



Heroes & Legends, Gods & Myths

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 100,000 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 School 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

All societies have myths or legends that represent the beliefs, principles, and concerns of that society. Myths may be used to relay important morals; or to portray the daring and inspiring exploits of gods and heroes. In the *Heroes & Legends, Gods & Myths* tour, students will explore different works of art from various cultures as the means of exploring the heroes, gods, and myths that are important to that culture. Students will discuss how a culture's heroes and gods are represented through art and how those stories help illustrate what that culture values. This guide explores the following big idea question that relates to the tour theme – How does a culture represent their myths in art? What does it say about that culture's values?

This tour is aligned with Common Core state standards for English Language arts for grades 5–12, California state history/social science standards for grade 6, and California visual arts standards for grades 6–12.

Before Your Visit to the Museum

What is a Hero?

Lead a class discussion about traits and characteristics of a hero using the following prompts:

- Name examples of heroes.
- What characteristics must a hero have?
- What characteristics must a hero not have?
- Who is your favorite hero?
- Why is he/she your favorite hero?

Have students share one story about their favorite hero with a partner. Have them draw or illustrate their favorite hero in the story. Have students share their drawings with their partner.

What is a Myth?

Read a myth or a legend from two different cultures to students. (See "Further Resources" for links to examples.) Lead a class discussion about the characteristics that make it a myth or legend (e.g., fictional story, include characters or heroes that have supernatural powers, demonstrate a moral, etc.). Have students compare and contrast the two myths or legends. Have them discuss the similarities and differences in the stories. Lead a discussion about how the myth or legend reflects the values of that culture.

Identifying Gods and Heroes

Ask students, "How do we identify Superman?" (He has a red cape, an "S" on his chest, etc.) Inform students that these are called attributes—objects that heroes and gods carry or wear that helps identify them visually. Other examples include Zeus and his thunderbolt, Thor and his hammer, etc. Display the four works of art included in this guide. Have students look closely at each of the figures and have them identify the attributes of the gods depicted in each artwork (provide the detail images of the mummy). Ask students to consider the following:

- What does the attribute say about that hero or god?
- What can you infer about that god or hero?
- If you could carry or wear something to identify you, what would that be? Why?

Instruct students to draw an attribute they associate with themselves.

After Your Visit to the Museum

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

Lead a class discussion about which myths or legends students learned about during their tour.

Have students read a written version of the myth or legend (as close to the primary source, if possible). Have students analyze the artwork and the text with the following prompts:

- How closely did the artist follow the text?
- What details from the text did the artist incorporate?
- What details from the text did the artist exclude?
- What details that are not in the text did the artist add?

Have students read a myth or legend from another culture. Have them illustrate a scene from the myth. Have students think about:

- How closely will you follow the text?
- What details from the text will you incorporate?
- What details from the text will you exclude?
- What details that are not in the text will you add? Why?



The Hope Athena

Italy, Ostia or Rome, Roman, 2nd century A.D.
Roman copy after a Greek Original of the 5th century B.C.
Sculpture, marble. 86 x 28 x 22½ in. (218.44 x 71.12 x 57.15 cm)
William Randolph Hearst Collection (51.18.12)
<http://collections.lacma.org/node/229951>

The Hope Athena

About the Work of Art

Athena, the Greek goddess of war and wisdom, is immediately identifiable by one of her attributes, a protective aegis, a snake-fringed garment on which is fixed the head of the gorgon Medusa—whom she helped the hero Perseus defeat. Her helmet is another distinctive attribute, topped here by two mythical hybrid creatures, a sphinx (lion's body, with a human head) and griffins (body and tail of a lion, head and wings of an eagle). She wears a heavy mantle (himation) over the lighter dress (chiton), which is visible as crinkled drapery around her shoulders and ankles. Gemstones would probably have been inlaid for her eyes, and bronze eyelashes were reportedly found when the statue was excavated in 1797, at Ostia, a port city on the mouth of the Tiber.

The Athena is a Roman copy of a Greek original. Many Greek statues were made of bronze, but no longer survive because the bronze was melted down and reused. Some idea of their appearance can be formed from the Roman marble copies that are preserved. In the case of the *Hope Athena*, there are a number of similar versions, including another full-length copy in Naples (the Athena Farnese)

Another sculpture in LACMA's collection, the *Hope Hygeia* (<http://collections.lacma.org/node/230223>), was found with the Athena among the ruins of a magnificent palace, buried under the niches in which they had once been placed. It is remarkable that these two statues still remain together today, over two centuries after their discovery. Following the statue's discovery, it was heavily restored by its first owner, Thomas Hope (1769–1831), as was typical practice in the nineteenth century. He added a figure of Nike, a spear and eyes. These were removed after the statue was acquired by LACMA.

