

Art Adventure

Let's Celebrate Life



Burkina Faso (Bwa),
Plank mask, about 1960

● **Become a member of the museum today!**

Thank you for participating in the Minneapolis Institute of Art's popular Art Adventure Program! By volunteering as a Picture Person, you build an important link between the museum and our region's schoolchildren.

By becoming a member of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, you can reach even further, bringing the experience of world-class art to thousands of museum visitors a year – some visiting for the first time ever, and many of them schoolchildren. Members help support the museum's free general admission every day. Members also help support the exhibitions, lectures, events, and classes offered for children, families, students, and adults.

As a member of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, you'll enjoy access to special exhibitions, savings, incentives, and information.

For more information or to join, please call the Members' Hotline at (612) 870-6323 (toll-free (888) 642-2787), or visit our website at www.artsmia.org.

● **What are you doing next Family Day?**

Family Days at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts are free monthly events that highlight the museum's collection and special exhibitions for art lovers of all ages. The second Sunday each month, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., the museum is filled with hands-on art activities, live music, dance performances, artist demonstrations, family tours, and more. All activities are free and appropriate for children of all ages. Visit our website, www.artsmia.org, for specific Family Day dates, themes, and descriptions.

About the Art Adventure Program

What's the Art Adventure Program?

The Art Adventure Program at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts is a way of bringing works of art that can't leave the museum into elementary school classrooms. Each of the ten Art Adventure reproduction sets features eight works of art chosen around a theme of particular interest to children. Students and teachers are encouraged to follow up classroom presentations with a class visit to the museum to see the actual artworks. They can take a tour with an Art Adventure Guide or with their teacher using a self-guide brochure available from the museum.

What's a Picture Person?

Picture People are the volunteers from the school community who present the reproductions in the classrooms. They are the vital link between the original work of art in the museum and children in the schools. Before they visit any classrooms, Picture People come to the museum for a training session on the reproduction set their school will be using that year. At training they receive printed background material, learn presentation techniques, and—most importantly—experience the enjoyment of interacting with the original objects they will soon be introducing to students.

What does a Picture Person Presentation consist of?

Each participating school structures its Picture Person presentations differently. A Picture Person may present pairs of images in a series of short visits; all the images at once in a single, longer visit; or some other schedule arranged by the school's Art Adventure Coordinator. The presentation may consist only of a discussion or it may involve hands-on activities. In addition, Picture People bring their own individual creativity to their presentations.

Whatever the format, however, one essential characteristic is constant: the Picture Person encourages the children first and foremost to **look** at the reproduction and **talk** about what they see. Although the Picture Person is knowledgeable about the works of art, she or he facilitates the discussion with thoughtful open-ended questions and related props rather than delivering "lecture"-style information.

What does the Art Adventure Program do for kids?

Picture Person presentations provide students with a rare opportunity to spend time looking at art and express what they see in words. Students gain confidence in their ability to find meaning in artifacts from a wide range of world cultures. They practice seeing things from another person's point of view, whether it's their classmate's or the artist's. They feel the thrill of meeting an old friend when they later come upon familiar objects at the museum. And, not least, they enjoy meaningful contact with a visiting member of the school community.

Preparing for a Picture Person Presentation

Relax!

The information provided in this manual is intended as background material to help you feel comfortable when you present the images to children. You are not expected to convey all the details. On the contrary; choose two or three key ideas you think will be compelling for the age group to which you are presenting. Kids love stories—what might you “spin” into a tale? What parallels can you draw with their lives?

Be sure everyone is able to see the reproduction.

Talk with the classroom teacher to find out what routines the class follows when gathering for a visitor. Young groups will often sit on the floor; older students may remain at their desks. Try for a setup that will get the students as close to the reproduction as possible. Keep the students’ eyes on you, too, by making regular eye contact throughout the group.

Establish a climate where students can listen to what each child has to say.

It is very difficult to listen to more than one person at the same time. Let the kids know at the outset that you expect them to take turns speaking. (If you don’t know the children’s names already, arrange with the teacher to have them wear nametags so you can call on them by name.) Paraphrasing what is said emphasizes that you are really listening and encourages them to listen to one another. Your rephrasing may also help expand their vocabulary. Take care to remember, however, that aesthetic judgments are personal and inexact—set your own preferences aside to allow students to form their own opinions.

Begin your presentation of each image with a long moment of silent looking.

Introduce the lesson by explaining who you are and that you have brought reproductions of real works of art from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Review with the class what a museum is and what you’ll be doing with them. Then make a show out of getting the class to understand that their first job is to look quietly. You might build the suspense by keeping each image hidden while you explain that you do not want them even to raise their hands until you ask them to. Model your expectations by spending the time looking too.

Give children time to talk about what they have discovered by looking.

Good questions to use are "What's going on here?" and "What do you see that makes you say that?" Be sure to use your finger to point to the part of the picture the child is talking about. Paraphrase his or her words to clarify the observation for others. You'll be surprised how quickly students learn to justify their comments with evidence they can see in the picture, with a little prompting. "What else can you find?" can help generate further comments. See the "Tips for Talking about Art" following this section for more ideas.

Connect your key ideas to the students' observations.

When the student's observations begin to slow down, use what you have learned about their interests to steer the discussion towards the key ideas you have chosen to focus on. Try to ask questions that will draw connections between what they have said and what you would like them to consider. If they pose questions you can't answer, admit it! Brainstorm together ways to find an explanation.

Keep the age of your audience in mind.

A child's interests and understandings evolve through generally predictable stages of development. Plan your presentations accordingly. Don't expect young children to be able to focus for more than twenty minutes. Consider your class's ability to understand time—will students understand a date or phrase such as "colonial times" (fifth graders might) or should you stick with "a long time ago" or "about 100 years ago"? At the same time, try not to talk down to older students.

You can expect developmental differences in children's aesthetic approaches to art, as well. Younger children will accept abstraction, while older children tend to demand a high degree of realism. Remember, too, that it's hard for young viewers to look "through" subject matter to notice compositional devices until preadolescence. And it's surprising to us as adults that children generally do not notice the emotional overtones of a work until the middle years of childhood. (Find out more about the stages of aesthetic development in *Invented Worlds*, by Ellen Winner, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.)

Talk to other Picture People and use your own imagination!

Veteran Picture People have great ideas about how to capture the imagination of a class. Don't hesitate to borrow and adapt their suggestions. In addition, several Art Adventure sets come with "prop kits," an assortment of supplementary materials for you to use in your presentation. Talk to your school's Art Adventure Coordinator to see if the set you are using comes with props.

Tips for Talking about Art

Remember, a key goal of the Art Adventure program is to help beginning viewers create personal meaning in a work of art. While your impulse may be immediately to begin "teaching," more is gained in the long run if you take the time to help the children establish an emotional connection with the art. The questions below help kids find their own relevance in works of art, and thereby learn to value art as having something to do with their own lives.

**What's going on in this picture?
What do you see that makes you say that?**

These simple questions work particularly well with artworks that have a narrative thread. You'll notice this question is different than, "What do you see?" Instead of eliciting a list of things in the picture, "What's going on?" invites a consideration of relationships and interactions and taps into children's natural interest in stories. The question, "What do you see that makes you say that?" focuses comments on the evidence at hand and helps kids explain their assumptions.

How would you feel if you were "in" this work of art?

What would you hear? How would something feel to touch? What path would you take through the picture? What do you see that makes you say that? Imagining the picture as an environment engages all the senses. The expressive qualities of a work become more concrete, easier to relate to.

How is this object like something you encounter in *your* life?

What would you use this for? What do you see that makes you say that? Do you have anything like it? Why do you like to have pictures of yourself? Why do you buy postcards on vacation? Drawing parallels with children's experiences gives them a hook on which to hang new information. Identifying similarities helps illuminate differences as well.

What person or object in this picture do you think was most important to the artist?

What are people in the picture looking at? What has a lot of details? Where are there bright colors? What is biggest? Talking about what makes things seem important in a work of art can allow even a novice to address basic compositional principles.

How would the artwork seem different if you could make a change?

What would happen if you changed a color? Made something bigger or smaller? Moved an object or person? Left something out? Added more details? Changed the quality of a line? Imagining changes helps identify visual elements and their contribution to the overall effect of the image.

How is this work of art like or different from another one you've seen in this set?

"Compare and contrast" is a staple of art historical thinking, but it can be done by anybody, at any level of thinking. Get together with your fellow volunteers to coordinate some provocative pairs.

How does this work of art relate to the theme of the set?

Let the students pull it all together! What connections do they see between the theme and what they've noticed and learned about the work of art?

Want to take it further?

Have a look at *The Intelligent Eye: Learning to Think by Looking at Art*, by David N. Perkins (Santa Monica, Calif.: The J. Paul Getty Trust, 1994), a very readable guide on how and why to look carefully at art.

Another good book is *Take a Look: An Introduction to the Experience of Art*, by Rosemary Davidson (New York: Viking, 1994). Written for young readers, it provides a nice example of how to talk with children about art.

Tips for Using Props

Why props?

Students normally first encounter the Art Adventure works of art in their classrooms as 20 x 22-inch reproductions. In the reproductions, all the works of art appear to be two-dimensional and similar in size. Props accompany many of the reproductions to help overcome this limitation. Touching a material similar to the work of art, seeing the technique used to create it, or looking at a photograph in which the object is being used adds another dimension to the reproduction of the work of art. The use of props also helps engage learners who prefer hands-on learning styles, and reinforces the understandings of all learners.

What are the challenges of props?

Be aware that props will do little but distract your group without careful planning. Consideration of the following points can prevent group management challenges from undermining the benefits of props:

- What understanding about the work of art does the prop best illustrate? Present the prop in conjunction with information about a work of art or to help answer a question about the work of art.
- How will you structure the group's interaction with the prop?
There are a number of ways to use the prop. Among the variations:
 - Pass the prop around to each student. If you do it this way, give the students a question to consider while they are waiting for the prop and one to consider after they have held the prop. Encourage the students to be ready for discussion when the prop finishes circulating.
 - Ask a single student to come forward and describe how it feels to the whole group.
 - Hold the prop yourself and walk it around the group for the students to touch or look at closely. What should the students be doing while you're doing that?
 - Hold the prop yourself to illustrate relevant parts of the discussion. Then give everyone a chance to examine it more closely at the end of your presentation.
- How will you explain to the group what you expect them to do with the prop? Clear communication of your expectations is essential to getting the students to stay focused on the activity. Will they all get to touch the prop? How should they take turns? What should they do when it's not their turn? How should they treat the prop?
- How will you link the experience with the prop to the rest of the discussion? After the students have explored the prop in some fashion, refer to the experience as you continue the discussion.
- How will you get the prop back? Don't forget to plan how you'll get the props back! Schools are charged significant fees for missing or badly damaged props.

