



NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART The Shaw Memorial by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, 1900

Art in the Classroom National Gallery of Art, Washington

Every work of art has many stories to tell. The Shaw Memorial tells of the bravery and commitment shown by a young American leader and his newly recruited soldiers as they departed to fight for a free and united nation. This monumental sculpture also gives us a lens to see the choices of an artist who aimed to memorialize a pivotal moment in the American Civil War (1862–1865).

President Abraham Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, declaring slaves in the South to be free and allowing African Americans to join the Union army. Shortly after this, the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, the first African American troop in the North, began recruiting soldiers to enlist. Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, a twenty-five-year-old officer from a noted abolitionist family, was chosen to lead the regiment.

A huge crowd assembled in Boston on May 28, 1863, to send the 54th Massachusetts off to battle. Alongside Colonel Shaw on horseback, some one thousand black soldiers marched in procession to join the conflict that would end slavery. Governor John A. Andrew addressed the regiment: "I know not Mr. Commander where in all human history to any given 1,000 men in arms there has been committed a work at once so proud, so precious, so full of hope and glory as the work committed to you."

On July 16, the 54th Massachusetts won its first battle on James Island, South Carolina, and then, hungry and tired, marched farther to attack Fort Wagner, a Confederate stronghold protecting Charleston, South Carolina. In a fierce battle Colonel Shaw was killed, and a third of his men were killed, injured, or captured. Even though the 54th was defeated at Fort Wagner, news of the soldiers' extraordinary courage spread quickly. President Lincoln later considered the role of African American soldiers to have been critical in winning the Civil War. By the end of the war 180,000 African American soldiers had fought for the Union.

Shortly after the Battle of Fort Wagner, the surviving soldiers of the 54th expressed their desire to create a memorial to their fallen commander, but many years passed before a design was realized. Colonel Shaw and his regiment were finally honored in a powerful bronze monument unveiled during ceremonies on Memorial Day 1897 on Boston Common, where it still stands. Sixty-five veterans of the 54th Massachusetts headed the parade. On display at the National Gallery of Art and illustrated here is a bronze-gold painted plaster version of the memorial in Boston.



John Adams Whipple, *Colonel Robert Gould Shaw*, 1863, albumen photograph. Boston Athenaeum

Getting to Know the Soldiers



The Drummer Boy

The Shaw Memorial includes a young drummer boy and a flag bearer. At the time of the Civil War, many regiments were led by drummer boys who set the marching tempo and sent signals to officers through their drum rolls. The drummer boy in the Shaw Memorial might represent Alex Johnson, a sixteen-year-old recruit and one of the first black musicians to enlist in the army during the war.

The young Johnson recalled marching at the head of the regiment with Colonel Shaw and singing "most of the way." "It was getting dark when we crossed the bridge to Morris Island. . . . Colonel Shaw ordered me to take a message back to the quartermaster at the wharf. . . . I took the letter by the first boat, as ordered, and when I returned I found the regiment lying down, waiting for orders to charge." Johnson probably remained behind as 600 soldiers of the 54th advanced into battle.*

* Ronald S. Coddington, *African American Faces of the Civil War: An Album*, foreword by J. Matthew Gallman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

above: H. C. Foster (?), *Private Alexander H. Johnson, Musician*, 1864, tintype. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society

above right: Unknown photographer, *Sergeant William H. Carney*, 1864, albumen print. West Virginia University Libraries, West Virginia and Regional History Collection



Sergeant William Harvey Carney

William Harvey Carney was born in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1840. He escaped slavery through the Underground Railroad at age fourteen and was reunited with his father, who had already made his way to New Bedford, Massachusetts. Together they helped others in their family flee to freedom.

In February 1863, Carney enlisted in Company C of the 54th Massachusetts, quickly earning the rank of sergeant. During the Battle of Fort Wagner, he acted bravely by saving the regiment's flag from falling to the ground when the color-bearer and Colonel Shaw were mortally wounded. Sergeant Carney steadied the flag above the parapet despite being injured, while the troops continued the charge. Once the regiment was ordered to retreat under fire, he courageously returned the flag to Union lines, saying later, "I never let the dear old flag touch the ground, boys."

Keeping the flag high through battle symbolized the regiment's determination to stand firm for freedom. For his "extraordinary heroism" on the battlefield, Sergeant Carney was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, which he received on May 23, 1900. He attended the dedication for the Shaw Memorial and again waved the tattered flag that he had carried at Fort Wagner.

1

Take a Look

Take a quiet minute to look carefully at the Shaw Memorial.

What do you see? Share words or phrases that describe any aspect of the work.

Include as many details as you can, listing what you observe with your eyes.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Look, again.

Now choose five adjectives to describe the memorial.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Think further:

How is the idea of leadership conveyed?

How does the artist suggest individuality and unity?

What does this sculpture communicate to you about war?

What do you see that makes you say that?

What does it make you curious to learn?

2

Perspective-Taking through Writing

Imagine yourself a soldier in the 54th Massachusetts. Choose a key moment in the soldier's life—marching from Boston Common, approaching the battlefield at Fort Wagner, or seeing the Shaw Memorial for the first time. What are you thinking or feeling at this moment? Write an "I Am" poem.