Adapted from "The Hope Athena" on the LACMA Web site at <http://collections.lacma.org/node/229951>

Discussion Questions and Prompts

- Discuss the sculpture using the following prompts and questions:
- How would you describe the figure?
- How would you describe what she is wearing?
- Describe the different textures on the statue.
- Her arms are missing now, but how do you think the arms were placed? Pose like the statue as if still had its arms.
- What do you think she was holding in each hand?

Inform students that this sculpture depicts Athena, the goddess of war and wisdom. The medallion in the center of her breastplate is the gorgon Medusa, who was infamous for turning men who looked into her eyes into stone (if necessary, tell the story of how she helped the hero Perseus defeat Medusa). Continue discussing the work with the following questions.

- Why would she want the face of Medusa on her breastplate?
- What attributes help identify her as the goddess of war?
- Why do you think she was the goddess of war and wisdom? Does this seem compatible? Why or why not?
- Knowing that the Greeks worshipped a goddess who was responsible for war and wisdom, what can you infer about ancient Greek society?



Coffin

Egypt, likely Thebes, mid-21st Dynasty (about 1000–968 BCE)

Furnishings; Accessories. Wood, overlaid with gesso and polychrome decoration and yellow varnish.

Base: $7\frac{3}{4}$ x $21\frac{1}{2}$ x 13 in. (187.33 x 54.61 x 33.02 cm)

Outer Lid: $7\frac{1}{4}$ x $21\frac{1}{4}$ x 14 in. (188.59 x 55.24 x 35.56 cm)

Inner Lid: $69\frac{1}{8}$ x $16\frac{5}{8}$ x $4\frac{1}{4}$ in. (175.58 x 42.23 x 10.79 cm)

Purchased with funds provided by Mr. and Mrs. John Jewett Garland (M.47.3a-c)

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/229429>

Coffin

About the Work

This sarcophagus, or coffin, including a base, lid, and mummy board, dates to the middle of the Twenty-first Dynasty (c. 1000–968 BCE) and likely comes from Thebes. The high priests of Amun, the local deity at Thebes, assumed rule over Egypt in the Twenty-first Dynasty, and a number of changes took place in funerary customs. Prior to this, during the Old Kingdom (2687–2191 BC), tombs were built of permanent materials and the interior walls of the tombs were decorated with scenes of daily life and funerary rituals. They were also inscribed with texts to further ensure that the deceased would travel from this life into the afterlife, as well as to provide sustenance for the deceased for all eternity.

During the Twenty-first Dynasty, burials were made in plain underground chambers or rock crevices, and the surface of the coffin served as the replacement surface for the ornate scenes and texts previously found on the walls of the tombs. This type of sarcophagus, as shown here, is known as an anthropoid coffin. It is made of sycamore wood and shaped in the form of a human outline. The head, hands, and feet are modeled in high relief. The figure's plaited beard (shown in pre-conserved images, see below), a reference to pharaohs and also to the god Osiris, most likely identifies it as a male's coffin. The space in the inscription on the lid's footboard that would have been reserved for the name of the coffin's owner has been left blank, leaving his identity a mystery.

Sarcophagi and the process of mummification were central to ancient Egyptians' beliefs about the afterlife. According to Egyptian belief, the sun god Re descends into the underworld when the sun sets, swallowed up by the goddess Nut. Protective deities help him overcome the dangers threatening to impede his path to rebirth at dawn. The Egyptians believed that in the afterlife, the pharaohs became one with Re and were likewise reborn with him at sunrise. While only the pharaohs journeyed with Re through the nighttime hours, all Egyptians faced the same dangers on their journey to the afterlife. Instructions for the elaborate preparations necessary to safe passage from life into the afterlife were found in the *Book of the Dead*. When a ruler or a well-to-do Egyptian died, his or her body was embalmed and wrapped in linen in order to keep the deceased looking as much like the living body as possible, enabling the person's spirit (ka) to recognize and return to the body for the afterlife. This process, called mummification, associated the deceased with Osiris, the god of the underworld. As a precaution against the disintegration of

the deceased's face, a substitute face was provided by depicting the face of the deceased on the coffin and also representing it on the inner lid (the mummy board). The other images on this sarcophagus are from the *Book of the Dead*.

