

ATH EN AE UM



Allan Rohan Crite: *History & Social Science Lessons*

Allan Rohan Crite was a visionary and versatile artist—he was also a community leader, mentor, and tireless recorder of the people and places of Black Boston. Throughout his century-spanning career, Crite embodied the role of a griot, or storyteller, with work that championed the extraordinary moments of everyday life and the many facets of humanity. Crite’s art was often grounded in his immediate surroundings, in the places and people he saw daily.

These lessons focus on Crite’s art, making connections to what is happening at that time in the United States and how it connects to the experiences of Bostonians.

Lesson 1 | *Burning and digging : South End housing project.*

Allan Rohan Crite: Documenting Urban Renewal

Lesson 2 | *The News*

Allan Rohan Crite: Black Bostonians in World War II

Lesson 3 | *Have your pass ready.*

Allan Rohan Crite: Women at the Charlestown Navy Yard

Additional Lesson Ideas

Curriculum Standards

Lesson 1 | *Burning and digging : South End housing project.* Allan Rohan Crite: Documenting Urban Renewal

Grade Level

Middle or High School

Time

1–2 class periods (45–90 minutes)

Essential Question

What was the experience of 20th-century urban renewal like for those affected?

Objective

Students will be able to define urban renewal, contextualize it in the city of Boston, and compare a map to *Burning and digging* by Crite.

Materials

- [*Burning and digging : South End housing project.* \(1940\)](#)
- [South End renewal area : locality map](#) (1960)
- Map Analysis Protocol (see pp. 4-5)



Context

The Housing Act of 1937 provided federal funding to build public housing projects as well as so-called “slum clearance” in American cities, including Boston. The Housing Act of 1949 jumpstarted large-scale urban renewal efforts with the clearing of entire neighborhoods. This painting shows 1939 excavations performed with a steam shovel in preparation for the Lenox Street Projects. Lenox became the first public housing site in Boston built specifically for African-American tenants. Crite documented the ongoing destruction near his home during this time, and in 1971, Crite and his mother were displaced from their home at 2 Dilworth Street due to urban renewal projects.

Lesson Sequence

Warm-Up

- Distribute or display Crite's *[Burning and digging : South End housing project.](#)*
- Break the image into four quadrants. For each quadrant, write one thing you:
See • Think • Wonder
- After discussing the painting, ask students to describe what this image is showing in one to two sentences. Then ask students to describe the mood or feeling the painting aims to convey.

What is Urban Renewal?

Use the Frayer model or other word mapping to define and discuss the term urban renewal.

Map Analysis and Discussion

- Introduce the *[South End renewal area : locality map.](#)*
- Use the **Map Analysis Protocol** (see following page) questions to analyze the map.

Reflection Question

Allan Crite's work focuses primarily on the neighborhoods of Lower Roxbury and the South End in Boston. Using the map, describe what physical changes were planned for this area. Then explain how Crite's *Burning and digging : South End housing project* reflects the human impact of those plans. Students can use writing or drawing to answer this question.

Map Analysis Protocol

Use these questions to guide you in interpreting and evaluating the map. NOTE: It may not be possible to find answers for every question. If not, that's useful to know.

1) What do you see on the map? Check for each of the following map elements. For each element that you see, describe it in detail and explain your thinking.

	Description	My thoughts
Title		
Creator/ source		
Year map was made		
Year data is from		
Legend		
Colors		
Symbols		
Illustrations		
Labels		
Font		
Tone/mood		

Lesson 2

The News

Allan Rohan Crite: Black Bostonians in World War II

Grade Level

Middle or High School

Time

1–2 class periods (45–90 minutes)

Essential Question

How did Black Bostonians contribute to World War II and challenge racial barriers?

Objective

Students will be able to describe the role of Black soldiers in WWII and draw connections to Crite’s *The News*.

Materials

- [*The News*](#) (1945)

Primary Sources

- [Twice a Patriot!](#) (poster)
- [Man with Guns](#) (photo)
- [First Predominately Negro Ship Commissioned USS Mason](#) (photo)



- [Enoch “Woody” Woodhouse](#) (Boston Public Schools graduate)
- [Leo R. Grey Interview](#) (Boston Public Schools Graduate)
- [Double V Campaign](#) (poster)

Context

The News offers a local perspective on an international event. On the corner of Columbus Avenue and Northampton Street in Boston’s Roxbury neighborhood, four men read of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s death during the final months of World War II. Crite, who referred to himself as an “artist-reporter,” reproduced the front pages of two prominent Boston newspapers, including miniature portraits of the late president.

Lesson Sequence

Warm-Up

- Distribute or display Crite's [The News](#).
- Break the image into four quadrants. For each quadrant, write one thing you:
See • Think • Wonder
- After discussing the painting, ask students to describe what this image is showing in one to two sentences. Then ask students to describe the mood or feeling the painting aims to convey.

