

Seeing Matters: Critical Thinking Through Art

A Resource Guide for Visiting LACMA

About this Guide

This guide contains information and activities that will help you prepare for your students' visit to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). This guide includes:

- **Information about Your Tour and about LACMA**
- **Selected works of art with information, questions, and prompts:** These examples represent the types of art, method of discussion, and activities that your students will experience in the galleries. The artworks profiled in this guide may not be on view in the galleries during your tour.
- **Pre-visit Activities:** In preparation for your trip, you may wish to use the featured works and discussion questions in conjunction with the activities listed in the "Before Your Visit to the Museum" section below.
- **Post-visit Activities:** After your trip, extend learning with the activities suggested in the section "After Your Visit to the Museum."
- **Related California Standards:** All LACMA tours for students address Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and other California state standards.
- **Further Resources:** Use these resources in your lesson planning or share them with your students, as appropriate, to provide additional information and background.

About the Museum

LACMA is the largest encyclopedic museum in the western United States with more than 120,000 works of art. Through its extensive collections, the museum is both a resource to and a reflection of the many cultural communities and heritages in Southern California. The collection includes artworks from various cultures from prehistoric to the present.

About LACMA Tours

Student experiences in the museum are grounded in close looking, inference, and inquiry. By closely examining works of art and inferring what is depicted based on observation, students construct their own understandings about works of art. LACMA docents are trained to facilitate discussion rather than lecture about facts and dates, allowing students the opportunity to share what they notice and therefore, what they are naturally interested in discussing. Docents will guide students to come to their own conclusions and use visual evidence to support their opinions. In this method of learning, rather than determining whether answers are "right" or "wrong," students discover the satisfaction of constructing meaning with their peers.

Introduction to the Tour

There's a difference between looking and seeing. In this introductory tour, students hone their perception skills in exploring how visual elements work together to create meaning. Through careful observation, conversation, and critical thinking, students learn to read visual language, examining the decisions and visual strategies involved in creating works of art. Students learn not just to look, but to really see. This guide explores the following big idea question that relates to the tour theme – What is the language of art and how can you read it?

This tour is aligned with state content standards for history/social science for grades 1 through 3, and language arts standards (listening and speaking) and visual arts standards for grades 1 through 5.

Before Your Visit to the Museum

To prepare students for their tour in the galleries, you may wish to complete the following activities:

Learn the Language of Art

While writers use words to create stories and poems, artists use the *elements of art* as building blocks to create artworks. Teach students the basic elements of art: *line, shape, form, space, color, and texture* (see Further Resources for more information). Divide the class into six groups and assign each group an element. Have the groups look around the classroom to find as many different examples of their assigned element as possible. Have the groups write down their findings and then share them with the class.

Principles of Design

Now that students have explored the elements of art, explore some of the *principles of design*, which relate to how elements of art are used in works of art. Teach students the definitions of *balance, emphasis, movement, pattern, repetition, and proportion* (see Further Resources for more information). Display a reproduction of a work of art, such as one of the featured works of art in this guide. Ask students to describe how the artist is using—or modifying—some of the principles in the work of art.

What's the Same? What's Different?

Artists employ the elements of art and principles of design to communicate meaning and tell stories. Prepare your students to learn how to read these tools in order to gain greater understanding of the content of the artwork and to formulate interpretations based on visual evidence.

Display reproductions of *Folding Screen with Indian Wedding and Flying Pole and Maharaja Takhat Singh* (r. 1843–73) and *His Ladies Celebrate the Teej (Swing) Festival*.

Inform students that the folding screen comes from Mexico and the other artwork comes from India. Using a Venn diagram, have students write down one thing the artworks have in common, and one thing that is unique to each. With their partner, have students discuss what they can learn about Mexican culture and Indian culture based on these two works of art.

Using paper and watercolors have students illustrate a celebration from their culture using different types of lines and at least two colors to emphasize certain elements in their drawings.

After Your Visit to the Museum

Extend your students' learning after their visit to the museum with the following activities:

Choose Your Element

Inform students that artists use some elements of art and principles of design more than others in a work of art. Select five of the elements and principles that students discussed in the galleries and write each on an index card. Next distribute reproductions of three works of art, such as the featured works of art in this guide. Have students match an element or principle to a work of art, selecting the index card that they think is best represented in a work of art.



Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio

DAVID HOCKNEY

(England, Bradford, active United States, born 1937)

England, 1980, Acrylic on canvas, 86 x 243 in.

Purchased with funds provided by the F. Patrick Burns Bequest (M.83.35)

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/247320>

Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio

About the Work of Art

British-born artist David Hockney expresses his great affection for the city of Los Angeles, his home from 1963 to 2005, in his paintings of luxurious swimming pools and sun-drenched landscapes. Painted from memory in just a few weeks, *Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio* (1980) vividly captures the quintessential Los Angeles activity: driving. It is a personalized panoramic map of Los Angeles based on the artist's daily trip from his home in the Hollywood Hills to his studio in Santa Monica.