Let's Celebrate Life

**Art Adventure Program
An Educational Program of the
Minneapolis Institute of Arts
Revised 2014**

Let's Celebrate Life

Prop Kit Contents

<u>Work of Art</u>	<u>Prop</u>	<u>Replacement Cost</u>
Tony Berlant, <i>Pacific</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sample of sheet metal affixed to plywood 	\$15
Lakota, <i>Dress</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sample of leather ● Container of glass beads 	\$15 \$10
Chinese, <i>Commemorative Gate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Photograph of entire gate 	\$10
Paul Signac, <i>Blessing of the Tuna Fleet at Groix</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sample painted canvas 	\$30
Iatmul, <i>Kundu (Hand Drum)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Photograph of men using kundu drums 	\$10
John Singer Sargent, <i>The Birthday Party</i>	No prop	
Bwa, <i>Plank Mask</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Photograph of plank masks in use 	\$10
India, <i>Shiva Nataraja</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Samples of bronze 	\$40

Please make sure that you have enclosed all of the items on this list when you return the prop kit. You will be responsible for the cost of replacing any missing items. Thank you!

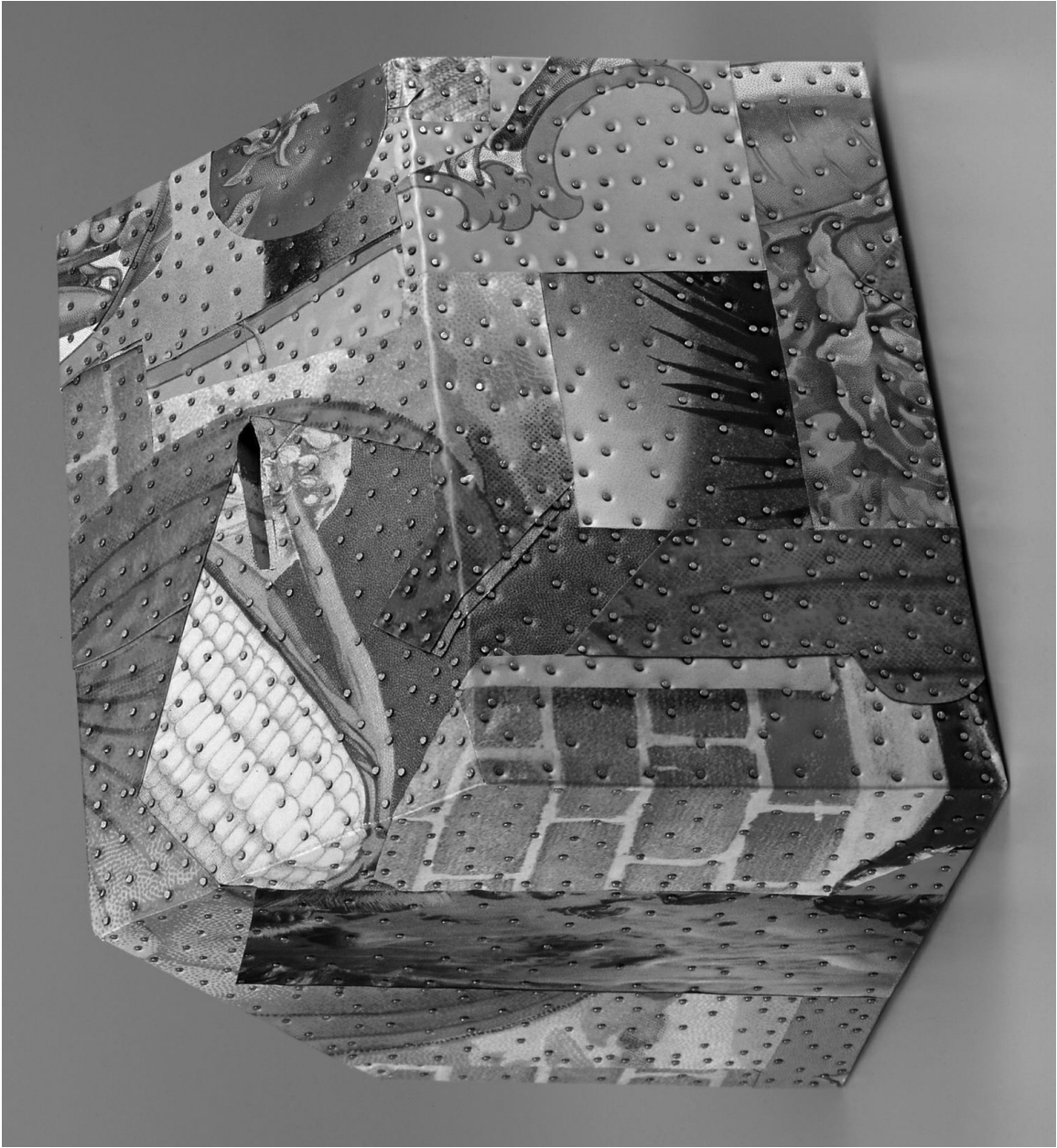
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Introduction

Holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, seasons and transitions—occasions for celebration! *Let's Celebrate Life* looks at eight objects from around the world to explore the ways in which people commemorate the special times in their lives. Whether it is the festive atmosphere of a communal holiday, the solemn ceremony of a sacred ritual, or a private moment to mark a personal milestone, celebrations bring people together. The artworks represented in this set illustrate the similarities and differences in how and why humans celebrate. *Let's Celebrate Life* examines each object as a unique work of art, reflecting the character of the time and place in which it was produced.



Tony Berlant, American, born 1941

“Pacific” from the Tzedakah Box series, 1998

Metal, plywood, steel

H.8¼ x W.8¼ x D.6⅝ inches

The John R. Van Derlip Fund, by exchange, 98.138

Key Ideas

Tony Berlant’s alms box, *Pacific*, celebrates the enduring Jewish tradition of charitable giving. The top of the box is inscribed with the Hebrew word *tzedakah* ([t]seh-**dah**-kah) which means “righteous deeds.” Tzedakah boxes are used to collect money for the poor, homeless, and those in need. In *Pacific*, Berlant has transformed pieces of discarded TV trays, wastebaskets, and old commercial signs into a contemporary alms box to create a work of art with a message of justice and charity.

Celebrating through Charitable Deeds

Tzedakah is the practice of giving alms, or assistance, to the poor and is one of the oldest and most sacred of Jewish traditions. Tzedakah boxes, called *pushke* (**push**-kah) in the Yiddish language, are containers for collecting charitable funds. Traditionally, every Jewish home had a pushke. Tzedakah pushke, which come in many shapes and sizes, are also found in synagogues, cemeteries, and other public places.

Jews often practice tzedakah, or righteous deeds, to mark important occasions. Donations are given to celebrate with the joyful at weddings, as well as to console mourners at funerals. Customarily, women put money into the pushke before lighting the candle for the Sabbath, the Jewish holy day. By depositing coins in the pushke, children are taught the practice of tzedakah at a very early age.

Giving to others is considered a duty to be performed with grace, kindness, and humility. The highest form of charity is given anonymously, to preserve the recipient’s dignity. This concept inspired Berlant when he created his *Tzedakah Box series*.

Tzedakah Box Series

Berlant created five boxes for the *Tzedakah Box series* to convey the Jewish concept of charity. The artworks are functioning alms boxes, complete with deposit slot and an opening on the bottom for removing the coins. For *Pacific*, Berlant used a sink stopper as the coin stop on the bottom. However, because Berlant’s boxes are so highly prized, they are not currently being used for tzedakah. Berlant said he called this box *Pacific* because he lives on the Pacific coast in California, which he enjoys.

House Imagery in Berlant's Art

The house is a central, recurring image in Berlant's work. He began making metal cubes, which evolved into the archetypal house-shape—a box form with a peaked roof. Berlant's houses are simple, comforting, toy-like shapes, which are solid and inviting. For Berlant, the house is a symbol that transcends all cultures, ages, and geographies. It is imbued with a sense of wholeness. He said the house is a powerful image because "...everyone needs to have their own place in the world."

Berlant recognizes that shelter, privacy, security, and comfort are basic human needs. *Pacific* is filled with references to these needs. The bricks, windows, door, and roof are fundamental architectural references to shelter. Images of vegetables—pumpkin, corn, peas, tomato, carrot—refer to food and nourishment, as well as spiritual sustenance. They symbolize the bounty that is meant to be shared with others.

Berlant explains the door and windows as symbolic passages between the inner and outer worlds, transcending time and culture. One window is filled with the image of sky and palm branch. The imagery on the other window and door is a rushing stream. The doors and windows are metaphors for what Berlant describes as "transitions between life and death, the secular and spiritual world."

Transforming Old into New

Tony Berlant sees art in everything. He collects the metal to create his artworks from old candy and cookie tins, TV trays, wastebaskets, old commercial signs, and such. He does not paint or alter the surface of the metal in any way, but changes the context of the materials by cutting them up and reapplying them to a new structure. Berlant said, "I make my work of artifacts... There's delight that you can go out and pick up discredited materials and make something out of them."

Materials and Construction

While Berlant was still in college studying art, he became interested in collage, the method of applying forms to another surface to create a composition. He found the metal for his earliest collages when a neighborhood grocery store discarded old tin signs. In constructing *Pacific*, Berlant hammered pieces of tin to a plywood structure with small steel nails, or brads. The colorful tin fragments are attached with a regular pattern of brads that resemble the "stitches" of a patchwork quilt. The patchwork quality evolved from a similarly-patched birdhouse he found in the 1960s.

