

Deconstructed Postcards

ages 11 and up | 60-90 min.

When traveling, it's common to send a postcard home to friends and family. Postcards typically depict images that summarize popular representations of history, culture, and place. But consider all the different perspectives of people who live in these places. In what way do these postcard images represent the place and people who live there? In what way do they misrepresent or leave out information about the place and its people?

From June 2016 to October 2016, Fodayemi Wilson exhibited her ongoing series, *P.S. I Love You*, in the gallery at the Lynden Sculpture Garden. In this series, Wilson uses early 20th-century postcards that she has found in second-hand stores or at rummage sales. These cards sentimentalize stereotypes of the "happy servant" in the economies of Southern plantation culture; by altering them with collage and mixed media, Wilson restores their dignity.

Wilson explains that her "work uses the language of furniture and constructed spaces to investigate ideas around the identity of people of African American descent and to re-present histories that counter dominant Western historical narratives. Using furniture forms and objects that I often integrate with other media such as sound and video, I create experiences that reposition historical objects and/or aesthetics in a contemporary context and offer audiences new ways of thinking about and interacting with history."

Inspiration:

This virtual tour of Fodayemi Wilson's *Eliza's Peculiar Cabinet of Curiosities*. (2016) at Lynden includes a mini-tour of *P.S. I Love You*, Wilson's 2016 exhibition of modified postcards: <https://lynden.tours/fodayemi-wilson-elizas-peculiar-cabinet-of-curiosities/>

I wonder...

- How can objects and images represent or misrepresent what we know and understand about our history?
- How do Wilson's postcards create a counter narrative about Southern plantation culture?





Project:

Deconstructed Postcards

In *PS, I Love You*, Wilson creates an environment of altered objects, images and sound that provides a new experience that can elicit questions of what we know of these peoples' lives. Wilson deconstructs postcards depicting biased views of Southern plantation culture to reimagine a more dignified history for the people who appear in them and, ultimately, to point us toward a more hopeful future.

How do postcards from the places we call home depict our experiences of place? What is not represented? What has happened here? What is happening here now and in what direction is this place headed? What do you hope might happen here, that is not already happening? What do you imagine will happen in the future?

Materials:

Printed version of this lesson (list and postcards), old magazines, junk mail, cards, calendars, etc., scissors, cardboard, glue, found objects to collage

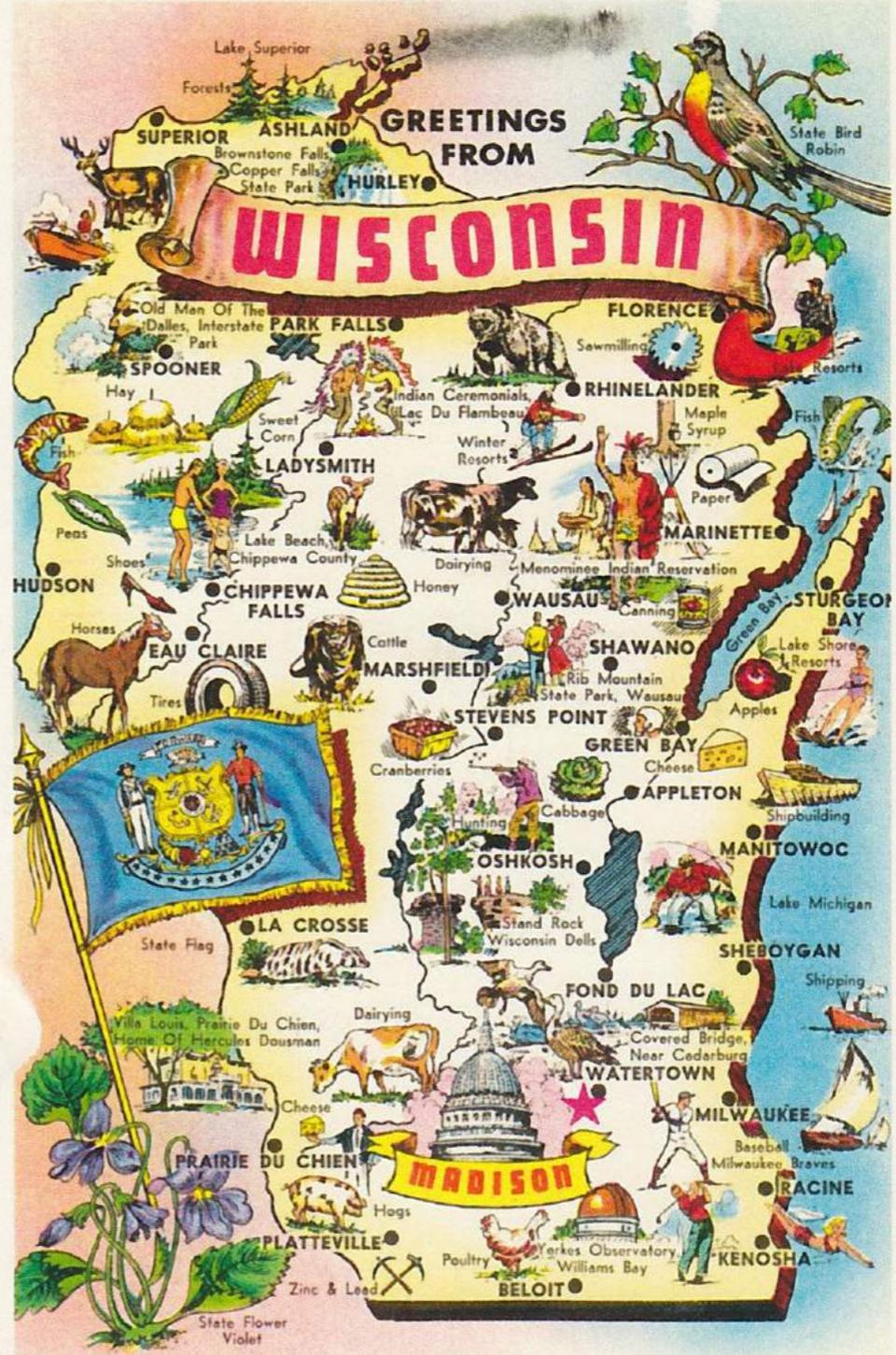
Making:

1. Begin by printing pages 3 and 4 of this lesson. Cut along the dotted lines to make a selection of postcards and a worksheet list. As an alternative, use a piece of junk mail that depicts a picture of the place you live, or google "Milwaukee postcards" for images of postcards, past and present.
2. Next, closely examine the postcards from Wisconsin and Milwaukee. What biases, flaws, or inconsistencies from your personal experience can you identify? Note any silences (things left out) or contradictions you feel when comparing them to your own experiences of places within Wisconsin or Milwaukee. What images do you identify with? What might be missing? Make a list of what you find that is visible and what is invisible on the worksheet.
3. Choose a postcard to alter. Glue it to a piece of cardboard to give it some stability.
4. Using your old magazines, cards, and calendars, look for images that depict things you identified as invisible on your list.
5. As Wilson has done in her postcards, use collage and assemblage to rework the postcards to create an alternative narrative that more closely represents your vision and experience of Wisconsin or Milwaukee.



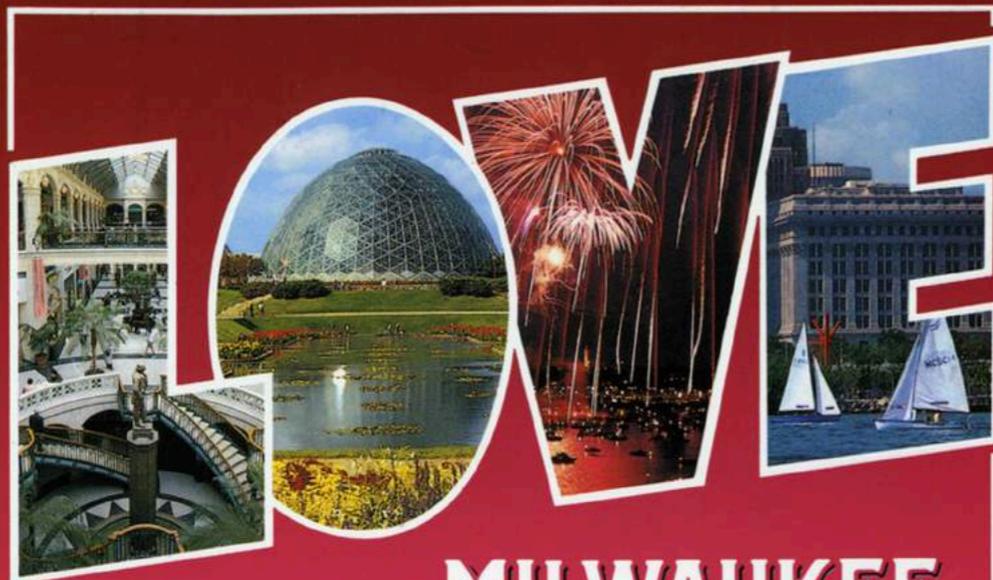
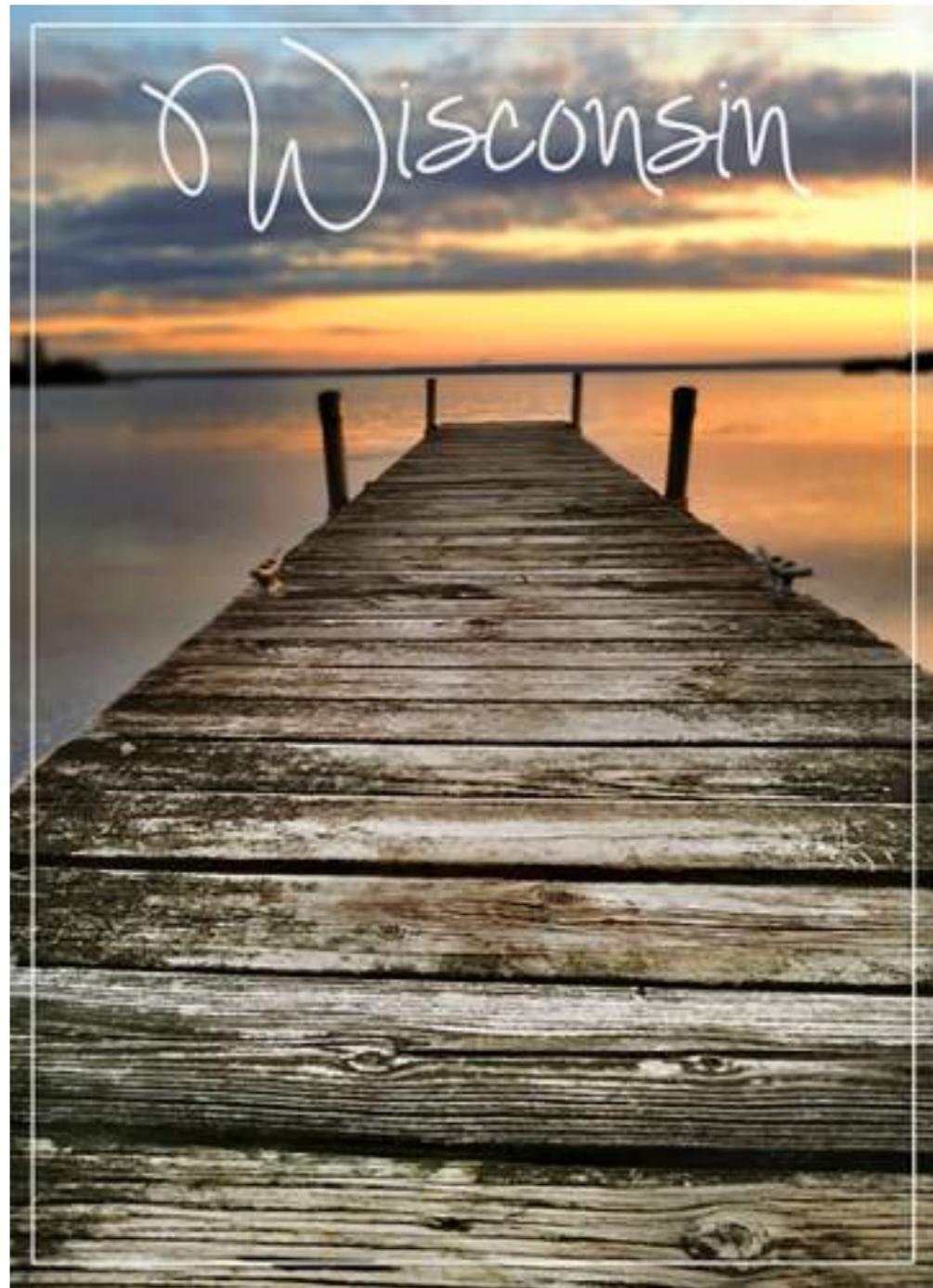


Visible	Invisible





LANDING, KETTLE MORaine COURT, LONG LAKE, CAMPBELLSPORT, WIS. 92



from **MILWAUKEE**

Taking It Further:

Deconstructed Postcards

Wilson's postcards were shown in an interactive sound environment, a collaboration with Joel Mercedes, constructed from the recorded narratives of former enslaved people archived in the Library of Congress's "Voices from the Days of Slavery."

To hear these stories visit:

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/voices-remembering-slavery/about-this-collection/>

Recording Prompt:

Record your own narrative of life in Milwaukee. Think about what people in the future might want to know about your life and your neighborhood that they wouldn't be able to discover by looking at postcards.

Writing Prompt:

Write a reflection exploring how this project transformed your perceptions of racial, ethnic, and cultural stereotypes and assumptions about Milwaukee or Wisconsin.

Vocabulary:

Deconstruct to take apart or examine (something) in order to reveal the basis or composition, often with the intention of exposing flaws, or inconsistencies.

Representation the description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way or as being of a certain nature".

Dignity the state or quality of being worthy of honor or respect.

Counter-narrative is a message that offers a positive alternative to extremist propaganda.

Biases a particular tendency, trend, inclination, feeling, or opinion, especially one that is preconceived or unreasoned.

Contradictions a statement or proposition that denies another or itself and is logically incongruous.

Stereotype a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