Mulholland Drive swirls across the top of the work, moving the viewer's eye from left to right. Along the way, the vantage point shifts, conveying the sense of motion and change in altitude that the artist experienced on the ridge road. Hockney establishes a sense of distance by alternating between detailed renderings of objects (trees, houses, tennis courts, and power lines) that represent sections of the landscape and more abstract planes of vibrant colors or simple grids. The grid patterns that extend across the top section of the canvas, copied from a Los Angeles city map, define the outlying Studio City and Burbank.

The largest of Hockney's canvases, the painting stretches 7 x 20 feet, a fitting size for a city known for sprawl.

Adapted and excerpted from J. Patrice Marandel, Claudia Einecke, eds., *Los Angeles County Museum of Art: European Art*. Paris: Fondation Paribas, 2006.

Additional Source:
Los Angeles County Museum of Art. *David Hockney: A Retrospective*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1988.

Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the work using the following prompts and questions:

- What do you notice first? What did you notice about it?
- Where does your eye go next?
- Imagine you are riding in the car along the road. Start in the front, the foreground. What do you see out the window?
- You just turned the corner and are now in the upper right hand corner of the painting. What do you see now?
- Now you're in the center of the painting. What new details do you notice?
- You are now at the edge of the painting. What more can you add?
- If you kept driving down the road, where would you go?
- The artist loved painting with bright, bold colors. What colors do you see?
- Which colors stand out the most to you?
- What lines do you see? Shapes?
- Point out that there is a lot of variety in this painting—especially different types of lines and patterns. Where do you see repeated lines or shapes that form patterns?
- Look closely at the top section of the canvas. What do the lines and shapes remind you of?
- Artist David Hockney was born in England, but he lived in Los Angeles for over forty years. Based on the way that the artist has painted this stretch of road and surrounding landscape, how do you think he feels about Los Angeles?



Folding Screen with Indian Wedding and Flying Pole

(Biombo con desposorio indígena y palo volador)

Mexico, circa 1690

Furnishings; Furniture. Oil on canvas. Overall: 66 x 120 in. (167.64 x 304.8 cm)

Purchased with funds provided by the Bernard and Edith Lewin Collection
of Mexican Art Deaccession Fund (M.2005.54)

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/209529>

Folding Screen with Indian Wedding and Flying Pole

About the Work of Art

The folding screen (called *biombo* in Spanish) depicts a celebration of native Mexicans in a village, probably Santa Anita Ixtacalco, a famous destination in the area surrounding Mexico City. On the right, in the background, the indigenous newlywed couple leaves the church. A number of figures participate in native games that continued to be played even after the Spanish conquest. Several dancers in lavish costumes perform a *mitote* (or *Moctezuma dance*), imitating the dance of the Aztec king, in the middle ground of the screen. In the center, figures dangle from a flying pole (*palo volador*) and to the left, a native Mexican man juggles a log with his bare feet before the dazzled crowd of locals and Spanish. The screen, which is missing two panels, satisfied European curiosity about the New World. It also proved that the conversion of the natives had been successful by showing them partaking in one of the most important Christian sacraments—marriage.

Adapted from "Folding Screen with Indian Wedding and Flying Pole (Biombo con desposorio indígena y palo volador)" on the LACMA Web site at <http://collections.lacma.org/node/209529>

Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the work of art using the following prompts and questions:

- Look closely at the details in the work. What do you see?
- Describe the types of lines that you see. How did the artist draw your eye to the activities by using lines?
- What color do you notice first? Why? What color do you notice next?
- Where did the artists use white? How did he use white to highlight the figures? Why do you think most of the native Mexicans are wearing mostly white clothing?
- What do you think is happening in the front, the foreground? What types of activities do you see?
- What do you think is happening in the middle, the middle ground of the screen? What types of activities do you see?
- What do you think is happening in the back, the background of the screen? What types of activities do you see?
- When do you think this is taking place? How do you know?
- Where do you think this is taking place? How do you know?
- What can you tell about native Mexican culture based on this image?
 - What types of things do you celebrate?



