NGV ASIAN ART

TEACHER'S NOTES
A4 sheets by country in chronological order

**Burma**
Burmese Buddhist sculpture (CC)

**China**
Neolithic jar (MAP)
Provisions for the afterlife (MAP)
Song tea bowls (MAP)
Ming bowl (MAP)
Buddhist statues (MAP)
Imperial robe (MAP)
Landscape as spiritual retreat (MAP)
Landscape as self-expression (MAP)
Zen painting (MAP)
Calligraphy (MAP)

**India**
Indian tree goddess (CC)
Shiva worship (CC)
The festival of Holi (CC)

**Indonesia**
Ikat textiles from Sumba, Indonesia (CC)
Javanese art (CC)

**Iran**
Persian art (CC)

**Japan**
Jōdo Shū: Pure Land Buddhism (WC)
Shigaraki jar (WC)
The Tale of Genji (Genji Monogatari) (JP)
Samurai: A life of art in war (WC)
Kin byōbu: golden screens (WC)
Chadō: The way of tea (WC)
Ukiyo-e in Edo Japan (WC)
Zen (WC)
Mingei (WC)

**Korea**
Korean ceramics (JP)

**Nepal**
Tantric Buddhist art from Nepal (CC)

**Pakistan / Afghanistan**
Gandharan Buddhist sculpture (CC)

**Vietnam**
Vietnamese ceramics (CC)

**Contributors:**
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The NGV has collected art from the countries of Asia since 1862, one year after the gallery was established. The Asian collection represented in this resource includes paintings, woodblock prints, ceramics, screens, scrolls, costumes, textiles, puppetry and bronze sculptures from China, Japan, Korea, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Burma, Vietnam and Indonesia from 2400 BC to the twenty-first century.

The countries of the Asian region are becoming increasingly important to Australia from an economic and a cultural perspective. Our closest neighbours and major trading partners, the countries of the Asian region also represent the cultural heritage of a growing number of Australians.

This resource aims to:

- engage teachers and students in acquiring authentic and culturally respectful information
- build factual knowledge about art, history, religion, cultural traditions, the role of the artist and the use of materials and techniques
- support teachers and students in developing skills in intercultural understanding
- develop Asia literacy, the understanding and valuing of the wealth of artistic and cultural traditions of Asia, and the links we share across countries and cultures.

The works of art, curatorial text and educational materials can be used to guide student inquiry, stimulate thinking, develop deeper understanding of concepts and to build knowledge through a range of learning situations, discussion, research, art making and written activities.

The resource has been designed for teachers and students across the levels of schooling and includes:

- A kit of thirty, A4 colour images of works of art with curatorial text
- Education activities and teacher’s notes for early, middle and later years
- A map and timeline
- A DVD

The material on the DVD is organised into three sections: China, Japan and Korea, South and South East Asia, with images of all works of art; additional resources, including curatorial information; interviews and related film, photographs and diagrams; and a list of further reading.

Each of the thirty A4 cards includes the title of the work, plus three key terms in the language of the country of origin of the work of art. These linguistic references can stimulate discussion about language and can also add to understanding of aspects of art and culture.

The educational material and teacher’s notes support the Victorian Curriculum and the Australian Curriculum and are designed for:

- Early Years (levels P–4) Stories in Art, Costume
- Middle Years (levels 5–8) Symbolism, Belief, Materials and Techniques
- Later Years (levels 9–10) Power and Politics, Culture and Identity, Artists and their Practice

It is recommended that teachers read the curatorial text and view the related DVD materials, as they determine which theme to select. The themes are designed as starting points and teachers are encouraged to develop and extend this material relevant to their school and students. Each theme is presented under the following headings:

**Introduction**

The introduction provides a framework for discussion of selected works around the given theme. It includes exploration of the theme within the art and culture of Asia, connections between selected works of art and examination of the theme in broader contexts.

**Explore**

This section provides guiding questions for teachers and students to facilitate observation, exploration and understanding of the works of art, including formal analysis of the use of visual elements, as well as discussion of cultural, social, geographical and historical contexts, meanings and messages in the works of art and the use of materials and techniques.

**Create**

This section provides suggestions for ways in which teachers can use the works of art as stimulus for students to explore their own creative responses to ideas, themes and issues raised in the exploration of the works of art. Explorations could take the form of performance, works of visual art, written works or a multimedia response.

**Investigate**

This section is intended to provide stimulus for further investigation in which students are able to explore connections and parallels within their own culture and those of others. These could be sustained visual explorations or group projects, involving aspects of history, geography, group performances or presentations.

This resource is also available on the NGV website www.ngv.vic.gov.au
Stories in Art

Early Years (Prep–yr 4)

Introduction

Storytelling is found in all cultures and the sharing of stories helps us understand our own lives and the lives of others, across time and place. In some early societies storytelling and the use of pictures and visual art provided moral and spiritual guidance for pre literate peoples. Today, stories continue to entertain and communicate important beliefs, values, morals and traditions. They can be told orally, sung, danced, performed, painted, filmed or written. Artists often create narratives in their works of art and can represent a moment or a sequence of events, and illustrate and document religious, historic and cultural stories.