Spiritual Connections

Berlant is a noted collector of Navajo blankets and ancient southwestern Mimbres pottery, which he once called "spirit lines" or "love notes from a distant culture." He is drawn to the spiritual content of these objects as well as their beauty. Berlant believes art should be *about* something—have some purpose beyond itself. In this way, it seems natural that *Pacific* carries a universal message of tzedakah.

EXTEND THE DISCUSSION:

See “*Tips for Talking about Art*” in the introductory pages for more ideas.

Look

What words or phrases would you use to describe this box?

What do you think the box might be used for? What do you see that makes you say that?

What do you think it is made of? How would it feel if you could touch it? What do you see that makes you think so?

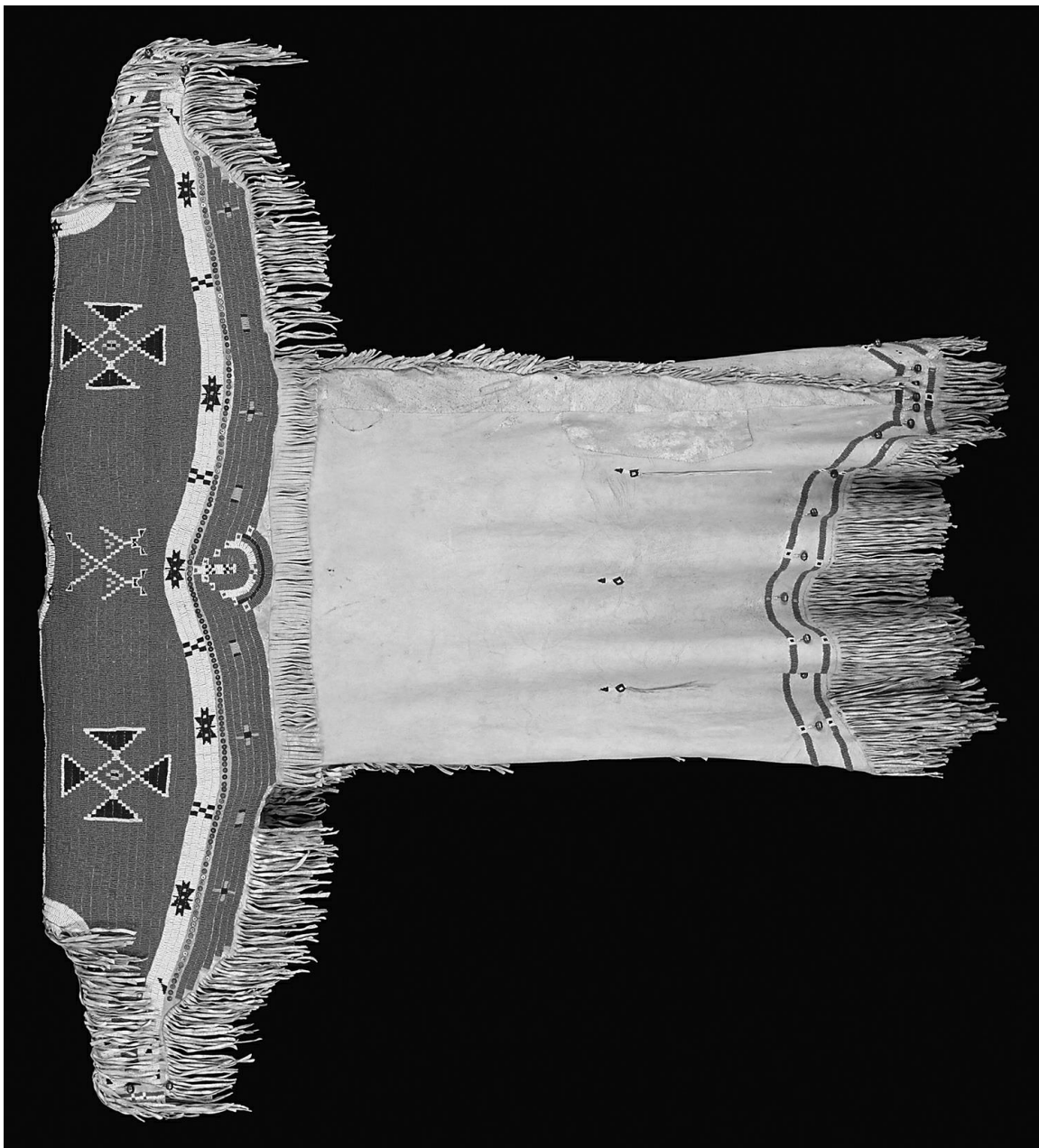
Think

What would you do with this box if you owned it? Why?

Alms boxes are used to collect money to help people in need. Can you think of ways in which you help others?

Tony Berlant often uses the “house” as a symbol in his art work. Why do you think he might consider the house an important symbol? What does a “house” mean to you?

The image of a “house” is important to Tony Berlant because it represents security and comfort. If you made your own alms box, what shape would you make it? Why? What kinds of things would you decorate it with? Why?



Lakota (North American, United States, Great Plains region)

Dress, c. 1880–1900

Leather, cotton, copper disks, bells, glass beads

51 inches long

Gift of James David and John David, 74.64.5

Key Ideas

A Lakota (Lah-**ko**-tah) woman once wore this beaded animal-hide dress for special occasions. Like many traditional Lakota dresses, this one is decorated with the turtle-by-the-shore-of-the-lake design. The Lakota consider the turtle a sacred animal because of its role in their creation story.

The Lakota Creation Story

The story of sacred turtle is shared by many American Indian tribes from the Great Plains. The story is told like this:

There was another world before this one, but the people of that world did not behave. Displeased, Creator set out to make a new world. He sang several ceremonial songs to bring rain, which poured stronger with each song. As he sang the fourth song, the earth split apart and water gushed up through many cracks, causing a flood. By the time the rain stopped, all the people and nearly all the animals had drowned. Only Kangi the crow survived.

Kangi pleaded with Creator to make a new place to rest. So Creator decided to make a new world. From his huge, sacred pipe bag, which also contained all types of animals and birds, Creator selected four animals known for their ability to remain under the water for a long time. He sent each in turn to retrieve a lump of mud from beneath the floodwaters.

First the loon dove deep into the dark waters, but was unable to reach the bottom. The otter, even with its strong webbed feet, also failed. Next, the beaver used its large flat tail to propel itself deep under the water, but it too was unsuccessful. Finally Creator took turtle from his pipe bag and urged it to bring back some mud. Turtle stayed under the water for so long that everyone was sure it had drowned. Then, with a splash, turtle broke the water's surface! Mud filled its feet and claws and the cracks between its upper and lower shells.

Singing, Creator shaped the mud in his hands and spread it on the water where it was just big enough for him and the crow. He then shook two long, powerful eagle feathers over the mud until the earth spread wide and varied, overcoming the waters. Feeling sadness for the dry land, Creator cried tears that became oceans, streams, and lakes. For Creator knew that for life to continue, a balance of dry land and water was needed. He named the new land Turtle Continent.

Creator then took many animals and birds from the great pipe bag and spread them across the earth. From the earth he made men and women. Creator gave the people his sacred pipe and instructed them to live a good life with a good heart. He warned them about the fate of the

people who came before them. He promised all would be well if all beings lived in harmony. But the world would be destroyed again if they made it bad and ugly.

The Meaning of the Turtle Symbol

For many peoples of the Great Plains, the turtle's central role in the creation story made it a powerful symbol with spiritual significance. Women often wore turtle images for protection and help with childbirth and to remain healthy. Turtle symbols decorated women's dresses, leggings, and bags, as well as baby cradles and special amulets for baby girls.

The turtle-by-the-shore-of-the-lake design appears on the beaded yoke, the part of the dress that drapes over the shoulders (see illustration). At the center of the yoke, resting over the wearer's heart, is a U-shaped motif that symbolizes the breast of sacred turtle. The broad blue area on the yoke symbolizes the sky reflected in a prairie lake, turtle's home. The narrow white strip below symbolizes the lakeshore. Some designs used by Lakota women were regarded merely as designs to delight the eye, with no spiritual significance. However, the two large diamond shapes may represent stars reflected in the water at twilight. The three triangular shapes directly above turtle may reflect the tipis of a distant camp reflected across the water.

Many of the complex Lakota designs appeared to the women who produced them in a vision or dream. The women who received the dreams were thought to have special powers. Some women dreamed entire finished designs.

Lakota *Dress* Worn for Celebration

By the late 19th century, the people of the Great Plains had adopted Euro-American clothing styles for daily use, but they often wore traditional garments for formal occasions. This traditional Lakota dress was such a "best dress."

A Lakota woman may have worn this dress for traditional dancing. When women danced in dresses like this they often moved in a slow, steady rhythm causing the fringe to sway and the bells to jingle. Traditional Plains dances performed by women emphasize control, continuity, and beauty. Many Lakota women still wear traditional dresses for dancing and special occasions.

The Spirit of the *Dress*

To the Lakota, animal hides provide more than just material for clothing. They believe the hides embody the spirit power of the animals from which they came. Wearing the hide symbolizes the powerful spiritual bond between animals and people. Embellishing a hide with decoration honors the spirit of the animal and thanks it for giving its life. Characteristics of the animal are accentuated out of remembrance and respect. For example, the sleeves are cut and beaded in such a way as to emphasize the shape of the hind legs. The U-shape, which represents turtle, is also likely a reference to the animal's tail (see illustration). Traditionally men hunted the animals and women tanned the hides, cut and sewed the skins, and crafted the beadwork.

The woman who made this dress used the skins of three animals, probably elk, in a specific Lakota style. Two skins were used to make the skirt and a third to make the yoke. It is likely

that the finely worked yoke once belonged to another dress. When its skirt became worn, the yolk was re-used, an indication of its esteem.

Traditions and Change

Great Plains women used seed beads to decorate clothing and other personal items. On this dress, the yoke, blue bands around the bottom, and small diamond-shaped designs on the front are all made of tiny, colored glass beads. Euro-American traders called them seed beads because they resembled early native beads made from real seeds. Seed beads, along with hundreds of other types of glass beads, were used for trade throughout North America since the 17th century.

Since about 1860, dresses with beaded yokes were popular among the Lakota women who readily incorporated the European trade beads into their traditional designs. The tiny beads soon replaced quill embroidery as applied decoration. Quill embroidery, done with porcupine quills, was difficult and time consuming. Quills first had to be removed from the porcupine, softened in water, dyed, and flattened. The quills were attached to the garment by folding the flattened quills in a criss-cross pattern over two parallel lines of sinew thread, creating woven rows of quill decoration.

