

*Examining Religious Symbolism in Art*

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| **Introduction** | |
| The development and spread of major religions can be examined through a variety of lenses. One lens through which students can explore religions is art. Many artifacts from the beginning of the Common Era highlight the beliefs and values of some of the major religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Using the Peacock Oil Lamp as an example, students will explore how symbols are used in religious art. | |
| **Indiana Standards Connections:**    7.1.2 Describe, compare, and contrast the historical origins, central beliefs and spread of major religions. | **Compelling Question(s):**    How are symbols used to represent beliefs and values?  What impact does religion have on other aspects of daily life? |
| **Lesson Objectives:**  Students will be able to: describe how art and artifacts can symbolize the values and/or beliefs of various major religions. | |
| **Materials** | |
| 1. Early Byzantine Terracotta Oil Lamps    1. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/241680>    2. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/241682> 2. Peacock Oil Lamp Image (Digital Toolbox Materials)    1. Peacock hanging lamp: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/170008550>    2. More examples of peacocks used in art: <https://rear-view-mirror.com/2015/06/08/the-peacock-in-all-its-splendour-and-glory/> 3. [Gallery Byzantium - Protection, Renewal, and the Peacock](https://gallerybyzantium.com/protection-renewal-and-peacock/) 4. Various Religious Art Pieces    1. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/477148>    2. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/448111>    3. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/50939>    4. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/472849>    5. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/465921>    6. <https://www.davidmus.dk/en/collections/islamic/cultural-history-themes/symbolism>    7. <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/popu/hd_popu.htm> | |
| **Learning Plan** | |
| **Activities**   1. First, show students the images of the Early Byzantine Terracotta Oil Lamps without telling them for what they were used. Allow the students to guess based on the images. After a few guesses, share with the students that these are oil lamps used during the early Byzantine era. You can explain to the students how they worked as well. 2. Then show the students the image of the Peacock Oil Lamp. Ask the students to examine what is different about this lamp from the other lamps. The conversation can be about how it is made out of different material and what that may mean, the process of lighting oil, etc. Most importantly, students should note that it is in the shape of a bird, specifically a peacock. Students can be asked to infer why the lamp would be designed to look like a peacock. Then share with students the religious significance of the peacock. Information about its significance in various religious is included in the Gallery Byzantium article (Material #3). 3. Share with students that they will examine examples of symbolism in religious art via participation in a Gallery Walk activity. 4. Material #4 includes a variety of images of various religious art pieces. Have these around the room. Provide students a graphic organizer that asks students, for each of the images, to write their notes for the following: what they notice, what they know, what they are wondering. Inform them that all of these images are of religious art and that you want them to particularly pay attention to what they see in the artwork that could serve as symbols of religion, beliefs, values, etc. You can also have them infer which of the major religions/cultures the art is representing/from. For students who may need more guidance, the graphic organizer could be more specifically tailored to the kind of information you want them to record. 5. Have students walk around the room to analyze the various images and make notes. After a period of time, have students return to their seats and discuss what they noted, having them share out their inferences. | |
| **Assessment Suggestions**    The Gallery Walk graphic organizer serves as a formative assessment of students’ thinking regarding the religious symbolism in art. As an individual assessment, students could answer the compelling question regarding how religion can be represented in art. | |
| **Extensions**  Students could explore the significance of oil lamps in the different religions. They could compare the purposes and styles of oil lamps such as the Menorah (Judaism), sanctuary lamp (Catholicism), and Diya lamp (Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism). | |

Peacock Oil Lamp 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. |
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| 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 peacock oil lamp, students are examining how items such as this not only reflected the symbolism of the peacock in this era but also the change in materials. The bronze instead of terracotta notes a change in materials but also could indicate a difference in class stature. 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 continuation and contributions of Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire) after the fall of the Western Roman Empire).* |
| 6.1.4 | *Identify and explain the development and organization of political, cultural, social and economic systems in Europe and the Americas. Examples: Feudal system, religious institutions* |
| 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.2.2** | *Differentiate among selected countries in terms of how their identities, cultural and physical environments, and functions and forms of government are affected by world religions.*    ***Examples:*** *Spain: Muslim, Jewish and Christian influences on government, considering their similarities and differences (100–1500); Russia: influences of the Eastern Orthodox Church (1400–1917), Iran and Saudi Arabia: how religion (Shia Islam and Sunni Islam) affects culture and government (1917–present); Israel: the Jewish state and a possible future Palestinian State (1948–present)* |
| **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.3.2** | *Explain the origin, rise, and achievements of the Byzantine Empire.* |
| **WH.3.4** | *Examine the origins, rise, and spread of Islam including the life of Muhammad, Islam’s division into the Sunnis and Shiites, and Islam’s early impact on the west Asia, Europe, and North Africa* |

*The study of the peacock oil lamp can involve content outside of examining the relationship between art and religion. The lamp was developed during the early Byzantine Empire era and therefore study could focus on the development of the Byzantine Empire with a secondary focus on the cultural contributions during this time.*

**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. |
| 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. |

*Students could conduct research projects in which they identify, explore, and write about examples of religious art. They could also focus this on how animals have been used in art throughout various civilizations and eras.*