Drawings; watercolors. Opaque watercolor and gold on paper
Image: 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 12 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (37.4 x 30.8 cm); Sheet: 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 14 in. (44.4 x 35.5 cm)
Gift of Paul F. Walter (M.81.280.6)
<http://collections.lacma.org/node/246928>

Maharaja Takhat Singh (r. 1843–73) and His Ladies Celebrate the Teej (Swing) Festival

About the Work of Art

In this artwork, the Indian ruler, Maharaja (Sanskrit for "Great King") Takhat Singh (b. 1819 d.1873) celebrates the festival of swings, known as Teej. Takhat Singh only came to the throne after the deaths of his elder brother and his nephew. Ruling for thirty years, he had thirty wives. The Teej, still celebrated in parts of India, marks the beginning of the monsoon season in August. The heavy rains are welcomed because they fall on land parched after the intense summer heat. During the festival (usually lasting three days), swings are hung from trees and women sing songs in celebration of the arrival of the monsoon.

The swing, outlined by the strong red columns in the center of the image, is a focal point. The singing women on either side are repeated over and over with similar dresses, colors, and parallel lines. Trees and architectural elements are depicted in flat stylized shapes using bold colors. The festival is dedicated to the Hindu Mother Goddess Parvati, commemorating her union with the god of destruction and rejuvenation, Shiva. The Goddess Parvati is worshipped by those seeking marital bliss and happiness.

The style of this Indian painting is known as Rajput painting. It was particularly promoted in the royal courts of Rajputana, a region in the northwest of India. Common themes in Rajput paintings depict events from epic stories, the life of Hindu god Krishna, landscapes, and important human celebrations—as seen in this image. While Rajput painting was done in a variety of scale and media, including large paintings on walls of temples, many artists preferred working in small-scale watercolors. These watercolors were done on sheets of paper that were kept in albums, or to illustrate manuscripts (books written and manufactured by hand). The colors in these small-scale artworks, known as miniatures, are still vibrant because the colors were derived from natural resources like minerals, plants, and precious stones and materials, including gold and silver.

Adapted from "Maharaja Takhat Singh (r. 1843-73) and His Ladies Celebrate the Teej (Swing) Festival." on the LACMA Web site at <http://collections.lacma.org/node/246928>

Discussion Questions and Prompts

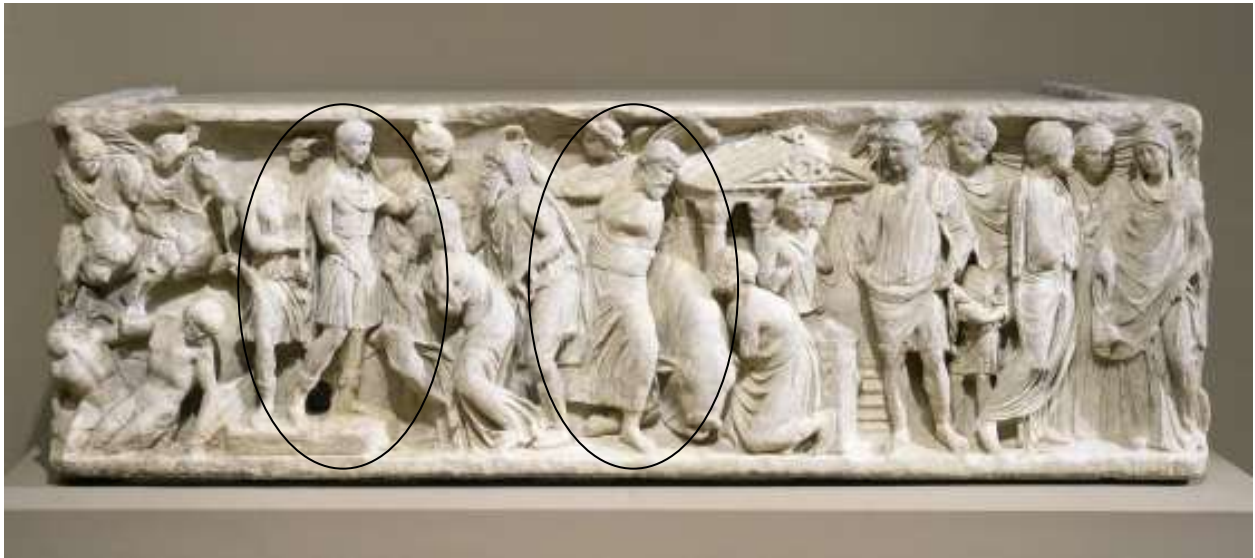
Discuss the work using the following prompts and questions:

- Look closely at the details in the work. What do you see?
- Describe the types of lines that you see.
- What color do you notice first? Why?
- What other colors do you notice?
- Who are the main characters? How do you know?
- Describe the other figures in the watercolor. What does it look like they are doing?
- When do you think this is taking place? How do you know?
- Where do you think this is taking place? How do you know?
- What can you tell about Indian culture based on this image?



