

NORTON SIMON MUSEUM
Student Preparatory Packet
Indian & Southeast Asian Art

Introduction to the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known worldwide as one of the most remarkable art collections ever assembled. Seven centuries of European art dated from the Renaissance to the 20th century are on permanent display, including works by Raphael, Botticelli, Rubens, Rembrandt, Zurbarán, Fragonard, and Goya. The Museum also boasts a celebrated Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collection—with paintings by Manet, Renoir, Monet, Degas, van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec and Cézanne—as well as works by Picasso, Matisse, and the German Expressionists. Moreover, the Museum also has one of the premier collections of South and Southeast Asian works of art in the country, spanning a period of some 2,000 years.

Curriculum Materials

To prepare your students for the tour, we have enclosed overhead transparencies of paintings and sculpture in the Museum’s collections. Included in the packet are the following:

- a lesson plan for each featured artwork, along with vocabulary and pronunciation guide
- a CD that covers pre-visit curricula for other tours offered by the Education Department
- a DVD, “The Art of Norton Simon,” to familiarize your students with the Museum, its founder and its collections.

Lessons Overview

Each lesson provides brief background information about the artwork and artist, followed by questions that promote observation and discussion. Suggested classroom activities present students with the opportunity to explore the collection through research, writing and art-making projects.

Learning Objectives

Students are encouraged to:

- take time to look closely
- describe what they see
- connect the visual arts with historical periods and religious traditions through research and writing projects
- create original artworks focusing on themes and formal elements of art found in works from the Norton Simon collection.

Curriculum Standards

The materials address Content Standards for California Public Schools in Visual Arts, History–Social Science and English-Language Arts for grades 5–12.

In addition to studying the enclosed preparatory packet, you may find it helpful to visit our website, www.nortonsimon.org

Sincerely,

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Buddha Shakyamuni, 9th century

Thailand: Si Thep, Mon-Dvaravati Period

Sandstone, 88 in. (223.5 cm)

The Norton Simon Foundation



One of the first artworks that visitors entering the Norton Simon Museum encounter is a large statue of **Buddha Shakyamuni**, the historical Buddha. This larger-than-life image was created in the 9th century by an unknown sculptor, during the Mon-Dvaravati period (6th–9th century). Mon-Dvaravati refers to a linguistic group and a chiefdom that inhabited parts of what is now Thailand.

Prior to becoming the Buddha, or “enlightened one,” Prince **Siddhartha** Gautama was born in Lumbini, in what is now Nepal, around the 6th century BCE. Prior to his birth, his father, King Suddhodana, visited a soothsayer, who predicted that Siddhartha would grow up to be either a great political ruler or a great religious teacher. In order to ensure that his son would choose to pursue politics, King Suddhodana arranged for Siddhartha to live a cloistered life of leisure. However, at age 29, Siddhartha, while traveling to meet his subjects, came across an old man, a diseased man, a corpse and an ascetic. Prince Siddhartha could no longer ignore the existence of suffering in the world and live a life of privilege, knowing that old age and death are inevitable. He chose to give up his life of ease to become an ascetic and find the truth to the universe.

He removed his jewels and rich robes, cut his hair and went into the forest to study with Hindu sages and yogis. But he was unsatisfied with their teachings. He also practiced several types of self-mortification—most importantly, starvation nearly unto death—because he wanted to concentrate exclusively on his spiritual advancements. These efforts proved fruitless, however, and he finally came to the realization that the **Middle Path** (that is, avoiding extremes) was the path toward **enlightenment**, truth. The middle path teaches adherents to avoid extremes. For Siddhartha, that meant neither a life of luxury as a prince nor starving himself.

Siddhartha traveled to a town in northern India called Bodh Gaya, where he sat under a **bodhi** tree (actually a fig tree) and vowed to stay there until he reached enlightenment. After remaining in that spot in deep **meditation** for 49 days, he was tested one night by the demon god Mara (a symbol of ignorance who is not evil, just deluded). Mara terrorized Siddhartha and sent his beautiful daughters to tempt him. Siddhartha remained unmoved, kept meditating and thus passed his final trial before gaining enlightenment. At the moment of his enlightenment, he came to be known as “Buddha,” which translates from the Sanskrit as “enlightened one.”

