



# Spirituality in Art

Museum Pre-visit Packet, 2008

Utah Museum of Fine Arts

www.umfa.utah.edu

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## Postcard List

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1. Susan Swartz, American  
**Exploding Sky**, 2006  
Oil on canvas  
Acrylic on Linen Canvas  
Image courtesy of Susan Swartz
2. Burmese  
**Seated Buddha**, ca 19th – 20th century  
Wood, paint, lacquer, glass  
Gift of the Christensen Fund  
Museum # 1999.55.209
3. Egyptian, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty  
**Ring with Eye of Horus**  
Faience  
Gift of Natacha Rambova  
Museum # 1952.023.027.025
4. Chinese, Kangxi Period (1662-1722),  
Q'ing Dynasty (1644-1911)  
**Plate with Doucai Style Decoration**  
Porcelain  
Promised gift of Bert G Clift  
Museum # L1993.005
5. Southwest, Pueblo culture, Hopi people  
**Koyemsi or Mudhead Clown**  
Wood and Pigment  
Utah Museum of Fine Arts  
Museum # ED 1998.3.21
6. Vincent Laurensz van der Vinne I  
(1692-1702), Dutch  
**Memento Mori (Remember Death)**,  
1656  
Oil on panel  
Purchased with funds from the Marriner S.  
Eccles Foundation  
Museum # 1985.021
7. Master of Apollo and Daphne  
(active 16th Century), Italian  
**The Annunciation**, early 1500's  
Oil on panel  
Gift of Val A. Browning  
Museum # 1994.017.001
8. Thomas Doughty (1793-1856), American  
**Along the Hudson**, 1852  
Oil on canvas  
Purchased with funds from the Marriner S.  
Eccles Foundation  
Museum # 1984.059
9. Mali, Dogon people  
**Primordial Couple**  
Wood  
On loan from Owen D. Mort Jr. for the  
Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection of African Art  
Museum # L2004.45.1



# Spirituality in Art

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## ***Introduction to Spirituality in Art***

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*Written by Jennifer Jensen*

The lessons provided in this packet consist of nine different sections with the overarching theme of spirituality in art. Many people associate spirituality with religion, and while religion is spiritual, spirituality does not necessarily mean religion.

The pieces used in this lesson all reflect spirituality in one form or another. Some pieces are religious while others are not. The Christian piece (*The Annunciation*) the Egyptian piece (*Ring of the Eye of Horus*) and the Buddhist piece (*Seated Buddha*) all have lessons that explain the spirituality found in various religious beliefs. Other pieces focus on the spirituality related to nature, overcoming trials, building self esteem, and relationships with others.

These lessons focus on helping students to think and reflect about themselves and what spirituality is to them. It is our hope that you will be able to adapt these lessons to meet the needs of your students and to make the delicate subject of spirituality a bit easier to teach in your classroom. We hope that as you use these lessons, your students will be able to see that spirituality is represented in multiple ways in art, as well as in various aspects around the world.

Each of the lessons touch on various standards from the Utah State Core Curriculum, grades K-6, however all lessons are adaptable to use in other grades. The lessons are designed so that they may stand alone, be used together, or used as a tool to teach about various pieces of art before visiting the museum.



# Spirituality in Art

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Utah Museum of Fine Arts

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## Exploding Sky

Susan Swartz



Susan Swartz, American  
**Exploding Sky**, 2006  
Oil on canvas  
Acrylic on Linen Canvas  
Image courtesy of Susan Swartz

Born in Pittsburgh, Susan Swartz inherited her creative gene from a family of artists and musicians and has been painting for more than 40 years. Since 1998, after raising her family (she has three children and nine grandchildren), she has devoted herself to painting fulltime from studios in Park City, Utah and on Martha’s Vineyard.

Inspired by the natural world and the intersection of spirituality and art, Swartz paints landscapes and nature scenes that are profoundly abstract. Her distinctive style and artistic excellence have earned her international awards and recognition, and her works are featured in private and corporate collections around the world.

Susan Swartz states: “My paintings are landscapes and nature scenes that are profoundly abstract. I choose to paint life and the environment because I desire to examine the different forms of nature and our emotional associations with it. But that’s not how it started out; I used to work from photographs and painted photorealistic work. Now, my work is evolving toward abstraction inspired by nature. I paint completely from imagination. I usually start with an idea, allow it to grow and then let my creativity drive me; mostly I paint from my heart and go where it leads me.

Color inspires me, also layering. My paintings have many layers, like an onion. When you stand in front of one you see something different than when you are 15 feet away. I am also continually challenging myself, trying out new ideas and using new materials, pushing the envelope and keeping myself fresh. Through my work, I try to elicit an emotion, evoke a feeling. I want people to get lost in my art, find joy in it and seek meaning for themselves.”

# ***Exploding Sky***

## **Spirituality in Paintings of Nature: A Museum Activity**

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written by Virginia Catherall

### **Objective:**

Students will explore their own reaction and ideas about nature during a visit to the Utah Museum of Fine Arts.

### **State Core Links:**

Grades 3-6 – Visual Art

Standard 3: The student will choose and evaluate artistic subject matter, themes, symbols, ideas, meanings, and purposes.

Objective 2: Discuss, evaluate, and choose symbols, ideas, subject matter, meanings, and purposes for artworks.

