

A Study of Stylistic Concern **Comparing and Contrasting Buddhist and Hindu Sculpture**

Aim

Broaden students' awareness of the artistic and cultural contributions of artists who lived and worked in the Indus Valley and later Himalayan civilizations.

Goals

Students in the 7th grade art class will be engaged in an age-appropriate study of Buddhist and Hindu art (with a focus on art produced in the Himalayan Region in ancient times) including a range of artistic media and techniques. Students will gain a rudimentary understanding of carving and an introduction to casting processes.

The main focus of the project will be the art forms common to the Himalayan Region, notably Nepal and Tibet. The culmination of this formal study will be the engagement of all in a hands-on art project (probably a clay sculpture) that will build upon the knowledge gained through the study of the Himalayan art works.

The seventh graders will examine a collection of images and look for specific stylistic commonalities as well as differences. By the conclusion of this visual survey, students should be able to identify major elements of art and principles of design in the art that they have viewed and studied.

For example, a distinct difference that will be made clear to students is that Buddhist sculpture in Tibet (and through other parts of Asia) will appear to be symmetrical and "stiff" compared to "looser", more animated organic poses of the gods in Hindu sculpture.

Some points of stylistic interest may move students to discuss and openly speculate... in the search for meaning. Within the context of this unit of study, it will be important to introduce a number of key theological concepts about both Buddhist and Hindu philosophies- along with an abbreviated history.

While the goals of this unit will not be to provide a comprehensive introduction to these two eastern religions, it is hoped that through a very simple study of some visual images that students will gain insight into an incredibly rich and complex region of the world. Seventh grade students at McCall Middle School traditionally have studied about the geography of the world, and this unit of study will serve to strengthen and reinforce content learned in their social studies course.

It is our goal to empower students to be creative and critical thinkers in the art program. Learning to appreciate gesture, symmetry, balance, nuance, detail, and scale in three dimensional art objects created in Hindu and Buddhist cultures (from ancient times) will serve to reinforce this goal.

Hinduism- A Simple Overview

Two basic influences in developed Hindu thought:

- A) Dravidian
- B) Aryan or Vedic (associated with the invaders who contributed to the destruction of the Indus Valley Civilization, while contributing their way of life and thought to Hinduism).

Dravidian elements: sensual, qualities associated with early fertility cults whose deities were founded in the Indus Valley sites of 2000 B.C.E.

In contrast to these down-to-earth (Dravidian) elements, are those derived from the Aryan tradition, which can be derived as formal or intellectual. Among these are the concepts of hierarchy and caste and other levels of society. The Aryan element of Hinduism included the concepts of hierarchy and caste, of the saved and the damned.

Emphasis was placed on religious rites conducted by the Brahmin or priestly caste, in contrast to the personal devotion of the Dravidians.

The earliest notations of Hindu civilization marked the Axial Age (a period of great revelation and spiritual, religious philosophers).

Trinity representing the three great gods of Hinduism:

- 1) Brahma (the creator), Sarasvati (companion of Brahma)
- 2) Vishnu (the preserver), Lakshmi (companion of Vishnu)
- 3) Shiva (the destroyer), Parvati (companion of Shiva)

There exist a vast number of gods in the Hindu systems of belief.

Other major, well-known gods include:

Kali- goddess of death

Krishna- son of Vishnu

(Krishna is known as the “divine child”- flirtatious, plays the flute.

He reminds everyone that “life is a dance.” Consummate prankster, jokester)

Rada- divine love of Krishna

Hanuman- exemplary servant. His tale is a story of merit (especially for children).

Leader of Monkey Army. Takes form of monkey.

Ganesh- god of education, learning.

Takes form of elephant head.

Originally, and in theory, Brahma the creator is 4-headed, and all seeing. In Hinduism, he is not the strongest deity- and artistically far from important.

The Hindu use of images was first of all an aid to contemplative discipline, a way of achieving identification with deity.

The development of Medieval Hindu art was relatively rapid. Its foundations go back to Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Valley civilization of the second millennium B.C. with its fertility cults. Hindu art is stylistically vivacious and exaggerated, it includes touching and interactions of a close, familial nature.

The Buddhist Tradition- A Simple Overview

Buddhist visual aesthetic style was based on a classic representational view that expressed most completely Buddhist ideals and iconography.

Buddhism thought and religious belief systems evolved from Hinduism.

In theory and in practice, Buddhists believe in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Dharma, in art, is frequently represented by a “Wheel of Life” in various styles and sizes. The theme of Samsara weaves through paintings and sculptural objects created in Buddhist art, from the earliest times.

Emptiness, impermanence, suffering, and deliverance from Samsara (to Nirvana) are repeated themes in Buddhist art and writings. Buddhism sutras dictate that we are all born with Karmic heritage. Buddhism has many voices.

There are three kinds of Karmas: *White

*Black

*Indifferent

Four Noble Truths:

- 1) Life is suffering
- 2) Cause of suffering is desire
- 3) Removing desire removes suffering
- 4) 8-fold path as the means to conquer desire

Path:

Right Speech

Mindfulness

Views

Action

Concentration

Intention

Livelihood

Intention

The goal of the Buddhist's life is to master desire in order to get out of Samsara. Nirvana, as in Hindu belief, is the aim.

In the Himalayan Region, birth, life, and death of the Buddha are celebrated according to the lunar calendar. The Cosmic reality of Buddha built up the perception that the Buddha was a metaphysical reality.

Dharmakaya is the embodiment of Dharma. Sakyamuni is the human Buddha. The word “Buddha” means “the enlightened one.”

Mahayana Buddhism means “Great Vehicle.”

Hinayana Buddhism means “Small Vehicle.”

The Prajnyaparamitas were the earliest Mahayana Sutras (holy writings).

Buddhist precept “There is nothing substantial in the physical world.”

Project Implementation

Students will be challenged to create a collection of notes that ascribe distinct differences, and similarities, to their subject (Hindu and Buddhist sculpture).

Working in groups of 3 to 5, students will examine a limited selection of randomly scattered images arranged on their respective table/s. Each student will then, in turn, contribute ideas as to what can be seen in each photographic reproduction of the sculptural image. They will then have to sort and separate Hindu and Buddhist images- and then be able to orally defend their assumptions and conclusions.

Students will engage in discussion about what various parts of the sculptures represent, how they might have been created, and why the artist/s chose to represent the sculpture in a given medium or scale.

CLAY UNIT-

Hands-on work process:

Students will be challenged to create a design (first on paper) of a ritual figure that they would like to build on a small scale. This sculpture may include details that relate to the students’ own respective spiritual experience – or an imaginative system of beliefs, or real life personal interests. The figure that the students design should be able to be constructed in clay- using the tools and equipment necessary.

Upon the completion of the students project design/s, each will begin to create their own clay figurative sculpture, based on their understanding and interpretation of a series of simple fabrication techniques that are presented to them on a limited basis.

Techniques that may be used:

- * Coil fabrication
- * Slab method
- * Pinch

Students will have the option of adding color elements to their work upon the completion of the 3-D work.

Upon completion of this unit, an informal discussion of the works created will take place where students may share perspectives on each completed work in a thoughtful, constructive manner.

The entire amount of time spent on this project may take approximately 10 class periods.