In order to depict the Buddha, the sculptor of this work has employed a number of visual mechanisms or iconographic **attributes**, some of which make direct reference to the Buddha’s secular past. Before beginning his journey, Siddhartha gave up all his belongings and cut his long, luxurious hair—acts symbolic of his renunciation of the material world. We see these narrative details reflected in the figure’s monk robe (called a **sanghati**) and his tufted hair, in addition to his elongated earlobes, which were once weighed down by heavy gold and jeweled earrings. Other characteristics symbolize Buddha’s supernatural qualities rather than his earthly roots, and are referred to as his **lakshanas**. A cranial bump, called an **ushnisha**, signifies his supreme wisdom; the tuft of hair between his eyebrows (called an **urna**) is considered a sign of good fortune. This Buddha image was later re-carved to include a receptacle for a jeweled *urna*. Originally, the image would have been depicted with a carved tuft of hair.

Carved from an enormous block of **sandstone**, *Buddha Shakyamuni* was once enshrined in a Buddhist temple in what is now Thailand. Over time, the figure sustained damage to its limbs and lost its decorative jewels, but what remains today still makes a remarkable impression on viewers.

Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara with Eleven Heads, c. 1500

Tibet

Gilt bronze with copper, gold and silver inlay and pigment,

17 x 8 1/4 x 3 5/8 in. (43.2 x 21 x 9.2 cm)

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Mahayana is a school of Buddhism that arose around 100 AD. It differs greatly in its views of enlightenment from the **Theravada** school (School of the Elders). Mahayana literally means “the big vehicle.” This vehicle transports sentient beings across the ocean of existence, from the wheel of *samsara* (cycle of rebirth) to enlightenment and nirvana.

The goal of Mahayana Buddhists is the enlightenment of all sentient beings, rather than personal enlightenment. To that end, the *bodhisattva*, a deity of wisdom and compassion, developed as a central Buddhist figure.

Bodhisattvas are individuals who have reached enlightenment but postponed their own final **nirvana** (*parinirvana*) in order to aid others in their spiritual quest for salvation.

There are many different bodhisattvas, both male and female, each with unique iconographic attributes.

Bodhisattvas also exist in the Theravada school of Buddhism; however, the title is used exclusively to refer to Prince Siddhartha.

In a Buddhist text called the *Lotus Sutra*, the Bodhisattva **Avalokiteshvara**, or Bodhisattva of Compassion, is described as looking in all directions, so that he may locate suffering beings and come to their aid. This concept is perhaps best illustrated by depictions of Avalokiteshvara in a manifestation called *ekadasamukha* (“11 faces” in Sanskrit). According to this narrative, Avalokiteshvara set before himself a difficult task: he vowed that he would not rest until he had freed all sentient beings in the world from suffering. With so much work ahead of him, he became overwhelmed, and his head split into thousands of pieces. **Amitabha** Buddha, the Buddha of “Infinite Life,” reassembled the broken pieces into 11 heads, enabling Avalokiteshvara to see many places simultaneously.

In this bronze sculpture of Avalokiteshvara in his **ekadasamukha** form, the first three tiers of elaborately crowned heads look out into the four cardinal directions. The tenth head above the three tiers depicts the fierce form of Avalokiteshvara, called Hayagriva. Though he appears to grimace in anger, Hayagriva is actually a protector deity, ready to spring into action to defend followers from harm. These 10 heads together not only symbolize the god’s omniscience but also refer to the 10 virtues, 10 stages of enlightenment and 10 spiritual strengths that are seminal in Mahayana Buddhist philosophy. At the top, an 11th head represents Amitabha Buddha, who is considered the spiritual father of Avalokiteshvara.

Serenely balanced on two feet, *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara with Eleven Heads* exudes the calm compassion for which the god is known. His lower right hand, with the palm open, expresses charity, or giving. Other hands hold sacred objects associated with him, including a cakra (wheel), which represents the ability of the Buddha’s teachings to cut through ignorance, and prayer beads that Buddhists count while meditating or chanting. His lower left hand grasps a water pot, symbolizing his ability to ease the suffering of his devoted followers. Originally, the sculpture would have stood on a lotus flower, a Buddhist symbol of divinity and purity.