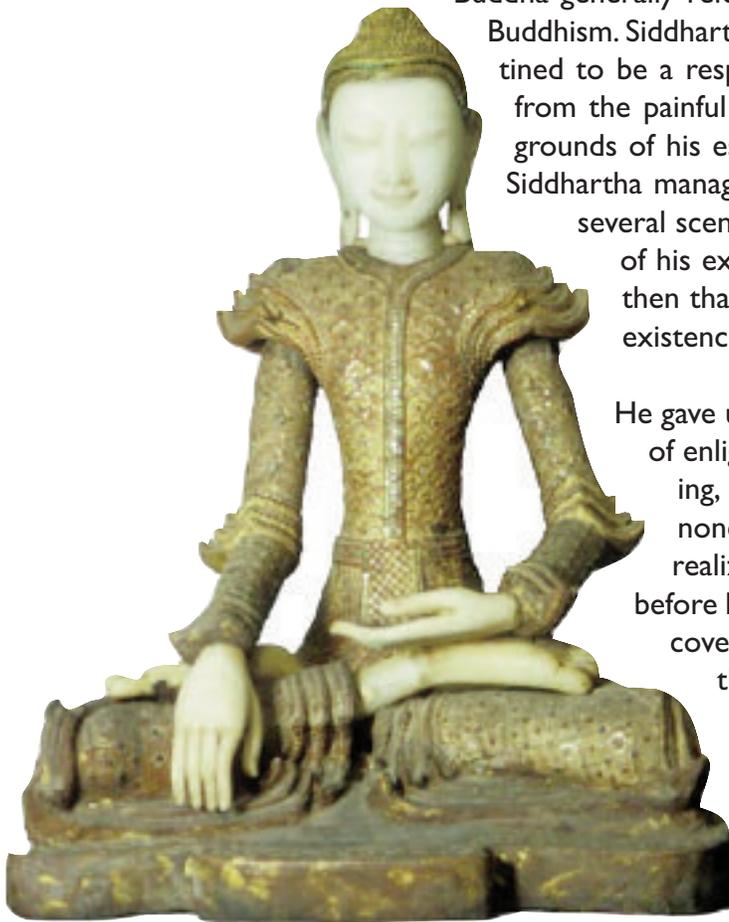
### **Grade Level:** K-6

### **Activity:**

1. This activity can be done in the museum either after you have discussed the idea of Spirituality in Art in your classroom or as a stand-alone activity.
2. Have the class stand in front of *Exploding Sky* by Susan Swartz (on display at the UMFA until April 13, 2008).
3. Tell them that we are going to take a trip with our imaginations. We are going to step into the painting. Have the students describe what they see, hear, smell, feel and taste:
  - What does the air feel like?
  - Where are they standing?
  - What sounds do they hear?
  - Are there any smells they can imagine while standing in this painting?
  - Can you taste the air?
4. As you return back to the museum (from your imaginations) ask the students what they felt in the painting. Compare that to a real experience. How do they feel when they are really in nature? Do they have the same feelings? Why did Susan Swartz title this painting *Exploding Sky*?
5. Try this same activity with a painting of a nature scene in the museum like *Along the Hudson* by Thomas Doughty. Was it easier or harder to imagine nature in *Exploding Sky*, a more abstract piece, or in *Along the Hudson*, a more realistic piece.? Why?
6. Ask the students some questions about nature paintings and have a brief discussion in the museum about spirituality and nature: What is nature? Why do so many artists paint nature scenes? What do you think about when you are outdoors in a nature, rural, or wild area? What does the term “commune with nature” mean?
7. Look for other nature and spiritual paintings as you tour the rest of the museum. See if you can find the rest of the artwork that is in this packet.

## Seated Buddha

**Burmese**



Burmese

**Seated Buddha**, ca 19th – 20th century

Wood, paint, lacquer, glass

Gift of the Christensen Fund

Museum # 1999.55.209

Buddha generally refers to Siddhartha Gautama, who was the founder of Buddhism. Siddhartha was the son of a wealthy land owner and was destined to be a respected leader. Siddhartha's father protected his son from the painful realities of life. He kept Siddhartha confined to the grounds of his estate, far away from pain, old age, death, and tragedy. Siddhartha managed to leave the confines of his estate and witnessed several scenes of suffering and poverty that changed the meaning of his existence. He was troubled by these images and it was then that he realized that there was meaning beyond physical existence.

He gave up all of his worldly goods and left his family in search of enlightenment. In order to find the answers he was seeking, he tried fasting, severe hardship, and meditation but none were able to bring him any consolation. Finally, he realized that enduring harsh conditions would end his life before he could find the answers he was seeking. He then discovered the middle path, the way of moderation. It was through this method that he attained perfect enlightenment.

Theravada Buddhism first reached Burma around 200 BC when King Ashoka sent missionaries out from India to spread the teachings of Buddha. From Burma it spread into other parts of Indochina, including Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The Burmese King Anawrghata of the eleventh-century was a convert to Theravada Buddhism. He made the capital city of Pagan a thriving center for craftsmen, architects and sculptors. It was in this atmosphere

that the Burmese style of depicting the historical Buddha in jeweled statuary, such as this one, was developed.

The Burmese have an especially reverent respect for Buddha images and how they are used. The Buddha is always in one of four postures deemed suitable : Sitting, Standing, Walking or Reclining Postures. The seated Buddha is in the meditation posture. This Buddha from Burma is an image of "the Buddha calling the earth to witness," the most common representation of the Buddha. The Buddha's hands are in the Earth-touching mudra.

# ***Seated Buddha***

## **Exploring Symbolism in Statues of Buddha**

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**written by Jennifer Jensen**

### **Objective:**

Students will be able to research the beliefs of Buddhism and identify specific symbolism present in a statue of Buddha.

