

5.4

Representations of Gender and Race on U.S. Currency

Most images on U.S. money have been of White men, conveying a message that the stories and achievements of women and people of color are less deserving of the honor of currency recognition. The new American Women Quarters initiative is designed to honor women change-makers. In these activities you will get a chance to design your own currency and campaign for change.

Given their constant use, the images on banknotes and coins become part of everyone's accepted stock of knowledge and important topics for critical media analysis. We take for granted that George Washington looked like just he appears on the \$1 bill, Alexander Hamilton like he does on the \$10 bill, and so on.

[Most images on U.S. money have been of White men](#), conveying a message that the stories and achievements women and people of color are less deserving of the honor of currency recognition.



[Watch on YouTube](#)

Since World War I and before the [American Women Quarters](#) program, only Susan B. Anthony, Sacagawea, and Helen Keller have appeared on U.S. coins. Martha Washington appeared on \$1 silver certificates in 1886 and Pocahontas was on the \$20 bill in the 1860s.

Booker T. Washington was the first African American on a coin in 1946; Jackie Robinson, Duke Ellington, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King, and the Tuskegee Airmen, among others have appeared since then.

A Native American figure appeared on the Indian Head penny, but the model [was a liberty lady wearing an Native American head-dress](#); only a few million Buffalo nickels were minted in the early 20th century.

Worldwide, only 15% of countries have images of women on their banknotes ([Which Countries Feature Women on Banknotes?](#), *Visual Capitalist*, March 8, 2022).

The new [American Women Quarters](#) initiative from the U.S. Mint is designed to honor women change-makers in U.S. history, including:

- Maya Angelou, writer.
- Anna May Wong, Asian American actress.
- Sally Ride, first woman in space.
- Wilma Mankiller, first elected woman principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.
- Nina Otero-Warren, New Mexico suffrage movement leader.



["The U.S. Mint's American Women Quarters Program celebrates five female trailblazers in American history each year between 2022 and 2025. Anna May Wong is featured on the fifth coin released in 2022."](#) | Public Domain

The U.S. Treasury plans to bring forth an image of Harriet Tubman on the \$20 bill, but not till 2030. New Hampshire Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D) is a supporter of the [Woman on the Twenty Act](#) that would require all \$20 bills printed from 2027 onward to have Harriet Tubman portrait on the face. Additionally, [commemorative coins honoring Harriet Tubman](#) were released by the U.S. Mint at the beginning of 2024.

If you were in charge of designing the next currency for the U.S. Mint, who would you include on coins and bills? In these activities you will get a chance to design your own currency and campaign for change.

Activity 1: Examine the Images of Women and People of Color on Currency

- Explore the following resources about women, African Americans, and Native Americans on money:
 - [Women on Money](#), National Museum of American History
 - [Native American Images on Money](#), South Dakota Public Broadcasting
 - [For the Love of Money: Black Icons on U.S. Currency](#), Google Arts & Culture
- Select one currency image featuring a woman, African American, or Native American and critically evaluate it using the [Teacher and Student Guide to Analyzing Images](#).
- **Create a video, screen recording, or interactive image to present your findings.**
 - Interactive image:
 - Start a new [Google Drawings canvas](#).
 - Upload a screenshot of the currency image to the middle of the canvas.
 - Insert text boxes and shapes to call attention to your findings.
 - Add links to additional information (e.g., the original image source).
 - Screenrecording:
 - If you have a Mac computer, [use this shortcut](#).
 - If you have access to Quicktime, here's [how to screenrecord using Quicktime](#).
 - Otherwise, use a web-based screenrecording tool such as [Screencastify](#), [Screencast-o-Matic](#), or [Loom](#).

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Sacagawea Currency Analysis](#) by Anetia Rom

- [Analysis full text](#)

Activity 2: Campaign for Changes in the Images on Currency

- Select a woman, Native American, Black American, or other traditionally marginalized individual who you believe deserves to be on U.S. currency.
- Then, **design a social media campaign** to encourage people to write to political leaders to add that individual to U.S. currency.
 - The social media campaign should include at least 2 videos (e.g., YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok), 5 example posts, and 3 images (e.g., memes, graphics, infographics) designed by you.
 - Here is a [Twitter campaign example](#) by Sara Shea.
 - Make sure to describe why the person you selected should be on U.S. currency.
 - Bonus: Create a prototype drawing (digital or pencil/paper) of what the currency might look like with the individual you selected on it.

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[New IT Girl of US Currency](#) by Anetia Rom

[Elizabeth Cady Stanton](#) by Anetia Rom

Activity 3: Design Images for Digital Currency

[Digital currency](#) is emerging as a means of exchange around the world. For example, early in 2021, China began testing in cities its own homegrown digital currency, the Electronic Chinese Yuan ([New York Times](#), March 1, 2021).

- Design a digital currency for use by the United States and other countries featuring influential individuals from history.

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Design Images for Digital Currency](#) by Anetia Rom

Additional Resources

- [The Faces on Every US Bill](#)
- [An Extremely Brief History of Women on U.S. Paper Currency](#), *The Atlantic*
- [Who, What, Why: How do you get your face on the dollar?](#), *BBC News*
- [How and why people are chosen to appear on US currency](#)

Connecting to the Building Democracy for All eBook

[Building Democracy for All: Whose Faces Should Be on U.S. Currency?](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
 - *Analyze the Constitutional issues that caused the Civil War and led to the eventual expansion of the power of the federal government and individual civil rights.* (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) **[8.T5.3]**
- [ISTE Standards](#)
 - Digital Citizen
 - 2c: Students demonstrate an understanding of and respect for the rights and obligations of using and sharing intellectual property.
 - Knowledge Constructor
 - 3a: Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.
 - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data, or other resources.
 - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
 - Creative Communicator
 - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
 - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
 - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
 - Ethics and Laws (CAS.b)
 - Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
 - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
 - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
 - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7



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