

Art of Many Cultures

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 representing various cultures from prehistoric to the present. Through its extensive collections, the museum is both a resource to and a reflection of the many cultural communities and heritages in Southern California.

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

Each culture has ideas and customs that they value. Artists are a product of the culture and society in which they grew; and as such, they are influenced by the customs and norms of their society. Often, their artwork reflects upon and upholds the objects, ideas, and customs that that society values. Looking at artworks and artifacts of different cultures can give us insight into what aesthetics and traditions a culture values, and in turn, inspire us to reflect on our own cultural artifacts and cultural values. Students discover and compare art from many different cultures, identifying the unique qualities that relate a work of art to the time and place of its origin. Students also learn how culture and art influence each other. This guide explores the following big idea question that relates to the tour theme – How is a work of art reflective of the culture in which it was made?

This tour is aligned with state content standards for history/social science and Common Core state standards for English Language arts for grades 6–12.

Before Your Visit to the Museum

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

Reflecting on Artifacts and Cultures from Today

Have students bring a decorative art object (a beautiful object that does not have a function) or artifact (an object made by humans for a practical purpose) from home and instruct them to place it in a box. Have each student pull one item from the box (not their own). Ask them to examine the object closely and reflect on the following:

- What is it? Or, what do you think it is?
- Does it have a purpose? If so, what do you think it is used for? How can you tell?
- What insight does it give you about the person who owned it?

Reflecting on Cultures from the Past

Have students research an artifact from a museum's website, such as the works featured in this guide. Have students select an item with a similar function from their home. Have students make the following comparisons between the two objects:

- Compare and contrast the designs on your object with the one from the museum. Are the designs similar? If so, how?
- Compare and contrast the decorations on your object with the one from the museum. Are the decorations on your object less elaborate? Or more?
- Do you use your object daily? Or only on special occasions? Does the museum object look like it would have been used daily? Or only on special occasions? What do you see that helps you come to your conclusions?

Which object would you prefer—your own, or the one in the museum? Why?

Cultures and their Objects

Inform students that an archaeologist is a person who excavates (carefully removing something from the ground) and studies the physical remains, or artifacts, of past cultures. Archaeologists keep a careful record of what they remove, and record their findings. Have pairs of students take on the role of archaeologists and have them pretend that they found one of the artifacts from this guide.

Instruct pairs of students to discuss and then address the following in writing:

Record your observations. Describe its appearance; write a description of what can be seen, heard, touched, and smelled on the artifact.

- What was the context (the place, location, and situation) in which the artifact was found?
- What can you learn about where it was found?
- What can you say about the culture that produced the object?

Have students read "About the Work of Art" regarding their chosen object. Have students review what they wrote about their object and revise their conclusions based on the information they learned.

After Your Visit to the Museum

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

One Object/One Culture?

Have students think about an artwork that they viewed at LACMA. Have them write about their object using the following prompts:

- What was it?
- How was it used?
- What did you learn about the object?
- What did you learn about the culture that produced it?
- Have students sketch the object. Did you notice new details?
- Do you have something similar at home? In what ways is it similar?
- Based on these two objects, in what ways are the two cultures similar?

Have students who selected the same LACMA object compare their notes.



Standing Warrior

Mexico, Jalisco, 200 B.C.—A.D. 300

Sculpture, Slip-painted ceramic, El Arenal Brown style, 37 x 15 in. (94 x 38.1 cm)

The Proctor Stafford Collection, purchased with funds
provided by Mr. and Mrs. Allan C. Balch (M.86.296.86).

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/253626>

Standing Warrior

About the Work of Art

This large, hollow figure comes from the present-day state of Jalisco, located on the Pacific coast of western Mexico. Between 200 B.C. and A.D. 500, the inhabitants of Jalisco and the nearby states of Nayarit and Colima constructed elaborate underground shaft-and-chamber tombs, which are unique in Mexico. Among the various burial offerings placed in these tombs were large, hollow ceramic figures and vessels, such smaller objects as stone implements, shell trumpets, and obsidian mirrors, or household objects such as spindles and mutates (mortar stones for grinding corn). Because each tomb had several chambers, it is believed that these tombs were used for families or lineages over time. Little monumental architecture and no writing systems from this region have survived, therefore our knowledge of these ancient cultures comes from the burials and their contents. Unfortunately, few burials have been excavated by archaeologists; therefore, much historical information about the people of ancient West Mexico has been lost since the items were taken out of context by looters.

