



NATIONAL VIETNAM VETERANS  
Art Museum

## Teacher Packet

# Shifting Memories:

Reconstructing an Identity Amidst the Dust of  
False Understandings, Deceiving Narratives, and “Iraq”

*The National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum would like for your class visit to be as enlightening and as effective as possible, and we are pleased to offer you our Teacher Packets to aid and prepare your class for their visit. This material is designed to be used both before and after your visit, and we hope it will maximize the impact of your class' experience here. We welcome any feedback or suggestions you may have on how to improve this teacher packet. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to be a part of your educational process. We look forward to your visit.*

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## Lesson Plans and Activities

### ACTIVITY 1

Locate the piece entitled, “This Is How I Wanted to See Myself.” Why might Aaron have painted himself in black and white while the rest of the painting is in color?

### ACTIVITY 2

The endless expanses of desert seem to have impacted Aaron’s artwork and narratives greatly. Objects in paintings are often dwarfed by the surrounding landscape.

Why do you think Aaron painted the landscape as he did?

Why do you think the desert had such an impact on Aaron?

What can the desert mean metaphorically/what can it symbolize? Do you think Aaron agrees with these symbols and meanings?

Think about the “battle” between man versus nature. Can man overcome nature all of the time, some of the time, or not at all? Use some of Aaron’s work, and world history, current events and your own experiences to support your opinion.

**Optional research or essay question for before or after museum visit:** how might the landscape have impacted the Iraqi and/or Middle Eastern cultures and peoples in general?

### ACTIVITY 3

Contrast the Vietnam Veterans’ artwork and Aaron’s treatment of the following themes: landscape; self-image; feelings on war; feelings of people in the war-torn countries; comrades; or any other subjects, themes or motifs that the students are struck by. Are they similar or different? Why might that be?

### ACTIVITY 4

*Iraq TripTik:* a TripTik is a AAA traveler’s map that helps someone get from point A to point B, which includes trouble spots like construction zones, etc, to help make the trip go as

smoothly as possible. This painting, however, has no maps or directions; it is composed only of images.

What do maps mean—what do they stand for? Can maps be misleading?

For most Americans, Iraq can be symbolized by a map: Iraq’s geographic location, major cities, topography, etc. Do you think Aaron thinks of Iraq in terms of a map and facts, or is Iraq other things to him? What do you think Iraq means to Aaron?

### ACTIVITY 5

In the paintings numbered one and two, there are images of maps superimposed over desert scenes. Why might Aaron have used map imagery here but not in *Iraq TripTik*?

### ACTIVITY 6

*Post-visit questions, courtesy the artist:*

Did your understanding of the War in Iraq change by seeing the artwork? If so, how?

Does the exhibit make it more difficult to have one set idea or perception about the War? Are your views on this war and/or war in general made more complex or simplified by the exhibit?

How do you personally relate to the people and places depicted in the artwork from this exhibit?

How do your memories and ideas about a place change over time?

What does the Ahmed video do? Does it change your understanding of Iraq? Would you want to take pictures even though you could never see them?

Do you have any questions for the artist?

## Works Cited

Hughes, Aaron. *Iraq TripTik*. 2005. National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum, Chicago, IL.

---. "Questions for teachers packets for your exhibit."  
Email to the author. 5 January 2007.

---. *This Is How I Wanted to See Myself*. 2006. National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum, Chicago, IL.