

Teacher Resource Guide

Asian Art

The
Nelson-Atkins
Museum
of Art



L to R: *Guanyin of the Southern Sea*, China, Liao (907—1125) or Jin Dynasty (1115—1234). Wood with multiple layers of paint, 95 x 66 x 43 1/2 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 34-10. | *Shiva Nataraja, The Lord of Dance*, South India, Tamil Nadu, Chola Dynasty (850—1278), early 13th century. Bronze, 34 1/4 x 27 1/2 x 13 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 34-7. | Mori Sosen (Japanese, 1747—1821), *Shaka Descending from the Mountains*, ca. 1800. Hanging scroll: ink and light color on paper, 42 x 21 5/8 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 82-4.

ABOUT THE COLLECTIONS

Asian art at the Nelson-Atkins represents a vast span of time and geographical distance. Galleries dedicated to the arts of China, Japan, and South and Southeast Asia present various and vibrant cultural traditions.

China

The Chinese collection contains over 7,000 works from every phase of China's artistic activity. Jades and bronze vessels reflect ancient Chinese burial rituals. Buddhist sculptures and paintings illustrate the important role the religion played in Chinese history. Paintings, furniture, ceramics, and textiles speak to China's long history of artistic development spanning over 4,000 years.

Japan

The strength of the Japanese collection lies in its folding paper screens from the 16th to early 20th century. Ceramic implements made for tea ceremonies, textiles made for religious and secular settings, and Buddhist sculptures and temple furnishings also form notable parts of the collection.

South & Southeast Asia

Ranging from the 3rd century B.C.E. to the 21st century C.E., works in the museum's South and Southeast Asian art collection reflect the rich artistic traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Islam. Bronze and stone sculptures, wooden interior furnishings, and metalwork comprise some of the highlights of the collection.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Look inside for background information about Asian art at the Nelson-Atkins, questions and activities to engage your students both at the museum and in the classroom, and suggestions for where to learn more.

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4525 Oak Street
Kansas City, Missouri 64111
nelson-atkins.org

To schedule a tour:
nelson-atkins.org/educators/school-tours

TIMELINE: CHINA, JAPAN, SOUTH & SOUTHEAST ASIA

China

ca. 1600—1046 B.C.E.: Shang Dynasty, noted for bronze casting and creation of writing system

1046—256 B.C.E.: Zhou Dynasty, marked by development of Confucianism and Daoism

475—221 B.C.E.: Warring States Period, a time of political disunity during the Eastern Zhou Dynasty

221 B.C.E.—206 B.C.E.: Qin Dynasty, when construction of Great Wall of China begins

206 B.C.E.—220 C.E.: Han Dynasty, known for strong central government, achievements in literature and art, and basing rule on Confucian ideals

1st century C.E.: Buddhism arrives in China

368—534 C.E.: Wei Dynasty, when Buddhism spreads and begins shaping Chinese society

581—618 C.E.: Sui Dynasty, which reunifies China after period of disparate dynasties

618—906 C.E.: Tang Dynasty, era of cosmopolitanism and cultural innovation with flourishing Silk Road trade

1279—1368 C.E.: Yuan Dynasty, founded by Mongols

1368—1644 C.E.: Ming Dynasty, noted for its insular culture and authoritarian rule

1644—1911 C.E.: Qing Dynasty, marked by economic development and population growth

1949—present: The People's Republic of China

Japan

ca. 300 B.C.E.: Yayoi Culture, an agricultural society making wheel-turned pottery

Mid-500s C.E.: Buddhism takes root in Japan

645 C.E.: Taika Reforms, a reorganization of society based on Chinese bureaucratic models and legal theories

710—814 C.E.: Nara Period, marking beginning of classical period in Japanese culture

794—1185 C.E.: Heian Period, known as height of classical Japanese arts and literature centered in Kyoto

1185—1333 C.E.: Kamakura Period, noted for feudal military rule under shoguns

1200s C.E.: Zen school of Buddhism arrives in Japan

1392—1573 C.E.: Muromachi Period, marked by development of Noh theater and refinement of tea ceremony based on Zen ideals

