

PRE-LESSON

#1 – Identity in Language and Symbols

This fall's tour pre-lesson explores **Identity in Art and Culture** through a series of short 10-minute “**bell-ringer**” activities.

You can do one activity each day the week before your UMFA/NHMU tour or do them all at one time!

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First, let's learn some vocabulary!

SYMBOL – An image, word, or character that represents an object, idea, or feeling. For example, a heart is a symbol for love in many cultures.

GLYPH – A character made up of symbolic images. Often used in reference to the writing system of Maya and other cultures.

CULTURE – The traditions, art, and beliefs of a group of people at a certain time and in a certain place.

LANGUAGE – The method of communication used by a certain culture or community.

Investigating Symbols in the Maya Culture



Plate with Jaguar-Serpent-Bird Motif, Guatemala , Petén, Maya Culture, 600-900 A.D., earthenware, Terra sigillata, pigment, UMFA1979.269

Describe the images and colors you see in this artwork.

What strikes you about the character in the center of this plate? What features does it have?

The center figure is a combination of a jaguar, a bird, and a serpent. It is surrounded by Maya glyphs. Each of these glyphs are made up of multiple symbols, representing words or phrases.

What do you think these symbols might say?

Building a Maya Glyph

The glyphs are sometimes made up of a combination of symbols that represented syllables. When combined, they make one word.

Maya glyphs can also be formed by placing two word-glyphs together. Let's look at an example of this type of glyph!



This symbol was used as a title for a male citizen, much in the way that we use "Mr."



This symbol represented the position of a scribe in Maya culture.

These two symbols can be combined to form a glyph representing a male scribe like this:



Now that you've seen how to build a glyph, let's look at this plate again! Can you see that each glyph is built from separate symbols?



Symbols in other cultures

Many other cultures use symbols to represent words or ideas as well!



The “Ankh” represents “life” in the Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic system of language.

The “Eye of Horus” was used to represent healing and renewal.



For a long time in European and American cultures, the dove and olive branch have been used to represent peace. More recently, people have used the peace sign instead.



Have you ever created your own language or designed symbols to represent your life or things that are important to you?

Let’s design symbols to represent our identities!

Now it's your turn to create 5-6 symbols representing different aspects of your identity!

You can combine these symbols as well to create a glyph of your identity.

Everyone needs!



paper



pencil

Let's look at an example!

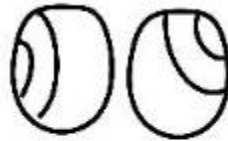
Building your own glyph

Here is an example of one student's work! She is an artist who is creative, compassionate, and energetic. She combined her three separate symbols into one glyph that shows part of her identity.

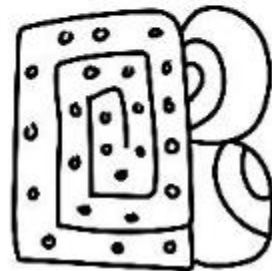
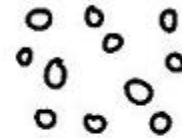
compassion



creativity



energy



— my artist glyph

Now you try it!

Do your best to come up with original symbols and avoid popular logos.
Be creative!

WRAP UP!

Let's gather together as a class and take a look at everyone's symbols.

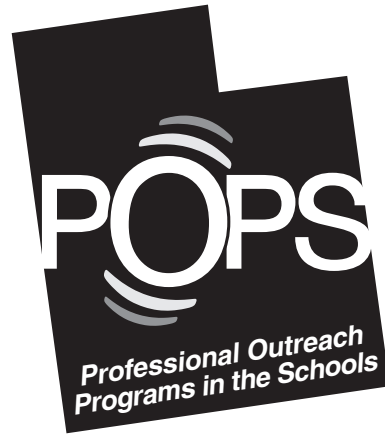
What makes these symbols important to you?

Do these symbols have the same meaning for everyone in your class, or is the meaning different for other people?

Keep thinking about your glyphs and your identities!

We can't wait to see you soon at your NHMU/UMFA visit!

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