As with many Tibetan Buddhist sculptures, *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara with Eleven Heads* is gilded (painted with melted gold), and the surface is lavishly inlaid with copper, silver and gold. These precious materials reflect this religious figure’s importance in Buddhist belief and practice. In fact, in his 11-headed form, Avalokiteshvara is considered to be the patron deity of the Potala Palace in Tibet, the former home of the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists.

Shiva as King of Dance, c. 1000

India: Tamil Nadu

Bronze, 31 3/4 x 24 in. (80.6 x 61.0 cm)

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Unlike Christianity or Buddhism, **Hinduism** did not develop from the teachings of a single founder. Because it has diverse traditions—owing to its long history and development over the past 3,000 years—it is difficult to define, as is the term “Hindu” itself. Originally, Arabs referred to Hindus as those living on the other side (east side) of the Indus River; by the 13th century, this term simply referred to those living in India. Since the 18th century, the term “Hindu” has referred to Indian religions in general.

Hindus adhere to the principles of the **Vedas**, a body of Sanskrit texts that date back as far as 1700 BCE.

Hinduism remains the most widely practiced faith in the Indian subcontinent. Throughout its long history, the rich mythology of Hinduism has inspired many devotional works of art. Made primarily for use in temples, these sacred objects were created with great care by master artisans, after much spiritual and artistic preparation. Besides their aesthetic beauty, these fine works provide the modern-day viewer with insightful glimpses into a complex Indian culture whose religion is filled with many gods, goddesses and myths.

The bronze sculpture known as *Shiva as King of Dance* depicts one of Hinduism’s prominent gods, **Shiva**, in a stance referred to as *Nataraja*, or “Dancing Lord.” As the god of destruction, Shiva enables the regeneration and continued harmony of the universe through his dance. In this image, he is destroying ignorance, illustrated by the trampled dwarf below his right foot. He also uses the dwarf as a pivot from which to spin and dance. With his uppermost right hand, he beats a drum, symbolizing the sound of creation, and with one of his left hands, he gestures to the practitioner to take refuge in his right foot. His uppermost left hand holds a flame, which represents cosmic destruction. The sculptor of this bronze piece was able to capture the momentum of Shiva’s intense dance by depicting the god’s thick, dreadlocked hair coming undone and his sacred rope whipping through the air. Seated in Shiva’s hair is the goddess **Ganga**, who Shiva catches as she falls to earth. His flowing dreadlocks also represent the flowing waters of the Ganga river, which regenerates the world. The ring of fire that encircles Shiva represents the samsaric cycle of rebirth. Like Buddhists, Hindus aspire to be released from the samsaric cycle.

“Dancing Lord” images of Shiva first appeared in southern India during the reign of the **Cholas** (850–1290), who took the Nataraja as their family deity. Today, as in the past, sculptures are housed in shrines devoted to Shiva, ritually bathed with milk or clarified butter, dressed and offered food every day. These practices reflect the belief that such objects contain the living spirit of the gods they represent. On certain holidays, a sculpture may be carried in a procession through the streets so that the faithful can connect with the god by meeting the gaze of the sculpture.



Vishnu as the Boar Avatar, 3rd century

India: Uttar Pradesh, Mathura

Sandstone, 35 1/2 x 16 x 5 in. (90.2 x 40.6 x 12.7 cm)

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This 3rd-century sculpture represents **Vishnu** in the form of Varaha, his **boar avatar**. Vishnu, one of the three principal gods in Hinduism, is known as the preserver. It is his duty to keep the world safe from natural disasters and to protect his followers. He also maintains the balance between good and evil on earth. He has 10 avatars, or physical forms that he may assume on earth, to assist him with these tasks. Vishnu's manifestations include several animal forms, including a man-lion, a fish and a tortoise.