1615—1868 C.E.: Edo Period, long era of peace and seclusion from global affairs

1868—1912 C.E.: Meiji Restoration, period of interaction with international society

1912—1926 C.E.: Taisho Period

1926—1989 C.E.: Showa Period

1989—present: Heisei Period

South & Southeast Asia

ca. 2500—1500 B.C.E.: Indus Valley Civilization, known for urban centers supported by agriculture

ca. 1750—1000 B.C.E.: Aryan Migration brings nomadic Iranian peoples into South Asia

500s B.C.E.: Siddhartha Gautama's teachings on the path to Enlightenment become Buddhism. Jainism develops from teachings of another Indian ascetic.

ca. 326—185 B.C.E.: Mauryan Empire, marked by imperial adoption of Buddhism in India

1st century B.C.E.—299 C.E.: Kushan Dynasty, ruling in northern India and Gandhara region of present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan

300—699 C.E.: Gupta Dynasty in India, era of great scientific and cultural advances

750—1220 C.E.: Buddhism is exported to Nepal, Tibet, and Southeast Asia

802—1431 C.E.: Khmer Dynasty in Cambodia

850—1278 C.E.: Chola Dynasty in southeast India, noted for bronze-working techniques

1526—1858 C.E.: Mughal Empire, era of Islamic rule in India and Pakistan

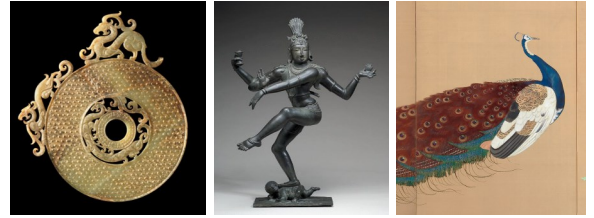
1858—1947 C.E.: British Colonial Period

1947—present: The Republic of India

THEMES TO EXPLORE IN ASIAN ART

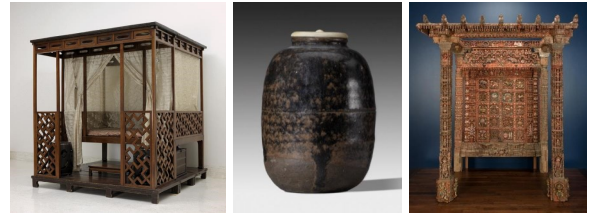
Craftsmanship & Technique

Asian artists of many times and places have found innovative ways to use various materials to create finely crafted works of art. Compare Chinese carved jade, bronze sculpture of India's Chola Dynasty, and Japanese painted screens. Where do you see signs of craftsmanship in each?



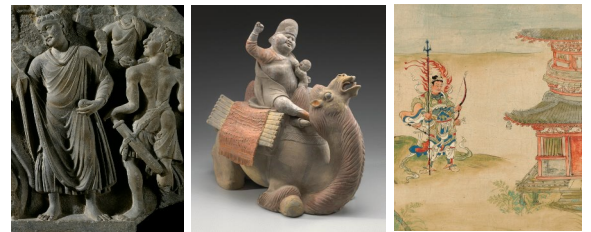
Art for Daily Life

Much of the Asian art at the Nelson-Atkins was created to serve a particular function, often one that was a routine part of life for the object's owner. Carved wooden furniture was a common sight in upper-class Chinese homes, and ceramic dishes for the preparation and serving of tea were important in Japanese culture. A wooden shrine allowed Indian Jains to conduct daily veneration at home. How can studying functional art objects like these help us understand what was important to a society?



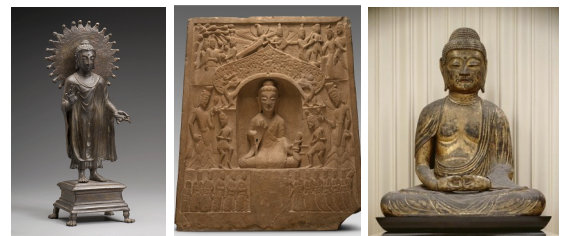
Outside Influences

Through trade, travel, and conquest, ideas and material goods have been circulating in and out of Asia for millennia. Stone sculptures made in the Gandhara region of ancient India contain references to Greek and Roman art, Chinese ceramic figures of the Tang Dynasty reflect the influence of Central Asia in facial features and clothing, and some Japanese paintings depict supernatural beings with roots in India and Korea. What other examples of cross-cultural exchange can you find?



