

Isamu Noguchi

Gregory (Effigy)

Pronounced: ee-SAH-moo no-GOO-chee

About this Resource

This lesson series is designed to connect students with primary source texts that offer opportunities for critical thinking and interdisciplinary connections with works in the Nasher collection. We suggest you invite students to first read the text and then discuss the artwork in pairs or small groups before completing the art making activity. **The information below is provided to offer teachers a broader context to guide student discussion.**

Gregory (Effigy)

Isamu Noguchi originally carved *Gregory* (which he titled *Effigy* when first exhibited) from purple slate. This sculpture belongs to a series created from 1944 - 1948, when Noguchi used readily available remnants of marble and slate that were cut into slabs for resurfacing buildings. This series is characterized by carved, interlocking pieces that fit together and support themselves without welding or cast joints. The Nasher's *Gregory* was later cast in bronze in 1969.

About Isamu Noguchi

Early in his career, Isamu Noguchi worked as artist Constantin Brancusi's studio assistant. Inspired by Brancusi's forms and philosophy, Noguchi turned from an academic style to modernism and abstraction. Throughout his prolific career, Noguchi created sculptures, gardens, furniture and lighting designs, ceramics, architecture, playgrounds, and set designs. He used a variety of media, including stainless steel, marble, ceramic, cast iron, balsa wood, bronze, sheet aluminum, basalt, granite, and water. Born in 1904 in Los Angeles, California, Noguchi's mother was an American novelist of mostly Irish descent, and his father was a Japanese poet. He lived in Japan when he was a young boy, returned to the United States to attend high school and then lived in the U.S. for the rest of his life.

Additional Resources

Isamu Noguchi's Biography, <https://www.noguchi.org/isamu-noguchi/biography/>

Exhibition Resources for *Self-Interned, 1942: Noguchi in Poston War Relocation Center*

<https://www.noguchi.org/museum/exhibitions/view/self-interned-1942-noguchi-in-poston-war-relocation-center/>

SparkNotes guide to *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/metamorph/>

Suggested Curriculum Connections (TEKS)

Fine Arts: Historical and Cultural Heritage, Critical Evaluation | §117.302. Art, Level I (c) (3) and (4)

Social Studies: Culture | §113.41. United States History Studies, (c) (2)

English: Reading Comprehension of Literary Nonfiction | §110.31. English I (b) (6)

Learn More at the Nasher

You can learn more about *Gregory (Effigy)* and see what's currently on view by visiting the "Art" section of the Nasher website. Discover more resources and lessons in the "Learn" section or book a guided or self-guided tour in the "Visit" section. www.nashersculpturecenter.org



Isamu Noguchi, *Gregory (Effigy)*, 1945 (cast 1969). Bronze, 69 1/4 x 16 1/8 x 16 3/8 in. (175.9 x 41 x 41.6 cm.). Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas.

Isamu Noguchi, *Gregory (Effigy)*

Read and Discuss

Working with a partner or as a group, fill in the blanks of this story.

When you are finished, read the completed story aloud.

Gregor Samsa often had _____ dreams. One morning, he awoke to find
adjective

he'd become a _____! Laying on his back,
adjective living creature

he raised his _____ and saw it was no dream. He had a
body part

_____, _____ and
adjective color body part

several _____ legs. "What's happened to me?" he thought.
adjective

Gregor tried to leave his _____. It was harder than he thought
piece of furniture

_____ all his _____ legs at once.
verb adjective

When his family saw Gregor, they felt _____. So, he stayed in his
emotion

bedroom and his _____ brought his _____ to
family member noun

him. During the day, Gregor _____ back and forth along the walls and the
verb-ed

ceiling. He especially liked _____ from the ceiling, where he felt
verb-ing

_____ and _____.
emotion emotion

On a blank sheet of paper, draw an idea for a sculpture based on something from the story. Share your drawings with a partner or with your class.

Isamu Noguchi, *Gregory (Effigy)*

Isamu Noguchi shared that the title of his artwork, *Gregory*, was inspired by a short story written by author Franz Kafka. In *The Metamorphosis*, traveling salesman Gregor Samsa awakens one morning to find he has transformed into a giant insect. At first, he thinks it is a temporary change, but that does not end up being the case. The story explores how Gregor adjusts to his new body and how his sister and parents react to his transformation. Their feelings of fear and disgust for his insect form affect the way they treat their brother and son.

Read the following version of the story:

The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka

Gregor Samsa often had **bad** dreams. One morning, he awoke to find he'd become a **giant bug!** Laying on his back, he raised his **head** and saw it was no dream. He had a **shiny brown stomach** and several **little** legs. "What's happened to me?" he thought.