This warrior figure, which may have served as a tomb guardian, is the largest known example from this region of Mexico of sculpture that was made strictly to be buried. Made in one piece, it is a tour de force of firing. The figure wears a cap like helmet with spikes; a stiff, leather-like vest; and short trousers. He raises a painted rod, possibly a club or baton signifying his rank. The brown clay figure, painted with fine red clay and other colors, protruding stomach, and pellets of clay on the figure's shoulders, representing scarified tissue, characterize what art historians call the El Arenal Brown style of West Mexican sculpture.

*Adapted from "Standing Warrior" on the LACMA website
<http://collections.lacma.org/node/253626>*

Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the work using the following prompts and questions:

- Describe the figure.
- Describe his expression.
- What is he wearing and holding?
- Describe the textures you see.

Inform students that this warrior figure may have served as a tomb guardian. Have students discuss with a partner how the object must have been used. Inform students that this object is over 1700 years old. It comes from the state of Jalisco in Mexico, from a culture whose written language did not survive. Therefore, little is known about this object or this culture. Continue discussing the object with the following prompts:

- What can we speculate about ancient Mexican burial practices?
- Ancient Mexicans placed different kinds of offerings in tombs—ceramic vessels, stone tools, household objects like spindles and mortar stones for grinding corn, and large, hollow ceramic figures like this one. What can we speculate about how ancient Mexicans viewed the afterlife, based on things they put in their gravesites, like this figure?
- Each tomb had several chambers. It is believed that these tombs were used for families or lineages over time. Within which family member's tomb do you think this figure would have been placed (male, female, patriarch, matriarch, son, daughter, etc)? Why do you think so?



Shiva as the Lord of Dance

India, Tamil Nadu, circa 950–1000

Sculpture, Copper alloy, 30 x 22½ x 7 in. (76.20 x 57.15 x 17.78 cm)

Anonymous gift (M.75.1)

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/240893>

Shiva as the Lord of Dance

About the Work of Art

Of the three gods of the Hindu trinity—Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer and Restorer—Shiva was especially popular and widely worshiped in southern India. This figure of Shiva has an opening in its base that allowed it to be borne in religious processions, typically ornamented and draped. In India the art of dance is not only regarded as a form of yoga (the practice of achieving internal peace through physical, mental, and spiritual exercises); but is associated with the very act of creation. As lord of yoga, Shiva is also the source of the cosmic dance that created the universe in endless rhythmic cycles.

This figure was made by sculptors from the Tamil Nadu region in southern India, one of the oldest civilizations in the region. The Tamil sculptors of the Chola dynasty (mid-ninth to early fourteenth centuries) sculpted Shiva as the Dancer; in his most complete form where he is about to perform his divine dance to destroy the universe in order to prepare it for the god Brahma, who will create a new world. This depiction of Shiva as the Dancer is known as Nataraja, which has become symbolic of Indian civilization.

Shiva is depicted dancing in an aureole of flame that rises from a lotus pedestal, a symbol of primordial being and creation. The arched aureole and its three-tongued flames represent the universe and its ultimate destruction by fire. In his upper right hand Shiva holds the drum representing the primordial sound at the creation of the universe; the second right hand makes a gesture of reassurance. His upper left hand holds the flame of destruction. The lower one points to his left foot, refuge of the soul, and shows the path of salvation through Shiva's trampling of the demon that personifies ignorance. Shiva's body seems to rise and expand with his aureole. The force of his broad shoulders and proud countenance are echoed by the rhythmic explosion of his locks; among the locks of hair, to the left of his head, is the small figure of Ganges, representing the god's intimate connections with water, the force of life. Perfectly poised, this work manifests Shiva's divine unity with compelling grace and majesty.

