music.
3 or More Generations Before You	Black Puerto Ricans	I play Afro-Puerto Rican bomba music. When I play the Afro-Puerto Rican barril drum, I try to embody the joy and sense of family that my mother and my Tio Luis passed down to me. However, I have to also recognize that Black Puerto Ricans on the island gave me the gift of the drum. Bomba music was outlawed from the time of colonization; many Black Puerto Ricans faced threats of extreme violence or death for playing the drums. Yet, through their dedication, strength, and resilience, they kept the music alive through the generations. As a light skin Puerto Rican, I owe gratitude and respect to Black Puerto Ricans for carrying the traditions, I must honor the Black Puerto Ricans within my family history, and I must defend Black Puerto Rican culture and people in my life.

ACTIVITY 3: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE: EXAMPLE ASSIGNMENT

<p>Photo of man playing a barril drum.</p>	<p>Photo of man playing a barril drum with a photo of his mother superimposed.</p>
<p>Photo of man playing a barril drum with a photo of his great uncle superimposed.</p>	<p>Photo of man playing a barril drum with a photo of Black Puerto Ricans from the 1800's superimposed.</p>

ACTIVITY 4: PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER



["When I Am Not Here, Estoy Allá," "The Flag. Color Code Venice." "My Mother Told Me I Am Chinese: The Painting Lesson" by María Magdalena Campos-Pons]

ESSENTIAL VOCABULARY

multifaceted - having many aspects or sides

Engaging with the Art

History and identity are not simple concepts. Discovering the fuller truth of who we are as individuals and as a people is messy and complicated. In the process, we find inspiring and violent stories, parts of ourselves that harmonize and parts of ourselves that seem to contradict each other. One response to objectification, sexualization, and erasure is exploring, embracing, and sharing our wholeness.

In her pieces, María Magdalena Campos-Pons explores her own multifaceted identity as a Black Cuban woman with Nigerian, Hispanic, and Chinese roots. Instead of reducing herself to just one part of who she is, Campos-Pons explores all of herself in her pieces.

1. What details and/or patterns do you notice in the piece?
2. Does the piece evoke any emotions within you?
3. How does Campos-Pons embrace her Cuban, Nigerian, Hispanic, and Chinese roots in her pieces "When I Am Not Here, Estoy Allá," "The Flag. Color Code Venice." "My Mother Told Me I Am Chinese: The Painting Lesson"?