According to the myth portrayed in *Vishnu as the Boar Avatar*, Vishnu assumed the form of a boar to rescue the earth goddess. Different versions of the myth exist: in one, the earth is sinking due to overpopulation; in another, a flood is the cause. In yet another account, an evil demon has dragged the earth goddess to the bottom of the ocean. In each version, Vishnu takes a great gulp of air and dives into the depths of the ocean to rescue the earth goddess.

In this sculpture, earth is **personified** as a female who emerges from Vishnu's mouth. Her hands are clasped in reverence and gratitude. The sculptor has added a second female behind his snout: **Lakshmi**, Vishnu's wife. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, often appears at Vishnu's side. She can be identified by the lotus flower she holds in her hand.

It is common for Hindu sculptures to depict this avatar with a human body and a boar's head, turned to the left, with one leg bent and the other firmly planted on the ground. This stance is associated with **heroism**.

Decorative details enliven the storyline and add to the beauty of this sculpture. For example, the garland of flowers adorning Vishnu's neck signifies his worship by believers. Two of the bulbous flowers in the wreath are from the *kadamba* tree, a favorite of Krishna, who is one of Vishnu's other avatars. By including these flowers, the sculptor reminds the viewer that the boar is not the only avatar of Vishnu, and that this powerful god can assume other forms as well.



Durga with Kumara, 9th century

India: Bihar, Shahabad District

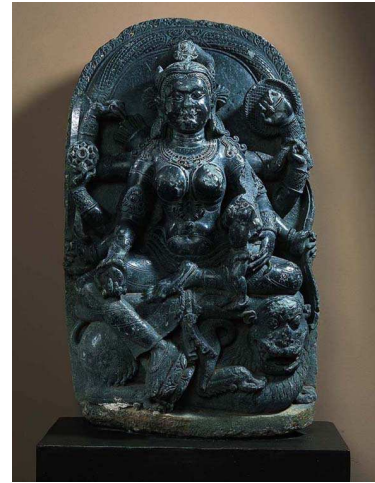
Schist, 35 1/4 x 20 x 10 in. (89.5 x 50.8 x 25.4 cm)

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The Hindu religious tradition incorporates a long and rich history of goddess worship. According to the *Devimahatmya* (Glorification of the Goddess), the sacred Hindu text upon which followers of the goddess base their faith, **Devi**, or “the great goddess,” will appear every time she is needed, in different regions and in different forms. Hence, many incarnations of Devi exist in the Hindu pantheon—among them are **Durga**, Parvati, Uma and Kali—each endowed with unique characteristics, attributes and powers.

Images of goddesses often emphasize nurturing or maternal qualities traditionally associated with femininity. In this 9th-century sculpture, the goddess Durga embodies some of these traits. Her left hand supports a child who sits on her folded leg, perhaps her son Kumara. In her right hand, she holds a piece of fruit, a reference to fertility. As with many representations of goddesses, the sculpture presents an idealized form of beauty. Her body is voluptuous, conveying abundance. In addition, her hair appears to be swept into an elaborate hairstyle, with delicate curls lining her forehead and cascading down her shoulders. Jewelry lavishly adorns her neck, arms, waist and feet, and she wears a sheer skirt patterned with lotus flowers. Indeed, she appears as the “jewel of womanhood,” as described in the *Devimahatmya*.

Yet, some of her attributes seem to contradict these traditional feminine qualities, hinting at her more aggressive nature. Her multiple arms hold an arsenal of weapons, including a sword, wheel and shield. With her upper right arm, she extracts an arrow from her full quiver, and in one of her left arms she carries a bow. She sits on a lion, whose open mouth suggests a growl. These objects identify the figure as Durga, the warrior goddess who defeats demons and titans in order to preserve the stability of the universe. Even her name reflects her fearless nature. Durga means “invincible” in Sanskrit, an ancient language of India. *Durga with Kumara* visually illustrates a balance of Durga’s maternal and warrior aspects, a juxtaposition of opposites that is a vital facet of Hindu goddess worship.



Vocabulary Words and Pronunciation Guide

Attribute—an object that helps identify a figure or character (for example, a crown is an attribute of a king).

Amitabha (a-mee-TAH-bah)—the Buddha of the past.

