

CULTURAL LESSONS: THE MESSAGE OF THE ART



Original Version 1 - 48" x 60" painting, 1987
(In the collection of the National Afro American Museum and Cultural Center)



Version 2 – 16" x 20" painting (poster)
(Created as a reproduction for the Black Book Fair – 2002)

The artwork “Higher Learning” shares a special message about “knowledge”. Below is Annie Ruth’s basic interpretation of the work; The meaning expands with a revelation from each viewer.

The once enslaved African is shown holding on to the same book that the *griot* (pronounced *gree-OTT* or *gree- OH*) is holding. This book is a symbol for knowledge and experience. The *griot*, who is a verbal historian, elder, and storyteller, is depicted in a non-traditional form to emphasize how much imparting history has changed for the American of African descent.

These two figures (the *griot* and the once enslaved African) are passing on the knowledge to our youths (the next generation). The holding of the book reinforces the importance of possessing a persevering spirit in one’s quest for knowledge.

The elders on the left side of the work represent the wisdom that must accompany learning, “...in all your getting, get an understanding.”

The key to understanding the art and pulling the message out is to **see beyond the surface and read the symbolism of the art.**

Example: (i.e. broken chains and holding a book would represent “freedom or openness of mind”, “freedom to think”, or “acquiring knowledge”)