A number of deities are shown assisting the deceased on his voyage. Depicted in the details below are the god Osiris, the god of the underworld, included with his attributes: the distinctive white crown of the Nile River, with two ostrich feathers on either side, holding the crook and flail (the crook representing the god as a shepherd, the flail symbolizing agriculture, since flails were used to separate grain)—together, with the throne, symbolizing kingship. Nut was the goddess of the sky, included with her attributes: stars and expansive wings since she was also the goddess who protects and envelopes the sun every night. By depicting images from the *Book of the Dead* in tombs, on papyri (paper made from the papyrus plant), and on sarcophagi, the Egyptians believed they could help produce the desired result—a successful voyage to the afterlife.

Adapted from "Coffin Mid-21st Century (About 1000-968 BCE)" on the LACMA Web site at <http://collections.lacma.org/node/229429>

Discussion Questions and Prompts

Display the image above. Discuss the mummy using the following prompts and questions:

- What do you see?
- What colors do you notice?
- What types of images are decorating the mummy?

Display the details suggested and share information about the figures being depicted on the mummy (see "About the Work" below). Continue the discussion with the following:

- Describe the figure of Osiris. Which of his attributes are evident in the image?
- Describe the figure of Nut. Which of her attributes are evident in the image?
- Why would it be important to the deceased to have images of these gods decorating a mummy?
- What does mummification and the inclusion of these types of gods and symbols say about how the Egyptians viewed the afterlife?



The mummy, pre-conservation, with the beard, symbolizing pharaoh rule and the god Osiris



Detail of the god Osiris



Detail of the goddess Nut



Buddha Shakyamuni

India, Uttar Pradesh, late 6th century

Sculpture, copper alloy with traces of paint

15½ x 6¾ x 4 in. (39.37 x 17.15 x 10.16 cm)

Gift of the Michael J. Connell Foundation (M.70.17)

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/236881>

Buddha Shakyamuni

About the Work

Gupta rule in northern India initiated a long era (320–600 CE) of peace, prosperity, and artistic accomplishment. This period has been referred to as the Golden Age of Indian history due to the remarkable achievements in science, literature, sculpture, and mathematics (the decimal system and concept of zero were introduced at this time). This image of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, with its serene countenance, embodies the Gupta balance of elegant form and inner spirituality. Although the Gupta rulers were Hindu, the dominant religion in India, they actively patronized Buddhism. Kings and devotees of Buddhism gained spiritual merit by pious acts: building temples, commissioning or making images of Buddha, such as this one, or worshiping them.

Buddhism was founded in the sixth century BC by the historic figure Siddhartha Gautama. Born into a royal family, a soothsayer predicted Siddhartha would be either a powerful king or great religious leader. Siddhartha's father, the king, isolated him from the suffering in the world to ensure his son would be a mighty ruler. The king's efforts were successful until Siddhartha saw four people outside the palace: a sick man, an old man, a dead man, and a wandering ascetic. Siddhartha decided to leave his life as a prince to search for spiritual truth. After many years of fasting and meditating he achieved Enlightenment and from that point on he was known as Buddha Shakyamuni (Enlightened Sage of the Shakyas).

This Buddha embodies two ideals basic to Buddhism: the perfect yogi (a practitioner of yoga—the practice of achieving internal peace through physical, mental, and spiritual exercises) and the universal ruler. He possesses the yogi's supple, almost buoyant body and contemplative gaze and facial expression, and the ruler's youth, strong shoulders, firm body, and webbed hands and feet (since according to tradition, the Buddha's hands and feet were connected by a web of white light). Time-honored traditions of portrayal connect the Buddha's human form with nature; his long eyes are shaped like fish, his curls like snail shells, and the profile of his left shoulder and arm is like the trunk of an elephant.

Adapted from "Buddha Shakyamuni" on the LACMA Web site at <http://collections.lacma.org/node/236881>

Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the sculpture using the following prompts and questions:

- Describe the expression on the figure of the Buddha.
- Describe his gestures. What do you think he is doing?
- Describe his posture.
- What mood does the sculpture convey? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Based on the sculpture's expression, posture, and mood, what can you speculate about what are important traits for the Buddha, and for Buddhists to admire?
- Think about the depiction of another religious figure. How does that image compare with this one? How are the poses and qualities of expression similar? How are they different?



Hercules and the Hydra of Lerna

Series: *The Labors of Hercules*, pl. 3.

Nicolo Van Aelst (Flanders, 1527–1612) and

Antonio Tempesta (Italy, Florence, 1555–1630). Italy, 1608.