"I Am" Poem

by _____
(your name)

about _____
(a key moment in the soldier's life)

I am _____
(two special characteristics you have)

I hear _____
(sounds, voices, or words)

I wonder _____
(something of curiosity)

I worry _____
(something that concerns you)

I understand _____
(something that you know to be true)

I feel _____
(an emotion)

I dream _____
(something you hope for in the future)

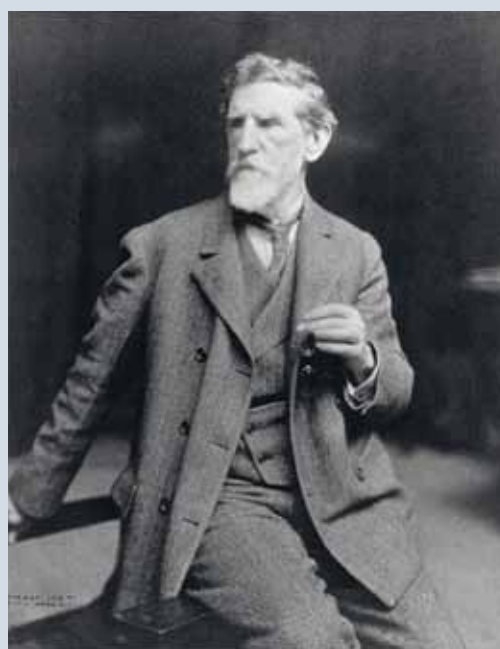
I am _____
(the first line of the poem repeated)

About the Artist

Born March 1, 1848, in Ireland, Augustus Saint-Gaudens was raised in New York City, where he took sculpture and drawing classes. As a young man, he studied and created art in Paris and Rome. The realistic style of Italian Renaissance sculpture—especially in relief, a type of sculpture whose figures project from a flat surface—inspired his style. Returning to New York, Saint-Gaudens received many commissions for public monuments and architectural decorations. Based on these accomplishments, he was the obvious choice for sculptor of the Shaw Memorial.

Creating the Memorial

Saint-Gaudens began the Shaw Memorial by making small sketches on paper and in clay. He then sculpted a plaster model from which he created molds used to cast the final bronze relief sculpture. Two primary design problems confronted him: how to honor the individuality and unity of this large group of soldiers, and how to convey the significance of the event. Addressing these problems, he made small portrait busts of African American men, using some of these sculpted heads in the final design, and showed the sol-



Augustus Saint-Gaudens, 1905 (photograph in older years). Courtesy of the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, Cornish, New Hampshire

diers marching in unison, shoulder-to-shoulder. To create an accurate portrait of Shaw, Saint-Gaudens used a photograph of the colonel and even brought a real horse into his studio. Shaw's upright posture on his horse shows his leadership and responsibility. To deepen the message of the sculpture, Saint-Gaudens depicted a symbolic figure floating above the men and holding an olive branch (a symbol of peace) and poppies (symbolic of death, sleep, and remembrance).



Detail of symbolic figure, Shaw Memorial

3

Memorials: Remembering through Sculpture

Memorial sculpture can take many forms, such as a single figure, a plaque of names, or a sculptural fountain. Can you think of a memorial sculpture in your area? Who or what does it commemorate? How did the artist convey the significance of this person or event?

If you could memorialize an important person or event through sculpture, who or what would you choose, and why?

Consider the artistic choices you will make:

- Design
- Materials
- Symbols
- Text
- Location

Sketch your memorial, noting your artistic choices.

Saint-Gaudens sketched his original ideas for the Shaw Memorial, like the one seen below.



Augustus Saint-Gaudens, pencil sketch for the Shaw Memorial, 1883. Courtesy of the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, Cornish, New Hampshire

4



Unknown photographer, *Unidentified Private, Company I, 54th Massachusetts Regiment*, 1863, ambrotype. The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

A Newspaper Report

If you were a journalist covering the historic moment of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment's departure from Boston, how would you describe what you witnessed and convey to your readers the significance of this event?

As a journalist, include who, what, where, when, and why in your newspaper article.

About National Gallery of Art School Tours

By slowing down and looking carefully at a few works of art, students have the opportunity to think creatively and critically. Through open-ended discussion, they find that questions seldom have a single answer and that art can possess multiple layers of meaning. Students are encouraged to be curious, to reason with evidence, and to develop their own ideas and interpretations. Their shared endeavor, in which all voices are valued, becomes a powerful learning experience. For more information about our school tours for K–12, and to register for school tours, visit www.nga.gov/schooltours.

Teacher, School, and Family Programs

The National Gallery of Art offers a wide variety of teacher, school, and family programs, such as Teacher Institutes, High School Studio Workshops, Art Around the Corner school outreach programs, and Artful Conversations for families. For more information about these and other programs, visit www.nga.gov/education.

Resources

To borrow the Shaw Memorial educational resource packet, visit www.nga.gov/learnshaw.

For a PDF of this Art in the Classroom poster, visit www.nga.gov/classposter.

For connections to Common Core State Standards, visit www.nga.gov/shawcommoncore.

For high-quality downloadable art images, visit www.images.nga.gov.

Art in the Classroom Feedback

Please tell us how you used this poster and share suggestions for future Art in the Classroom resources. E-mail us at artintheclassroom@nga.gov.

Children's Books

Hold the Flag High

By Catherine Clinton, illustrated by Shane W. Evans
The story of Sergeant William H. Carney and the 54th Massachusetts' valor during the Battle of Fort Wagner (ages 6 to 12)

The Boy's War: Confederate and Union Soldiers Talk about the Civil War

By Jim Murphy
First-hand accounts describe the experiences of boys under sixteen years old who fought in the Civil War (ages 8 and up)

Fields of Fury: The American Civil War

By James M. McPherson
An account of the Civil War with personal anecdotes from soldiers on the battlefield and civilians at home (ages 9 and up)

Historic Monuments: The Civil War's 54th Massachusetts Regiment—The Shaw Memorial

By Julia Hargrove, illustrated by Gary Mohrman
The story of Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts from original documents (ages 9 and up)

Image on front and details on back: Augustus Saint-Gaudens, *Shaw Memorial*, 1900, patinated plaster. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, Cornish, New Hampshire. Photographed by Lee Ewing

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Detail of soldiers, Shaw Memorial