The Indian painting from 1715, Maharana Sangram Singh II and his son at a Shiva shrine, painted to record life at court, shows the importance of religious worship at court with Maharana Sangram Singh II and his son at a shrine worshipping Shiva, a Hindu god in the form of a linga.

The Indian Rajput painting from 1844, Maharao Ram Singh II of Kotah and companions playing Holi on elephants in a street, captures a moment during the festival of Holi. The Maharao, seated on the elephant is squirting his servants and court women with water from the palace fire engine. This festival continues to be held in spring to celebrate the youthful Krishna, a Hindu god, and the coming of spring crops, foliage and flowers, by throwing water and coloured powder over family, friends and strangers.

Ancient Hindu epics and Indonesian folk narratives are still performed in Indonesia using wayang kulit shadow puppets. This oral story telling tradition provides moral guidance and entertainment for the audience. The puppet Prabu Suyudana represents a character in the Mahabharata, an important Hindu story. Facial features, costume, physiognomy and the use of colour determine the character of each puppet, and clarify the moral aspects of the narrative.

The Burmese Buddha, Buddha calling the Earth to witness, is a bronze sculpture for religious guidance. This seated Buddha extends the fingers of his right hand down towards earth. This posture recalls a particular moment in the story of the Buddha’s life and path to enlightenment in which the Buddha overcomes obstructions to realise the true meaning of life.

Hokusai was a Japanese artist who made many Ukiyo-e woodblock prints, and created the famous image The great wave off Kanagawa. Here the artist captures a moment in time, celebrating and contrasting the power of nature, with Mt Fuji in the background and a massive wave consuming the foreground. Ukiyo-e multi-coloured woodblock prints are from the Japanese Edo period (1600–1868) and describe the life styles and interests of the people, including the landscape, kabuki actors, historical dramas, sumo wrestlers, beautiful women and picture books.

Explore

Learning to read paintings and works of art requires us to observe carefully. What do we recognise? What don’t we understand? What does it make us think about? Look closely at the selected art works and identify the messages each artwork conveys. Can you group these?

Compare the two Indian paintings. Use the images on the DVD to closely examine the artworks, note the people, their costumes, objects, animals, the setting and the use of shape, size and colour. Make a list of the features that describe the artistic style so that in the future you can recognise this type of painting.

Create

Hokusai loved drawing; he called himself a ‘drawing maniac’ and invented the term manga, meaning random sketches or comical drawings. He created many volumes and his images show figures, nature, architecture and mythology, often in unusual positions and with a sense of humour. Draw your own manga or comic strip story. Use your imagination to invent a character, give them magic powers and describe their adventures in simple pictures using line drawing and a few words.

The Chinese zodiac divides time into a cycle of twelve years and uses animals to tell stories about the characters of people who are born in particular years. Look on the DVD to find the Cricket and Dragon section, and go to the zodiac to find and learn about your animal. Create a simple puppet to represent your animal and make up a play that tells a story about the characters in your class.

Investigate

The Indian paintings, the Javanese shadow puppet, the Burmese Buddha and the Hokusai woodblock print share a strong sense of historical and or religious identity. Discuss how these works of art communicate stories that reflect cultural or religious values.

What are the historic or cultural features in your location? Are they part of the natural environment or a place of worship, a significant public building, statue or a park? As a group, select different places and draw, paint or photograph them, and then write about them to create a series of folding books, postcards or picture storybooks. Share these with students from different schools.

Use the DVD to learn more about the woodblock prints from the Floating World. Find an example of a wayang kulit performance on You Tube. Can you think of any similar stories from another culture?
Clockwise from top left:
Javanese Prabu Suyudana; Kisan Das Maharao Ram Singh II of Kotah and companions playing Holi on elephants in a street 1844; Indian Maharana Sangram Singh II and his son at a Shiva shrine c.1715; Katsushika Hokusai The great wave off Kanagawa c.1830; Burmese Buddha calling the Earth to witness
Costume

Early Years (Prep–yr 4)

Introduction
Humans have always needed protection from the elements. Over thousands of years, clothing has developed from animal skins to a wide variety of natural and synthetic fabrics and textiles, and is still essential to our daily lives. We dress for specific purposes, including social, cultural and religious ceremonies, which display our status and at times our self-expression. Design, decoration, choice of fabric and colour often has symbolic meaning.

The Manchu Emperor’s *jifu* robe from late 1800 was worn in court on semi formal occasions such as banquets and festivities. The robe, demonstrating highly advanced technology, was made from finely woven silk and metallic thread. The entire surface is decorated and embroidered with traditional symbols of Chinese authority and good fortune. Clothing distinguished the Qing court and government officials from the ordinary people for nearly 300 years.

The Japanese samurai were highly respected warriors, whose key role was to protect the land, status and integrity of the feudal lords and emperor. Their protective and distinctive armour was made using curved metal plates and laced together. Decorative insignia or designs on helmets and breastplates expressed the warrior’s personality and strength.

