

GREAT ART IDEAS FOR TEACHERS

COMPOSITE CREATURES: INSPIRED BY GUARDIAN SPIRITS FROM ANCIENT CHINA

YEAR P-2

OVERVIEW

In this activity students will explore the use of sculptural artworks in Ancient Chinese burial practices and enrich their understanding of the meanings and messages in ritual objects. They will develop analytical and interpretive skills through examining an example of traditional Chinese funerary earthenware. Imagining a unique composite creature of their own, they will produce a collage which represents their ideas.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Discuss the role of art and objects in social and cultural practices and rituals.
- Examine the physical features of a Chinese earthenware sculpture.
- Design a composite creature composed of the body parts of various animals.
- Produce a 2-dimensional collage of a composite creature with coloured paper.
- Describe the physical characteristics and personality traits of their composite creature to the class or a partner.

STUDENT EXAMPLES



RELATED ARTWORKS



CHINESE
Guardian spirit 700 CE–750 CE
earthenware (Sancai ware)
74.4 x 23.4 x 19.5 cm
National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1926

DISCUSS

Look at the related works and use the following discussion prompts to explore the use of art in cultural and social practices with your class:

The ancient Chinese believed in an afterlife, a life in which people who had died would continue to live. The afterlife was believed to co-exist in parallel with the world of the living. Objects and figures were often placed in a person's tomb to guarantee safe passage into the afterlife, and to protect and serve them. Sometimes these objects were real items, and at others, they were models made of clay.

Often when a great Emperor was buried, living animals and even human beings were sacrificed and entombed as a provision for the ruler's afterlife. This ritual was eventually abandoned, and humans, animals, and other precious items and everyday objects were replaced with ceramic replicas for entombment.

Social and cultural practices and rituals

- Which special cultural or religious events and festivals do you observe with your family and friends?
- Which special objects do you use when you participate in these events? What are they for?
- Think about the following people in ancient Chinese history. Which items might they like to take with them into the afterlife?
 - A farmer
 - A warrior
 - An Emperor

What objects are important in people's lives today? Which objects or figures might people today like to take into an afterlife?

The Guardian Spirit

Guardian spirits were protective figures made from earthenware clay composed of lots of parts of different animals. This example has a human face, a bird's wings, an elephant's ears, a lion's body, and legs and hoofs of a deer or horse. The figurine also represents *Tubo*, the earth spirit or lord of the underworld. He has the power to ward off demons and evil spirits and was placed in tombs to guard the body of the deceased ruler.

- What is a guardian? What does a guardian do?
- What is a spirit?
- Describe the Guardian spirit using three words.
- Which different animal parts does the Guardian spirit have?
Examine each body part in turn.
- Why do you think the artist created a guardian spirit to look like this?
- How might each of the different animal parts help it to be a good protector?
Consider which physical abilities and personality traits it would need to be an effective guardian.

- If you could create a guardian to protect something in your life what might it look like? What would it protect?

Read more about ancient Chinese burial practices and related works in the NGV's collection here:

https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/school_resource/asian-art-resource/

<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/in-search-of-immortality-provisions-for-the-afterlife/>

RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- Pictures of various animals (digital or printed copies)
- Paper and pencils
- A4 sheets of coloured paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Black markers
- Black A3 paper

CREATE

Students design and create their composite creature artwork through the following steps:

1. Look at images of various animals for ideas and inspiration. Decide which animal body parts will be included in your design.
Consider its physical characteristics, personality traits and its purpose (what will it protect?).
2. Sketch a plan of your composite creature collage.
Your drawing should look like an imaginary animal composed of different body parts from different animals.
3. Collect some coloured paper for your collage.
Use a different colour for each body part.
4. With a pencil, draw or trace each animal body part onto the coloured paper.
Be careful to draw each part to scale so that each part will fit together when you create the collage.
5. When you are happy with your pencil drawings, go over each one with a black marker. Use black marker to add textural details such as scales. Experiment with using both thin and thick markers to create interesting visual effects.
6. Cut out each of the body parts and arrange them on a black piece of paper
7. Glue them down to complete your composite animal collage.
8. Finally, give your unique creature a name.

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