### **State Core Links:**

Grades 3-6 – Visual Art

Standard 3: The student will choose and evaluate artistic subject matter, themes, symbols, ideas, meanings, and purposes.

Objective 2: Discuss, evaluate, and choose symbols, ideas, subject matter, meanings, and purposes for artworks.

### **Grade Level: 3-6**

### **Materials:**

Postcard of *Seated Buddha*

Paper and pencil

### **Activity:**

1. Ask students what it means to observe something. Have them describe what they need to do if they observe something.
2. Walk around the room displaying the postcard of *Seated Buddha*. For five minutes have the students write down every observation they can about the statue. Tell them to be specific and describe what they see. (ex. Don't just say hands, say left hand lying horizontally.)
3. Write down every observation that the students say up on the board.
4. Explain who Buddha refers to and tell the story of Siddhartha Gautama (as shown in the background of the piece).
5. Tell students that statues of Buddha often have various fortunate symbols present in them. Most likely students observed some of these symbols. Go through the list and point out the symbols and explain their meaning to the students.
  - Endless knot – the knot on the top of Buddha's head signifies his infinite wisdom and enlightenment
  - Lotus position – this seated Buddha is sitting in what is called the "lotus position." The lotus symbolizes the grounding of peoples' lives in suffering, as the lotus' roots are in mud. The mud, however, can be used for growth to reach enlightenment, just as the lotus rises above the mud and water to point to heaven.
  - Long earlobes - these show that he used to wear heavy earrings and adornments, but has left these material riches behind.
  - Smile – this portrays Buddha's compassion.
  - Mudras (hand gestures) – Each position has its own meaning, indicating intentions such as the granting of wishes, protection, teaching, or meditation.

6. Ask students to discuss with a partner why Buddhist artists would choose to include the symbolism present in this statue. Why do artists include symbolism rather than just portray something the way it really looks? Where are other places you see symbols used?

**Assessment:**

Have students take out a sheet of paper and write down what they learned from this activity. Also, ask them to write down one or two questions they have, now that they have this knowledge about statues of Buddha.

**Extension:**

Take the students' questions that they wrote down during the assessment part of the lesson to guide your next lesson on symbolism and Buddhist beliefs.

**Sources:**

<http://mcel.pacificu.edu/as/students/vb/history.htm>

<http://www.budtempchi.org/symbols.html>

<http://encyclopedia.farlex.com/Buddha+rupa>

## ***Ring with Eye of Horus***

***Egyptian***



Horus, the son of Osiris and Isis, was a god of the sky and is usually depicted as a falcon or a man with a falcon's head wearing the crown of all Egypt. He is probably most well known as the protector of the ruler of Egypt. His name means "He who is above." This is probably linked to his status as a god of the sky and to the high soaring of the falcon.

After fighting Seth, to avenge his father's death, he lost one of his eyes. The eye was restored to him and it became a symbol of protection and royal power from deities, to the ancient Egyptians. After this battle, Horus was chosen as the ruler of the world of the living. Notice in this representation, underneath the eye is a tear and a stylized beard, which symbolized divine kingship.

The ancient Egyptians believed strongly in life after death. This symbol was often painted or carved on sarcophagi, enabling the dead to see again. It was a popular charm symbolizing wholeness, well-being, and fruitfulness. This ancient Egyptian *Ring with the Eye of Horus* was found in a tomb in Egypt.

Egyptian, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty  
***Ring with Eye of Horus***  
Faience  
Gift of Natacha Rambova  
Museum # 1952.023.027.025

# Ring with Eye of Horus Lesson

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**written by Jennifer Jensen**

## **Objective:**

Students will be able to discuss the importance of symbolism in ancient Egypt and create a symbol and meaning that is important to them after studying various important symbols of ancient Egypt.

## **State Core Links:**

Grade 6 – Social Studies

Standard 4: Students explore the cultures of ancient civilizations.

Objective 1: Explore the culture of ancient Egypt.

## **Grade Level: 6**

## **Materials:**

Postcard of *Ring with the Eye of Horus*

Examples of different Egyptian symbols such as the scarab, djed, ankh, and bast

Bright colored pencils

Light colored paper to draw on

## **Activities:**

1. Begin providing background knowledge on Egyptian gods and goddesses. Explain what they did and the commonality of placing drawings or carvings of symbols on the sarcophagi to assist them in the after life.
2. Display the postcard of *Ring of the Eye of Horus* to the class. Explain that when the ancient Egyptians carved or painted this symbol, it represented a variety of things. It could stand for protection, wholeness, or even enable the dead to see again.
3. Be sure to emphasize how important and sacred this custom was to the ancient Egyptians.
4. Have the students close their eyes and imagine that they lived in ancient Egypt. Explain that they were chosen to be in charge of determining what to put on the sarcophagus of someone they love or admire who has passed on.
5. Reinforce that these symbols used in ancient Egypt were supposed to help the dead in some way. What would they want to wish for them? What would the symbol look like?
6. After the students think about the assignment for a few minutes, provide students with paper and brightly colored pencils. Tell them that it is time for them to design the symbol. (Put up many examples so students can see how simple they often were).
7. Once students have finished their symbol and determined the meaning of the symbol, have them present them to the class. Since this may be very personal to some students if they chose the symbol for a relative who has recently died, allow the option to pass if they don't feel comfortable sharing.

**Assessment:**

Give students clear expectations about what they must include in their drawings. How much color should it have? How big should it be? Providing a rubric could be very useful in this assignment so students know exactly what is expected of them.

**Extension:**

Once students have finished their artwork and presented it to the rest of the class, provide an opportunity for students to write about this experience. Give them the choice between writing about how they came up with their symbol and why this was important to them or writing about what it would be like to live in ancient Egypt.