Beads, in contrast, were relatively durable, available in a wide range of colors and needed no preparation. Women applied seed beads by sewing them directly onto the hide or fabric. As on this dress, several glass beads were strung on a string and then stitched down at marked intervals with cotton thread. Small bells around the hem and cuffs and a row of tiny copper discs sewn on the yoke also decorate this dress. Finely-worked beading and quill embroidery remain highly admired Lakota skills.

The Lakota Traditions Endure

The Lakota, also known as Sioux, once inhabited the northern woodlands, but were forced westward to the plains by European settlers and other native groups. By the 19th century, Euro-American settlers had overrun the plains, decimating the buffalo herds, and impeding the nomadic way of life for the Lakota. Many of the Plains groups were forced into sedentary life on the reservations.

Ironically, the forced immobility of reservation life spurred a golden age in Lakota beadwork. Beaded objects soon became highly valued in the tourist market. Creations like this dress demonstrate the Lakota people's ability to embrace and reshape the materials of another culture to reflect their own artistic and cultural identity.

EXTEND THE DISCUSSION:

See “*Tips for Talking about Art*” in the introductory pages for more ideas.

Look

What do you think this dress is made of? What do you see that makes you say that?

Do you think this dress was difficult to make? Why or why not? Which part of this dress do you think was the *most* difficult to make?

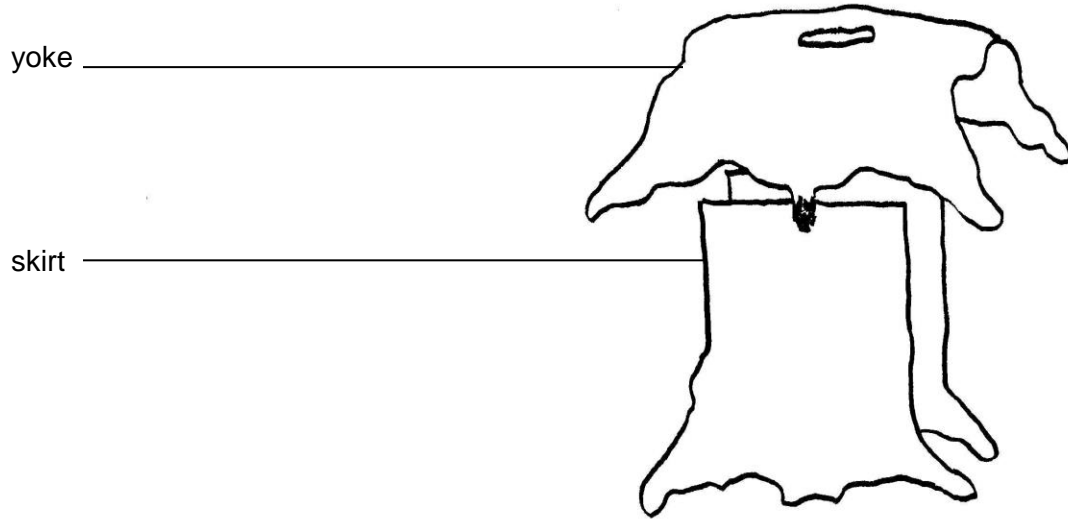
What do you think is the most important part of this dress? What do you see that makes you say that?

Think

The Lakota associate the turtle with the ability to create life and often decorate their clothes with turtles. Do you have any clothing that is decorated with an animal image? Does the animal have any special meaning for you? If so, what?

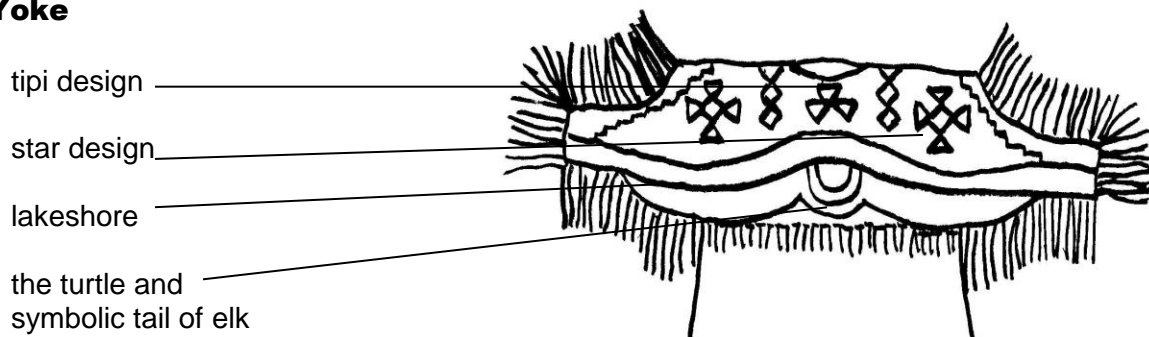
A Lakota woman would have worn this dress on special occasions. What kind of clothes do you wear for special occasions? How are they similar to or different from this dress?

Three-skin dress construction

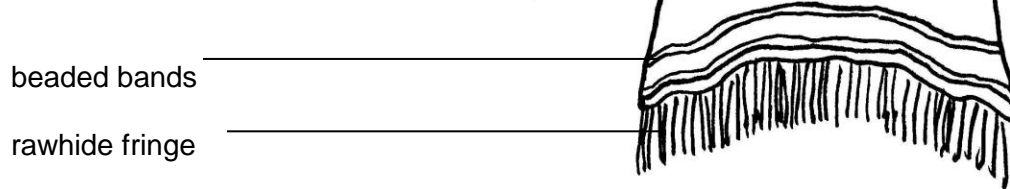


Lakota Dress

Yoke



Skirt



Illustrations adapted from *Hau, Kola!* by Barbara A. Hail, Plains Indian Collection, The Haffenraffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University, 1980.



China (Asia, Suchou region)

Ceremonial Gate, 1728

Handcarved tile

H.192 x W.114 x D.35 inches (approximate)

Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton 98.61.3

Key Ideas

This elaborate ceramic gate once adorned the interior courtyard of a large 18th-century Chinese home, serving as a passageway to and from the family's private ceremonial space. The gateway's decorative tiles depict the Confucian themes of duty to family and state and bear the four-character inscription, "In Celebration of Bestowed Glory."

In Celebration of Family and State

This impressive gateway served as a monument to honor the family. As inscribed on the panel, the gate was dedicated in 1728 to the family by the state for government service. The spotted deer, found in the deeply carved boxes to either side of the inscription, probably symbolize the attainment of high office. Thus, the gate's decorative carving serves to reflect the respected social position and aristocratic nature of the family.

Confucian philosophy stressed family relationships and service to the state. Confucianism took hold in the 5th century B.C. and remained central to Chinese thought during the Ch'ing Dynasty (1644–1911) when this gate was constructed.

The Four Noble Agrarian Professions

Agriculture was the basis for the wealth and prosperity of many aristocratic Chinese families, so it is fitting that the carved ceramic tiles adorning the gate depict the "four noble agrarian professions" with images of a fisherman, a woodcutter, a farmer, and a scholar/landowner. The economy and social well-being of the agrarian society depended on the productive management of the land, water, and forests. Stewardship of these natural resources was a great concern of the government.

On the right, the fisherman stands in his boat upon the rolling waves. Fish, consumed in massive amounts in China, were raised on fish farms under bureaucratic direction. Next is the woodcutter with a yoke upon his back, walking through a heavily wooded area. Then comes the farmer with a hoe over his shoulder leading a water buffalo. To the far left is the scholar/landowner. He sits in a studio looking out on a small garden of plants and rocks. Although he represents the educated gentry class, he is very much a part of this agrarian fellowship, for it is the landowner who ultimately bears the responsibility for the management and prosperity of the land.

Private Contemplation

As this gate celebrates the virtues of family, it also serves to define the family's celebratory space. This monument of honor was not for public display. Rather, it was meant for the family's contemplation as part of the home's private interior space. The gate's decorative frieze faced the interior of the courtyard, north toward the ceremonial hall. This hall was the family's most important building and gathering space. It was located at the opposite end of the residential complex from the public entrance. Here, the family would meet on special occasions to honor ancestors, pray, greet special guests, and celebrate other important events.

The Courtyard House

The gateway and ceremonial space were once part of a large enclosed Su-chou-style courtyard house from the West Tung-t'ing Hills district of Lake T'ai in southern China. Large dwellings such as this one comprised several buildings with gardens and courtyards, all contained within a walled complex (see illustration). Larger homes had several courtyards with more than one commemorative gate.

The gated wall provided both protection and privacy and was an essential architectural component of Chinese cities and homes. The enclosed space often housed large extended families and their servants. Based on Confucian principles, the family was patriarchal and may have consisted of as many as four or five generations living together.

The Production and Use of Ceramic Tile

The ceramic tiles were fired in a kiln and then intricately carved by hand. The decorative tiles are carved in relief, a method in which the figures project out from the background. The completed tiles were then set into place with a thin layer of mortar. This type of carved ceramic work, a 2,000-year-old Chinese tradition, was a specialty of the craftsmen from the Su-chou region. Ceramic tiles were used as roof, wall, and floor coverings because they were durable, relatively inexpensive, and attractive.

All of the carved ceramic tiles on the upper half of the gate and the heavy wooden cross-beams are original. The smooth tiles on both jambs, or supporting posts, are modern replacements. The original 18th-century passageway had large wooden doors that swung from the doorjambs on iron pivot hinges.

Construction of the Gate

The construction of this ceramic gate derives from earlier wooden forms. All the elements of the wooden gates were carefully reproduced. Ceramic blocks, such as those that support the projecting roof, were cut in the same shape and size of the timber prototypes and put together with notched and housed joints.

Although beautifully carved, this gate was never embellished with colored glaze or paint. Left unglazed, the ceramic gate better suited the refined tastes of scholarly aristocrats, but also adhered to strict government-imposed sumptuary laws. Building codes were dictated by social

status and government rank wherein certain colors of decorative glazes were reserved for the buildings of the royal court.

EXTEND THE DISCUSSION:

See *“Tips for Talking about Art”* in the introductory pages for more ideas.