Biographical Sarcophagus

Possibly Eastern Mediterranean (Turkey), Roman, probably circa 176–193
Marble (47.8.9a-c). Sculpture. Marble. 28½ x 89 x 32 in. (72.39 x 226.06 x 81.28 cm).
Purchased with funds provided by the William Randolph Hearst Foundation (47.8.9a-c)
<http://collections.lacma.org/node/229260>



Biographical Sarcophagus

About the Work of Art

The three panels on this Roman coffin, called a sarcophagus, tell the story of different events in one man's life. The main character, presumably the beardless man shown in the center left and center right of the panel (see image below), is depicted several times as the scenes of his life unfold. This type of story, when an artist repeats a character or characters in one image is called a continuous narrative. The scenes depicted represent the most important virtues of a Roman citizen: valor, mercy, piety and harmony.

Sarcophagi were used to bury the dead, a practice that became popular under the Roman Empire in the second century A.D. Prior to this time; the Romans practiced cremation and placed the ashes in urns. In the Greek language, sarcophagus means "flesh-eater" since they were originally made of limestone, a material that helps decompose the body. The most luxurious and expensive sarcophagi were made of marble, as the one depicted here; but many were made of other materials like stone, lead or wood. The panels on sarcophagi often depicted mythological stories, like scenes from the *Iliad*; battle scenes that alluded to important traits, such as bravery; or scenes from the life of the god Dionysus since he was the god of revelry and rebirth. Sometimes, as the one seen here, scenes of the deceased's life were depicted, called biographical sarcophagi.

Sources

Roman Sarcophagi, Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History
The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rsar/hd_rsar.htm

Donahue, Kenneth. Los Angeles County Museum of Art Handbook
Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1977

Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the work using the following prompts and questions:

- List some of the things you notice in this artwork.
- This Roman sarcophagus, or coffin, tells the life of one man. The artist represented him several times on the panels. Can you tell who the main character is? Why or why not?
- Compare and contrast the two depictions of the same character. How is he interacting with the people around him in both depictions?
- Why do you think the artist wanted to show the person again and again but in different ways?
- The most important virtues of a Roman citizen were valor (being brave), mercy (being compassionate), piety (being faithful), and harmony (being united). Where in the panel do you see an example of the deceased being compassionate to someone less privileged than he?
- Why do you think he or his family wanted him to be remembered in this way?
- What virtues are important to you and your family? How would you illustrate them?

Related California State Standards

California State Content Standards for Visual Arts

Grade 1

- Artistic Perception 1.3: Identify the elements of art in objects in nature, in the environment, and in works of art, emphasizing line, color, shape/form, and texture.
- Creative Expression 2.4: Plan and use variations in line, shape/form, color, and texture to communicate ideas or feelings in works of art.
- Creative Expression 2.7: Use visual and actual texture in original works of art
- Connections, Relationships, Applications 5.3: Identify and sort pictures into categories according to the elements of art emphasized in the works (e.g., color, line, shape/form, texture).

Grade 2

- Artistic Perception 1.1: Perceive and describe repetition and balance in nature, in the environment, and in works of art.
- Artistic Perception 1.3: Identify the elements of art in objects in nature, the environment, and in works of art, emphasizing line, color, shape/form, and texture.
- Historical and Cultural Context 3.1: Explain how artists use their work to share experiences or communicate ideas.
- Historical and Cultural Context 3.2: Recognize and use the vocabulary of art to describe art objects from various cultures and time periods

Grade 3

- Artistic Perception 1.5: Identify and describe elements of art in works of art, emphasizing line, color, shape/form, texture, space, and value.
- Historical and Cultural Context 3.1: Compare and describe various works of art that have a similar theme and were created at different time periods.
- Historical and Cultural Context 3.4: Identify and describe objects of art from different parts of the world observed in visits to a museum or gallery (e.g., puppets, masks, containers).
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.1: Compare and contrast selected works of art and describe them, using appropriate vocabulary of art.

Grade 4

- Artistic Perception 1.4: Describe the concept of proportion (in face, figure) as used in works of art.
- Artistic Perception 1.5: Describe and analyze the elements of art (e.g., color, shape/form, line, texture, space, value), emphasizing form, as they are used in works of art and found in the environment.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.3: Discuss how the subject and selection of media relate to the meaning or purpose of a work of art.

Grade 5

- Artistic Perception 1.3: Use their knowledge of all the elements of art to describe similarities and differences in works of art and in the environment.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts—Grade 1–5

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard for Reading

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard for Speaking and Listening

2. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
3. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Further Resources

ArtsConnectEd. *The Artist's Toolkit*.

<http://www.artsconnected.org/toolkit/explore.cfm>

J. Paul Getty Museum. *Understanding Formal Analysis*.

http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/formal_analysis.html

Philadelphia Museum of Art. *Learning to Look: Works of Art Across Time and Cultures*. http://www.philamuseum.org/booklets/1_2_3_1.html

Credits

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