**Adaptations:**

While this lesson specifically targets the Utah core curriculum for sixth grade, it is a great activity for exploring other cultures and traditions. Similar activities could be done looking into other cultures or other traditions of the United States, depending on your grade level.

**Sources:**

<http://www.egyptiandreams.co.uk/keywords/horus/eye%20of%20horus%20ring.php>  
<http://www.horus.ics.org.eg/en/History/LifeafterDeath.aspx>

# Egyptian Symbols



Ankh



Djed



Hathor



Maat



Scarab



Lotus



Seba



Eye of Horus

**Plate with Doucai Style Decorations**

**Chinese**



The decoration on this saucer-dish, while being a beautiful design, is also symbolic. Ducks are normally an emblem of felicity, i.e.: happiness and success. The ducks on this dish are Mandarin ducks and these are specifically associated with conjugal fidelity because pairs of them are supposedly very true to each other. The lotus is normally an emblem of numerous offspring, meaning sons to the Chinese, because of the large number of seeds contained in its pod. Therefore, this design is essentially a wish for success, happy marriage and many sons.

The important symbol of a lotus flower on the dish also has other meanings. The roots of a lotus are in the mud, the stem grows up through the water, and the heavily scented flower lies pristinely above the water. Though there are other water plants that bloom above the water, it is only the lotus which, because of its strong stem, regularly rises eight to twelve inches above the surface.

The lotus is held sacred in several religions. Lotuses are symbols of purity and symbolize divine birth. According to the Lalitavistara, “the spirit of the best of men is spotless, like the new lotus in the muddy water

Chinese, Kangxi Period (1662-1722), Q'ing Dynasty (1644-1911)  
**Plate with Doucai Style Decoration**  
 Porcelain  
 Promised gift of Bert G Clift  
 Museum # L1993.005

which does not adhere to it.” According to esoteric Buddhism, the heart of the beings is like an unopened lotus: when the virtues of the Buddha develop therein the lotus blossoms.

The color of the lotus also determines the associated symbolism:

- White Lotus: This represents the state of spiritual perfection and total mental purity.
- Pink Lotus: The supreme lotus, generally reserved for the highest deity. Thus naturally it is associated with the Great Buddha himself.
- Red Lotus: This signifies the original nature and purity of the heart. It is the lotus of love, compassion, passion and all other qualities of the heart.
- Blue Lotus: This is a symbol of the victory of the spirit over the senses, and signifies the wisdom of knowledge.

# ***Plate with Doucai Style Decoration***

## **Getting Through Tough Experiences Lesson**

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**written by Jennifer Jensen**

### **Objectives:**

Students will be able to reflect on ways they or someone else have overcome various trials and brainstorm ideas for how to work through a problem.

Students will be able to relate personal experiences to the symbol of the lotus flower.

### **State core links:**

Grade K-2 – Core Content

Standard 2: Students will develop a sense of self in relation to families and community.

Objective 1: Describe behaviors that influence relationships with family and friends.

Grade 3-6 – Health Education

Standard 5: The students will adopt behaviors to maintain personal health and safety and develop appropriate strategies to resolve conflict.

**Grade Level:** K-6

### **Materials:**

Postcard of *Plate with Doucai Style Decoration*

Various pictures of the lotus flower

Book where the character overcomes a trial

Notebooks or paper for students to write their responses

### **Activity:**

1. Begin by having a class discussion on the lotus flower. Show them the picture of the lotus from the saucer-dish as well as other pictures of lotuses. What is so incredible about this flower? Explain that the lotus grows out of muddy water, and despite its dirty environment, rises up and beautifully blooms.
2. Ask students to think about how this flower could be related to their own life. How could this symbol be similar to them? Ask students to discuss with a partner and then share with the class the response they came up with.
3. One possible response is that the muddy water could represent different trials or problems that they face in their life, and the lotus blooming represents them growing through the problem and overcoming it. Depending on the responses from the class, you may want to build on other ideas that they come up with as well.
4. Socrates said that a good imagination is a powerful tool for solving problems. Ask students how their imagination could help them solve problems. Have you ever used your imagination to solve a problem, or to predict what might happen if you did something? Do you think it's a good idea? How did that help you (or, how could that help you)? What are some other ways that you try to solve problems?

5. Brainstorm and list ideas on the board for ways that students have seen others or themselves overcome different trials.

6. Read students a book or portion of a book that deals with someone overcoming various difficulties. For younger grades, you could use the book *Fortunately* by Remy Charlip, which is about a fictional boy who overcomes various mishaps by looking on the bright side. For older grades, you could read portions of *Lincoln: A Photobiography* by Russell Freedman or any other biographies where it discusses ways the person overcame trials.

7. After reading the story and discussing ways that the person in the story overcame trials have the students think of someone they know who has had to deal with a very difficult problem. Have students write about this person and what they learned from their example of how to get through a problem or trial. Have them finish their writing by explaining how this person relates to the lotus flower they learned about.

**Assessment:**

Have students turn in their responses about a person who has overcome their trial. For full credit, students should have a specific person they chose, how they overcame their trial, and how this person relates to the lotus.

**Adaptations:**

Various books may be chosen for this activity. Depending on what genre your students are studying, there is typically a problem or conflict in every book you read, so you could choose a specific book that fits with your genre. If your students are having a hard time thinking of enough ideas to write an entire paper on a person, you may want to have them work with a buddy to get ideas. You could also have the students draw pictures of the person overcoming trials if you would rather have this be an art lesson instead of a language arts lesson.