Look

What words or phrases would you use to describe this gate?

What do you think is the most important part of the gate? What do you see that makes you say that?

Look for clues. What kind of person do you think might have owned a gate like this? What do you see that makes you think that?

Think

What parts of this gate do you like the best? Why?

The gate has the images of the “four noble agrarian professions,” which include a farmer, a fisherman, a woodsman, and a landowner/scholar. Why do you think these images were included on this gate? What kinds of scenes would you put on your family gate? Why?

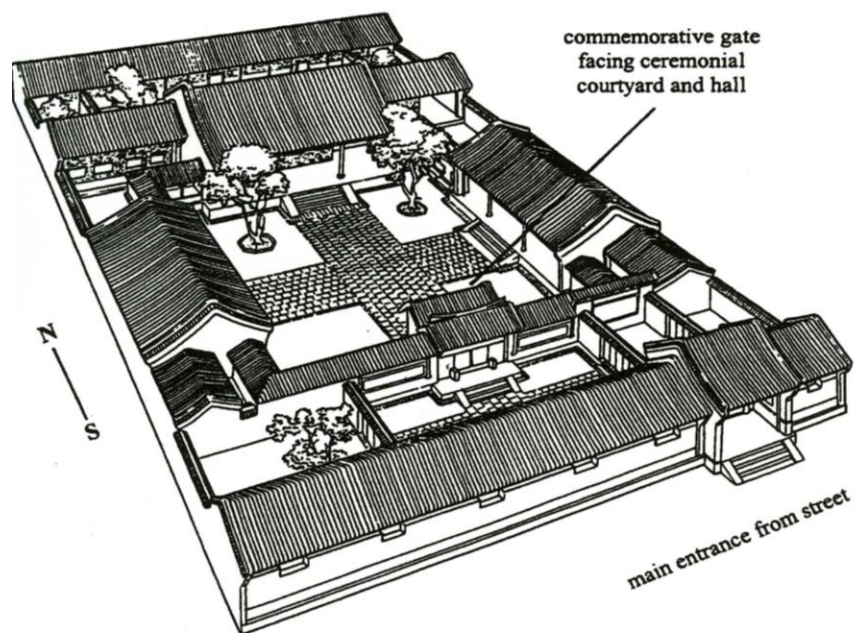
Would you like this gate in your home or yard? Why or why not?

This gate was left plain, without color, to suit the taste and status of the family who owned it. How would this gate be different if it were painted in many colors? What colors would you paint it, if you could? What things in your home are left unpainted? What things are painted?

Commemorative Gate

Chinese, 1728

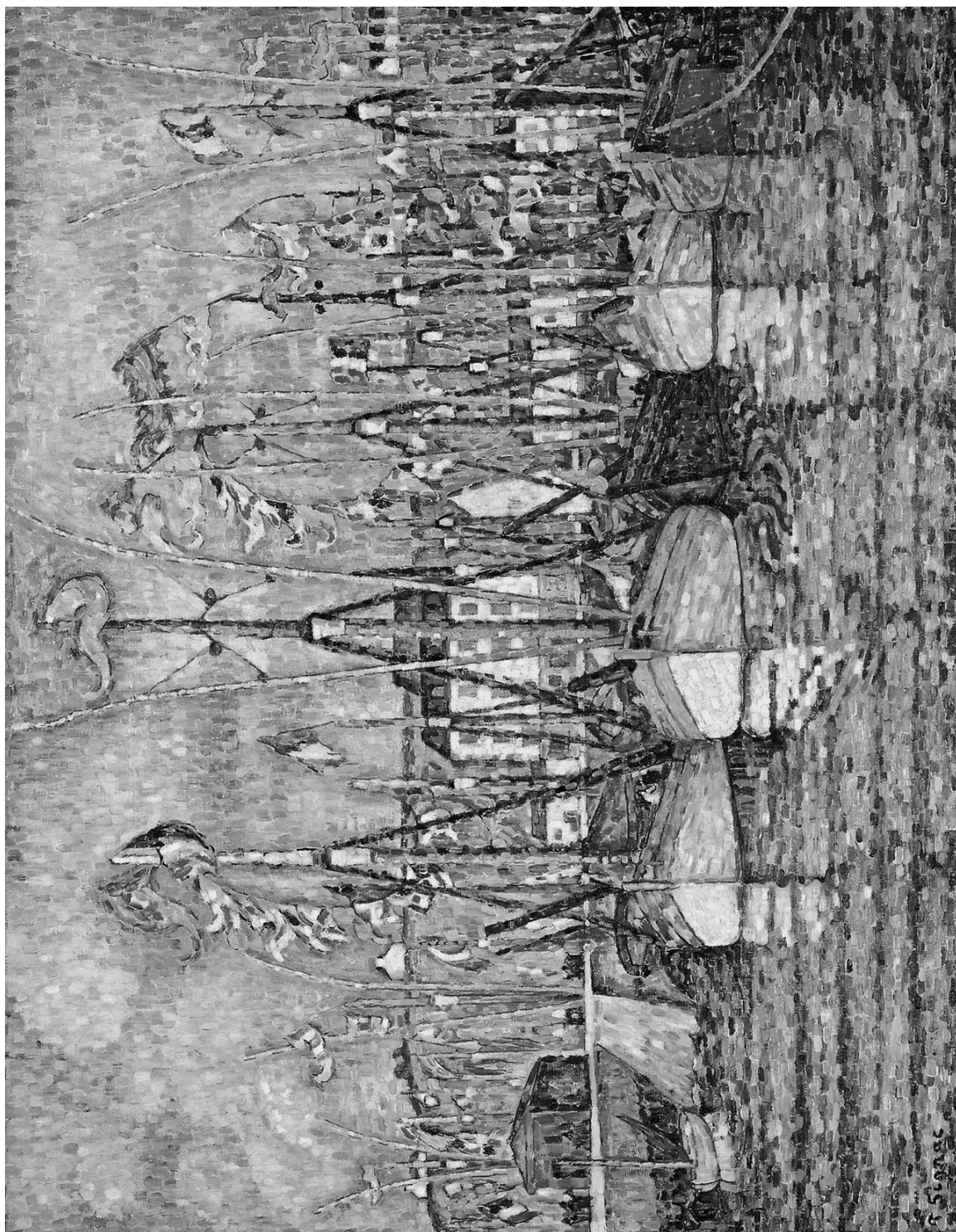
Example of a courtyard-style house



Courtyard house, Beijing, 18th-20th centuries; isometric view

Adapted from the *Dictionary of Arts*, Volume 6, edited by Jane Turner. New York: Grove's Dictionaries, Inc. 1996. China, SectionII: Domestic architecture: Plan and structure. p 688.

For Your Notes:



Paul Signac, French, 1863–1935

Blessing of the Tuna Fleet at Groix, 1923

Oil on canvas

H.28¼ x W.35½ inches (sight)

The William Hood Dunwoody Fund, The John R. Van Derlip Fund, and Gift of funds from Bernice Dalrymple, 62.36

Key Ideas

This early 20th century painting by Paul Signac (**See**-nyak) depicts the traditional blessing of the tuna boats at Groix (Gwah) in northwestern France. The fishermen and townspeople conduct this colorful seaside ceremony to ask blessings for a safe journey and a bountiful catch. Signac captures the atmosphere of celebration in this festive scene by filling his canvas with carefully placed strokes of brightly colored paint.

A Fishing Community

The tuna boats of Groix, in the south of Brittany, wait in the quay for the procession and religious ceremony to mark the beginning of the fishing season. The townspeople gather on the pier as the fishermen, already in their boats, prepare to depart for the fishing grounds off the coast of Ireland. The centuries-old tradition of the blessing was developed out of respect for the dangers of the sea and to ensure that the fishermen have a safe and prosperous journey. A plentiful catch was central to the prosperity of the community of Groix, where most inhabitants made their living through fishing and its supporting industries.

A Celebration of the Sea

Signac loved the sea and frequently sailed the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, painting as he went. In this painting Signac has focused on the sea, sky, and sailboats. The five boats lining the quay dominate the scene, their tall masts and thin fishing poles extending into the cloud-filled sky. Their colorful prows are reflected down into the sea. The boats face seaward, festooned with brightly colored flags that flap in the wind. The buildings of Groix along the quay and distant hills appear in the background. The townspeople at the pier and the sailors readying their boats are almost invisible. Signac has simplified them into small dots of color that blend into the seaside scene.

A Celebration of Color

Signac painted the entire canvas with a series of uniform rectangular strokes of pure color. He applied the paint in small divided patches of color, as in a mosaic. Each brush stroke appears separate and distinct; dabs of color cooperate or contend with one another.

Signac wrote, “For a color to be beautiful it should be influenced by its neighbor by harmonizing and subduing it, for their common benefit.” The eye separates and groups the different color patterns to create recognizable shapes and forms. The result is a painting of carefully controlled

color contrasts in which the viewer is transported to the seaside where the wind blows, the water shimmers, and the sky illuminates.

The Interaction of Colors

Signac was fascinated by color theory and in 1898 he wrote a book describing his own theory, *Eugène Delacroix to Neo-Impressionism*. He called his theory “Chromoluminarism,” but it was later referred to as “Divisionism” by the well-known critic, Félix Fénéon. Whatever his method is called, Signac sought to achieve the greatest color intensity, brightness, and purity in his work.

Signac’s ideas were based on opponent-color theory. Opponent colors, better known as complementary colors, intensify when placed directly next to one another. By juxtaposing the complementary colors—violet and yellow, orange and blue, red and green—Signac created the most brilliant and colorful effects. As in this work, complementary dabs of yellow, orange, and red heighten the blues and greens of the sea. The interaction of complementary colors produces a sense of tension and movement that enlivens this celebration scene.

Signac also used gradations of similar hues, or analogous colors, together—blue, blue-green, and green—to modify and harmonize each other. Both the sea and sky appear to shimmer and vibrate as variations of the color blue dash and dart over the canvas.

In addition, Signac used achromatic colors, black and white, to lighten or darken a color. The blue of the sky appears brighter because it is permeated with white. The same blue, found on the trim of the red boat, appears darker because it is surrounded by black.

