

# YOUNG AMERICA

## KEY TERMS

- Colonial Maryland/  
Federal Baltimore
- Children's Portraiture
- Free African-Americans
- Landowners
- Merchants



## CLOSE LOOKING

**JOHN HESSELIUS'S PAINTING** of Charles Calvert was created when Charles was just five years old. Charles stands in a commanding full-length pose wearing a plumed hat and expensive clothes made of imported silk. He holds drumsticks in his right hand and is attended by an enslaved boy who holds a drum and also wears fine dress. Charles appears as a miniature adult, which was often the way children were depicted during the 18th century. The grand scale of the Charles Calvert portrait, its outdoor setting, lush textures, rich use of light and shade, and careful details identify it as being painted in a European style that wealthy American patrons demanded.

**PAINTED BY BALTIMORE ARTIST** Joshua Johnson around 1804, Charles Herman Stricker Wilmans was a young child of six or seven when this portrait was made. Blond with blue eyes, Charles wears

### **CHARLES CALVERT AND HIS SLAVE** (left) 1761

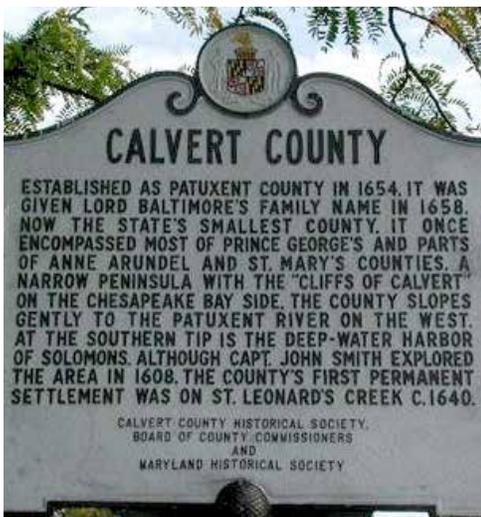
John Hesselius  
American, 1728–1778  
Oil on canvas  
Gift of Alfred R. and Henry G. Riggs,  
in Memory of General Lawrason Riggs  
BMA 1941.4

### **CHARLES HERMAN STRICKER WILMANS** (right) c. 1804

Joshua Johnson  
American, 1761–c. 1830;  
active in Baltimore, 1796–1824  
Oil on canvas  
Bequest of Susan D. Tilghman Horner  
BMA 1944.6

## ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

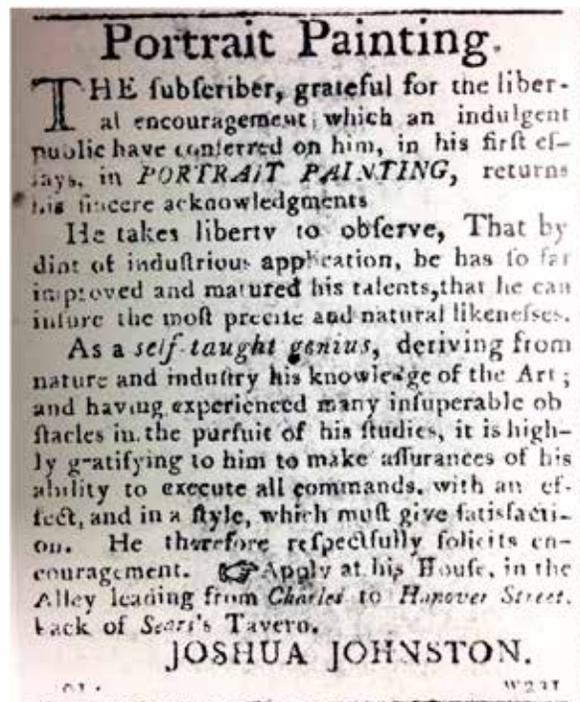
**SON OF SWEDISH-BORN** portraitist Gustavus Hesselius, John was born in the colonies and worked primarily in Maryland and Virginia as an artist and as a plantation owner in Anne Arundel County. He was one of the few members of a group of artists working in the Middle Colonies whose training was exclusively American. By the early 1750s, Hesselius had established himself as a colonial painter of the upper class and painted many of the prominent families in the area. His wealthy patrons demanded refined portraits in the style of their aristocratic counterparts in Europe. Benedict Calvert was one of Hesselius's most important patrons, and the portraits of his children were the artist's most important commissions to date. Around 1824, Baltimorean Robert Gilmor, one of America's first art collectors, declared Hesselius the painter "by whom the greater part of the family portraits in the old mansions of Maryland was painted, and that in a respectable manner."<sup>1</sup>



a dark-gray suit, white collar, and red shoes. His right hand holds a pair of white gloves and his left rests on the barrel of a toy gun. A small white dog looks up at him adoringly in the left foreground. Behind Charles is a backdrop consisting of a dark-green, fringed drape pulled back to reveal a vine-covered gray stone arch and a landscape with buildings. Johnson's portrait has many characteristics that identify it as early American. Portraits of this period were frequently painted with minimal contrasting light and shade resulting in a more flattened or two-dimensional appearance. This is true of the faces of the sitters, which may appear to the viewer as somewhat rigid. Intricately painted details are also found in early American paintings, as evidenced in the depiction of the ornate metalwork of Charles's gun.

