
*Symbolism and Political Power*

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| **Introduction**  |
| The Medici family was one of the most powerful families in Italy during the Renaissance. The Medici family was unique from others because it wasn’t noble. At this point in time, most families gained and kept power by marrying and/or being born into noble families. Instead, the Medicis became powerful through business, and their political power was a result of their wealth. Their home city of Florence was a center for maritime trade. Cosimo the Elder, a banker, was the first Medici to secure massive economic and political sway in Florence.After Cosimo the Elder’s death in 1464, his economic and political power over Florence was passed down to his descendants until 1532, when Alessandro de’ Medici was officially declared the Duke of Florence by Pope Clement VII. However, his rule did not last long, ending in 1537 when he was assassinated by his cousin Lorenzino de' Medici, who fled Florence afterward. Without a legitimate direct heir, Cosimo I de Medici was elected to be the second Duke of Florence despite being from a more distant branch of the family. The men who elected him thought he would be easy to manipulate, as he was only 18 years old at the time and had lived most of his life outside of Florence, but they were quickly proven wrong. Cosimo I furthered the Medici’s legitimacy of Florentine rule by gaining the approval of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, and he laid a siege on the city of Sienna in the 1550s that led him to be named the first Grand Duke of Tuscany by Pope Pius V.This medal was made in 1537, the year that Cosimo I became Duke of Florence and attained power. These portrait medals became popular during the Renaissance as people began to revive classical Roman customs (including portrait medals). Like ancient Roman coins, portrait medals were a quick and official way to promote important political figures. However, unlike ancient Roman coins, they had no monetary value. At their core, medals were just tchotchkes. They were often given as gifts to friends or potential business partners, and then slowly spread around the city. Cosimo I was the first Medici to take advantage of portrait medallions in this way, and later passed the practice on to his children, along with the rest of his massive, mercantile fortune. |
| **Indiana Standards Connections:**  6.1.8 Compare the diverse perspectives, ideas, interests and people that brought about the Renaissance in Europe.6.1.9 Analyze the interconnections of people, places and events in the economic, scientific and cultural exchanges of the European Renaissance that led to the Scientific Revolution, voyages of discovery and imperial conquest.WH.4.1 Trace the origins and developments of the European Renaissance and its impact throughout Western Europe.WH.4.3 Discuss the emergence of nation-states as well as the increased impact of the citizen as a result of the decline of the European medieval period.WH.4.6 Examine the growth and development of the European economic system as a result of exploration and the growth of mercantilism.WH.5.5 Explain the reasons for the rise of nation-states and the effects of nationalism in Europe, North America, and Asia. | **Compelling Question(s):** How do symbols, art, and media shape political influence in both the Renaissance and today?What role does money play in gaining influence and control in society?How does the portrait medal serve as a symbolic tool for personal and political power? |
| **Lesson Objectives:**  Students will:  Learn about symbolic power through close observation of the Cosimo de Medici medal. They will understand the significance of the Medici family in the Renaissance, the rise of Cosimo I to power, and the role of portrait medals in Renaissance politics and culture. Students will also analyze the connection between art as a tool for political influence and power, and politics during the Renaissance. |
| **Materials**  |
|   [Medal of Cosimo de Medici- W2W Website](https://w2w.indiana.edu/explore-collections/medici-medal.html)[Florence and the Renaissance: Crash Course European History- YouTube Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tecocKSclwc)[Medal of Cosimo de Medici- The British Museum](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_G3-TusM-205)[Medal: Giovanni de’Medici delle Bande Nere- The Met](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/461151)* Pens, colored pencils, markers
* Cardboard paper
* Scissors
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| **Learning Plan**  |
| **Activities** 1. Closely observe this medal, look at the inscriptions and the figures represented. Describe what you see, what language is it written in? What and who is portrayed? Does it look familiar to you? What material is it made from? What is its value? Who would use it and how? Why do you portray an important figure on a medal?

Students might mention the looks similar to contemporary coins but note this this medal did not have monetary value but symbolic. It was given as gifts to friends or to potential business partners. Highlight that this medal did not have monetary value but symbolic that was given to members of Italian society at the time to fortify alliances.1. Introduce students to the Italian Renaissance using some of the resources provided above. After contextualizing the historic period, introduce the Medici family. Encourage students to discuss the family’s influence in Florence. How did the Medici rise to power and how did they maintain it?

Emphasize how the Medici family used wealth from banking and trade to influence political structures rather than relying on noble bloodlines.Discuss Cosimo I’s rise to power and the creation of the portrait medal as a symbolic medal to spread his influence.1. Ask students to analyze the medal’s design:
* What symbols or features might represent power or authority?
* How does the portrait communicate Cosimo’s political significance?
* How might someone viewing this medal in 1537 have understand it?
1. Students will design their own modern portrait medal that represents a contemporary figure of power. It could be a historical figure, a celebrity or political figure

The medal must include: * A profile of the figure
* Symbols or text that represent the figures power, influence, or values
* A brief description explaining why they chose the figure, and the symbols used