Gregor tried to leave his **bed**. It was harder than he thought to **move** all his **small** legs at once.

When his family saw Gregor, they felt **scared**. So, he stayed in his bedroom and his **sister** brought his **meals** to him.

During the day Gregor **crawled** back and forth along the walls and the ceiling. He especially liked **hanging** from the ceiling, where he felt **relaxed** and **happy**.

**The above version of The Metamorphosis was adapted by Nasher Education staff for length and does not replicate the original version.*

Look at this image of the sculpture *Gregory (Effigy)* by Isamu Noguchi.

How might the sculpture relate to the story?



Isamu Noguchi, *Gregory (Effigy)*

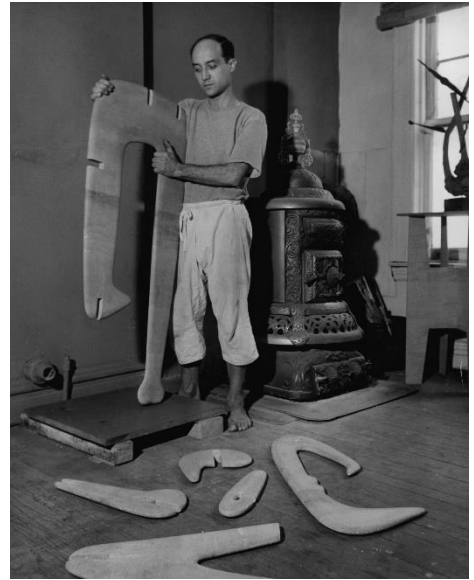
Make

"Everything I do has an element of engineering in it – particularly since I dislike gluing parts together or taking advantage of something that is not inherent in the material. I'm leery of welding or pasting. It implies taking unfair advantage of nature."

– Isamu Noguchi

Isamu Noguchi created slotted sculptures such as *Gregory* using a multistep process:

1. First, he drew abstract, biomorphic shapes (shapes that resemble living things) with pencil on graph paper.
2. Next, Noguchi cut out the shapes from black cardboard and assembled them into small freestanding models.
3. Then, he enlarged and traced the shapes onto slabs of wood, stone, slate, or marble.
4. Next, Noguchi cut the forms using a circular saw.
5. Finally, he assembled the sculpture without welding or using glue or nails.



Isamu Noguchi assembling *Figure* in his MacDougal Alley studio, 1944. Photograph by Rudolph Burckhardt. The Noguchi Museum Archives © INFGM / ARS – DACS / Estate of Rudolph Burckhardt

Create your own freestanding sculpture by following steps 1 and 2 above.

You might use the following materials:

- Loose leaf or sketch paper and pencil
- Cardboard, cardstock or posterboard
- Scissors or utility knife

Draw and cut out several abstract, curving shapes and arrange them into a sculpture that stands on its own.

Take a picture or make a sketch, then assemble your pieces into a new arrangement.

Experiment until you find the most interesting composition.

How well does your sculpture balance? How does it look from different viewpoints?

What will you name your sculpture?

Isamu Noguchi, *Gregory (Effigy)*

Write

In February 1942, three months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed an Executive Order demanding that all residents of the West Coast who were of Japanese descent be relocated to internment camps. Isamu Noguchi, who lived in New York at the time, said, "I felt that I ought to be able to help in some way...I felt that I ought to be contributing something." Noguchi voluntarily entered the internment camp in Poston, AZ, with the goal of designing programs that would give the residents hope for a better future while showing the world that Japanese Americans were patriotic citizens who contributed to society.

However, the programs never took place and Noguchi did not receive the support he was promised before entering the camp. Camp administrators instead saw him as simply another prisoner. After several denied requests to leave, Noguchi was finally released after seven months.

World War II ended in 1945. Noguchi carved *Gregory* that same year. It was one of the earliest works in his series of interlocking sculptures.

Below are excerpts from an essay that Noguchi wrote while still living in the internment camp, titled "I Become a Nisei." (*Nisei* is a term used to describe a person born in the U.S. whose parents were Japanese immigrants.)

"To be hybrid anticipates the future. This is America, the nation of all nationalities."