Primary Source Stations Activity

- [Twice a Patriot!](#) (poster)
- [Man with Guns](#) (photo)
- [First Predominately Negro Ship Commissioned USS Mason](#) (photo)
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- [Double V Campaign](#) (poster)

Teachers could consider these themes when writing questions for students:

- Work and Service: What were Black Bostonians doing during WWII?
- Emotions: What emotions do you see these servicemen expressing?
- News and Information: How was news being shared during WWII?
- Double V Campaign: How did Black soldiers fight for democracy and equality both at home and in the war?

Reflection/Assessment Question

How do all of these sources together help us understand the experiences of Black Bostonians during World War II? Students can show understanding by writing 1-2 paragraphs or drawing their analysis.

Lesson 3

Have your pass ready.

Allan Rohan Crite: Women at the Charlestown Navy Yard

Grade Level

Middle or High School

Time

1–2 class periods (45–90 minutes)

Essential Question

How did Black Bostonians contribute to WWII and challenge racial barriers?

Objective

Students understand the role of women at the Charlestown Navy Yard (Boston, MA) and make connections to Crite’s painting *Have your pass ready*.

Materials

- [*Have your pass ready*](#). (1943)
- [“We Can Do It!” Shipbuilding Women Invade the Charlestown Navy Yard](#)
- [Executive Order 8802: Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry](#) (1941)



Context

Officials collect passes from a queue of men and women in both military and civilian dress. Depicting the mundane, regulated start of his workday, Crite identified the location as “Gate 1 / Boston Navy Yard / Charlestown” in an inscription on the back of this watercolor. Crite’s works capture not only his changing neighborhood but also his workplace at the Charlestown Navy Yard where the workforce changed dramatically during WWII.

Lesson Sequence

Warm-Up

- Distribute or display Crite’s [Have your pass ready.](#)
- Break the image into four quadrants. For each quadrant, write one thing you:
See • Think • Wonder
- After discussing the painting, ask students to describe what this image is showing in one to two sentences. Then ask students to describe the mood or feeling the painting aims to convey.

Document Analysis

Using a “Talk to the Text” protocol or similar strategy, have students read the following and summarize, question, and make connections:

- [“We Can Do It!” Shipbuilding Women Invade the Charlestown Navy Yard](#)
- [Executive Order 8802: Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry](#)

Reflection/Assessment Question

Think about the opportunities, challenges, and contributions of Black women working in Boston during this time. How do you think Executive Order 8802, their work, and the community around them shaped their lives and their city?

Students can write their answer or create a drawing showing:

- What a day in the life of these women might have looked like
- How they contributed to the war effort and their community
- What feelings and/or challenges they might have experienced

Possible Extension Activity

Students can read this [Case Study of Helen Lee Franklin](#) who worked at the Charlestown Navy Yard during some of the same years as Allan Rohan Crite.

Additional Lesson Ideas

1) Boston's Black Artists: Celebrating Black Joy and Identity *Student Research project*

Students can [select any works by Allan Rohan Crite](#).

Students read the poem [study of abundance](#) by Emmanuel Oponng-Yeboah

Sample Boston Artists for Research:

- Rob “Problak” Gibbs (visual artist)
- Donna Summer (singer and songwriter)
- Oompa (musician)
- Lois Mailou Jones (artist)
- Cliff Notez (digital media artist, musician, filmmaker)
- Paul Goodnight (artist)
- Fern Cunningham (sculptor)
- Reginald Jackson (visual artist, photographer)
- John Wilson (visual artist)

Reflection/Assessment Question

Curate a classroom mini-exhibit that pairs Crite’s artwork with music or other art forms from any era of your chosen artist. As you design your exhibit, focus on how Crite’s paintings and your chosen art reflect expressions of Black Joy, community, and cultural celebration. Consider how everyday life, faith, family, and creativity are expressed in both visual art and music. Be prepared to explain the connections you see between Crite’s work and the broader celebration of Boston Black life in the arts.

2) Allan Rohan Crite as “Griot of Boston”

Students will be able to define Griot and tell their own story of Boston through art or writing.

Define: Griot (What does it mean? Who in your family/friend circle/community is a griot?)

“All my work is designed—I’m telling a story. As a matter of fact, the old African tradition—what they call a griot: storyteller. That’s what I’ve been doing all of my life in all my drawings. I’m a storyteller.”

—*Allan Rohan Crite* (1910–2007)

Reflection/Assessment Question

Students should reflect on their personal experiences of living and growing up in Boston.

Students will then create their own expression of Boston through writing, drawing, or music.

They should draw on the “everydayness” of their experiences as Crite does.

Curriculum Standards

These lessons meet several standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework in US History II including:

USII:

Topic 3. Defending democracy: responses to fascism and communism [USII.T3]

8. Explain the long-term consequences of important domestic events during the war.
 - b. the beginning of the second Great Migration of African Americans from the South to industrial cities of the North and to California
 - c. A. Philip Randolph and the efforts to eliminate employment discrimination on the basis of race
 - d. large numbers of women in the workforce of munitions industries and serving in non-combat jobs in the military, including as pilots, clerks, computer scientists, and nurses
 - f. how the two world wars led to greater demands for civil rights for women and African Americans.