## ART IN CONTEXT

**CHARLES CALVERT WAS** one of thirteen children born to Elizabeth and Benedict Swingate Calvert, a politician and planter in Maryland who bred and trained horses. The illegitimate son of Charles Calvert, Fifth Lord Baltimore and proprietary governor of the Province of Maryland, Benedict was unable to inherit his father's title or estates. However, at the death of the Fifth Lord Baltimore, when Maryland became a proprietary colony under the governorship of Benedict's half-brother Frederick Calvert, the family benefitted from income garnered from taxes and rents. Ten years before young Charles's portrait was painted, Benedict inherited a 4,000-acre plantation, known as Mt. Airy, in Prince George's County, Maryland, where he grew tobacco using the labor of more than one hundred and fifty slaves. Eager to produce bountiful cash crops, plantation owners, such as Calvert, used enslaved people and indentured servants as their labor force both in the fields and in the home. West Africans, traded through the West Indies, were forced to plant and harvest crops such as tobacco and act as servants and childcare-givers. Young people were even designated as playmates for their owner's children. This may have been the role of the young boy in Charles Calvert's portrait whose identity is yet to be discovered. Charles Calvert, like many young men of his status, was sent to England to be educated at Eton College. Intended heir to his father's holdings, young Charles died in England at the age of seventeen, never marrying or having children. His legacy and that of the rest of the Calvert family is carried on in eponymously named sites in Maryland, such as Calvert County and Calvert Cliffs State Park, and as far afield as the town of Calvert, Texas.



Joshua Johnson advertisement published in the *Baltimore Telegraph*, October 11, 1802, 3.

## ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

**JOSHUA JOHNSON** was a free artist of African descent—the earliest known African-American artist to earn his living as a portrait painter. In 1798, Johnson placed a newspaper advertisement in the Baltimore *Daily Intelligencer* describing himself as a “self-taught genius” and offering “the most precise and natural likenesses” of his sitters. Speaking in third person, Johnson hinted at his formal challenges as a slave by stating that he had “experienced many insufferable obstacles in the pursuit of his studies...” Johnson continued that it was “...highly gratifying to him to make assurances of this ability to execute all commands with an effect, and in a style, which must give satisfaction.”<sup>4</sup>

A manumission (release from bondage) dated July 15, 1782, stated that Joshua Johnson was the son of a European American man, George Johnson, and an unidentified enslaved woman owned by Baltimore area farmer William Wheeler, Sr. In it, George Johnson acknowledged his son and agreed to free Joshua, age nineteen, under the condition that he either complete his current apprenticeship with Baltimore blacksmith William Forepaugh or turn twenty-one, whichever came first.<sup>5</sup> The bill records that on October 6, 1764, eighteen years prior, George Johnson had purchased Joshua from Wheeler. Joshua Johnson received his freedom in 1782 and became a portraitist, working in Baltimore from 1796 to 1824. By 1810, 22% of people living in Baltimore consisted of Africans and their descendants.<sup>6</sup> Of this group, 45% were enslaved, and 55%, including Johnson, were free. Between 1790 and 1810, these “other free persons,” as they were referred to in census records, experienced a higher growth rate than any other demographic group in Baltimore, increasing 15.4%.<sup>7</sup> At the time, Maryland state law assumed that all people of African descent were slaves, unless they could prove that they were free either through descent or through manumission.<sup>8</sup>

**AT THE BEGINNING** of the 19th century, when Joshua Johnson painted the Charles Wilmans portrait, Baltimore had become the third largest city in America, having experienced tremendous growth during and after the Revolutionary War. The city was an important port for the “Triangle Trade” between America, Europe, and the West Indies. Baltimore exported commodities such as grain, tobacco, and wheat flour ground at one of more than fifty grist mills around the city. The city imported manufactured and luxury goods such as Chinese silks, English porcelain, French wallpapers and clocks, Irish glassware, sugar cane from the British settlements in the West Indies, and West African peoples trafficked through the West Indies.