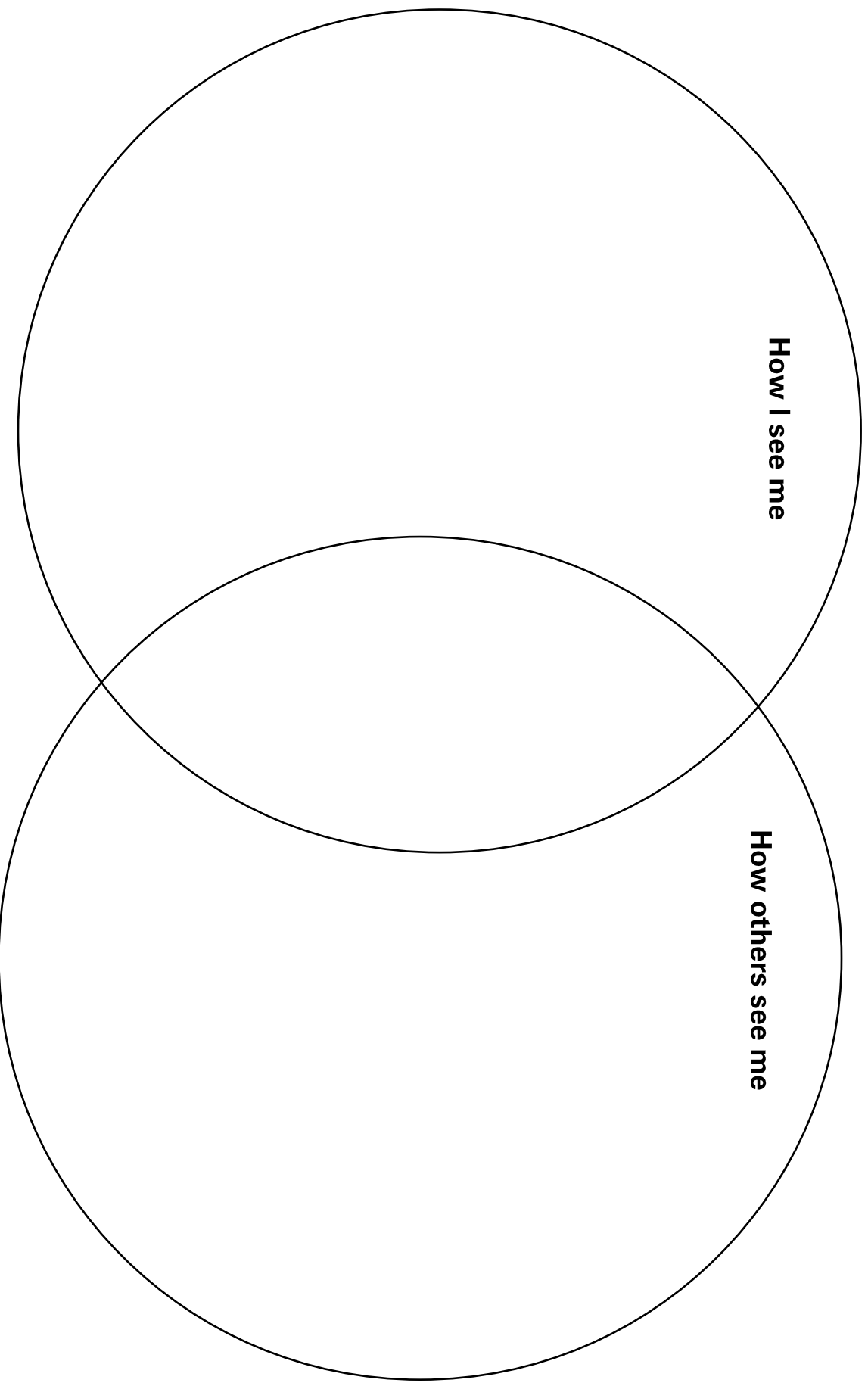
"How strange were my reactions on entering camp. Suddenly I became aware of a color line I had never known before. The administration staff, some of whom I had known previously, seemed to change character. In my mind they seemed to have changed from the sensitive people I knew them to be into our keepers whose word was our law. Nevermore could anything be done without first asking them. Along with my freedom I seemed to have lost any possibility of equal friendship. I became embarrassed in their presence."

To view the entire essay, visit <https://www.noguchi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Isamu-Noguchi-I-Become-A-Nisei-The-Noguchi-Museum.pdf>

Has anyone ever believed something about you based on how you look before they got to know you? How did that make you feel?

Think about your own identity and fill out the diagram on the following page.

What makes you *you*? Fill in the sections with words that describe your personality, physical traits, skills, interests, and other aspects of your identity.



Adapted from the Inside/Outside Identity Chart by [Facing History & Ourselves](#)