

NORTON SIMON MUSEUM
Student Preparatory Packet
Indian & Southeast Asian Art

The Norton Simon Museum is known worldwide as one of the most remarkable collections ever assembled. Seven centuries of European art from the Renaissance to the 20th century are on view, including works by Raphael, Botticelli, Rubens, Rembrandt, Zurbarán, Fragonard, and Goya. The Museum boasts a celebrated Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collection with paintings by Manet, Renoir, Monet, Degas, van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec and Cézanne. In addition, there are 20th-century works by Picasso, Matisse, and German Expressionists. Complementing the Western art is an outstanding group of Asian sculptures from India and Southeast Asia spanning a period of 2000 years.

To prepare your students for the tour, we have enclosed five overhead transparencies representative of the Asian collections. Artworks from India, Thailand and Tibet are included that reflect each country's religious and cultural practices. For each transparency, you will find an information sheet about the artist, culture and artwork along with a lesson plan that address Content Standards in Social Studies and Visual and Performing Arts. Additionally, we have included the video "The Art of Norton Simon" which will familiarize your students with the Museum, its founder and its collections. We hope that you and your students enjoy the preparatory packet as well as your visit.

In addition to the enclosed preparatory packet, you may also find it helpful to visit our website, www.nortonsimon.org. Look for the "Study Guides" in the Education section of the website.

Sincerely,

Michael Ano
Educational Assistant
Norton Simon Museum

Buddha Shakyamuni, 9th century

Thailand: Si Thep, Mon-Dvaravati Period

Sandstone

88 in. (223.5 cm)

The Norton Simon Foundation

Upon entering the Norton Simon Museum, visitors first encounter a large sculptural representation of Buddha. Created in the 9th century by an unknown sculptor from the Mon-Dvaravati kingdom in present-day Thailand, *Buddha Shakyamuni* is an iconic example of Southeast Asian Buddhist sculpture.

It is said that Buddha Shakyamuni, the historical figure who founded the Buddhist religion, was born Prince Siddhartha around the 6th century B.C.E. to the king and queen of a Nepalese warrior clan. In his 20s, he rejected his father's wealth and embarked on a journey in search of spiritual truth. During Siddhartha's self-imposed exile, he achieved enlightenment, a clear understanding of life, while meditating under a *bodhi* tree. He was thus given the name *Buddha*, or "the enlightened one." Having reached the transcendent state of *nirvana*—a state of perfect bliss accompanied by release from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth—Buddha serves as an example for Buddhists who, like him, seek enlightenment through meditation and detachment from the material world.

The sculptor employed a number of visual features commonly used to depict Buddha. Some of these elements make direct reference to his secular past. Before beginning his journey, Siddhartha gave up all his belongings and cut his luxurious long hair—acts symbolic of his renunciation of the material world. We see these narrative details reflected in the figure's modest robe (called a *jivara*) and his short curls of hair. In addition, the figure's elongated earlobes suggest that Siddhartha, like many princes, once wore large weighty earrings. Other characteristics symbolize Buddha's supernatural power rather than his earthly roots. A skull protuberance atop the head, called an *ushnisha*, signifies supreme wisdom. Traditionally, a tuft of hair between the eyebrows (called an *urna*) is considered a sign of good fortune. Here an indentation marks where a jewel representing an *urna* once lay. This divine symbol would have been complemented by inlaid jewels in the arch-like notches of the eyebrows.

Carved from an enormous block of sandstone, *Buddha Shakyamuni* once adorned a Buddhist temple in Thailand, standing an imposing ten feet tall. While over time the figure has sustained damage to its limbs and lost its decorative jewels, what remains still makes a remarkable impression on viewers today. The smoothly modeled features, downward gaze and gentle smile lend *Buddha Shakyamuni* a powerful, yet reassuring presence.



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)

The Norton Simon Foundation

Mahayana, or “Greater Vehicle” Buddhism, emerged in India in the first century. The goal of Mahayanists is total enlightenment of all living creatures, rather than solely one’s personal enlightenment. Along with the development of this branch of Buddhism came the concept of the *bodhisattva*, a religious figure who aids the faithful in their pursuit of enlightenment. These compassionate beings are capable of entering nirvana, yet they postpone their own final entrance in order to help others attain release from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. There are many different bodhisattvas, both male and female, each with unique characteristics.



In a Buddhist religious text called the *Lotus Sutra*, the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara 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* (“eleven faces” in Sanskrit). According to legend, Avalokiteshvara set before himself a most difficult task: he vowed that he would not rest until he had freed all beings in the world from suffering. With so much work ahead of him, he became overwhelmed and his head split into thousands of pieces. Fortunately, Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of ‘Infinite Life,’ reassembled the broken pieces into eleven heads, enabling the bodhisattva to supernaturally see many places simultaneously.