Charles Wilmans’s father, Carl Heinrich Wilmans, was a merchant involved in Baltimore’s bustling trade, though his exact vocation is not known. Sadly, he was lost at sea in 1798, when Charles was a year old. A few years before this portrait was made, his mother married the owner of the Bellona Gunpowder Factory outside Baltimore.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the gun in Charles’s portrait is a nod to his stepfather’s occupation. The family would have been living a comfortable middle-class life, thus having the funds to commission Charles’s portrait. Like his father, Charles died tragically on the water. According to the family, on January 18, 1833, when Charles was thirty-six, he was killed in a boat accident on the Ohio River.<sup>3</sup>

**ELEANOR CALVERT** (left) 1761

Oil on canvas

Born: Annapolis, Maryland 1728

Died: Prince George's County, Maryland 1778

Gift of Alfred R. and Henry G. Riggs, in Memory of General Lawrason Riggs, BMA 1941.9

**ELIZABETH CALVERT** (right) 1761

Oil on canvas

John Hesselius

Born: Annapolis, Maryland 1728

Died: Prince George's County, Maryland 1778

Gift of Alfred R. and Henry G. Riggs, in Memory of General Lawrason Riggs, BMA 1941.10

## RELATED ARTWORK

**IN 1761, THE SAME YEAR** that John Hesselius painted Charles Calvert, the artist was given the commission to paint Charles's twin sisters Eleanor and Elizabeth, aged eight. While Charles was painted in an expensive full-length format, his sisters were painted in a less costly round format showing their bodies in three-quarter view. The grand size and style of Charles's likeness speaks to the value that was placed on the male heir. While portraits of boys during the period often show them with props such as pull toys, balls, drums, or toy guns intended to reflect boisterous natures and masculinity, the small bird that Eleanor holds and the cut flower in Elizabeth's hand reflect characteristics of ideal femininity for the time.

Eleanor Calvert later married John Parke Custis, stepson of George Washington, who attended the wedding celebrations at the Calvert family home. Elizabeth Calvert's future father-in-law, Dr. George Steuart, owned a racehorse that won a trophy commemorating the first recorded formal horse race in Maryland. Made by silversmith John Inch of Annapolis, the trophy, the oldest known piece of Maryland silver, is housed at the BMA.

**IN THE GARDEN** c. 1805

Oil on canvas

Joshua Johnson

Born, probably Maryland 1763

Died, probably Maryland c. 1830

Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, New York, BMA 1967.76.1

The unidentified young girl in this painting wears red shoes similar to those of Charles Wilmans in his portrait. Johnson often used the same props in multiple compositions. These elements included small dogs, strawberries, cherries, large moths, and red shoes, which appear in many of his portraits of children.

<sup>1</sup> Sona K. Johnston, "American Painting of the Revolutionary Period," in *Maryland Heritage: Five Baltimore Institutions Celebrate the American Bicentennial*, ed. John B. Boles (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1976), 62.

<sup>2</sup> Frick Art Reference Library, <http://arcade.nyarc.org/record=b1081657>

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn J. Weekley and Stiles Tuttle Colwill, *Joshua Johnson: Freeman and Early American Portrait Painter* (Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, 1987), 119.

<sup>4</sup> Weekley and Colwill, *Joshua Johnson: Freeman and Early American Portrait Painter*, 75.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Bryan and Robert Torchia, "The Mysterious Portraitist Joshua Johnson." *Archives of American Art Journal* 36, 2 (1996): 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Mariana L.R. Dantas, *Black Townsmen: Urban Slavery and Freedom in the Eighteenth-Century Americas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 134

<sup>7</sup> Dantas, *Black Townsmen: Urban Slavery and Freedom in the Eighteenth-Century Americas*, 136.

<sup>8</sup> Weekley and Colwill, *Joshua Johnson: Freeman and Early American Portrait Painter*, 24.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

## ACTIVITY 1: Exploring portraiture

**Grades: 3–5, 6–8**

**Subjects: English Language Arts, History/  
Social Studies, Visual Arts**

Within a unit of study on the Colonial Period, students will look closely at *Charles Calvert and His Slave*, *Elizabeth Calvert*, and *Eleanor Calvert*. They will discuss the portraits and their historical contexts using the questions below for consideration. Students will form teams of four for the initial discussions, then rejoin the class for a large group discussion. Teacher will record the results of the group discussion on a black/white board.

- What words would you use to describe the four people in the paintings?
- What objects and landscapes were included in the portraits to communicate ideas about the people in them?
- Using previous knowledge about life from this period and other sources on the status of women and enslaved African Americans, what words would you use to describe what the lives of these four people may have been like?
- How were the individuals depicted and what do their faces, clothing, and positioning tell us about their personalities, how they lived, and the social and historical context of the time? Do you think their portraits reflect an accurate picture of their lives? Explain your response.
- Are there similarities between the way the two boys are depicted in *Charles Calvert and His Slave* and what their lives may have been like? Differences? Why do people have portraits made?