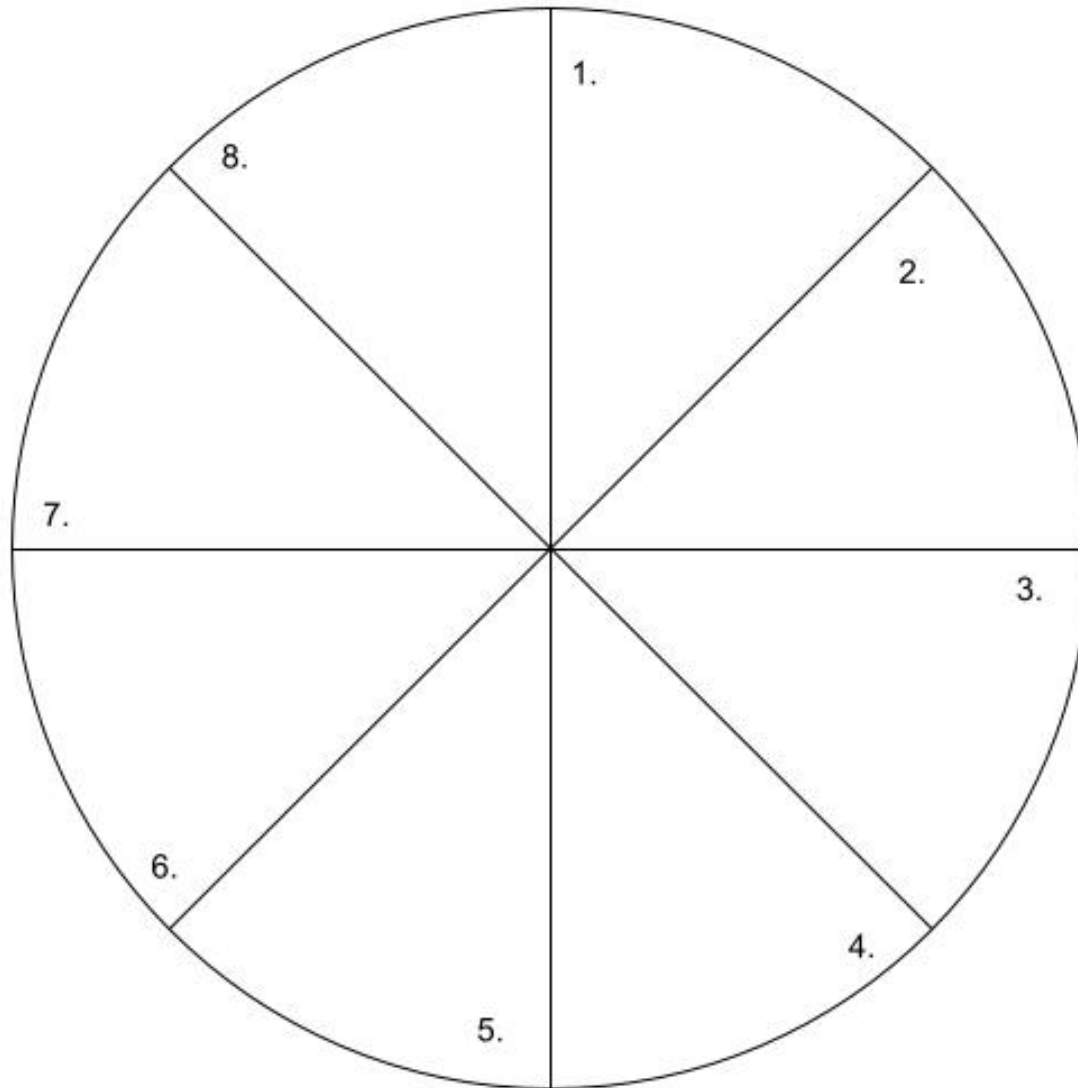
ACTIVITY 4: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE

Throughout *Abyss of the Ocean*, you have seen how the artists use their pieces to explore, analyze, and challenge Latin America's limiting portrayals of Black women. Now, it's your turn to do the same with your own multifaceted identity. Instead of photographs, you will be using video.

Directions:

1. On the graphic organizer provided below, list eight parts of you that make up your identity. This could be your cultural background, your local community, your interests, your personality traits, etc. If possible, try to think of as many seemingly contradictory parts of your identity as possible. For example, are you a city girl who also loves nature? Is your family from two seemingly distinct cultures? Think about how you could bring together parts of yourself that others might not expect to be together.
2. On the outline below, visualize and write out video scenes that could represent these parts of your identity. Focus on making the scenes as contrasting as possible. For example, if one scene is in the middle of the city, another scene could be in the middle of a forest. Or, if one scene has mostly dark colors, the next could have mostly light colors.
3. Using the scene outline, create a video that shows and celebrates your multifaceted identity.

ACTIVITY 4: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE: GRAPHIC ORGANIZER



ACTIVITY 4: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE: VIDEO SCENE OUTLINE