The Language of Emotion

Although Signac’s methods of painting were guided by science, he never let go of personal interpretation. He considered his color theory to be the language of emotion. In this way, he combined painterly practice and theoretical methods. Signac wrote, “It is through the harmonies of lines and colors, which he can govern according to his needs and his will, and not through the subject, that the painter ought stir the emotions.”

In addition to his use of color, Signac conveyed a mood by manipulating the direction and angle of the lines—vertical, diagonal, and horizontal. He believed ascending lines, as in the masts, produce a feeling of joy. The horizontal lines of the quay, distant hillside, and gentle ripples of the sea create a sense of calm. The triangular shapes of the boats and diagonal lines of the fishing poles give a sense of movement.

Paul Signac and Neo-Impressionism

Signac was a self-taught painter, but received informal training from like-minded artists. He was most influenced by Georges Seurat (Suh-rah), a good friend and leader of the Neo-Impressionist movement. Like other Neo-Impressionists, Signac greatly admired the Impressionists and was drawn to their passion for color and light. However, Neo-Impressionism delved much further into the physiological and scientific theories of color and light than the Impressionists. Their work, based on technical methods and formalized scientific principles,

was anything but spontaneous. Signac remained an ardent follower and principal spokesman for the Neo-Impressionist movement until the day he died.

EXTEND THE DISCUSSION:

See “Tips for Talking about Art” in the introductory pages for more ideas.

Look

What things in this painting do you think were most important to the artist? Why?

What objects seem close to you? What objects seem far away? What do you see that makes you say that?

Look closely at the picture. Just by looking at the strokes of paint, can you imagine how the artist put the paint on the canvas? Can you act it out? Do you think this is a good way to paint? Why or why not?

Think

Imagine you are here in this scene. What sounds do you hear? What are you doing? What are you feeling?

Signac wanted to create a mood “to stir the emotions” in his paintings. What kind of a mood does this painting create for you? What do you see that makes you feel that way?

How would this scene be different if it were painted with shades of black, gray, and white paint instead of bright colors?



latmul (Melanesia, Papua New Guinea)
Kundu (Hand Drum), 20th century
Wood, rope
H.8½ x W.26¾ x D.6½ inches
The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 98.37.3

Key Ideas

This hand drum with a crocodile-shaped handle was used in important ceremonies by the latmul (**yaht**-mool) people of the Middle Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea. The symbolism of the crocodile is rooted in latmul mythology, which traces the latmul ancestry back to a great primordial crocodile. The crocodile imagery is connected to ancestral devotion and the initiation of young boys into the men's secret society. The drum's sound, representing voices from the spirit world, strengthens these associations.

Wagen, Crocodile Ancestor

The latmul believe they were spawned by *Wagen*, a great mythological giant in the form of a crocodile. They believe the world floats on *Wagen*'s enormous back and the earthquakes and meandering rivers are created by the movements of its giant swishing tail. Musical instruments, such as this hand drum, are used to accompany the songs that recount the creation story of the great crocodile.

Ornamentation of the Drum

Like most hand drums from Melanesia, this latmul drum was carved from a single piece of wood. The drum has an hourglass shape with patterns of arcs, dots, and zigzag bands shallowly carved into the surface and painted black and white. These designs depict the gaping jaws of two crocodiles, their open mouths directed toward either end of the drum.

One end of the drum was once covered with animal skin, possibly from a lizard. A recessed lip indicates where the skin was stretched and secured to create the drum. The other end, encircled by intricately carved geometric designs, is left open. For the latmul these two sound chambers—one open and one closed—symbolize the earth and sky, the two major components of the cosmos.

The drum's handle, in the center position, links the two worlds represented by the sound chambers. The handle is fully carved in three dimensions and represents the ancestral crocodile with reptilian patterned skin, long narrow snout, and exposed, dangerous teeth. Rows of small projecting spikes carved on the sides and underside of the drum resemble aspects of the crocodile's being, such as its knobby, spiked skin and sharp teeth.

Spiritual Connections

Every object the latmul use, both sacred and secular, is decorated in some way. Tools, weapons, masks, and musical instruments become spiritually charged when elaborately ornamented. The surface appearance expresses the spiritual power within the object and ultimately has the ability to affect the welfare of the whole village. Ornamentation often includes animal totems which are associated with the ancestors.

latmul Totems: Paying Homage to Ancestors

Each kinship group within a village takes an emblematic name, or totem, from the birds and animals of the Sepik River region. A totem serves as the group's symbol and signifies their ancestral heritage. Elders who have memorized the numerous totemic emblems hold great prestige and power within the village. The latmul use hand drums and flutes to play song cycles which honor the totems. The songs can recount up to 20,000 totemic names. Representations of the animal totems, such as the crocodile, are important in honoring and nurturing relationships with the ancestors.

The latmul revere their ancestors, who they believe possess *mana*, a potent force that requires respect and attention through ritual and ceremony. Ancestors serve as intercessors between the living and the supernatural worlds. If the ancestors are pleased, they will obtain help for the living from the spirit world. If aggrieved, ancestor spirits can cause sickness, death, failed crops, and other natural disasters.

The Men's House

latmul kinship groups are based on descent from the male ancestor. Men from various kinship groups come together to form secret societies. Their meeting place, the men's house, is where they gather to talk, eat, relax, and discuss problems confronting the community. Important ceremonies and celebrations of the village take place in the area surrounding the men's house. Ceremonial objects, such as this hand drum, are stored inside the house.

Initiation into Adulthood

One of the most important events to take place at the men's house is the initiation of young boys to mark their transition from boyhood into manhood. During initiation the boys display feats of physical and mental endurance and are taught the sacred ritual knowledge of the latmul ancestral heritage. When the rites are completed, the young initiates earn the privilege to enter the men's house, and are ready to marry and have children. Drums provide rhythmic accompaniment for the dances and songs performed during initiation. Sounds from musical instruments, such as the hand drum, are said to represent the voices of the spirit world.

During the initiation, the men form a long line representing Wagen, the returning ancestral crocodile from which all latmul people descended. Some latmul groups create huge basketry masks representing the great crocodile in which young initiates are symbolically devoured. This act marks the death of childhood and the beginning of adult life. The initiates are decorated with small lines suggesting teeth marks on their chests and shoulders. Scarification is considered a mark of beauty which distinguishes the initiates as members of the men's secret society.

The latmul Today

Today the latmul number about 10,000. They live in large villages located along a 100-mile stretch of the banks of the Middle Sepik River. The Sepik River region is located in the northwest corner of mainland Papua New Guinea (see map). New Guinea, the largest of the Melanesian islands, is divided between two countries. The eastern half is part of the nation of Papua New Guinea and the western half is a province of Indonesia, Irian Jaya. Although accouterments of the modern world have reached much of Papua New Guinea, many native religious and social traditions are still practiced today.

EXTEND THE DISCUSSION:

See “Tips for Talking about Art” in the introductory pages for more ideas.

Look

Imagine that you came across this object in an antique shop. What clues can you see to help you figure out what it is?

What things do you recognize? What things surprise you?

Describe the crocodile on this drum. What can you tell about it?

Think

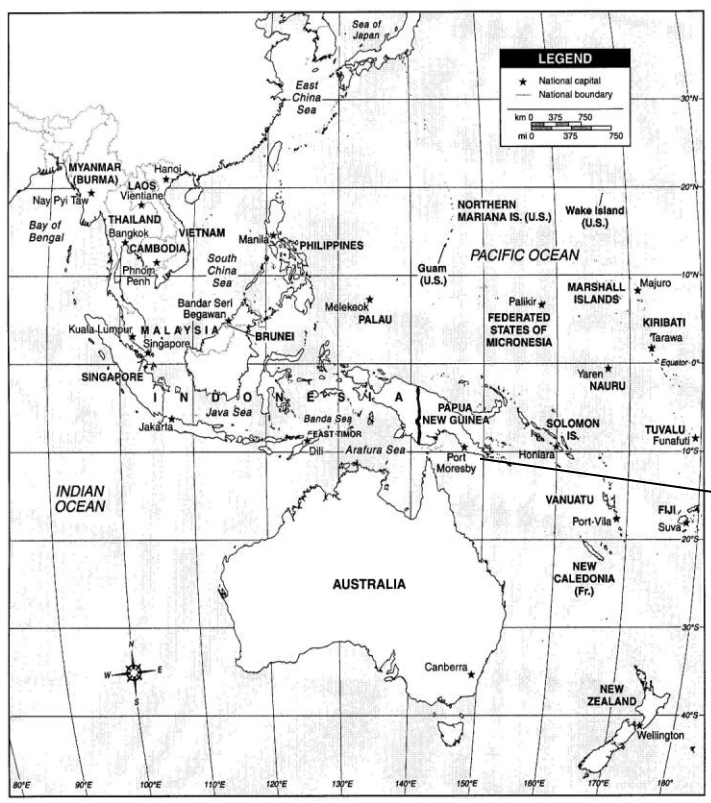
The latmul consider the crocodile to be a very powerful animal. How did the artist show the crocodile’s power on this drum? Why do you think it was important to the latmul to put the crocodile on this drum? What animal do you consider to be powerful?

The latmul played drums like this on special occasions. Do you have music for special occasions? If so, when and what kind of music?

The latmul pay homage to their ancestors through song, music, and decoration. Are there ways in which you pay respect to important members of your family?



Southeast Asia and the South Pacific: Political



Papua New Guinea



John Singer Sargent, American 1856–1925

***The Birthday Party*, 1887**

Oil on canvas

H.24 x W.29 inches x $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (canvas)

The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund and The John R. Van Derlip Fund, 62.84

Key Ideas

Many cultures share the custom of observing birthdays with a special party. At the turn of the century in Europe, John Singer Sargent recorded this intimate family celebration of Robert Besnard's (**Bay**-nar) sixth birthday. Sargent vividly captured the event as he perceived it, not just as a family portrait, but also as a canvas filled with color and light.

Memories of a Family Celebration

The Birthday Party is a family portrait of the French artists, Albert and Charlotte Besnard, with their young son, Robert, on his sixth birthday. The Besnards, who lived in Paris, were close friends of Sargent. Sargent gave *The Birthday Party* to the Besnards in exchange for a painting by Albert Besnard. In 1928, Besnard explained how much his family valued the painting:

The picture represents a feast day cake which my wife is about to cut to the great joy of our little Robert, whose birthday it was. I can be seen standing at the back of the picture participating in this family feast. What a precious souvenir for his mother and me.