Avalokiteshvara (ah-vol-lik-tesh-VAR-a)—the Buddhist deity of compassion; he is the most popular of the bodhisattvas and appears throughout Asia. In China, Avalokiteshvara is a female figure known as Guan-yin.

Avatar (AH-va-tar)—according to Hindu belief, a form that deities such as Vishnu assume (for example, in one story, Vishnu becomes half-man, half-lion to destroy a demon).

Boar—an animal similar to a pig.

Bodhi (BO-dee)—a sacred tree associated with the Buddha's enlightenment.

Bodhisattva (BO-dee-SAHT-vah)—a Buddhist religious figure who gives up his or her entrance into nirvana in order to help others.

Buddha Shakyamuni (BOO-dah SHAHK-ya-MOO-nee)—the historical figure whose teachings form the basis of the Buddhist religion.

Cholas (CHO-lahs)—leaders who ruled parts of southern India from 850 to 1290.

Deity (DEE-it-tee)—a god or other religious figure.

Devi (DAY-vee)—the Great Goddess, who is manifest on earth in many forms.

Divine (deh-VINE)—related to a god or goddess.

Durga (DOOR-gah)—a Hindu goddess; one of the manifestations of Devi.

Ekadasamukha (EH-ka-da-sa-moo-ka)—the Buddhist religious figure Avalokiteshvara, shown with 11 heads.

Enlightenment—A complete understanding of everything in the world, which results in compassion for others and freedom from suffering.

Ganga (GAN-ga)—a Hindu goddess, the personification of the Ganges River.

Gods and Goddesses—male and female religious figures (for example, in Hinduism, Shiva is a god and Parvati is a goddess).

Heroic—brave; like a hero.

Hinduism (HIN-doo-is-um)—an ancient Indian religion practiced mostly in India.

Lakshana (LAKH-shaan-NA)—a mark or auspicious characteristic of a great man. This term is used to describe the 32 major marks of the Buddha, which distinguish him from the mundane.

Lakshmi (LAKH-shmee)—a Hindu goddess; the wife of Vishnu.

Mahayana (Ma-ha-ya-na)—translated as the “big vehicle” school of Buddhism

Manifestation (man-ih-feh-STAY-shun)—the way something appears; its physical form.

Meditation (med-it-TAY-shun)—a way of praying or refining the mind that involves sitting quietly with one’s eyes closed.

Mythology—a group of myths or traditional stories that usually have to do with religious beliefs, deities and/or ancestors.

Nataraja (Na-ta-ra-ja)— translated as king (raja) of dance (nata) and is a title associated with Shiva

Nirvana (nir-VAH-na)—extinction of all things; perfect bliss.

Personification—an idea or inanimate object represented as a person.

Representation—the way something appears; the way it is presented.

Sacred—important because of a connection to a religion or idea.

Samsara (SAAM-saa-ra)—endless cycle of rebirth.

Sandstone—rock made of sand and held together by silica, calcium, carbonate, iron oxide or clay.

Sanghati (Sang-ha-ti)—a simple robe worn by a monk.

Shiva (SHE-vah)—a god who, according to Hindu belief, destroys and re-creates the universe.

Siddhartha (sid-DARTH-ah)—Buddha’s princely name, before he became a religious figure.

Supernatural—unexplained by the laws of nature; miraculous.

Symbol—a mark with a prescribed set of meanings.

Theravada (Tear-ra-va-da)—a school of Buddhism, which is thought to be closest to the Buddha’s original teachings

Urna (oor-N’YAH)—a tuft of hair between the eyes; considered one of the Buddha’s 32 *lakshanas*.

Ushnisha (oosh-NEE-sha)—a raised bump on top of the head that symbolizes the Buddha’s supernatural knowledge, also considered a *lakshana*.

Vedism (VAYD-ism)—the religion of the ancient Aryans, who settled in India around 1500 BCE.

Vishnu (VISH-noo)—A god who, according to Hindu belief, protects his followers and the universe.

Title of Lesson/Unit:

Time: One to two class periods

Grades: 6 (with adaptations for older students)

Standards (VAPA):

1.2 Discuss each work of art in terms of theme, idea and differences among various media.

Standards (academic content areas):

History–Social Science

6.5 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious and social structures of the early civilizations of India.