In this bronze sculpture of Avalokiteshvara in his *ekadasamukha* form, the first three tiers of elaborately crowned heads indeed face many directions. Each wears an expression of perfect calm. 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 to action to defend followers from harm. These ten heads together symbolize not only the god’s omniscience, but also refer to the ten virtues, ten stages of enlightenment and ten spiritual strengths that are seminal to Mahayanist philosophy. At the top, an eleventh 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. The lower left hand with palm open expresses a sign of charity, or giving. The hands also hold several sacred objects, including a wheel which represents the Wheel of the Law or the teachings of the Buddha and rosary beads that Buddhists count while meditating or chanting. The lower right hand grasps a water pot, symbolizing the god’s ability to ease the thirst of his devoted followers. Originally, the sculpture would have stood on a base representing 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 eleven-headed form, Avalokiteshvara is considered to be the patron deity of the Potala Palace in Tibet, the former home of the Dalai Lama.

Shiva as King of Dance, c. 1000

India: Tamil Nadu

Bronze

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

The Norton Simon Foundation



Hinduism, which evolved from the Vedas, a set of sacred texts composed in the second millennium BCE, remains the most widely practiced faith in the Indian subcontinent today. 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 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." In the sculpture, the deity balances atop a small figure that represents ignorance, surrounded by a nimbus aflame with the fires of destruction. The pose symbolizes Shiva's ability to create, preserve, and destroy the universe in an endlessly repeating cycle, all while eliminating ignorance.

Like many representations of Hindu gods, this sculpture of Shiva boasts many arms, holding objects that emphasize the god's power. The upper right hand controls the flame that will eventually destroy the universe, while the lower right hand points to the ground as an indication of Shiva's power and strength. The upper left hand holds a drum, the beating of which creates the universe. A snake is draped across the other left arm, a reference to reincarnation. The snake is also symbolic of egotism, a condition which followers of Hinduism must conquer in order to realize *moksha*, or release from the cycle of birth-death-rebirth.

Flowing lines that represent hair also reference the Ganges River, a body of water sacred to Hindus. Just above the hair stands a small figure of the goddess Ganga. Her presence alludes to a narrative that testifies to Shiva's power. According to Hindu belief, the river goddess Ganga originally lived in the sky. A drought fell upon India, and she was asked to send water to the earth. Reasoning that a forceful downpour from the sky would wash away the land completely, Shiva suggested that she pour the river onto his hair, where it would spread gently down his locks creating the Ganges River.

"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 generally housed in shrines devoted to Shiva, ritually bathed with milk or butter, dressed and offered food every day. These practices reflect the belief that such artworks contain the living spirit of the gods they represent. On certain holidays, sculptures are carried in processions through the streets so that the faithful can connect with the gods by meeting the gaze of the sculpture.

Vishnu as the Boar Avatar, 3rd century

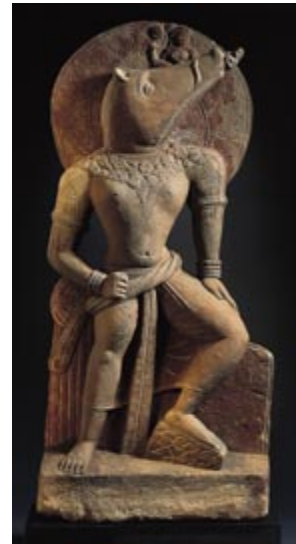
India: Uttar Pradesh, Mathura

Sandstone

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

The Norton Simon Foundation

This 3rd-century sculpture represents Vishnu in the form of *Varaha*, his boar avatar. Vishnu's job as a god is 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 ten avatars, or physical forms that he may assume, to assist him with these tasks. Vishnu's manifestations include several animal forms: including a man-lion, fish and 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. In yet another account, an evil demon had dragged the earth goddess to the bottom of the ocean. In each version, Vishnu took a great gulp of air and dove into the water, and then carried her safely to the surface.

The earth, personified as a female, emerges from Vishnu's mouth. Her hands are clasped in reverence and gratitude. The sculptor has added a second female behind his snout, who is most likely 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. His stance is heroic. With one leg bent and the other firmly planted on the ground, he seems ready to burst with energy. One fist is held firmly against his right thigh in resolve. His chest, arm, and leg muscles are well-developed, imparting a sense of strength. Vishnu looks up triumphantly.

Decorative details enliven the story line and add to the beauty of this sculpture. For example, the wreath of flowers adorning Vishnu's neck, called a *vanamala*, reinforces his power as a deity. Two of the bulbous flowers in the wreath are from the kadamba tree, a favorite of Krishna's 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.

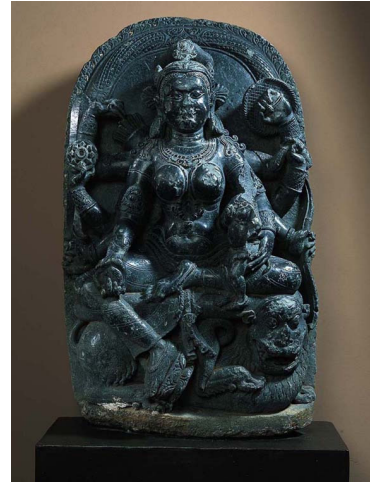
Durga with Kumara, 9th century

India: Bihar, Shahabad District

Schist

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

The Norton Simon Foundation



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 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 upon 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 diaphanous skirt patterned with lotus flowers. Indeed, she appears as the “jewel of womanhood” that the *Devimahatmya* describes.