The painting became more valuable to the family after Robert's early death. Robert's brother Philippe kept the painting in the family until it was sold on the London market.

Seeing Color and Light

Sargent was known for his portraits. However, recording the likeness of the subject was secondary to his concern for the formal elements of painting, such as light, color, and shape. For Sargent, visual realism was based on surface value, void of sentiment. When asked if he sought to paint the inner person behind the veil, he replied, "If there was a veil, I would paint the veil. I can only paint what I see." Nevertheless, Sargent was revered for his ability to capture the true inner nature of his subjects.

Using Color to Define and Direct

In this painting, Sargent suggests the warmth of a quiet evening gathering with deep, rich red tones. The walls, carpet, mother's dress, and even the child's napkin are red, creating a sense of lavish elegance. Although the scene is one of serenity, there is a tension created between complementary qualities—dark and light, shadow and illumination, subtlety and drama. The predominant use of red is boldly juxtaposed against the bright, cool whites of the table and lamp. Yet Sargent painted color on color—red on red and white on white—with subtle variation.

The mother's red dress melds into the floor and the opaque objects on the table blend and merge into the circular white mass of the tablecloth. Sargent used color to define and emphasize, but also to obscure. Through color, he directs the way in which this scene reveals itself to the viewer.

Manipulating Light and Shadow

Sargent also used light to define and direct the viewer's eye. Robert's face is completely illuminated from below by the golden glow of the candles. His delicate facial features and soft, curly hair reflect his youth and innocence as he stares intently into the candles with bright, blue eyes. The lamp light offers a clear view of Robert's proud and composed mother. Sargent reveals the details of her elegant hands as she focuses with downcast eyes on her task of serving the cake. Yet he only hints at the serving implement she holds.

The outlines that define the shape of things become blurred within shadows and reflections. Details such as the items on table and the father's facial features are minimized. His face, void of detail, becomes a mystery revealing only a hint of expression through his gesture. His dark torso is painted as a flat plain of color—almost a silhouette.

Capturing the Essence

Sargent was not interested in describing the event with precise details, but rather in giving the viewer the essence of things. In a spontaneous manner, Sargent dashed paint on the canvas to evoke character and texture. Blue-and-white flashes of paint flickering across the surface of the table depict the reflective and translucent qualities of glass and silver. Small, intense dots of white flame are immediately understood as the reflection of the candles on the dark glass of the window. Long, broad strokes of white paint create the pattern and sheerness of curtains. There is weight and texture within the folds of the mother's dress, as well as lightness to its ribbons and lace.

A Modern Composition

There is a sense of arrested motion and informality in *The Birthday Party*, as if the painting were composed with a camera rather than paint and brush. The table, lamp, and window in the corners are not neatly confined within dimensions of the canvas, but are cut off by the frame.

Sargent has not arranged the Besnards for a traditional family portrait. The figures are casually posed. The action of the mother's arms, the father's turned head, and Robert's gaze all lead to the birthday cake. The cake is also the viewer's focus, resulting in a composition that is off-center, or asymmetrical. This style of composition was a modern innovation inspired by both the camera and the newly popular Japanese wood block prints. These innovations in painting moved painters like Sargent away from the formal styles of the past and into the future.

***The Birthday Party* as Sargent's Celebration**

The Birthday Party commemorates a birthday celebration, but perhaps more important, it celebrates Sargent's use of paint. Sargent has completely and thoroughly explored the properties of color and light with oil paint on a two-dimensional canvas. Like many artists at the turn of century, Sargent was beginning to see art not just as a way to record nature, but also as a means to personal expression.

John Singer Sargent

Sargent is known as an international artist, famous for his society portraits. During the 1880s, he also did a series of paintings, like *The Birthday Party*, of interior domestic scenes depicting his friends. He has been described as “an American born in Italy, educated in France, who looks like a German, speaks like an Englishman, and paints like a Spaniard.” Sargent was born to American parents living in Florence and was a seasoned traveler of Europe by age eight. He did not visit America until he was 20 years old, but was always proud to be an American.

EXTEND THE DISCUSSION:

See “Tips for Talking about Art” in the introductory pages for more ideas

Look

What do you notice first in this picture? Why?

What things are easy to see? What things are difficult to see? Why might the artist have painted the picture this way?

What do we know about these people by looking at this painting? What seems similar to the way you live? What seems different?

Think

How would this painting be different if Sargent had used another color, such as pale yellow, instead of red?

John Singer Sargent was a friend of the Besnards and likely attended the party. If the artist attended this party, where do you think he would have been standing when he painted this scene? What do you see to make you think that?

How is this painting similar to a snapshot photograph you might take at a friend's birthday party? How is it different?

Would you like to be invited to this party? Why or why not?

Imagine you are at this party. What kinds of sounds might you hear? What will happen next? What do you see that makes you say that?



Bwa (Africa, Burkina Faso, West Africa region)

Plank Mask, c. 1960

Wood, pigment

H.82½ x W.18 x D.9½ inches

The William Hood Dunwoody Fund, 98.2

Key Ideas

This wooden plank mask from Burkina Faso in West Africa was once linked to all-important events in the village life of the southern Bwa people. The plank mask embodied a supernatural force that acted on behalf of the Bwa community. Among its many significant roles, the mask played a vital part in the initiation of young men and women into Bwa adult society.

Celebrating with a Masquerade

Masquerades with masks and dancing are performed at all important village ceremonies to ensure good relationships with the spirits that the Bwa believe inhabit the natural world. These ceremonies include initiation rites, market days, harvest festivals, and the consecration of newly carved masks. Masks also appear at burials and memorial services to honor the deceased. These different ceremonies are organized by individual groups within the village. These groups compete to give the most innovative performances.

Calling Upon the Spirit of the Mask

Each mask represents a specific spirit. The mask becomes a vehicle to evoke and control the powers of that spirit through masquerades. The plank mask known as *Nwantantay* ([n]wahn-tahn-tay), gives the spirit force a physical form that is neither human nor animal.

Plank masks, like other Bwa performance masks, are kept in a special storehouse to be brought out for important events. The plank masks are often used together with other Bwa mask forms. Masked performers often dance before spectators accompanied by drumming and singing. The masks, worn only by men, are part of a complete costume made of long hibiscus fibers dyed red, black, or white. The costume covers and protects the dancer from the powerful spirit forces that inhabit the mask. The dancer does not *become* the spirit but temporarily gives up his own persona to allow the spirit to enter the mask. However, the Bwa believe that outside of its intended environment the mask contains no spiritual force or meaning.

Transition to Adulthood

Bwa initiation is a rite of passage for young men and women as they transition from childhood into adult society with all its privileges and responsibilities. Unlike most West African peoples, the Bwa initiate young men and women together. The initiates are taken from the village for approximately 15 days, during which time they receive instruction from the elders. They are taught how to behave as respectful community members and warned of the dangers of straying

from proper Bwa behavior. Their lessons include hearing the stories about the founding ancestors, the world of spirits, and the wooden masks that represent them.

The initiates also learn how to construct the fiber costumes that are worn with the masks. The young men wear the costumes and learn the dances, while the young women learn the accompanying songs. When the initiates are ready, they return to the village to demonstrate their new knowledge of the masks in a public ceremony. Afterwards, the young men and women rejoin their families as adults. They are now ready to marry and form their own families.

Learning from the *Plank Mask*

During initiation, young men and women learn the many meanings of the geometric symbols that appear on the plank masks. For example, each symbol has a specific meaning by itself. These same symbols take on other meanings when combined with other patterns. The symbols communicate the moral, spiritual, and historic lessons the initiates must learn. Comprehension of these meanings varies depending on the age and understanding each individual; only the village elders can understand the most profound meanings.

Bwa wooden plank masks are carved and painted with natural pigments of black, white, and sometimes red. The masks are often repainted before each performance. The dramatic juxtaposition of black and white on this mask stands for the symbiotic relationship between the elders and the young. When the young initiates complete their instruction they each receive a new white goat hide to sit on during ceremonies. They are reminded that as the years pass, they will become the elders and their goat hides will have aged to a deep, dark color.

The Symbolism of the *Plank Mask*

Most plank masks consist of an oval face connected to a large, flat plank that is topped with a turned-up crescent (see illustration). A round mouth with small teeth protrudes from the face. The performer wearing the mask can see through the mouth opening. The mouth may represent the ancestor's sacred wells that never go dry. Below the mouth, white triangles radiate downward. They may represent the leaves of the *kenaf*, an African hibiscus cultivated for its fiber and used to make the costumes worn with the mask. The triangles may also symbolize the tears that fall with the death of an elder. The face is connected to the plank by a diamond shape from which projects a prominent hook. Some Bwa say this depicts the bill of the hornbill, a bird associated with the supernatural world and believed to be an intermediary between the living and dead.

The plank consists of a vertical rectangle marked with geometric patterns. The most prominent is the X, or cross, in the center. The X, called the *bidayuhe* (bah-dah-whay), represents the scar that each initiate receives as a mark of devotion. The horizontal zigzag lines below the X represent the path of the ancestors to the sacred grove where offerings are made to the spirits of the masks. It may also depict the path of proper behavior—a difficult path to follow.

On top of the plank is a large crescent shape turned upward which representing the quarter moon, under which the initiation takes place. The two white triangular shapes underneath the crescent may represent “bull roarers,” which are sacred sound-makers. Performers swing the bull roarers on long cords during the masquerades to recreate the voices of the spirits.

History of the Wooden Masks

The Bwa began to use plank masks in late 19th century. They borrowed the wooden form made by neighboring groups. Bwa elders say all Bwa once followed the religious practices of *Do* (dough). This religion focuses on the renewal of life and the life-giving bush, or forest. The ceremonies associated with the religion of *Do* incorporate a fiber, or leaf, mask form. The northern Bwa continued to follow the belief of *Do* while the southern Bwa sought a new masking tradition.

The southern Bwa acquired the wooden masks in response to new dangers. The Moslem Fulani empire from the north invaded Bwa territory, destroying crops, stealing animals, and enslaving men and women. Later the French arrived. They employed the Fulani to control the Bwa regions. Many Bwa believed the wooden masks were more effective than fiber masks in communicating with the spirits for protection against these incursions. The southern Bwa adopted the new masks into their ceremonial practices and oral history.