The Sumbanese cloth, *hinggi*, is a traditional garment still worn by men on the island of Sumba. Distinctive patterns and designs represent daily life and past customs. The red dye was once reserved for men of nobility. The use of cotton, a natural fibre and the *ikat* method of resist dying reflect tradition, and available materials and technology.

Explore
Look carefully at the Emperor’s robe, the samurai armour and the Sumba man’s cloth. Describe the shapes and the colours in these costumes. What do the garments have in common and how are they different? Identify and consider why these patterns are significant. Brainstorm and discuss the importance of each piece. Talk about the materials and techniques used to make each garment. Watch the DVD and observe the process of dying the Sumba cloth.

Analyse the idea of a national costume with reference to China, Japan, Indonesia and Australia. Consider how uniforms and their designs represent different groups.

Create
Reflect on the shape of the Emperor’s robe and the important symbols that cover the surface. Using the images on the DVD, zoom in on the details in the robe and look for the dragons, find the symbols for cosmic power, such as the sun, moon and stars, and identify the patterns for waves, clouds and mountains. Where are these placed? Why would the Emperor alone use the dragon symbol? Refer to the DVD for the Imperial robes diagram.

Design your own robe on a grand scale. Decorate your robe with symbols that represent important people, objects, animals and interests in your life. Determine which symbols are most important by varying the size and colour. Arrange these in patterns on the front and back of your robe. Imagine you are the ruler, the emperor or empress. How would you treat your people, what rules would you impose?

Investigate
For many centuries textiles have been traded between countries. Would the Manchu Emperor’s robe, the samurai armour and the Sumba man’s cloth be traded? Discuss.

Clothing is made in many countries and from different materials using a range of techniques. Silk, cotton, wool and linen are natural fibres that have been spun, woven, knitted or sewn into clothing for thousands of years. More recently, technology has enabled synthetic fabrics to be made from plastic, nylon and acrylic. Where are your clothes made? Check three different types of clothing at home and make sketches or take photos. Read the labels and write a list noting the manufacturing location, the types of fabric, pattern or colours. Compare your results.

Use the DVD and zoom into the Japanese *Suit of armour* (*Yoroi*) to observe and explain the insignia on the samurai helmet, the breastplate and shin guards. How would you move in this armour? Why is metal used? Discuss what types of protective clothing are worn to play sport, ride animals, bikes or scooters. How do they offer protection? Design a logo or insignia to place on an item of protective clothing. Consider line, shape, colour and your personality.
Clockwise from top left:
Chinese Emperor’s semi-formal court robe (Jifu);
Japanese Suit of armour (Yoroi); Sumbanese Man’s cloth (Hinggi) (detail)
**Symbolism in Art**

**Middle Years (yr 5–yr 8)**

**Introduction**

Many of the art works in the NGV collection of Asian art contain complex layers of meaning. Images, colours, shapes and even materials can take on significance, representing various ideas, philosophies or emotions. Symbolic meaning is often built in subtle layers and nuances over time, relating to language, history, belief and cultural stories. Images, objects and visual forms are used to communicate knowledge in place of the written word. While some of the symbolism crosses borders, in many cases it is specific to place and people. Some objects, such as the Ming dynasty bowl depicting carp, lotus and water plants, incorporate the subtleties of language to add significance to visual symbols, affecting the way the work is understood.

The symbolism in cultural practices can be embodied in individual objects. The Japanese tea ceremony is a highly symbolic ritual, in which the values of simplicity, contemplation and meditation in the moment are reflected in the ceremony itself and in the objects used. On the Indonesian islands of Sumba, the symbols woven into the textiles tell us something of the history of the Sumbanese people and their cultural practice: the skull trees refer to the practice of head hunting once prevalent in the region, the anchors tell of trade and the horses indicate wealth and status. The colour of the cloth worn traditionally denoted the status of the wearer.

The golden screens of Japan were decorated with symbolic images to convey the changing moods of different seasons, and to provide an auspicious atmosphere for particular events. Images of cranes and tortoises, for example, were used at occasions such as weddings and births to represent wishes for a long life.

Symbolism can contain vast ideas. Zen master Nakahara Nantenbo uses the symbol of the ensō (circle) to embody the philosophy of Zen and a vision of the whole universe – all and nothing. Similarly, Hiroshi Sugimoto reveals that the result of capturing an entire movie with a long exposure is a white screen, erasing all image and meaning. The minimal aesthetic of Zen Buddhism is contrasted with the elaborate layers of iconography present in the Buddhist deities Mahasamvara and Vajravarahi, whose symbolism embodies the notion of spiritual growth, wisdom, compassion and the dualities present in the universe.

**Explore**

Look closely at the artworks pictured. Identify elements that may be symbolic, and find out what the symbolism means.

Compare and contrast the Ming dynasty bowl with the Japanese tea bowl. How does each object reflect the society and culture from which it comes?