Prints; etchings. Etching, Sheet: 3¹⁵/₁₆ x 5⁹/₁₆ in. (10 x 14.13 cm)

Los Angeles County Fund (65.37.9)

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/234356>

Hercules and the Hydra of Lerna

About the Work of Art

This etching, the art of incising a design onto a metal surface, illustrates the second of the Twelve Labors of Hercules. Hercules, the most popular and represented Greek hero is seen here battling the fierce monster, the multi-headed Hydra of Lerna. The Hydra was a fierce dragon-like creature, who grew two heads whenever one was cut off. Hercules's father was the god Zeus; his mother the mortal Alceme. Hera, Zeus's wife, was unhappy about her husband's infidelities and Hercules's birth, thus made her child's life difficult by continually trying to harm him. When Hercules was still only an infant, Hera put snakes into his crib, but Hercules strangled them. Later, after he married, Hera caused Hercules to have a fit of madness, which resulted in his killing his wife and children. In order to repent for this unthinkable deed, Hercules was tasked by King Eurystheus of Tiryns with performing twelve difficult labors. His first labor was to kill the Nemean Lion, whose skin was impenetrable. After failing to kill it with a sword and arrows (shown in the foreground on the right), Hercules wrestled with the lion, and using his famous strength, Hercules strangled the lion and with its own claws, unsheathed the skin. Because the lion's skin was impenetrable, Hercules wore the head of the lion as a helmet and the skin of the lion as his shield. Here, Hercules is shown wearing the pelt of the Nemean Lion, his first labor, and carrying his club—his attributes.

This work was a collaboration by the artists Nicolo Van Aelst and Antonio Tempesta (1555–August, 1630). Van Aelst was born in Brussels around 1526. Not much is known about his life, but Pope Sixtus V may have been a patron. He died in Rome around 1613. Tempesta was born in Florence. Known mostly for his talent as an engraver, Tempesta worked in different media throughout his career. He worked for some of the most prominent Italian families, creating frescoes for the Vatican, while also participating in the decoration of the Villa Farnese, the Villa d'Este, and the villa of the Medici. In addition the 13 plates on the Labors of Hercules that he co-created with Van Aelst, Tempesta drew designs for tapestries, illustrated many books, and created etchings, among them plates for scenes from the Old Testament.

Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the print using the following prompts and questions:

- Look closely at all of the details in this print. What do you see?
- Describe the monster in the background of the drawing.
- Describe the figure of Hercules in the foreground. What are his attributes?
- What is happening? What do you see that supports your opinion?
- How did the artist convey the sense of the drama of the battle between Hercules and the Hydra?
- Who is winning the battle? What did the artist do to communicate this part of the story?

Inform students about why Hercules had to do his Twelve Labors (see "About the Work of Art" below). Ask students to debate the following questions:

- Do you think Hercules is heroic? Why or why not?
- Do you think Hercules was truly repentant? Do you think completing the Twelve Labors absolved him of the murder of his family? Why or why not?

Have students read about another of Hercules's labors. Using pencils and paper have students illustrate the labor they read about. Ask students to consider the following:

- What/who will you put in the foreground?
- What/who will you put in the background?
- How will you include Hercules's attributes?
- Just as the artist conveyed a sense of dramatic action, make sure your illustration demonstrates dramatic action between Hercules and his opponent.

Related California State Standards

California State Content Standards for Visual Arts

Grade 6

- Artistic Perception 1.2: Discuss works of art as to theme, genre, style, idea, and differences in media.
- Artistic Perception 1.3: Describe how artists can show the same theme by using different media and styles.
- Historical and Cultural Context 3.1: Research and discuss the role of the visual arts in selected periods of history, using a variety of resources (both print and electronic).
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.1: Construct and describe plausible interpretations of what they perceive in works of art.
- Historical and Cultural Context 3.2 View selected works of art from a culture and describe how they have changed or not changed in theme and content over a period of time.
- Connections, Relationships, Applications 5.3 Create artwork containing visual metaphors that express the traditions and myths of selected cultures.

Grade 7

- Historical and Cultural Context 3.2: Compare and contrast works of art from various periods, styles, and cultures and explain how those works reflect the society in which they were made.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.2: Analyze the form (how a work of art looks) and content (what a work of art communicates) of works of art.

Grade 8

- Artistic Perception 1.1: Use artistic terms when describing the intent and content of works of art.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.3: Construct an interpretation of a work of art based on the form and content of the work.
- Grades 9–12 Historical and Cultural Context 3.1 Identify similarities and differences in the purposes of art created in selected cultures.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts—Grade 6–12

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

1. 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.
2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

California State Content Standards for History/Social Studies—Grade 6

Note: The following standards may be addressed, depending on which works of art are selected.

6.2 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Kush.

6.4 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Ancient Greece.

6.5 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of India.

Further Resources

Tufts University. "Perseus Digital Library."
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>

Scholastic. "Myths from Around the World."
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mff/myths.htm>

Credits

Writers: Veronica Alvarez and Theresa Sotto with contributions by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's Education Department. Editor: Sarah Jesse