

Myth in Art

Overview: Students will analyze a myth for deeper understanding and connect the myth to works of art from the same culture.

Goals: This lesson will

Support concepts & skills: use of diverse sources to study the world.

Fulfill Learning Standards: Visual Art 2.8-11, 5.1-3, 6, 8, 11, & 12; ELA 1-3, 11, 12, 14, 16; History & Social Sciences SEA.3, A.3, SAM.3, 4, 5, CA.3, 4, 7.1, 2.

Practice: story analysis, inference and interpretation, forming hypotheses and identifying evidence, forming questions.

Familiarize students with: cultural differences expressed in literature and art.



*Figurine of a Cat,
Sacred to Bastet
Egyptian*

Objectives for Students: Students will

Be able to: decode primary sources for meaning, message, and cultural information.

Understand: that objects from a culture express something about that culture, and give us information about people's values, ideas, and beliefs.

Key Questions (to be answered by students):

1. What are the messages and meanings conveyed by this object or story?
2. What do objects, myths, and folktales tell us about the culture they come from?
3. In what ways are cultures different from each other?

Materials Needed: "Reading the Object" worksheet

Museum Objects: Many works of art could be used for this lesson, but the following are especially recommended:

- Object shown is *Figurine of a Cat, Sacred to Bastet*, Egyptian, cast bronze, B. C. 945-525, Anonymous Loan (L2002.1.1)
- *Fragmentary jar, Heracles slaying the Hydra*, Greek, ceramic, B.C. 350-325 (2001.3)
- *Vessel in the form of a Jaguar Head*, Costa Rican, ceramic, A. D. 900-1200 (2002.18)

Pre-Museum Visit – Read a myth or folktale from another culture – Greek, African, Egyptian, or Mayan. Discuss as a class: "What is the message of this story? What lesson(s) does it teach?" Then ask whether the story gives you any clues about the culture that it comes from. "Can you find in the myth or folktale any clues about what is important to these people? What they respect or fear? What they work toward in their lives, or what their values are?" List the students' hypotheses and the evidence in the story that led them to think that. Make a list of questions the students would like to ask about that culture, based on their hypotheses.

At the Museum – Look at selected works of art from other cultures (for example, African, Egyptian, Pre-Columbian, Greek). You may want to work in smaller groups. For each object ask the same questions we asked about the story: "What is the message of this object? What lesson(s) does it teach?" (See "Reading the Object" worksheet.) Then ask whether the object gives you

any clues about the culture that it comes from. Look at the materials the object was made from, the way it was made, the feeling or mood. “Can you find in this object any clues about what is important to these people? What they respect or fear? Their likes or dislikes? What they work toward in their lives, or what their values are?”

List the students’ hypotheses and the evidence in the object that led them to think that. Compare these with the hypotheses they had connected to the myth or folktale, and discuss. Were your hypotheses from the story the same, similar, or different from your hypotheses from the object? What do you conclude from that? Add to the list of questions the students would like to ask about that culture.

Post-Museum Visit – Read about the culture (in texts or other resources), and see if the students can find answers to the questions they compiled, or confirmation of their hypotheses. Return to the Museum, and ask a Museum staff person to meet with your class to discuss their hypotheses and answer their remaining questions. Look at other objects from that culture with the Museum staff and discuss the cultural information that is embedded in the works of art from that culture – visual art, literature, music, dance, or theater.

Optional writing assignment: Choose a work of art, myth or folktale and write about how it reflects the culture it grew out of.

Supportive Materials: Myths and/or folktales from African, Greek, Egyptian or Pre-Columbian cultures. See also lessons connected to the Theme unit “Truth: Myth, Fact and Fiction” for more information about myth and culture.

Documentation and Assessment Options: Pre- and post-test: How do works of art (including literature) reflect the culture they grow out of? If the activity is repeated to introduce different cultures from the curriculum, you could keep their lists of hypotheses and questions for analysis. Compare original hypotheses with written essay at the end.

Works of Art in the Museum that can connect to this lesson: Egyptian *Heart Scarab*; other Greek and Roman objects; Pre-Columbian objects; *Buddha Heads*; *ci wara* headdresses and other African objects.

Links to Other Curriculum: Poetry from different eras holds clues to that time period (values, attitudes, concerns, etc.), as does fiction. Some works are more indicative of a culture than others. Some authors and artists reflect their cultural norms, and others break away from the norms. This would be an interesting discussion in itself.

Author of the lesson: Anne Rhodes

“Reading the Object” Worksheet

Look at the work of art, and discuss the following questions.

1. What do you think is going on here? What is happening?
2. Is there a story that this object tells? What is it?
3. What is the message of this object? What lesson(s) does it teach?
4. Does the object give you any clues about the culture that it comes from? Can you find in the object any clues about what is important to the people who made it? What they respect or fear? What they work toward in their lives, or what their values are?

List your hypotheses (guesses based on what you see or know) about what the culture is like, and name what you see in the object that makes you think that.

<u>Hypotheses</u>	<u>Evidence</u>