The implements used in the tea ceremony have a rustic simplicity. How does this contribute to the aesthetic experience of the tea ceremony?

**Create**

Art objects inform us of the society and culture from which they emerge. Look for symbols that you believe embody your time and culture. Create your own series of symbols that describe something about your values and beliefs. Incorporate these symbols into a design for a textile or item of clothing.

Watch the tea ceremony on the DVD. What kind of ceremony would you create for contemplation and meditation appropriate to your values and time? What symbols or tools would you use? Create your own ceremony and the objects that it requires. Film your ceremony, adding music and a description of the significance of the actions and objects.

Language is often used to convey symbolic meaning. Find out the rules of haiku poetry. Create a haiku poem to capture the essence of a particular moment.

**Investigate**

Find out about the symbolism of flowers in Chinese and Japanese art. Animals also have symbolism in Asian art. Find out about the attributes of different animals. Which animal’s attributes best apply to your character?

Watch *Land of the Immortals* on the DVD. List all of the symbols mentioned in the DVD and their meaning.

Colour has symbolism in many cultures, but this differs from place to place. Find out about the symbolism of colour in different cultures. Communicate what you have learned in a visual form.

What are the three sacred treasures of Imperial Japan, and what qualities do they represent? What symbols represent the communities you are involved in: personal, local, state and national? What ‘sacred treasures’ would you choose to represent Australia and why? What treasures would you use to represent yourself?

Find out from class members about special cultural objects or items that have symbolic significance to them. Is the symbolism personal or shared?

Use Google Earth to map a tour to the home of the art works pictured. What else can you learn about the place and people?
Clockwise from top left:

Nepalese Mahasamvara and Vajravarahi; Japanese Brazier (Furo), Pot (Kama), Water ladle (Hishaku), Tea bowl (Chawan), Suganuma Michiko Tea caddy (Natsume), Japanese Tea scoop (Chashaku), Water container (Mizusashi) and Whisk (Chasen); Chinese Bowl (Ming dynasty); Nakahara Nantenbo Enso with a poem 1922–23; Hiroshi Sugimoto Winnetka Drive-In, Paramount 1993; Sumbanese Man’s cloth (Hinggi) (detail); Japanese Noble lady’s carriage and a flower cart (Goshoguruma)
Philosophy and Belief

Middle Years (yr 5–yr 8)

Introduction
Belief systems provide ways of ordering the world. They also provide moral and ethical structures to guide human conduct, and to help pave the way to reconciliation with the absolute consciousness. Our collective beliefs can bind us together and identify us as part of a community, but beliefs can also be intensely personal and individual as each of us defines our place in this life and beyond. The many beliefs held throughout Asia tell us about culture, faith, history, geography and politics, as different schools of thought have made their way with people and through trade across the region. Often, religious or philosophical ideas have been adapted to accommodate local practices. Objects frequently reflect the complex mixture of beliefs, religions, philosophies or practices observed by the society that produces them.

Values and beliefs are sometimes evident in the appearance of ‘everyday’ objects: the pure, simple forms of Korean Joseon dynasty ceramics, for example, embody the values of austerity and frugality taught by Confucianism. Provision of mingqi (objects for the afterlife) for the deceased in ancient China attests not only to a belief in continuity of the spirit and a realm beyond the physical, but also to belief in the Confucian value of filial piety – devotion to one’s elders.

Some objects aim to physically represent divine beings or spiritual concepts. Sculptures of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara illustrate the concepts of spiritual growth, rebirth and compassion for all living things, to inspire good behaviour and to connect the viewer with true wisdom.

The manifestation of aspects of the divine in nature is shown in the Svayambhu linga and in the sculpture of the tree goddess Salabhanjika, both of which are used to invoke and celebrate the creative energies of the universe. The watercolour painting Maharana Sangram Singh and his son at a Shiva shrine shows the worship of Shiva (in the form of a linga) in practice. In the depiction of himself and his son at worship, the Maharana affirms his Hindu faith and his position as divinely ordained king.

Explore
Avalokiteshvara and Guanyin both represent the same bodhisattva or enlightened being. What is meant by ‘enlightenment’? How do you explain the differences in the way the bodhisattva is portrayed? How does each portrayal add to your understanding of the bodhisattva and the beliefs he/she represents?

Look closely at the image of the Maharana Sangram Singh II and his son at a Shiva shrine. What is the purpose of the artwork? How does the artist use colour, line, pattern and space to serve this purpose?

Consider your beliefs. What are they? Where do they come from? How are they evident in your life?

What is the relationship between philosophy, belief and religion?

Create
The mandala is often used as a tool to map and contemplate the world of the spirit. It can be created out of many different materials. Find out more about mandalas. Working alone or in a team, create your own mandala as an object for peaceful meditation. Look at the images of the Indian rangoli on the DVD. How are they similar to mandalas?

The Tang dynasty Guardian spirit that also represents Tubo, guardian of the Underworld, combines the attributes of many different creatures. Identify the creatures used. Design and make your own guardian figure that utilises the attributes of different creatures to give it power. What attributes have you included and for what reason?