**Sources:**

[http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/b\\_lotus.htm](http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/b_lotus.htm)

<http://altrreligion.about.com/library/glossary/symbols/bldefslotus.htm>

<http://www.religionfacts.com/buddhism/symbols/lotus.htm>

*Fortunately* by Remy Charlip, Aladdin, 1993, ISBN 0689716605

*Lincoln: A Photobiography* by Russell Freedman, Clarion Books, 1987, ISBN 0395518482

# Lotus Flower



### ***Koyemsi or Mudhead Clown***

### ***Hopi People***



Many followers of Native American spirituality do not regard their spiritual beliefs and practices as a "religion." Their beliefs and practices form an integral part of their very being.

*The Koyemsi, or Mudhead Clown, comes from the Pueblo culture, descendants of the ancient Anasazi people who lived in villages in southern Utah and Colorado. After a long period of drought in the 1200s, the Pueblos settled further south in New Mexico and Arizona.*

The Pueblo community is divided into various clans. Members of these clans play an important role in administration, government, and religious ceremonies. The Pueblo are a sincerely religious group of people. Various ceremonies are held coinciding with the agricultural seasons.

The Koyemsi are probably the most popular and recognized of all Pueblo Katsina and they serve religious and secular functions. They appear in almost every ceremony or ritual as clowns, drummers, dancers, and chiefs during the season called Kwiyamuya. Made of mud, they symbolize the material from which humans were made.

Southwest, Pueblo culture, Hopi people  
***Koyemsi or Mudhead Clown***  
Wood and Pigment  
Utah Museum of Fine Arts  
Museum # ED 1998.3.21

# **Mudhead Clown**

## **Native American Spirituality & Traditions Lesson**

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**written by Jennifer Jensen**

### **Objective:**

Students will be able to examine the importance of spirituality in the Native American culture by presenting information on various rituals and traditions used during ceremonies.

### **State Core links:**

Grade 4 - Social Studies

Standard 4: Students participate in activities that promote cultural understanding and good citizenship.

Objective 1: Demonstrate cultural understanding by showing appreciation for the uniqueness of other cultures.

Grade 2 – Core Content

Standard 2: Students will develop a sense of self in relation to families and community.

Objective 2: Examine important aspects of the community and culture that strengthen relationships.

**Grade Level:** 2, 4

### **Materials:**

Postcard of *Koyemsi* or *Mudhead Clown*

Availability of four computers

### **Activity:**

1. Begin the lesson by showing students the postcard of the *Mudhead Clown*. Have students observe the piece for a few minutes and ask them to guess what it might be used for or what it might symbolize.
2. Discuss with the students the background information given on the *Koyemsi*. Explain that various Native American tribes practice various rituals and ceremonies. These ceremonies are very sacred and spiritual to them.
3. Tell students that there are a lot of misconceptions about rituals of Native Americans and tell them that they will be researching a specific one on a computer.
4. Divide the class into five groups and provide them with access to a computer. Each group should be assigned to one of these five websites:
  - a. <http://www.apples4theteacher.com/native-american/names/presenting-to-cosmos.html>
  - b. <http://www.apples4theteacher.com/native-american/names/giving-the-child-a-name.html>
  - c. <http://www.apples4theteacher.com/native-american/names/bestowing-a-new-name.html>
  - d. <http://www.apples4theteacher.com/native-american/names/taking-an-indian-name-in-camp.html>
  - e. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?sec=travel&res=9D05E7DEIE39F93IAI5754C0A962948260>

5. Ask students to work with their group and discover the main ideas in the articles, songs sung, or clothing worn during different ceremonies. They should also determine a clever way to present the information in the article to the rest of the class and why it's important to know this information.

6. Give the student plenty of time to research their topic and come up with a presentation. Depending on your preference, they could do drawing, write a paper, or complete a PowerPoint presentation.

**Assessment:**

Students will be assessed on the information they present to the class. Since this is a group project, it would also be nice to include an individual assessment. You could come up with a form where each person in the group individually writes down how each member contributed to the group. Students grades should be based on an average of scores from the individual assessments and group presentations.

**Extension:**

This activity can easily lead into explorations of various other cultures. There are various aspects of spirituality embedded into every culture and this activity will help students to except other cultural beliefs and spiritual traditions and gain an appreciation for differences.

**Adaptations:**

If it is not possible to get computers for the five groups or if your students are not accustomed to working on computers, these articles may be printed out or they could use encyclopedias to gather information. For older students, you may want to ask them to present other informational facts that may require extra searching in order to expand their thinking.

**Sources:**

[http://www.adobegallery.com/detail.php?item\\_id=1195340368](http://www.adobegallery.com/detail.php?item_id=1195340368)

[http://mo.essortment.com/pueblowherecan\\_riij.htm](http://mo.essortment.com/pueblowherecan_riij.htm)

## Memento Mori

**Dutch**



Vincent Laurensz van der Vinne I (1692-1702), Dutch  
**Memento Mori (Remember Death)**, 1656  
Oil on panel  
Purchased with funds from the Marriner S. Eccles Foundation  
Museum # 1985.021

Many people have a belief that there is an afterlife. The painting *Memento Mori* (*Remember Death*), and other similar still-lives of the era, were done to urge the viewer to remember that the salvation of one's soul does not depend on worldly success. Objects displayed in this painting represent accomplishments in this life that become meaningless in the face of death. These types of paintings are called *Vanitas* meaning "emptiness" in Latin.

