

## Identity: Family Tree



Ulrich Museum of Art

**Object:** Zhang Huan, *Family Tree*, 2000, 2003 (Date of printing). Chromogenic color print. Ulrich Museum of Art, Museum purchase.

### Description:

Students will learn about Zhang Huan's use of identity in his work by exploring their own. Optionally, could have them conclude the worksheet with an essay or artwork response.

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Subject:** Visual Art, English

**Length of Lesson:** Independent worksheet, 40 minutes.

### Standards:

VA:Re7.1.1a: Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences.

VA: Re7.2.1a: Analyze how one's understanding of the world is affected by experiencing visual imagery.

VA:Re7.11a: Recognize and describe personal aesthetic and empathetic responses to the natural world and constructed environments.

VA:Cn10.1.1a: Synthesize knowledge of social, cultural, historical, and personal life with art-making approaches to create meaningful works of art or design.

### Materials:

Worksheet  
Pencil

### Resources:

Further Information on artwork: <https://de1.zetcom-group.de/MpWeb-mpWichitaUlrich/v?mode=online#!m/Object/NVsjCsplSseh7xY2gooerA/form/ObjCatalogViewFrm>

## Identity

Merriam-Webster definition of identity

:the distinguishing character or personality of an individual

:the relation established by psychological identification

**Identity warm-up:** Think about your own identity, what defines you as a person? Summarize your identity with three words.

1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_ 3) \_\_\_\_\_

Examine what words you chose to describe your identity. Do these words have something to do with location? Culture? Personality? Interests? Heritage?

After thinking about the roots of your three chosen words, select a word to get rid of. Maybe it is the least applicable to your personality of the three, maybe it's the one you like the least. Which word are you getting rid of and why?

Your two remaining words: 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

Now select a second word to get rid of, leaving you with only one word to define your identity.

Your identity in one word: \_\_\_\_\_

Was it difficult getting rid of one or both words?

Do you feel this last remaining word adequately captures your identity? Why or why not?

**Now examine the photographic series *Family Tree* by Zhang Huan:**



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Zhang Huan is a Chinese artist well known for his performance art.

**Performance art** is art that is action, with the material for the artwork being the performer's body, usually the artist's or participants'. As it is an action, the performance itself is temporary. Documentation—like video or photography—is what is exhibited when the performance is over.

Zhang Huan's work, *Family Tree*, is a series of nine photographs that document a performance where he had three calligraphers write on his face until it was completely covered in ink. They wrote names and stories he selected that related to his cultural background and identity. His face is overwhelmed with the ink, showing us that there are numerous stories and experiences that make up one person.

**Writing prompt:**

If you were to replicate Huan's performance, what names would you give?

What stories would you tell? The stories could be ones you grew up with and helped to shape you or they could be ones that you create.