The events we celebrate highlight what we value and believe. What events are celebrated in your community? Create an artwork, an animation, a short film or a descriptive piece of writing that depicts a cultural or religious celebration that you enjoy. Show as much detail as you can of participants and key aspects of the celebration.

Investigate
The practice of meditation forms a large part of Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Daoist practices. Find out about the purpose of meditation, techniques of meditation and scientific research into its benefits.

Go to the Australian Bureau of Statistics website and using Census data, investigate the different religious affiliations held in your local and wider community. Organise an interview with a representative of one faith group to find out more about their faith. Share your findings with your class.

Find out about different mudras or hand positions used in representations of the Buddha and bodhisattvas. What is their significance? Find similar symbolic gestures in other faiths. When are they used? What similarities do you notice? What are the differences?

How is an object such as the Svayambhu linga used? Find an image or video clip of a puja or Hindu worship for a linga. How does seeing the puja change your view of the linga? What is the role of ritual in belief and worship? What rituals do you observe in your own life? What function do they serve?
Clockwise from top left: 
Korean Bowl, Vase, Bowl and Dragon jar; Chinese Guardian spirit; Chinese Female attendant; Indian Maharana Sangram Singh II and his son at a Shiva shrine c.1715 (detail); Indian Tree goddess, Salabhanjika; Chinese Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin); Tibeto-Chinese Avalokiteshvara; Indian Svyayambhu linga
Materials and Techniques

Middle Years (yr 5–yr 8)

Introduction
In addition to giving an artwork its aesthetic and physical qualities, the materials and techniques used by artists and craftspeople through the ages give us insight into society, culture, technology and trade. Particular techniques can identify a region or culture. *Mingei* (folk arts) of Japan are often made from local materials and formed and decorated in distinctive regional style. Similarly, the Shigaraki jar, named after one of the six ancient kiln centres of medieval Japan, shows the distinctive character of its region. The sandy clay it is made from, the speckled irregularities of its surface, the natural flows of glaze and uneven colouring all reveal the power and drama of the firing process.

Trade routes such as the Silk Road, which stretched from China to the Mediterranean, promoted the trade of silk and other goods throughout much of Asia, but also fostered the exchange of ideas and innovation, often with far reaching impact. The Persian Samanid dynasty *Bowl* shows the use of white clay slip by Persian artists, to imitate the beauty of porcelain, imported to the Middle East from China.

Materials can often take on their own importance. The brush, ink stick, ink stone and paper – the four treasures of the Chinese scholar’s study, while giving particular character to the work, are also emblematic of the traditions and values of the Chinese literati (scholar-official) painters. Brushes were valued for the special properties given by the different kinds of hair, which came from animals such as rabbit, goat and weasel. Ink sticks were prepared with soot, glue and aromatic spices and herbs (to scent the ink) and shaped into special forms. Ink stones, on which the ink was ground, could be intricately carved artworks in themselves. The best examples of each of these ‘treasures’ were considered highly collectable.

Knowledge of techniques and skilful use of materials frequently confer prestige. The ikat cloth of the Sumbanese people is made using a resist dyeing technique that involves tying or binding bundles of thread. While ikat textiles are found throughout Asia, the secrets of particular dyes used by the Sumbanese gave status to the women who held them. The rituals of production and the trade of these fabrics traditionally involved complex social hierarchies. In Japan, custodians of specialist cultural knowledge and expert practitioners of traditional techniques such as sword making, papermaking, calligraphy and raku ceramics are designated as Living National Treasures and also accorded special honours.

Explore
Compare the Neolithic pot and the Shigaraki jar. Which qualities do they share? What is different? Which one looks the more recent? How does the Shigaraki jar reflect the values of the time in which it was made? How do the technique and materials used reflect these values?

Look closely at all of the selected works. What is the effect of each of the different materials used? Why do you think these materials were chosen to produce the object?

Watch *The Moon in Reflection* on the art of Kim Hoa Tram on the DVD. What materials does the artist use? How do the characteristics of the materials affect the look of the work? How is Kim Hoa Tram’s philosophy evident in his work?

Create
Use modelling wax or plasticine to create a model for casting. Try carving a sculpture from a block of soap, soft stone or chalk. Which material is easier to use? Which technique allows for more detail?

Design and make a storage pot from clay. Use the technique of coiling to create your pot. What characteristics would the pot need to be effective for storage?

Make a storage vessel from recycled materials. What qualities does the material add to the finished work?

Investigate
Find out about the traditional techniques used for making paper, ink and brushes. How are these materials produced today? Find out about local (Australian) producers of paper.

How did ancient potters fire their wares? Find out about different types of kilns. What is a climbing kiln? What is a cave kiln? Find a video of a raku firing. How is the firing process evident in the final result?

What is the difference between earthenware and stoneware? What are the special qualities of porcelain?

Find out about the Silk Road. Who used it, when, where and for what?

How might tourism and globalisation affect the production of traditional items such as Sumbanese ikat textiles?