Adapted from "Shiva as the Lord of the Dance" on the LACMA website <http://collections.lacma.org/node/240893>

Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the work using the following prompts and questions:

- What does it look like this figure is doing? What details lead you to your conclusion?
- Think about the different types of dances you can perform or are familiar with. On what occasions do you dance? What does it mean to dance?
- Inform students that dance in India is not only fun and stimulating, but is associated with the act of creation. How is this reflected in the artwork?

Inform students that this artwork depicts one of the most popular gods in the Hindu religion, Shiva. Shiva was the god who destroyed, but also restored. Ask student to look at the flames and ask the following questions:

- How did the artist represent fire in this artwork?
- What positive attributes does fire represent?
- What negative attributes does fire represent?

Consider Shiva's attributes. Why might the god be depicted with fire? Show details of the *Shiva as the Lord of Dance* from the LACMA website, <http://collections.lacma.org/node/240893>, and ask students to share their observations. Provide information as appropriate for all of the symbolism from the "About the Work of Art." Based on the information they learned, have students write one paragraph about how this artwork is reflective of Indian culture.



Hand Drum (warup)

Papua New Guinea, Torres Strait Islands, circa 1850

Tools and Equipment; musical instruments. wood, fiber, shell, and cassowary feathers

45 x 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 8 in. (114.3 x 22.23 x 20.32 cm)

Purchased with funds provided by the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation
with additional funding by Jane and Terry Semel, the David Bohnett Foundation,
Camilla Chandler Frost, Gayle and Edward P. Roski and The Ahmanson Foundation (M.2008.66.12)
<http://collections.lacma.org/node/215595>

Hand Drum (*warup*)

About the Work of Art

This drum, known as a hand drum, would have been played with bare hands, rather than with any type of mallet or stick. *Warup*, or kundu drum, is the name given to hand drums used in New Guinea. There are many different types of these drums, as tribes often had styles and preferences distinctive to certain regions. However, artisans throughout New Guinea often preferred to use lizard, possum, or alligator skin stretched over the top; and formed the body of the drum from a hollowed-out log.

Papua New Guinea is an island nation that occupies the eastern half of New Guinea in the southwestern Pacific Ocean. Papua New Guinea is one of the most diverse countries in the world, made up of numerous tribes, each with distinct customs and preferences. Among its most recognized art forms is their work with carved wooden sculptures—masks, canoes, and drums.

Drums in Papua New Guinea served an important purpose in their culture. Drums were used for rituals, to accompany certain jobs, and for recreational purposes such as parties. Drums were also used by healers or shamans, and they served important functions during daily rituals, initiation rituals, and important, transitional phases in people's lives. This drum is a carefully crafted musical instrument. Hour-glass in shape, the musician or performer would have held it in one hand, and hit it with the other. This type of drum is rare since it was hand-made through a long, laborious process. The logs were hollowed out by placing hot coals in the center and burning and scraping the middle out, being very careful to only remove only the parts necessary to retain the hourglass shape. The designs and outer decorations, often carved with stone tools, were added after the hollowing out was complete—creating unique works of art.

Sources

"Bikmaus—A Journal of Papua New Guinea Affairs, Ideas and the Arts"
Vol 7 No. 3, September, 1987 pages 51–61

The National Museum
<http://orgs.usd.edu/nmm/Oceania/2330PapuaNewGuineaDrum/Drum2330.html>

Minneapolis Institute of the Arts
<https://collections.artsmia.org/index.php?page=detail&id=5754>

Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the artifact using the following prompts and questions:

- Look closely at the object. How would you describe its form?
- Notice the difference between the two ends of the object. Does this give you any clues about how this object was used?
- Consider the size and shape of the object. How would someone play this?
- How does this drum compare with other drums you know?
- Describe its decorations.
- Drums were used for rituals, to accompany certain jobs, and for recreational purposes such as parties. What kind of dance or celebration do you think this drum would have been used?
- What can we say about the people of Papua New Guinea, where this drum was made?

Watch a YouTube video of people from Papua New Guinea playing the *warup* drums. Ask students to discuss the following: What was the occasion in which the drums were played? How can you tell?

- How were the drums being played? By whom?
- Did they sound differently from drums you are more familiar with? How so?

Have students create their own musical instrument using found or all natural objects. Instruct students to decorate their musical instrument with objects, decorations, and images that reflect something important about their culture.