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

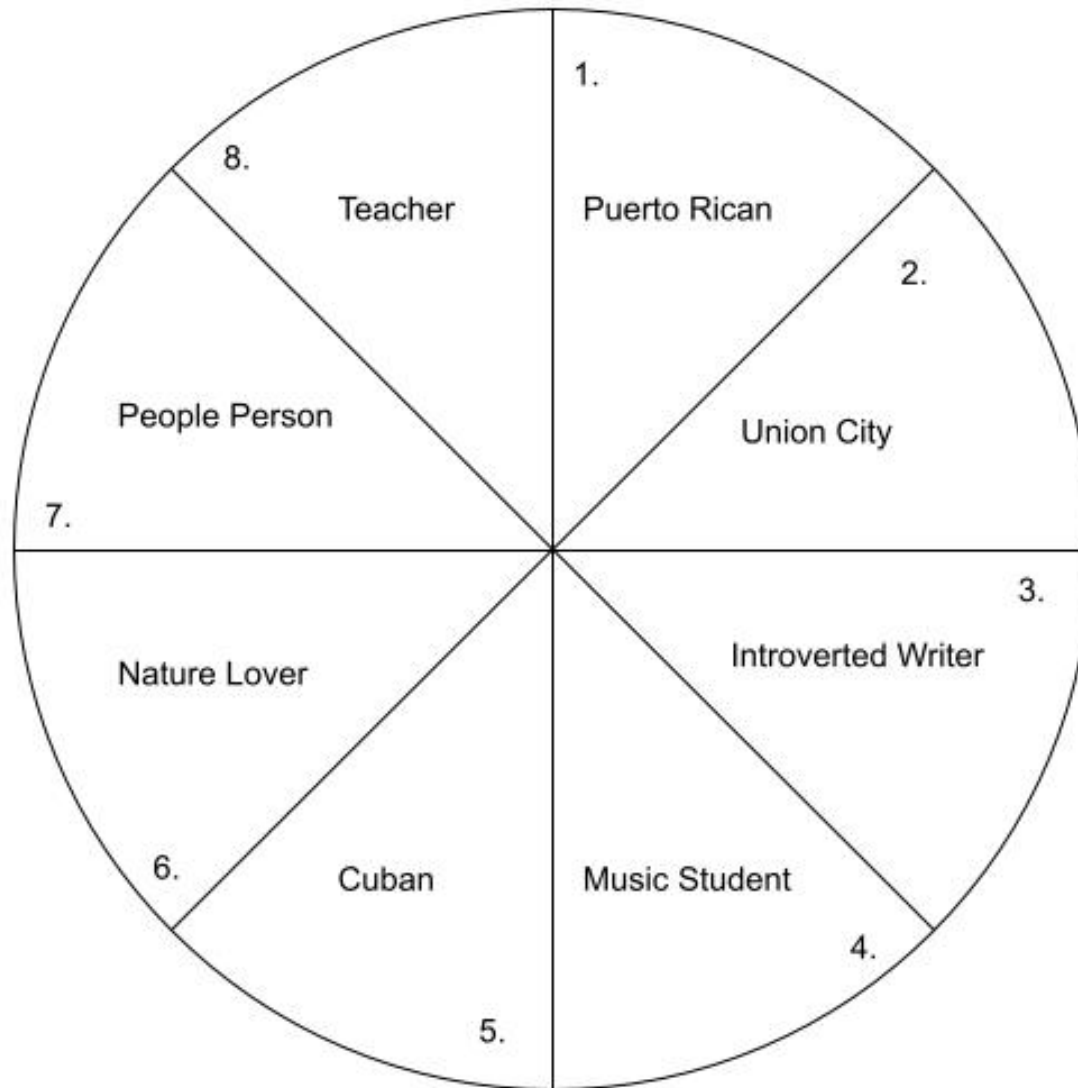
6.

7.

8.

9.

ACTIVITY 4: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE: EXAMPLE ASSIGNMENT



ACTIVITY 4: MAKING CONNECTIONS AND EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE: EXAMPLE ASSIGNMENT

1. I am playing Puerto Rican bomba music on a street corner. There are Puerto Rican flags, lots of laughing, people playing drums.
2. I am walking through the streets of Union City. There are many cars, loud music playing, people selling food on the street, and different types of stores (botánicas, dollar stores, etc.).
3. I am writing in my journal early in the morning in my room with headphones on.
4. I am studying percussion with an older teacher. It is clear that he is showing me what to do.
5. I am ordering a cortadito coffee with toasted bread and butter at a Cuban bakery.
6. I am in the middle of the forest with my girlfriend, looking at trees, mushrooms, plants, and other aspects of the nature around me. There is lots of sunlight and no other people.
7. I am at a party laughing and dancing with other people.
8. I am in a classroom with students looking at the whiteboard as I talked.

Thank you for exploring the exhibition and this accompanying education guide.

www.TheAbyssoftheOcean.digital

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