What items does Australia export? Where do they go? What is imported and from where? What does this tell us about our society and time?
Clockwise from top left:
Japanese Suit of armour (Yoroi); Munakata Shikō Upāli, Samantabhadra and Pūrnamātrāyanīputra from Two Bodhisattvas and ten great disciples of Sakya 1939; Sumbanese Man’s cloth (Hingga) (detail); Chinese Jar Neolithic period; Kim Hoa TRAM Awakening 2002; Japanese Jar Muromachi period; Persian Bowl
Power and Politics

Later Years (yr 9–yr 10)

Introduction
Artworks, artefacts and objects, including clothing and costume can evoke allusions to power and authority, status, class, gender, politics, belief systems, values, philosophy and/or religion. Examining the social context of these objects provides insights into a particular time and culture. Distinct use of materials and techniques, embedded signs and symbols, script or language, and the purpose and function of a work can also add new meaning.

Chinese calligraphy is distinctive, and revered for the expressive and aesthetic qualities found in the brushwork. Subtle nuances hidden in the language, read aloud, can allude to alternative meanings. The Chinese language has more words than sounds, and one sound can have several meanings. Depending on the tone or sound, Chinese language contains puns, double entendres and metaphors. This made it possible for amateur-scholars to express their frustration with the reigning power of the Emperor and his court through the use of calligraphy and symbolism, as in the autobiographical work of Chen Hongshou. Zhang Huan is far less subtle in his intention in his photograph from the series Shanghai family tree, 2001. He uses calligraphy to progressively obliterate his own face, and those of his friends, as a form of political protest against the power of authority and the destruction of the urban environment.

Ornamentation and decoration on the clothing of the wearer may express political status or affiliation denoting class and rank. The sumptuous Emperor’s semi-formal court robe (Jifu) of the Qing dynasty proclaims his authority. It evokes psychological protection through the use of visual, puns and auspicious symbols, symbols of imperial sovereignty and cosmic power, and symbols of good fortune.

The armour of the samurai warrior was not just a means of physical protection, but was a powerful way to express a warrior’s personality and presence worthy of his social position. The dark armour obscured the humanity of the individual wearer and presented to the viewer, or potential opponent, a formidable force and power through the design of the helmet and symbols of power.

Power and politics underlie the novel The Tale of Genji written by Murasaki Shikibu. In Tosa Mitsunori’s album, illustrating part of the story, we are given a glimpse into life in the eleventh century Heian Court in Kyoto and the exploits of the Prince Genji, who is admired for his poetry skills and revered for his charms and good looks. The story traces his meteoric rise in rank and influence.

History confers power on an object that was not intended during the time it was created. For example, Vietnamese ceramics produced for daily use, local markets, trade and use in Buddhist temples and monasteries can now be re-evaluated and admired for the diversity of their aesthetic qualities.

Explore
Look at the calligraphy and read the curator’s interpretation of the work by Chen Hongshou. What character and word is repeated in his hanging scroll? What is Chen attempting to emphasise by the repetition of this character?

Compare the calligraphy by Chen Hongshou to the image Shanghai family tree by Zhang Huan. What are the similarities and differences in the use of materials and techniques? How do the artists individually express their own political point of view? What might the title Shanghai family tree add to your understanding of the work?

Look at the Imperial robes featured on the DVD. Discuss the significance given to the meaning of the colour and the use of silk in the Imperial family robes. Identify the following auspicious symbols and their meanings: shou, bat, peaches, swastika. What other meanings have been attributed to the use of the swastika in history?

Refer to the Powerhouse Museum website http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/hsc/evrev/chinese_dress.htm Compare the robes worn by different people. Look at the shape of each robe and determine the purpose and function, and the gender of the intended wearer.

Discuss the difference between an artwork, an artefact and an object. Who classifies what is considered art and what is an artwork?

Create
Look at the Imperial robes diagram on the DVD. Make a chart with all the symbols and their meanings that you have identified in each of the selected works.

Find symbols that have been used throughout history to denote power. What qualities do these symbols share? Use text and image to design a poster to promote your own powerful political message. Display and evaluate the results.

Use your own face or body as a basis to create an artwork. Express your concern over an issue you feel strongly about. Include signs and symbols to add meaning to the work.

Choose a contemporary or current event or issue with which you identify. Explore a range of materials and techniques to create a work of art.

Investigate
Some artists use artwork to protest against either political or social issues. The artists Ah Xian and Ai Weiwei, Ivan Durrant, Mike Parr, Gordon Hookey and the American artist Jean Michel Basquiat, are artists whose work responds to current politics. Investigate one or more of these artists and their artwork.

Politicians frequently use art to convince or promote a point of view. Find examples of political posters. What elements do they have in common?