The Bwa Today

There are approximately 300,000 Bwa living in Burkina Faso and Mali today. The Bwa are primarily cotton farmers. These people live in independent villages with no central political authority; they are governed internally by a council of the male elders. In Burkina Faso, more than 80 percent of the country's population continue traditional religious practices in which masking is still very important. The spiritual forces evoked by the masks are summoned for the good of the community.

EXTEND THE DISCUSSION:

See “Tips for Talking about Art” in the introductory pages for more ideas.

Look

What things in this mask do you recognize? What things surprise you? What things do you wonder about?

What part of this mask do you think is most important? What do you see that makes you say that?

Does this mask look more human or animal to you? What do you see that makes you say that?

Think

The Bwa use masks to communicate with spirits who can help and guide them in their lives. Have you ever worn a mask or costume? Why? How does it feel to wear a mask? How might it feel to wear this mask? What makes you think so?

The decorations and markings on this mask have messages and meanings for the Bwa. What kinds of symbols would you put on a mask? What messages would they give?

A Bwa dancer wore this mask with a full costume made of long *kenaf* fibers. He danced in the mask and costume to music with other masked dancers while an audience watched. Think about how this mask was used during the masquerade. How is this mask different in a museum setting? How is it different from a mask you might wear?

Plank Mask, c 1960, Africa, Burkina Faso, West Africa region (Bwa)

Crescent

Represents dark side of the moon.

The crescent moon turned upward.

Triangles represent bull roarers (noise-makers), voices of the spirits.

Plank

Bwa X, mark of devotion received during initiation rite.

Horizontal zigzag indicates path of proper behavior.

Bill of the Hornbill

The hornbill is connected to the supernatural world.

Face

White semi-circle represents the field in which the initiates first dance with the masks.

Large target-like eyes are those of the owl, a bird believed to have power.

Protuberant mouth represents a sacred well.

White triangles indicate leaves of *kenaf* and tears shed for ancestors.



The colors of black and white symbolize the goat hides of the young and old, and the symbiotic relationship between generations.



India (Asia, Tamil Nadu)

Shiva Nataraja (Lord of the Dance), Chola period

Bronze

H.28 inches

Gift of Mrs. E. C. Gale 29.2

Key Ideas

This bronze figure of Shiva, a Hindu deity, comes from India and was used in Hindu festival processions more than 1,000 years ago. Shiva takes many forms, but when he is dancing he is known as Shiva Nataraja (Nah-tah-**rahj**-ah), Lord of the Dance. Shiva's dance represents the cycles of destruction and creation, a continual process of universal regeneration.

The Attributes of Shiva Nataraja

People of Hindu faith easily recognize Shiva by his attributes. Most obvious are Shiva's four arms, symbolic of the four directions: north, south, east, and west. In his rear left hand, Shiva grips the flame of destruction. His rear right hand holds a double-sided kettle drum whose beat summons up creation. A small, vertical third eye on Shiva's forehead is his principal weapon of destruction and symbolizes his awesome power. This bronze image of Shiva Nataraja was originally depicted dancing within a ring of flames, now missing. The ring also symbolizes the continuing cycle of creation and destruction.

Shiva's expressive hand gestures, called *mudras*, identify him as a Hindu deity. His right front hand displays the mudra of reassurance. This mudra, with palm facing the viewer, means "have no fear." The front left hand, in downward position, gestures the promise of spiritual liberation. This hand points to the deity's left foot, a source of grace and refuge.

Shiva the Divine

Although depicted in human form, Shiva is distinguished from mortals by his perfect form. His broad shoulders, narrow waist, and smooth, elegant limbs are the personification of eternal youth. His scant clothing reveals the beauty of his idealized form. His round, tranquil face and large almond-shaped eyes, elegantly arched brows, and full lips reflect his spiritual nature.

Shiva dances atop the demon of ignorance, *Apasmara* (Ah-pas-**mare**-rah). As Shiva dances, he crushes Apasmara under his right foot. Despite his dangerous situation, Apasmara shows little concern as he looks up at Shiva in admiration.

The Cosmic Cycle

Shiva Nataraja continually dances his dance of destruction and creation, the universal cycle of death and rebirth. In a paradox typical of Shiva's nature, he appears simultaneously still and active—in perfect balance. The dynamic gestures of his graceful limbs express effortless

perpetual motion, whereas his torso and head appear still. As Shiva performs, matted cords of hair fly out from either side of his head in the frenzied destructive force of the cosmic process. The remainder of his elaborate hairstyle is held perfectly in place upon his bejeweled head. His earrings, male on the right and female on the left, emphasize the duality of his nature. Shiva is able to reconcile these opposing actions, reinforcing his supernatural powers.

Shiva Nataraja in Hindu Festival Celebrations

This bronze figure of Shiva Nataraja, modeled in the round, is meant to be seen from all sides. Bronze images, like this one, are carried in daily processions in the temple courtyard for special ceremonies and festive celebrations. Each Hindu temple is dedicated to a particular deity. Traditionally, each temple has a fixed image, which always remains in the sanctum, or temple interior, and a smaller replica, which is the processional image.

Communal processions are important in Hindu festivals. In times past, low-caste members of the community were forbidden to enter the temple sanctum. Public processions, however, allowed everyone to make offerings of devotion. Hindu festival processions are still practiced today. As part of the festival ritual, the image is bathed; anointed with milk, clarified butter, honey, and sugar; perfumed with sandalwood paste; and attired with silks, garlands, and jewels. Statues such as this one are carried either on wooden poles high above the crowds or on colorfully festooned wooden chariots. These chariots serve as a type of mobile temple for the duration of the festival.

Hindu sculptures encourage the devotee to acknowledge the presence of the deity. The image itself is not the deity, but rather a temporary channel into which divine energy can flow. The spiritual connection between the image and the deity is established during a special purification ceremony. During this ritual, the deity's eyes, the last detail to be added, are chiseled or sculpted to symbolically open them.

The Chola Dynasty

This sculpture of Shiva Nataraja dates from the Chola Dynasty of South India. The Cholas were a dominant political and cultural force from the 9th to 13th centuries, when bronze casting reached its most brilliant achievement in India. The sculptors from the province of Tamil Nadu, where this image was made, produced bronzes of exceptional beauty and the highest technical skill. The Cholas adopted Shiva, Lord of Dance as their patron deity, which accounts for the increased popularity of the image during this period.

The Lost-wax Technique

This sculpture was created through the process of lost-wax casting. Lost-wax is a process in which the image is first made of wax and then encased in a material, such as clay, that hardens around the wax form. The wax form and clay covering are heated to melt the wax. The melted wax is poured out, leaving a clay mold into which molten bronze is poured. When the bronze has cooled and hardened, the clay mold is broken away to reveal the bronze image.

This bronze sculpture was likely cast in a single piece, including the now-missing ring of flames. Only the flying hair was cast separately and soldered onto the back. To cast this object in one piece requires astonishing technical skill, considering the complicated extensions of the limbs and intricate detailing.

Artistic Traditions in Hinduism

The basis of Hindu sculptural forms is deeply rooted in tradition. Artists adhered closely to written guidelines of proportions and iconography. The gestures, attributes, and costume seen here were all prescribed by such manuals. Many of the postures found in Indian sculpture are derived from traditional dance, an integral part of Hindu ritual ceremony. These prescribed principles did not, however, inhibit individual artists from creating their own distinct style. Both the prescribed similarities and individual differences can be seen when comparing images of Shiva Nataraja in other collections.

EXTEND THE DISCUSSION:

See “Tips for Talking about Art” in the introductory pages for more ideas.

Look

Look closely at this image. What words or phrases come to mind when you look at this figure?

What surprises you about this figure? Why?

What parts of Shiva look human to you? What parts do not?

Think

Why do you think the artist made Shiva look this way? What questions would you like to ask the artist about this work if he were here?

Shiva Nataraja is also known as Lord of the Dance. What kind of music might he be dancing to? What do you see that makes you say that?

People of Hindu faith easily recognize Shiva by his attributes, or symbols. What symbols are familiar to you in daily life? (red stop sign, American flag)

Compare and Contrast

The works of art represented in *Let's Celebrate Life* illustrate similarities as well as differences in how people mark the special occasions in their lives. It is often helpful to compare and contrast (see "Tips for Talking about Art" in the introductory pages). The following list is provided as a guideline.

Family/Ancestors

Bwa, *Plank Mask*, Burkina Faso, about 1960
 Sargent, *The Birthday Party*, American, 1887
 Iatmul, *Kundu (Hand Drum)*, Papua New Guinea, 20th century
Commemorative Gate, China, 1728

Creation/Story

Shiva Nataraja, India, late 10th century
 Lakota, *Dress*, North America, 1880-1900
 Iatmul, *Kundu (Hand Drum)*, Papua New Guinea, 20th century

Symbolism

Berlant, *Pacific*, American, 20th century
 Shiva Nataraja, India, late 10th century
 Lakota, *Dress*, North America, 1880-1900
 Iatmul, *Kundu (Hand Drum)*, Papua New Guinea, 20th century
Commemorative Gate, China, 1728
 Bwa, *Plank Mask*, Burkina Faso, about 1960

Community Well-Being

Berlant, *Pacific*, American, 20th century
 Signac, *Blessing of the Tuna Fleet at Groix*, French, 1923
 Bwa, *Plank Mask*, Burkina Faso, about 1960
 Iatmul, *Kundu (Hand Drum)*, Papua New Guinea, 20th century
 Lakota, *Dress*, North America, 1880-1900

Religious Beliefs

Berlant, *Pacific*, American, 20th century
 Signac, *Blessing of the Tuna Fleet at Groix*, French, 1923
 Bwa, *Plank Mask*, Africa, about 1960
 Iatmul, *Kundu (Hand Drum)*, Papua New Guinea, 20th century
 Lakota, *Dress*, North America, 1880-1900
 Shiva Nataraja, India, late 10th century

Other Themes to Compare and Contrast

- Techniques: how things are made
- Medium: what things are made of
- Point in time: when things were made
- Place of origin: where things were made