This still-life includes many symbols to portray this theme of avoiding vanity. The watch and hourglass depict the passage of time. The helmet, sword, and gun refer to military affairs. The globe, maps, and the money bags refer to worldly knowledge and wealth. The overturned candlestick cautions that life will be extinguished like a candle that is burned out. The musical instruments refer to the sense of hearing and to music--one of the seven liberal arts. Since they wither and die, the cut flowers in a vase allude to the passing of life, as does the skull. The ivy crowning the skull, however, offers hope because it is a symbol for immortality.

# ***Memento Mori***

## **Appreciating Yourself Lesson**

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**written by Jennifer Jensen**

### **Objective:**

Students will be able to make connections between literature and paintings. They will be able to express their feelings through writing and make other students feel good by writing appreciations for each student in the class.

### **State Core Links:**

Grades K-2 – Content Core

Standard 1 – Students will develop a sense of self.

Objective 3 – Develop and use skills to communicate ideas, information, and feelings.

Grades 3-6 – Language Arts

Standard 7 – Students understand, interpret, and analyze narrative and informational grade level text.

Objective 1 – Identify purposes of text.

### **Grade Level:** K-6

### **Materials:**

Postcard of *Memento Mori* by Vincent Laurensz van der Vinne I

*The Quiltmaker's Gift* by Jeff Brumbeau

Markers

Construction paper

### **Activity:**

1. Begin the lesson by reading aloud *The Quiltmaker's Gift* by Jeff Brumbeau. Be sure to pause during important parts of the story and emphasize what you want students to get out of the book.

2. Once the book is finished display the postcard of *Memento Mori* by Vincent Laurensz van der Vinne I. Explain to the class that many painters of this era created these paintings called memento mori, meaning “remembering death.” Explain that the message of the painting is to avoid vanity in your life. Depending on the age of your students, you can discuss the religious belief of an afterlife and the idea that you cannot take your worldly possessions on to the afterlife. Discuss the symbolism used in this painting with your students.

3. Explain that no matter what religious beliefs you have or don't have, the message of avoiding vanity helps us to become more caring, civically engaged people because we are no longer focusing on our riches and possessions.

4. Once the students have heard *The Quiltmaker's Gift* and observed the postcard, ask the students to write a response about the similarities they see in the message of both of these pieces of art. This will help students to compare and contrast two different types of art and express themselves through writing.

5. Discuss with the class the different characteristics that make each student unique and special. Discuss the difference between personality traits and characteristics and owning extravagant possessions. An example from the book would be that the King was very charitable and felt happy making other people happy; he also had various precious items that were given to him as gifts.
6. Explain that for the next activity you will be focusing on the personality traits and characteristics instead of possessions. (Be sure to explain that it is okay to have possessions, however that it is important for people to develop personal qualities as well. This is not a lesson that should make students feel bad for having nice or fun things.)
7. Give each student a large piece of colored construction paper and have them write their name in the middle of the paper fairly large.
8. For the next twenty minutes (or however long you think it will take depending on your class size and age of your students), have your students go around the room and write about a personal quality that they appreciate in each student. Make sure to organize the activity in a way so that you are able to tell that every student had the opportunity to write to each student.
9. Once the activity is done, give the students a few minutes to think about the comments that their peers wrote to them. Tell them that these are qualities that others see in them so that they are able to increase their self esteem.
10. Provide time for students to share their feelings about this activity if they wish. This is a great opportunity to build community in your classroom by discussing the good feelings they got writing nice things and hearing nice things back.

**Assessment:**

Students will be assessed informally. The teacher should wander throughout the room reading various comments from students to see if they are truly grasping the concept. It will also be formally assessed by having students turn in their responses about the similarities and differences between the book and the painting.

**Extension:**

This activity leads to various self esteem building lessons, especially for younger students who are working on developing their sense of self. This is also a great starting point for talking about service learning projects in the classroom. The book brings up service and the feeling you get from helping someone, so the next step could be deciding on a service project the class could do.

**Adaptations:**

Depending on the age and developmental stage of the students, the religious aspect may be included more or less. Teachers always know their students best. If this lesson is taught in younger grades, it may be better to just have a class discussion on the similarities and differences between the book and painting rather than have them write down their ideas. For older grades, the writing project could become much more in depth on what they learned from both of the pieces and could involve researching different topics brought up in both of these pieces.

**Sources:**

*The Quiltmaker's Gift* by Jeff Brumbeau, Scholastic Press, 2001, ISBN 0439309107

## **The Annunciation**

**Italian**



Symbolism is used in various types of artwork such as painting, sculpture, writing, and poetry. It is often used to relate far more than what could initially be seen at first glance of the piece.

*The Annunciation* is a pictorial narrative of the biblical story of the Virgin Mary receiving word from the Archangel Gabriel that she has been chosen to be the mother of Christ. The artist has used many symbols in his painting to tell that this is a sacred place. If you notice the dove in the top left corner, its presence represents the Holy Spirit. Gabriel carries a lily to represent Mary's purity. The white scarves beneath the window also represent her chastity. The glass vase with flowers on the bed's headboard is again a symbol for Mary's purity because light can shine through glass without breaking it. The halo around Mary's head depicts angelic presence.

Master of Apollo and Daphne (active 16th Century),  
Italian  
**The Annunciation**, early 1500's  
Oil on panel  
Gift of Val A. Browning  
Museum # 1994.017.001

# ***The Annunciation***

## **Symbolism in Art Lesson**

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**written by Jennifer Jensen**

### **Objectives:**

Students will be able to identify and analyze the deeper meaning of artwork by learning the meaning of various symbols present in artwork.

Students will be able to create a symbol that could be used to represent a part of themselves that not everyone would know just by looking at them.

