

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Joan Sandler

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Sandler, Joan, 1934-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Joan Sandler,
<b>Dates:</b>	February 2, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:40:58).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Arts educator Joan Sandler (1934 - ) worked for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Endowment for the Arts. She was also a lecturer and faculty member at several colleges and universities. Sandler was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 2, 2005, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_035
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Joan Delores Sandler was born on October 2, 1934 in Harlem, New York. Her mother worked as a nurse's aide and domestic and her father was an elevator operator. Sandler was educated in New York City public schools earning her high school diploma in 1952 from the New York High School of Music and Arts.

After graduation, Sandler worked as a clerk for an insurance company. She also surrounded herself with artists and musicians, while becoming a political activist involved in the peace movement. In the early 1960s, Sandler began studying

theatre with the Negro Ensemble Company and landed a role on the television drama series, *Black Girl*.

She began her art career in 1975, working as a program specialist for the Department of Cultural Affairs. Sandler then went on to work for the Black Theatre Alliance and Fundraising in the Public Interest. From 1983 until 1987, she worked for the Metropolitan Museum of Art where she was in charge of community education. She also worked for the National Endowment for the Arts and the Museum of American Folk Art. In 2001, Sandler served as executive director for the foundation of her longtime friend, artist Romare Bearden. The Romare Bearden Foundation continues Bearden's visual arts legacy through community outreach and education.

Sandler continues to consult in arts education. She has worked as a lecturer and faculty member at Hunter College, New York University, Marymount College and Princeton. She has served as an advisor to many foundations and grant making organizations. Sandler has received a number of awards and honors for her contributions to arts education.

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## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Joan Sandler was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on February 2, 2005, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Arts educator Joan Sandler (1934 - ) worked for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Endowment for the Arts. She was also a lecturer and faculty member at several colleges and universities.

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## **Restrictions**

### **Restrictions on Access**

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### **Restrictions on Use**

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The

## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Sandler, Joan, 1934-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Sandler, Joan, 1934---Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

EducationMakers

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## **Administrative Information**

### **Custodial History**

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### **Preferred Citation**

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Joan Sandler, February 2, 2005. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## **Other Finding Aid**

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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## **Detailed Description of the Collection**

## Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Joan Sandler, Section  
A2005\_035\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:19 2005/02/02

Joan Sandler was born on October 2, 1934 in New York, New York. Her mother Mary Wade Alexander, was born in Rocky Mount, North Carolina to Arthur Wade and Gatsy Wade. Both of her parents were farmers and she attended boarding school in North Carolina. After moving to New York, she became a nurse's aide and held a variety of jobs in order to help support her family. Sandler's father Otis Alexander, was born in Rocky Mount, North Carolina to Arthur Alexander and Ella Alexander. He worked as an elevator man, but was frustrated by his inability to make the money he had expected. Sandler grew up in several houses in Harlem, New York. Her parents divorced when she was 9 or 10 years old, and she lived with her mom after that though her dad had visitation. Sandler had nine siblings, but her older brother died from dysentery when he was 2 years old. She remembers family members moving up from the South to live in Harlem and large parties her parents would throw at their home.

Video Oral History Interview with Joan Sandler, Section  
A2005\_035\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:31 2005/02/02

Joan Sandler attended PS 10 in Harlem for elementary school. There, she had a teacher Mrs. Fairplow (ph.) who introduced her to many aspects of black art and culture at the time. After her parents separated, Sandler lived with her mother's family for several months in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. At home, she lived with her mother Mary Wade Alexander, and sometimes her stepfather Willis Hunter, where they held rent parties and guests would come to play poker and other games. Sandler attended Junior High School 81 but transferred to Joan of Arc Junior High so that she would be able to get into the High School of Music and Art. While in high school, she enjoyed listening to Harlem street corner orators and began moving between the radical Harlem lifestyle and parties in Greenwich Village. After high school, she hoped to make a living from this lifestyle so she lived with a friend and an acting company until their money was gone. Sandler then roomed with Audre Lorde for a short time

before marrying Al Sandler.

Video Oral History Interview with Joan Sandler, Section  
A2005\_035\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:31 2005/02/02

Joan Sandler worked for an insurance company for a couple years after her marriage to Al Sandler. After her marriage she worked occasionally with children and remained politically active. She befriended several significant figures including Louis Burnham and Lorraine Hansberry. In 1959, she moved to Mexico with her husband and her daughter Eve while pregnant with her daughter, Kathe. They lived there for 2 years, spending most of their time with other expatriates, including Elizabeth Catlett. In 1961, they moved back to New York and Sandler separated from her husband. She worked at the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs where she assisted with public art initiatives. She then worked for the Black Theater Alliance where she instituted several initiatives to get funding and programming for black theaters around New York. After, she began working for Fundraising in the Public Interest. Sandler remembers the growth of the interest in black art from the 1960s to the 1980s in New York and nationally.

Video Oral History Interview with Joan Sandler, Section  
A2005\_035\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:59 2005/02/02

Joan Sandler's political thought affected her family life, and she resisted the rigidity of the Communist Party and her husband. As part of the Black Theatre Alliance, Sandler worked to show black film throughout New York. She began working at the Metropolitan Museum of Art unexpectedly, and helped bring in prominent artists such Randy Weston, Romare Bearden, and Richard Long. She worked with a friend to publish a study on professionals of color in museums in America. Sandler moved to the National Endowment for the Arts where she was regional representative for New England. She travelled throughout the region and networked with artists and donors in order to connect them to the NEA. She then worked as a consultant for arts organizations and foundations. Sandler then moved to the Museum of American Folk Art. Following this, she began working at the Romare Bearden Foundation. Sandler also describes shifts growth in the

black arts community, especially the decline of black theatre.

Video Oral History Interview with Joan Sandler, Section  
A2005\_035\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:55 2005/02/02

Joan Sandler spent time with significant figures such as Paul Robeson who intimidated her. She talked with James Baldwin shortly before his death and appreciated his liveliness. Sandler works with the Romare Bearden Foundation as an advocate for the late artist and emerging black artists. Sandler describes challenges for contemporary black artists in the market. She talks about her daughters, Kathe and Eve Sandler, and their art. Sandler reflects upon her life even as she looks ahead to discoveries she still hopes to make. She considers her legacy as an accessible figure in the art world. Sandler hopes that African American artists will be supported by institutions. She concludes the tape by narrating her photos.

Video Oral History Interview with Joan Sandler, Section  
A2005\_035\_001\_006, TRT: 0:07:43 2005/02/02

Joan Sandler narrates her photographs