Tile section of a mihrab

Iran, Kashan, early 14th century

Architecture; Architectural Elements

Frit ware, over glaze luster-painted, with cobalt and turquoise

40½ x 46⅞ in. (102.87 x 119.06 cm)

The Nasli M. Heeramaneck Collection, gift of Joan Palevsky (M.73.5.1)

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/239878>

Tile section of a mihrab

About the Work of Art

A mihrab is a niche in the wall of a mosque that helps Muslim worshippers know the direction of Mecca, where the Kaaba stone is kept; a granite cube-like structure that is one of the most sacred objects in Islam. Muslims are expected to pray five times a day, and during those daily prayers all worshippers must face in the direction of the Kaaba; that direction is called the *qibla*. Therefore the mihrab gives worshippers a beautiful ornate, visual reference of the correct direction. Since the wall faces the Kaaba, the wall onto which the mihrab is put into is known as the *qibla* wall. Originally, the *qibla* was noted by written signs that were placed on the wall facing Mecca. Around the 8th century, architects starting distinguishing them with mihrabs. Mihrabs were very ornately decorated and designed as either semicircular or pointed arched doorways to give the impression of a door, to symbolize passage into Mecca.

Because mihrabs were the most important element in a mosque, its decoration was very elaborate and the most skilled artists decorated them. Like this one, many mihrabs were composed of mosaic or glazed tiles in geometric or floral patterns. The writing, in Arabic, is read from right to left across the top of the pediment (an architectural element that forms a triangular shape). According to Islamic tenants, only God can create life, therefore man should not attempt to depict people or even animals—both of which are forbidden in Islam. Therefore, in religious art and architecture, artists focused on geometric patterns, natural elements, and on the written word—becoming master craftsmen of beautiful, ornate calligraphy. This mihrab is made of frit ware, a type of pottery in which stone-paste is added to the clay to achieve a glossy, glass-like finish.

Sources

Karen Armstrong (2000). *Islam: A Short History*. Modern Library Chronicles, New York.

Kuban, Doğan (1974). *The Mosque and Its Early Development*. Muslim Religious Architecture, Leiden: Brill Mason, R.B.; Tite, M.S. (1994), "The Beginnings of Islamic stone paste technology", *Archaeometry* 36: 77–91

Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the artifact using the following prompts and questions:

- This object is made to resemble a doorway. What symbolic references are associated with doors and doorways?
- Describe the types of lines decorating this artifact.
- Describe the colors you see.
- How would you describe the decorations on this object?

Inform students that this object is called a mihrab. The mihrab of a mosque was put into the niche that faced Mecca, the direction Muslim worshippers have to face when saying their five daily prayers. Continue the discussion of the artifact with the following:

- Why would it be important to mark the correct direction?
- Why would the mihrab have to be lavishly decorated?

Form student groups. Have students brainstorm ideas about other symbols associated with doors and doorways. Encourage them to also think of idioms related to doorways. Using an art medium of their choosing, have students create their own doorways. Have students think about what symbolic place their door would lead to and what type of decoration would be suitable for a door of such significance. Students can draw, sculpt, or manufacture their doorways.

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.
- 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.

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

- Aesthetic Valuing 4.3: Construct an interpretation of a work of art based on the form and content of the work.
- Grades 9–12
- Artistic Perception 1.5: Analyze the material used by a given artist and describe how its use influences the meaning of the work.
- Historical and Cultural Context: 3.1 Identify similarities and differences in the purposes of art created in selected cultures.
- Historical and Cultural Context 3.3 Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.

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.
2. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

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

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

Grade Six

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

Grade Seven

7.2. Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the civilizations of Islam in the Middle Ages. 7.7. Students compare and contrast the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the Meso-American and Andean civilizations.

Further Resources

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Art of the Islamic World" Educator Guides <http://www.metmuseum.org/learn/for-educators/publications-for-educators/art-of-the-islamic-world>

Smithsonian Museum, "Cultural Programs" <http://www.si.edu/CulturalPrograms>

Credits

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

Education programs at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art are supported in part by the William Randolph Hearst Endowment Fund for Arts Education and the Margaret A. Cargill Arts Education Endowment.