### **State Core Objectives:**

Visual Art: Grades 3-6

Standard 3 - The student will choose and evaluate artistic subject matter, themes, symbols, ideas, meanings, and purposes.

Objective 2 - Discuss, evaluate, and choose symbols for students' own artwork.

### **Grade Level: 3-6**

### **Materials:**

Postcard of *The Annunciation* by Master of Apollo and Daphne

Notebooks or paper for students to write on

Paper

Markers, crayons, paints, or colored pencils

### **Activity:**

1. Present the postcard of *The Annunciation* to the class. Ask them to take five minutes to observe everything in the picture and make a guess at what is happening. At first glance, students might not know who the figures are or what is happening.
2. Next, discuss with the class how artists often use symbols to convey a deeper meaning to a story. Point out the different symbols used in this painting and see how many students noticed them when they were observing.
3. Explain the symbols and what they mean to the class. You can pick and choose symbols depending on the age group of students.
4. Ask the students to write what they think the picture is showing after they have learned what the different symbols mean.
5. Have students think for a few minutes of a few symbols that could describe their life if a painting was done of them. Show an example of how you would make one for yourself. Example: draw a sketch of you, place a book on a table to show your love of learning, a rake to show your dedication to service, and a window with a nature scene outside to show you love the outdoors. Encourage students to think of what makes them who they are instead of things like "I like nintendo, sports, and recess." Help guide the students into a deeper examination of themselves.

6. Pass out papers to each student and have them create their own portrait of themselves adding at least three symbols that would tell the viewer something they might not know about them.
7. Have students present their artwork to the class and tell about the symbols they used. Give the students a right to pass if they do not want to share, as they may add symbols that choose very special to them that they do not want to talk to a large group about.

**Assessment:**

Students will be graded based on the completeness of the artwork and on the quality of their responses in the initial activity. Students must know the expectations of how many symbols they must include in their artwork so that they have an idea of what the teacher is looking for.

**Adaptations/Extensions:**

For older grades, many annunciation paintings and other symbolic artwork may be examined and a greater study of the meaning of the symbols could come into play. For younger grades, the writing portion of observing the painting could be taken out and just done orally. This activity could help younger students to develop a sense of self as they create symbols for their life.



## Spirituality in Art

Museum Pre-visit Packet, 2008

Utah Museum of Fine Arts

[www.umfa.utah.edu](http://www.umfa.utah.edu)

### *Along the Hudson*

*American*

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Thomas Doughty (1793-1856), American  
***Along the Hudson***, 1852  
Oil on canvas  
Purchased with funds from the Marriner S. Eccles Foundation  
Museum # 1984.059

*Along the Hudson* is one of many paintings by Thomas Doughty, a founder in the Hudson River School. The Hudson River School was a group of American landscape painters of the mid-nineteenth century. These painters romanticized the depictions of New York's Hudson River Valley as well as lands further west. While it was called a "school" it was simply a group of people whose outlook, inspiration, or style demonstrated a common thread, rather than a learning institution.

The paintings depict the American landscape as an idyllic setting, where human beings and nature coexist peacefully. Hudson River School landscapes are characterized by their realistic, detailed, and often idealized portrayal of nature. While the artists of the Hudson River School varied in their religious beliefs, they all believed that nature in the form of the American landscape was an indescribable manifestation of a higher being.

# ***Along the Hudson***

## **The Spiritual Aspect of Nature Lesson**

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**written by Jennifer Jensen**

### **Objective:**

Students will be able to observe a beautiful spot in nature and portray a realistic picture of what they observed by creating a landscape in the manner of the Hudson River School paintings.

### **State Core links:**

Science Intended Learning Outcomes: Grades K-6

Use Science Process and Thinking Skills: Observe objects and patterns and report their observations.

Visual Art: Grades 4-5

Standard 1- The student will explore and refine the application of media, techniques, and artistic processes.

Objective 1- Observe and render the details of real objects with a high degree of accuracy

### **Grade Level:** K-6

### **Materials:**

Postcard of *Along the Hudson* by Thomas Doughty

Writing journals

Access to a scenic view without a lot of noise

Watercolor paints

### **Activity:**

1. Present students with these quotes and ask them what they think the people who said them thought about nature. What do the quotes mean?

“Nature always tends to act in the simplest of ways.” - Bernoulli

“Nothing is more beautiful than the loveliness of the woods before sunrise.” - George Washington Carver

“Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you.” - Frank Lloyd Wright

“The richness I achieve comes from Nature, the source of my inspiration.” - Claude Monet

2. After discussing the students’ responses, show them the postcard of *Along the Hudson* and briefly discuss with them what the Hudson River School did. Explain that these painters saw nature as incredibly beautiful and that it was a manifestation of a higher being. They believed that something so exquisite could not have been constructed by chance

3. Discuss how the Hudson River School painters would often venture out to the most dramatic sites and would paint an idealized version of what they saw. Tell students that they are going to act as the Hudson River School painters today and find inspiration for their artwork by being in and observing nature.

4. Take the class to an area where they can observe beautiful scenery with very few distractions around if possible. (Examples: playground when there are no classes out for recess, a local park, a field trip to somewhere like Silver Lake, etc.)

5. Give students a piece of paper or journal pad and a piece of art paper to take with them on the journey.
6. For ten minutes have the students just observe. Don't let them write or sketch anything. You may want to go over how observing uses your five senses and that they should be using them during this time (except taste).
7. Next tell them to begin writing down everything they observed during that ten minutes. What did they hear, see, smell, feel, etc.
8. For the remainder of the time outdoors allow students to sketch an idealized view of what they are seeing. (You will most likely want to let them just sketch their picture outside and do the painting back in the classroom.)
9. Have students present their work by doing a gallery walk in the classroom, letting students analyze each piece with music in the background.