Students will then create individual self-portraits—through drawing, painting, or paper collage—representing themselves the way they *want* to be perceived by others, including props, objects, or environments that they feel communicate something important about who they are and what they value. They will then share the artistic choices they made to convey their point of view in their self-portraits.

## ACTIVITY 2: Examining the lives of free African-Americans in 19th century Maryland

**Grades: 3–5, 6–8**

**Subjects: English Language Arts, History/  
Social Studies, Visual Arts**

Within a unit focused on the lives of enslaved and free African Americans, students will examine *Charles Herman Stricker Wilmans* and *In the Garden*. They will discuss the life of the artist Joshua Johnson using these and other resources. Students, divided into teams of four, will research one free individual of African descent in Maryland from the Revolutionary period through the early 19th century using print and/or online materials. The following questions will act as a guide for their research.

- What kinds of trades were these individuals involved in?
- What were their lives like?
- How were their lives similar or different from enslaved African-Americans in Maryland?

Students will come back together and share their team research in oral presentations that feature visual images. As a large class, the group will discuss the differences and similarities between the life of the free individual of African descent that they chose for their research, and the life of Joshua Johnson.

## ACTIVITY 3: Comparing American artistic styles across time

**Grades: 3–5, 6–8**

**Subjects: English Language Arts, History/  
Social Studies, Visual Arts**

Students will look closely at *Charles Calvert and His Slave* and *Charles Herman Stricker Wilmans* and describe the two paintings. Using the following questions, students will explore the similarities and differences between the two in a class discussion. Teacher will record student responses in a Venn Diagram on a black/white board.

- Describe the art elements—color, line, shape, texture, space, and form—you see in the paintings.
- How are the subjects of the two paintings similar? How are they different?
- How are the art elements used differently in the two paintings? How did the artist use the art elements to express important information about the subjects?
- How are the compositions (the arrangements of the different parts of the image) of the two paintings similar? How are they different? (See “Close Looking” section.)

Using the results of the comparative discussion outlined above, previous knowledge, and additional resources (including the full or adapted text of “Young America”) individual students will write a one- to two-paragraph text exploring the following question. They will then generate one additional question for further exploration.

- What do the differences in the paintings suggest about the socio-economic status of the individuals? Explain your response.

# STANDARDS AND CURRICULUM

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

### English Language Arts

Grade 4

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.SL.4.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.W.4.7 Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

Grades 6–8

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g. charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

Grade 8

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.W.8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.ELA—Literacy.W.8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

## MARYLAND STATE CURRICULUM

### History/Social Studies

Grade 4

5.C.4.a. Compare the lives of slave families and free blacks.

Grade 8

5.C.4.b. Analyze the experiences of African-American slaves and free blacks.

### Visual Arts

Grade 4

1.2.b. Create and describe artworks that communicate mood and point of view.

1.1.a. Analyze ways that artists use and communicate mood and point of view using art vocabulary.

2.1.a. Analyze selected works of art and describe how different artists express ideas and feelings about the human experience.

Grade 8

2.1.a. Analyze the roles and functions of the visual arts in expressing ideas, events, and universal themes within and among cultural groups.

2.2.a. Compare historical, social, and cultural themes in selected artworks that communicate beliefs, customs, or values of a society.

2.3.a. Compare similarities and differences in subject matter, styles, and techniques among various cultures and periods of art history.



*Charles Calvert and His Slave*, 1761, Oil on canvas  
John Hesselius  
Born: Annapolis, Maryland 1728  
Died: Prince George's County, Maryland 1778  
Gift of Alfred R. and Henry G. Riggs, in memory of General  
Lawrason Riggs, BMA 1941.4



*Charles Herman Stricker Wilmans, c. 1804, Oil on canvas*  
Joshua Johnson  
Born: probably Maryland 1763  
Died: probably Maryland c. 1830  
Bequest of Susan D. Tilghman Horner, BMA 1944.6



*Eleanor Calvert*, 1761, Oil on canvas

John Hesselius

Born: Annapolis, Maryland 1728

Died: Prince George's County, Maryland 1778

Gift of Alfred R. and Henry G. Riggs, in Memory of General  
Lawrason Riggs, BMA 1941.9



*Elizabeth Calvert*, 1761, Oil on canvas  
John Hesselius  
Born: Annapolis, Maryland 1728  
Died: Prince George's County, Maryland 1778  
Gift of Alfred R. and Henry G. Riggs, in Memory of  
General Lawrason Riggs, BMA 1941.10



*In the Garden*, c. 1805, Oil on canvas  
Joshua Johnson  
Born, probably Maryland 1763  
Died, probably Maryland c. 1830  
Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch,  
New York, BMA 1967.76.1