Compare the armour of the samurai warrior with an image of Darth Vader. What similarities and differences can you find? How are themes of power and politics, or good and evil, explored in contemporary film and media? Select a film and analyse how these themes are manifested in the characters portrayed.
Clockwise from top left:
Chen Hongshou Plum-blossom study after 1644 (detail); ZHANG Huan Shanghai family tree 2001; Chinese Emperor’s semi-formal court robe (Jifu); Japanese Suit of armour (Yoroi); Vietnamese Covered jar, Bowl, Dish, Covered ewer with bowl; Tosa Mitsunori The Tale of Genji 17th century
Culture and Identity

Later Years (yr 9–Yr 10)

Introduction

Objects are a product of their society and time, and provide insights and information about the culture that produced them. When viewing objects in a museum or a gallery we can often lose sight of their original intention or function. For example, *Salabhanjika, The Tree Goddess* (c. 1150–1200) was originally a decorative sculptural bracket in a Hoysala dynasty temple. Invoked as a Hindu fertility symbol, her purpose was to bless worshippers on their journey through the sacred space of the temple, to assist them in their transition from the earthly world. In addition to religious worship, the temples were centres for education, music and dance, and housed courts of justice and treasures. Celebration of the pantheon of deities is a part of Hindu life and culture. The central aim of Hinduism strives for release from the cycle of reincarnation and for ultimate union with the divine absolute.

The *Prabu Suyundana* (early 20th century) is one of many original *wayang kulit* puppets, which are manipulated by the *dalang*, or puppet master to tell a story from the *Mahabharata* epic, an important and enduring work of Hindu literature, significant to Javanese culture. This sharing of story and transformation of knowledge through the interplay of characters has references that guide viewers in moral and spiritual choices. The *wayang kulit* performances reinforce the links between culture and identity. They are enjoyed at all levels of society, and the appearance of the familiar characters to the audience would serve to promote social and cultural ideals.

The use of poetry in the *Khamsa (Quintet) Manuscript* to tell the story of Bahrum Gur, the Sasanian King of Iran (420–438), is based on the Persian tradition of oral story telling most known to the West through the *Thousand and One Nights*. This particular page shows Bahrum Gur sitting with one of the seven princesses who feature in the story, the girl in the white pavilion. The texts and images in Persian manuscripts combine to impart the histories, romances and moral tales that are a feature of Islamic literature.

Important narratives with an insight into the intricacies of human relationships, social customs and emotions are also played out in the woodblock prints of the Edo period, and in the album leaves by Tosa Mitsunori depicting *The Tale of Genji*, a story which has remained so popular in Japan it has been incorporated into many art forms, including hand scrolls, hanging scrolls and folding screens. Through the individual characters portrayed in *The Tale of Genji* we gain insight into the customs and values of eleventh century court society, but also something of contemporary Japan in the manners, customs, poetic nature and gentle observations of the seasons. The author Murasaki Shikibu (c. 973–c. 1014 or c. 1025) was considered to be from a lower ranking class but because of her outstanding literary talent she was able to serve under the Empress Shōshi (988–1074).

Ceremonies are often linked to culture and identity. All aspects of the tea ceremony give us insights into Japanese culture: the contemplation of nature, the practice of meditation, the changing aspects of the seasons, and the importance of ritual. The utensils used were considered subtle art forms appreciated for their aesthetic and tactile qualities, and served to elevate the awakening spirit. Utensils used for making, drinking and appreciating tea can be admired for their aesthetics alone but are understood better when seen used in the context of the Tea Ceremony. The Tea Ceremony provided a profound spiritual experience, characteristic of Japanese culture, aimed at a life of calm and simplicity.

Explore

Use the Internet to explore the purpose of sculpture in the temples of the Hoysala dynasty. How were they made? What were some of the functions of the deities and gods in Indian culture? What are some of the connections between Hindu art and Indian dance?

Examine the facial features of some of the deities in this resource. What do you notice about them? Do they have distinguishing characteristic?

Explore the history of tea making and its origins and influences. Watch the DVD of the Tea Ceremony and list all the implements and vessels that are used. What was their function and purpose?

Create

Using digital media create a self-portrait which reflects your identity and important aspects of your culture.

Create a storyboard for a short film or screen cast about yourself to reflect something of your own identity and culture. Include significant objects, people or places that are important to you.

Investigate

The Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata, Ramayana* and *Upanishads* provided the inspiration for many diverse art forms. Compare two characters from one of these stories. What are some of the identifiable features? How are they represented and what do they symbolise?

There are many symbols for fertility across a diversity of cultures. Use the Internet to research other cultures and symbols of fertility. Are there commonalities? Why do you think fertility was important?

Research the representation of women in Asian art and culture. What aspects of their identity are reflected in how they are depicted?
Clockwise from top left:
Indian Tree goddess, Salabhanjika; Javanese Prabu Suyudana; Persian A page from a Khamsa (Quintet) manuscript: Bahram Gur in the white pavilion; Tosa Mitsunori The Tale of Genji 17th century; Japanese Brazier (Furo), Pot (Kama), Water ladle (Hishoku), Tea bowl (Chawan), Suganuma Michiko Tea caddy (Natsume), Japanese Tea scoop (Chashoku), Water container (Mizusashi) and Whisk (Chasen)
Artists and their Practice

Later Years (yr 9–yr 10)

Introduction
The National Gallery of Victoria’s Asian collection includes a broad representation of techniques and materials covering a range of historical periods, societies and cultures, including calligraphy, painting, prints, bronzes, sculptures, lacquer, jade, glass, furniture and textiles. Some objects are produced by artists working individually, others by artisans working collectively towards a common purpose or function, such as the production of Mingqi or funerary ware, designed to serve the deceased in the afterlife.