**Assessment:**

Students will be graded based on the completeness and quality of the artwork. Students must be given clear expectations of what is expected in the final piece. A rubric could be useful for an activity such as this one.

**Extension:**

The next activity could lead into why it is good to reflect on nature. Students could discuss how peaceful, beautiful areas of nature make them feel. This could lead into a writing piece on what students like best about nature. They could also come up with their own quotes about nature similar to the ones shown at the beginning of the lesson.

**Adaptations:**

For older grades, a greater study of Hudson River School paintings could be done to extend their learning and present more fully the ideals of the group of painters. If it is hard for your class to go somewhere peaceful in nature, many paintings of nature could be shown and a CD of nature sounds could be played as students observe them to still provide a feeling of being in nature.

**Sources:**

<http://www.artlex.com/ArtLex/h/hudsonriverschool.html>

## *Primordial Couple*

## *Dogon People*



The Dogon are an ethnic group located mainly in the administrative districts of Bandiagara and Douentza in Mali, West Africa. The Dogon are best known for their mythology, their mask dances, wooden sculpture and their architecture.

Dogon art revolves around religious values, ideals, and freedoms. Dogon sculptures are not made to be seen publicly, and are commonly hidden from the public eye within the houses of families and sanctuaries. The importance of secrecy is due to the symbolic meaning behind the pieces and the process by which they are made.

Dogon belief maintains that one couple gave birth to humans. This Primordial Couple is traditionally represented in sculpture as sitting together on a stool with the man's arm around the shoulder of his companion. The base of the stool represents the earth, and the seat represents the sky signifying the couple's dominion over all of heaven and Earth. In this specific piece, the couple is on top of the seat, almost merging into the stool and might symbolize that they are still in the sky about to descend to earth.

Mali, Dogon people

**Primordial Couple**

Wood

On loan from Owen D. Mort Jr. for the Owen D. Mort Jr. Collection of African Art  
Museum # L2004.45.1

# ***Primordial Couple***

## **Exploring the Beliefs of the Dogon People**

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**written by Jennifer Jensen**

### **Objectives:**

Students will be able to research the beliefs of another culture and present their knowledge to the class.

Students will be able to gain an appreciation for a culture different from theirs by finding the similarities and differences between the culture being studied and their own.

### **State core links:**

Grades K-2 – Core Content

Standard 2: Students will develop a sense of self in relation to families and community.

Objective 2: Describe important aspects of the community and culture that strengthen relationships.

Grade 3 – Social Studies

Standard 3: Students trace the development and emergence of culture in indigenous communities.

Objective 1: Describe the various factors that draw communities together.

Grade 4 – Social Studies

Standard 4: Students participate in activities that promote cultural understanding and good citizenship.

Objective 1: Demonstrate cultural understanding.

**Grade Level:** K-4

### **Materials:**

Postcard of *Primordial Couple*

Encyclopedias, websites, and books on the Dogon culture

Various materials for presentations (Paper, Markers, Butcher Paper, Modeling Clay, etc)

### **Activity:**

1. Display the postcard of the *Primordial Couple* and explain the meaning of the piece.
2. Explain to students the importance of learning about other cultures because it helps us to gain an appreciation for people who are different from us. It also helps us to discover that there are many similarities between different cultures as well.
3. Tell your students that they will be dividing up as a class to discover more information about the Dogon people because there is so little known about them.
4. Divide the class into small groups and assign each group one of these categories: religious beliefs, cultural traditions, geography and history, art, and homes and living spaces.
5. This would be a great time to explain how to research different topics. If your students are not familiar with doing research you can discuss various search engines on the internet, encyclopedias, ways to search for books in the library on the topic, etc.

6. Once the students are divided up into groups, give them time to research their section. Depending on how much information you want the students to collect, this activity could take several class periods.

7. Also explain that when people normally research a topic, they don't typically write down full sentences about different topics, but they take out the "trash" words and only write down the "treasure words." For example if you read a sentence that said, "Dogon art is primarily wood sculpture, although some pieces are made out of stone or forged from metal." Students studying art would write, "Sculptures: wood, stone, metal."

8. Once students have gathered their information on their topic, give the students the choice on how they will present their findings.

- write a paper to read to the class
- draw a picture and explain how it relates to the section studied
- create a PowerPoint explaining their section including pictures
- make a sculpture out of modeling clay that explains their section

9. After students have presented the materials about these featured aspects of the Dogon culture, ask students to tell why it is important to learn this information. How does this activity help them to become more accepting of others?

### **Assessment:**

Providing choices for the final presentation will allow students to choose the type of presentation that they feel most comfortable with so they should be expected to create the highest quality of work.

### **Extension:**

This could be the first activity to start a unit on exploring other cultures. If you are going to have your class do individual reports on different cultures/countries this will help students to see what is expected of them and will take a bit of the pressure off for the first report because they will be working with their peers. Once they have experienced the process, they will be more comfortable doing a presentation like this on their own.

### **Adaptations:**

If students are struggling to find information on the specific culture, you could provide websites with information and pictures so that students don't need to search too long to find the information they need.

### **Sources:**

Here is a list of some websites your students could use to research on the internet.

[http://www.necp.net/society.php?id\\_soc=12](http://www.necp.net/society.php?id_soc=12)

<http://www.sacredsites.com/africa/mali/dogon.html>

<http://www.crystalinks.com/dogon.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dogon>