ReflectionHave students share their medals and discuss why they chose that person and symbols. What political or social messages are conveyed through their designs. How do their designs compare to those used in Renaissance Florence  |
| **Assessment Suggestions**  Evaluate students’ medals based on creativity, understanding of symbolism, and explanation of the design.Assess their ability to connect historical and modern concepts of political influence through art. |
| **Extensions** Students can [Bar Currency W2W Website](https://w2w.indiana.edu/explore-collections/bar-currency.html)Ask students to research another political figure who used art and images to promote their power. Have them create a short report or presentation on how this figure used art to influence their image and why it was effective? |

Medal of Cosimo de Medici 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 – Responding:**

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| **Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work****Enduring Understanding: Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed throughout engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments.** **Essential Question(s): How do life experiences influence the way you relate to art? How does learning about art impact how we perceive the world? What can we learn from our responses to art?**  |
| **VA:Re7.1.1a** | Select and describe works of art that illustrate daily life experiences. |
| **VA:Re7.1.6a** | Identify and interpret works of art or design that reveal how people live around the world and what they value. |
| **VA:Re7.1.6a** | Identify and interpret works of art or design that reveal how people live around the world and what they value. |
| **VA:Re9.1.5a** | Appraise the impact of an artist or a group of artists on the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a society |
| **VA:Re7.1.Ia** | Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences. |
| **VA:Re7.1.IIa** | Recognize and describe personal aesthetic and empathetic responses to the natural world and constructed environments |
| **VA:Re7.1.IIIa** | Analyze how responses to art develop over time based on knowledge of and experience with art and life |

**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:Cn11.1.2a** | Compare and contrast cultural uses of artwork from different times and places. |
| **VA:Cn11.1.3a** | Recognize that responses to art change depending on knowledge of the time and place in which it was made |
| **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. |
| **VA:Cn11.1.7a** | Analyze how response to art is influenced by understanding the time and place in which it was created, the available resources, and cultural uses |
| **VA:Cn11.1.8a** | Distinguish different ways art is used to represent, establish, reinforce, and reflect group identity |
| **VA:Cn11.1.IIa** | Compare uses of art in a variety of social, cultural, and historical contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts. |
| **VA:Cn11.1.IIIa** | Appraise the impact of an artist or a group of artists on the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a society. |

*Students can be asked to consider how art reflects time periods, beliefs, cultures, traditions, etc. In exploring the Medici medal, students are examining how items such as this reflected class and stature in European society and why such items were seen as luxury. Students could also explore how luxury items have changed over time; how different cultures use art, artifacts, and props to demonstrate their interests, beliefs, and stature; how such items demonstrate social capital; etc.*

**Social Studies**

**Grade 6: History, Places, and Cultures in Europe and Americas**

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| **6.1.3** | ***Explain the impact of humans on the physical environment in Europe and the Americas.*** |
| **6.3.10** | *Explain the ways cultural diffusion, invention, and innovation change culture.*  |
| **6.3.11** | *Differentiate between the terms anthropology, archaeology, and artifacts while explaining how these contribute to our understanding of societies in the present and the past.*  |

**Ethnic Studies**

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| **ES.4.1** | *Students examine historical and contemporary economic, intellectual, social, cultural and political contributions to society by ethnic or racial group(s) or an individual within a group.*  |

**Geography and History of the World**

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| **GHW.4.2** | *Use a variety of text (writing, maps, timelines and/or other graphic representations) to show the movement, spread and changes in the worldwide exchange of flora, fauna and pathogens that resulted from transoceanic voyages of exploration and exchanges between peoples in different regions. Assess the consequences of these encounters for the people and environments involved.*  |
| **GHW.4.3** | *Identify and compare the main causes, players, and events of imperialism during different time periods. Examine the global extent of imperialism using a series of political maps.*  |
| **GHW.4.4** | *Analyze and assess how the physical and human environments (including languages used) of places and regions changed as the result of differing imperialist and colonial policies.* |

**World History and Civilization**

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| **WH.7.3** | *Investigate and interpret multiple causation in analyzing historical actions and analyze cause-and-effect relationships.* |
| **WH.7.6** | *Formulate and present a position or course of action on an issue by examining the underlying factors contributing to that issue and support that position.*  |

*Outside of the 6th and 7th grade Indiana standards, the exploration regarding how imperialism has led to an impact on other cultures and environments. Students should be able to examine the role of human environment interaction involved in the development of such items as the Medici medal or coins included in this lesson. There’s room for them to make connections to contemporary issues that are similar to and a consequence of economic systems and symbolic and political power.*

**Language Arts**

**Writing Skills:**

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| **4.W.5**  | **Conduct short research on a topic.** * **Identify a specific question to address (e.g., What is the history of the Indy 500?).**
* **Use organizational features of print and digital sources to efficiently locate further information.**
* **Determine the reliability of the sources.**
* **Summarize and organize information in their own words, giving credit to the source**
* **Present the research information, choosing from a variety of formats.**
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| **5.W.5** | Conduct short research assignments and tasks on a topic.* With support, formulate a research question (e.g., What were John Wooden’s greatest contributions to college basketball?).
* Identify and acquire information through reliable primary and secondary sources.
* Summarize and paraphrase important ideas and supporting details, and include direct quotations where appropriate, citing the source of information.
* Avoid plagiarism and follow copyright guidelines for use of images, pictures, etc.
* Present the research information, choosing from a variety of sources.
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*Students could conduct research projects in which they examine examples of other items that have symbolic power instead of monetary value and explain their importance in society.*