Historically, the production of ceramics throughout Asia was a collective process often endorsed by the ruler, or emperor. Certain styles were reserved for specific purposes: court use, daily use, burial practice, or trade. Other styles were revered for their aesthetic qualities. The Shigaraki Jar (15th–16th century), said to have been owned by one of the most influential twentieth century potters, Shōji Hamada (1894–1976), continues to be admired today for its spirit of wabi-sabi: beauty, imperfection, age, simplicity and rustic earthiness.

The contribution of the individual and their artistic practice as singular or unique is a comparatively recent practice. The Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), for example, is widely recognised for his distinctive style. Hokusai referred to himself as ‘a drawing maniac’, spending his days drawing scenes he encountered while travelling throughout Japan. He was a keen observer of people and nature, producing drawings that were unique in their humour and character. One of Hokusai’s most famous images is the ukiya-e woodblock print showing the familiar outline of Mt Fuji, The great wave off Kanagawa (1830).

An abiding interest in exploring religious belief and cultural traditions unites many contemporary artists in their practice. Munakata Shikō (1903–75) draws on the tradition of Japanese woodblock printing to produce his large-scale woodblocks, strongly influenced by Buddhism and Japanese folklore. He also draws on the expressive influence of the artist Vincent Van Gogh’s (1853–90) gestural brushstrokes, in his technique of drawing and carving vigorously into the woodblock to achieve an immediate vitality and dynamism.

Kim Hoa Tram (born 1959) is influenced by Zen Buddhism and captures the essence of his subject using an expressive and energetic style, drawing on the tradition of calligraphy. The work of both Kim Hoa Tram and Munakata Shikō contains a hidden energy that is evocative and suggestive. They appear to produce their artwork effortlessly, but in reality this can only be possible after years of skilful practice.

The influence of philosophy and belief prevails in many artworks. The elements of nature, mountains, rivers and streams, rocks and pine trees abound in the Qing dynasty scroll by the artist Kuncan (1612–74). The painting reflects the artist’s view of nature as a place for retreat and his own meditative practice as a Chan (Zen) Buddhist monk. Kuncan’s Walking through pine trees in bright moonlight is one of the most significant art works in the NGV’s Chinese collection.

Explore
Observe the practice of Kim Hoa Tram on the Moon in Reflection DVD. Select an artwork of your choice and explore the artist’s practice. What evidence do you find of the artist’s individual style? How might the artist’s beliefs and philosophy be evident in the work?

How might the life experiences of Kuncan or Hokusai be reflected in their work?

Create
Using digital media make an artwork that shows an aspect of your outer life, the places you spend time, and the things you often see. Now make an artwork that reveals something of your own inner life, your emotions, thoughts and dreams. How do they differ?

Experiment with different art materials to find which you like best. Why do you prefer the materials you have chosen, and what does this reflect of your character?

Visit the NGV website and view the video of woodblock printing www.ngv.vic.gov.au/ngvschools/Floating World/fweducation/

Woodblock printing can be very complex. Create a diagram or storyboard to explain the process.

Without planning a design, trial the method of carving directly into a wood or lino block. Compare the results, working from a carefully planned design. Analyse the impact of this immediate method of working on the character of the final artwork.

Hokusai’s manga contain witty and wicked observations of people and their beliefs. Produce a series of comical drawings to show something you have observed about people’s behaviour or actions.

Investigate
Philosophy and belief have a strong influence on the artwork of Munakata Shikō and Kim Hoa Tram. Find other artists who are inspired by faith or philosophy. Some possibilities to consider include Bill Viola, Colin McCahon and Ginger Riley Munduwalawala.

Investigate a contemporary Australian artist whose cultural tradition has influenced their artistic practice. Some artists to consider include Constance Zikos, Kate Beynon and Guan Wei.

In contemporary art practice, collaboration can be very important for achieving an individual style or realising an idea. Many of the works by Andy Warhol, Gregory Crewdson and Patricia Piccinini are achieved with the assistance of others. Similarly, many artworks made by Indigenous Australians are the result of collaboration. Research a work of art that is produced in this manner. How is it made, and for what purpose?
Clockwise from top left:
Chinese Female attendant; Munakata Shikō Upāli, Samantabhadra and Pūrnamaitrāyanīputra from Two Bodhisattvas and ten great disciples of Sakya 1939; Katsushika Hokusai The great wave off Kanagawa c.1830; Chinese Jar Neolithic period; Kim Hoa TRAM Awakening 2002; Kuncan Walking through a pine forest in moonlight 1660