Indicators of achievement:

- ★ Student participates in class discussion.
- ★ Student identifies areas of India, Thailand and Tibet on a map.
- ★ Student identifies the Himalaya Mountains and the Ganges River.
- ★ Student creates an artwork expressing concepts related to Hindu and Buddhist beliefs, then writes a gallery label for his or her creation.

Materials:

- ★ Overhead transparencies and map (provided in packet)
- ★ Sketch paper or construction paper
- ★ Pencil, crayons, pastels, paint or other media (depending on what is available)

Preparation/Background:

Read the enclosed information sheets from the *Norton Simon Museum Student Preparatory Packet*.

Activity:

1. Using the overhead transparencies included in the packet, discuss each artwork with students. Focus on what students can learn about each religious figure by examining the image. For example:
 - What *attributes* does the artist use to tell the viewer that *Buddha Shakyamuni* is an image of the Buddha? What tells you that the Buddha is powerful?
 - The image *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara with Eleven Heads* is much smaller than *Buddha Shakyamuni*, yet the artist still indicates the figure's high status. How does he achieve this? How has the artist communicated the qualities of this religious figure (compassionate, peaceful)?
 - In *Vishnu as the Boar Avatar*, the god appears as a triumphant hero. What brave act has he just committed? How does the artist tell the story? What other figure is included in the sculpture?
 - There are many figures in *Shiva as King of Dance*. Which one is the most important? How do you know? What role do the other figures play? How else does the artist tell us that Shiva is powerful? What is he doing in this sculpture?

- *Durga with Kumara* shows a female figure endowed with a variety of characteristics, attributes and special powers. What are they? How has the artist conveyed the complex nature of the goddess (motherly, frightening)?
2. As they examine each image, students should mark on the enclosed map the area from which the sculpture originated. In addition, students should find the Himalaya Mountains (where the gods are said to live) and the Ganges River (a sacred river that Hindus believe washes away all sins). How do *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara with Eleven Heads* and *Shiva as King of Dance* reflect some aspect of these landmarks?
 3. These artworks emphasize each figure's essential role(s): nurturing life and combating evil (Durga), offering protection (Vishnu), creating the world (Shiva), bestowing compassion (Avalokiteshvara) and providing guidance (Buddha Shakyamuni). Do these roles exist in our culture today? Are they valued by society? Who represents these roles today? Consider both secular and religious figures.
 4. Students then design an artwork that communicates one of the above-mentioned ideas: creation, protection, destruction, compassion or guidance. They can choose a contemporary figure, an invented figure or an ancient figure. Students should use objects/symbols, body language and narrative to visually demonstrate their figure's power. They may create an illustration, painting or sculpture, or use whatever other medium is available.
 5. Next, students write a gallery label explaining their artworks. Questions to consider include: How does the student's creation reflect the idea? What stories about the figure illuminate his or her role? What objects/symbols are associated with the figure?

Format for a gallery label:

Name of the artwork, year it was created

Origin or the country it came from

Material or what it is made of

Dimension of the object or how big/small the object is

Text discussing the artwork

Sample:

Buddha Shakyamuni, 9th century

Thailand: Mon-Dvaravati Period

Sandstone

88 in. (223.5 cm)

Having once stood more than nine feet tall, this sculpture of the Buddha Shakyamuni testifies to the great reverence shown to Buddhism by the Mons during the Dvaravati period (6th-11th centuries). Colossal images of this type, dating to such an early period, are rare in Southeast Asia.

In its original state, this Buddha would have been displayed in a temple adorned with a precious gem in between his eyebrows, now an exposed cavity. This mark, called an urna, distinguishes the Buddha from the mundane and serves as a symbol of an enlightened being. The arms of this sculpture would have been bent at the elbows, with both hands extended into space and the thumb and index finger of each touching to form the gesture of teaching (vitarkamudra). The double vitarkamudra is a hallmark of Dvaravati-period Buddha sculptures.

Alterations: Find other artworks from the same time period from other cultures. How are they similar to these? How are they different? Do religious figures from other ancient cultures play similar roles to Hindu and Buddhist gods and goddesses?

