

Komainu Statues: Jigsaw of Guardian Statues Across Asian Religions

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| **Introduction** | |
| This lesson begins with the Komainu statue, a familiar and revered figure in Japanese culture, often found standing guard at the entrance of Shinto shrines. These lion-dog statues serve not only as protectors but also as symbols of power and spirituality.  But Komainu are not alone in their role as guardians. Throughout Asia, many religions have their own unique guardian statues, each with distinct characteristics and cultural significance. In this lesson, we will delve into the guardian statues of four different religions using a jigsaw discussion. | |
| **Indiana Standards Connections:**    GHW.1.1 Use maps, timelines, and other graphic representations to identify and describe the location, distribution, and main events in the development of culture hearths in Asia, Mesoamerica, and North Africa. ● Examples: irrigation-based civilizations; rainforest; land-based civilization, pastoral societies.  GHW.2.1 Map the development over time of world religions from their points of origin and identify those that exhibit a high degree of local and/or international concentration. ● Examples: Universal religions/beliefs: Judaism (Jerusalem), Christianity (Jerusalem), Islam (Mecca, Medina), and Buddhism (Varanasi); Ethnic religions: Hinduism (Indus River), Confucianism (Qufu), Taoism (Yellow River), Shintoism (Japan), Sikhism (South Asia).  7.H.2 Describe, compare, and contrast the historical origins, central beliefs, and spread of major religions. (E) ● Examples: Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. | **Compelling Question(s):**         How do similar features present in different religions?  What are some of the major religions in Asian countries?  How do religious practices spread from one place to another? |
| **Lesson Objectives:**  Students will be able to:  Describe four of the major Asian religions, common beliefs, and practices  Compare religious beliefs of these religions  Explain how religious beliefs spread across the world | |
| **Materials** | |
| 1. Komainu Statue from Windows the World Project 2. Video on gargoyles: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g\_IJ5RYMk7A 3. Resources for Chinese Foo Dogs:  * <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_guardian_lions> * <https://www.chinafurnitureonline.com/foo-dogs> * <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yL9qkbCZ3E>  1. Resources for Korean Haechi  * <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/TiSmxSmduTQ> * <https://mythlok.com/haetae/#google_vignette> * <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiezhi> * <https://myseoulbox.com/blogs/seoul-blog/relation-between-haechi-and-korea>  1. Resources for Japanese Komainu:  * <https://w2w.indiana.edu/explore-collections/komainu.html> * <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TmifOiMul4> * <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulaHOAjjako> (this video is a little painful, but if watched on a faster speed has really interesting information on the spread of these statues to Japan) * <https://traditionalkyoto.com/culture/figures/lions-komainu/>  1. Resources for Indian Dvarapala:  * <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dvarapala> * <https://mapacademy.io/article/dvarapalas/> * https://www.buddhatoothrelictemple.org.sg/gate-guardians# | |
| **Learning Plan** | |
| **Activities**   1. Ask students what reference they have for gargoyles in European architecture. (tv shows, movies, photos, books, etc.). You could show them clips from the video on gargoyles or just summarize some of the information for them—those mostly served a practical architectural function, while the statues we are going to look at today had much richer beliefs and history tied to them. 2. Tell students that these guardian figures are very common in Asian cultures. Today we are going to look at four different kinds that represent different cultures and religions 3. Number students from 1-4 and assign them to one of the different places. Give them access to the resources for that type of statue and let them work on their own research. Students will need at least 20 minutes to do this research.  * Explain to students: To explore these statues and their meanings, we will use a jigsaw classroom discussion format. This method allows each of you to become an expert on one particular guardian statue and then share your knowledge with your peers. By the end of the lesson, you will have a comprehensive understanding of how these statues serve as protectors and symbols within their respective religions.  1. Give students time to study the statues from their different places. They can focus on religious beliefs, cultural traditions. powers, myths, usage, construction, and worship of these statues. It may be helpful for students to create an infographic to display and record their information 2. Have the students form groups of four. One person per country. 3. Have one student present on what they learned. At the end of their presentation, have the group members discuss. It may be helpful to provide sentence starters:  * One similarity I found is: * One difference is: * I see a connection…  1. Come back together and discuss the possible ways these different cultures and religions were in conversation with each other.   Focus on information from Windows to the world: “Lion-dog statues first appeared in India about 2,300 years ago, as a part of Indian Buddhist traditions, and became popular across the Middle East as well. When Indian and Central Asian monks brought Buddhism to China about 500 years later, they brought the myth of lion-dogs with them. The guardian creatures then spread to Korea, and from Korea to Japan.”  This may be interesting information to share with your students to explain some of the similarities and differences: “Some of these differences are purely stylistic, but others are due to geography and distance. Translating the myth of lion-dogs across cultures was like a giant game of Telephone. India is the easternmost edge of native lion territory- no Chinese, Korean, or Japanese person would have seen one in the wild. Imagine trying to explain or draw a lion without ever seeing one yourself! It probably wouldn’t look very accurate. As a result, many East Asian guardian figures look more like dogs and less like lions.  While these guardian figures share the theme of protection, each culture has its unique interpretations and artistic representations. They reflect the cultural, religious, and artistic diversity across China, Korea, and India.” (windows to the world project). | |
| **Assessment Suggestions**    Have students create a chart to compare and contrast these different statues. | |
| **Extensions**    Students could write a short article on one of these types of statues and relate it to another topic you have studied this year.  Students could practice making a more professional infographic like one that might be displayed in a museum | |

Komainu Activity Possibilities

Some of the best opportunities for education are *integrative*—meaning that students are able to make connections across disciplines to reinforce the knowledge that they are developing. For example, they may be learning about Renaissance Italy in World Studies at the same time that they read Dante’s *Inferno* in English class while also studying Botticelli in Art. Feel free to combine and adapt some of the ideas across disciplines and standards to best suit your particular context. You can also collaborate with other teachers at your school or supplement the resources provided by contacting your librarian.

**Note: The following ideas are meant to give general guidance for teachers to include artifacts and other material culture in their classrooms. They are not meant to be treated as comprehensive activities or lessons that are one-size-fits-all for any classroom. They should be personalized to best fit the needs of a teacher’s individual context in accordance with prior student learning, student abilities, available resources, and any curricular guidance.**

**Art**

**Visual Arts – Connecting:**

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| Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.  Enduring Understanding: People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.  Essential Question(s): How does art help us understanding the lives of people of different times, places, and cultures? How is art used to impact the videos of a society> How does art preserve aspects of life? | |
| VA:Cn11.1.1a | Understand that people from different places and times have made art for a variety of reasons. |
| VA:Cn11.1.4a | Through observation, infer information about time, place, and culture in which a work of art was created. |
| VA:Cn11.1.6a | Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses. |

*Investigate different materials and styles of guardian statues. What can those materials tell us about the time, place, and culture these pieces are created. Examining more modern interpretations of Komainu might provide and interesting lens in which to think about cultural and time effects of pieces of art.*

**Language Arts**

**Writing:**

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| 9-10.W.2 | Write informative compositions on a variety of topics that: a. Introduce a topic and organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions. b. Develop the topic utilizing credible sources with relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic. c. Use appropriate transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts. d. Choose language and content-specific vocabulary that express ideas precisely and concisely to manage the complexity of the topic, recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy. e. Establish and maintain a style appropriate for the purpose and audience. f. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic). (E) |

*Ask students to write a placard that might show up in a museum. Use a variety of mentor texts to allow students to understand the format of the text. Focus on how summarization and tone influence the pieces. Students could also write a longer form article like the ones found online to teach others about these different statues.*