What’s inside?

Follow along with your student as you uncover the story of Henry Ossawa Tanner, the first world famous Black American artist. Watch Henry grow and overcome the many barriers before him as he claims his destiny as a great artist.
Henry Ossawa Tanner
He was a world-famous artist.
Let’s learn about his life!

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Henry wanted to be an artist when he grew up. His father wanted him to work in a factory.

Painting helped Henry get better from being sick.

Henry tried working in a factory, but he got very sick.

Henry went to school to study art in Philadelphia. He was the first Black student at his school.
His classmates and teachers shared his love of art, but he still felt alone.

They all treated him differently because of the color of his skin. They were all white while he was Black.

In Philadelphia, even when white people said nice things about Henry’s artwork, they always sounded surprised. It seemed like just because he had brown skin, people didn’t think Henry could be a good artist.

Wow, are you sure Henry made this?

I’m so surprised

I’m not sure how he does it. It’s too good.
Henry’s parents always expected the best of their children.

My kids can do anything! I know I can be a great artist! No matter what.

Lots of great artists live in France. I should go there.

After school, Henry felt like an artist, but he knew he could be even better.

It would cost a lot of money to get there.

Henry worked as an art teacher and sold his paintings to save up money for his trip.

After a few years, Henry made this dream come true.

But France was very far away.
In France, people saw his skin color, and they still believed he could be a great artist.

He was able to let his talent shine and not worry about what other people thought.
Henry also got the chance to travel to faraway places.

He saw lands and animals that he had never seen before.

When Henry went back to America, a lot of people had the same unfair ideas as before. But something was different! It was Henry!

Henry saw the world, and he wanted the world to see where he came from, too.

He made art that showed how beautiful it was to be Black.

I am the great artist I wanted to be!

I am proud of who I am!
He also made a sculpture of his father. Henry’s parents taught him that he could do anything.

I want people to remember how much you helped me and many others!

Henry visited America a few times, but he chose to live in France for the rest of his life. He got married and had a son.

He worked hard and made beautiful art. He won awards. He helped other young artists who came to visit him. Henry’s dream of being a great artist came true.
“I decided on the spot I would become an artist, and I assure you, it was no ordinary artist I had in mind.”
TEXT SOURCES


IMAGES


*Daniel in the Lion's den*, Henry Ossawa Tanner, 1907-1918, oil on paper mounted canvas. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California, Mr. and Mrs. William Preston Harrison Collection, 22.6.3. https://collections.lacma.org/node/228961

*Gateway, Tangier*, Henry Ossawa Tanner, ca. 1910, oil on plywood. Smithsonian American Art Museum, D.C., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Norman Robbins, 1983.95.190. https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/gateway-tangier-23655


*Mrs. Tanner and Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner*, mother and father of Henry Ossawa Tanner, ca. 1900, photographic print. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, D.C. 20960 http://collections.si.edu/search/detail/edanmdm:AAADCD_item_14646?q=henry+tanner&fq=online_media_type%3A%22Images%22&record=28&hlt=term=henry%2Btanner&inline=true