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 right arm, she extracts an arrow from her full quiver, and in her left arm she carries a bow. She sits upon a lion, whose open mouth suggests a growl. These objects identify the artwork as a depiction of Durga, a warrior goddess who defeats demons and titans in order to preserve the stability of the universe. Even her name reflects her fearless nature, for 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 & Pronunciation Guide

Attribute - An object that helps identify a person or character. For example, a crown is an attribute of a king.

Amitabha (a-mee-TAH-bah) - In Tibetan Buddhism, one of the many forms of Buddha.

Avalokiteshvara (ah-vol-lik-tesh-VAR-a) - A Buddhist religious figure; the most popular type of bodhisattva.

Avatar (AH-va-tar) - According to Hindu belief, a form that the Hindu god Vishnu changes into. For example, in one story Vishnu becomes a half-man, half-lion to destroy a demon.

Boar - An animal similar to a pig.

Bodhi (BO-dee) - A kind of tree sacred to Buddhists.

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 life story forms the basis of the Buddhist religion.

Chola (CHO-lah) - Leaders who ruled parts of southern India from the years 850 - 1290.

Conch - A spiral-shaped sea shell. The Hindu god Vishnu is said to have made it into a horn, which when blown destroys demons as well as ignorance.

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

Devi (DAY-vee) – the Great Goddess who is manifest in many forms.

Divine (deh-VINE) - Something that is related to a god or goddess.

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

Egotism - Selfishness.

Ekadasamukha - (EH-ka-da-sa-moo-ka) A form of the Buddhist religious figure named Avalokiteshvara, where he is shown with eleven heads.

Enlightenment - The goal of most Buddhists. A complete understanding of everything in the world, which results in compassion for others and freedom from suffering.

Exile - Separation from one's home.

Ganga (GAN-ga) - A Hindu goddess, the personified river Ganges.

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 religion practiced mostly in India.

Iconic - When something is created to look a certain way, according to a set of rules.

Jivara - A simple robe worn by a monk.

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

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

Meditation (med-it-TAY-shun) - A way of praying that involves sitting quietly with one's eyes closed.

Moksha (MOKE-shah) - A Hindu belief that it is possible to break out of the cycle of life-death-rebirth.

Mythology - A group of myths, or traditional stories that usually have to do with a people's religious beliefs, deities and/or ancestors.

Nimbus (NIM-biss) - A ring that circles around an object or figure like a halo.

Nirvana (nir-VAH-na) - A state of mind where a person feels no pain or suffering; perfect bliss.

Personification - When an idea or an inanimate object is represented as a person.

Representation - The way something appears; the way it is presented.

Sacred - Something that people consider important because of its connection to a religion.

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

Shiva (SHE-vah) - A Hindu god who, according to Hindu belief, destroys and recreates the universe.

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

Supernatural - Something that cannot be explained by the laws of nature; miraculous.

Symbol - An object or image that has a special meaning.

Urna (oor-N'YAH) - A round mark on the forehead considered a sign of enlightenment in Buddhist belief.

Ushnisha (oosh-NEE-sha) - A raised bump on top of the head that symbolizes Buddha's supernatural knowledge.

Vanamala (va-na-MA-la) - A long garland of flowers, traditionally used in art to identify the Hindu god Vishnu.

Vedism (VAYD-ism) - The religion of the ancient Aryans who settled in India around 1500 B.C.E.

Vishnu (VISH-noo) - A Hindu 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 works of art as to theme, idea, and differences in 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 Himalayan Mountains and the Ganges River.
- ★ Student creates an artwork that expresses concepts related to Hindu & Buddhist beliefs, and 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 utilize to tell the viewer that *Buddha Shakyamuni* is an image of 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 his high status. How does he achieve this? How has the artist communicated the qualities of this religious figure (compassionate, peaceful)?
 - *Vishnu as a Boar* 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 can you tell? 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 you examine each image, students should mark the area that the sculpture originated from on the enclosed map. In addition, students should find the Himalayan 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/or 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, sculpture, or 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 out 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)

This colossal freestanding statue of Buddha Shakyamuni is a testimony to the enormous skill and confidence of the Mon-Dvaravati sculptors. When complete, this sculpture must have stood more than 9 feet (3 meters) tall and is probably the largest image of its kind outside Thailand. Although the Buddha's size is awesome, his expression is benign and his gentle smile comforting. Both his hands would have been bent at the elbow and extended with palms facing forward in the gesture of teaching. The hole between his eyes may have once been inlaid with a gemstone, representing the Buddha's *urna*, an auspicious tuft of hair.

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?

Museum Extensions: When you arrive, tell the Museum Educator to cover the artworks included in the packet. She will also be able to show you similar artworks from the same time periods, regions and/or belief systems.