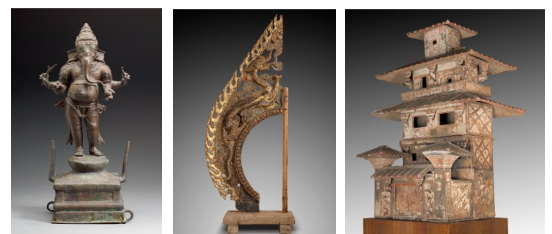
Buddhist Art

The development and spread of Buddhism had a profound impact throughout Asia. At the Nelson-Atkins, you can view images of Buddha and other Buddhist figures made by a variety of Asian cultures. Compare Indian images of Buddha with those made in China and Japan. What similarities and differences do you see? What does this art say about how Buddhism was practiced in different countries?



Temples & Tombs

The belief systems that developed in Asia are embedded in its artistic heritage. Many works at the Nelson-Atkins were made for religious sites, such as bronze sculptures of deities made for Hindu temples and wooden furnishings made for Buddhist temples in Japan. In China, tombs were sites where religious beliefs were put into practice, with art objects serving to honor and appease dead ancestors. What other works made for temples or tombs can you find?



View image credits on Page 8.

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

Practice Looking

Students can learn a lot from Asian art objects if they know how to look. Help students develop observation, analysis, and critical thinking skills by practicing this looking exercise:

Choose a work of Asian art from the Nelson-Atkins. Recommended works:

- CHINA: *Ritual Wine Vessel (hu)*, Shang Dynasty (ca. 16th century—1046 B.C.E.), 12th—11th century B.C.E.
Image viewable at: bit.ly/2VIBZ4Z
- JAPAN: Somada, *Inro*, Edo Period (1615—1858 C.E.)
Image viewable at: bit.ly/2vvcucW
- SOUTH & SOUTHEAST ASIA: *Kamadhenu, the Wish-Granting Cow*, South India, possibly Karnataka, 15th—17th century C.E.
Image viewable at: bit.ly/3cw4MzO



Ask students to observe the image and to discuss the following questions:

- What is this object made of?
- How might it have been made?
- What designs or patterns can be seen on this object?
- Where do you think this object came from?
- How old is it? What clues could help you determine its age?
- How might it have been used?
- Who might have owned something like this?
- What could it teach us about the culture that produced it?



While students may not arrive at correct conclusions during this discussion, they should support their interpretations with visual evidence they see in the work or with details from their existing knowledge. When they visit, they can track down the work they examined to see how accurate their hypotheses were!

Explore Belief Systems

Much of the Asian art on view at the Nelson-Atkins is religious in nature. Becoming familiar with the belief systems of China, Japan, and South and Southeast Asia will help students better understand the meaning and original context of the works they will see at the museum. Instruct students to work in pairs or small groups to investigate one of the following belief systems using library materials or web resources:

- Buddhism
- Confucianism
- Daoism
- Hinduism
- Jainism

Students can then present what they have learned to their classmates.

Note: See the **Suggested Resources** section for tips on where students can look for information.

Plan for Your Visit

As a class, complete a modified version of a K-W-L chart in advance of your museum visit. Ask students to brainstorm what they already **KNOW** about Asia, what they **WANT** to learn about it when they are at the museum, and what kinds of things they **EXPECT** to see in the museum's Asian art collections.

IN-GALLERY ACTIVITIES

Keep Looking

Invite students to repeat the pre-visit looking activity described on the previous page of this guide. In the Asian art galleries, have each student select any work of art that appeals to them. Then, divide the class into pairs for conversation. Partners can share with one another why they chose their selected work and can draw on their own observations and posted gallery labels to try and answer the same series of questions listed previously, beginning with ***What is this object made of?***

Connect to Themes

Have students choose one of the themes listed earlier in this guide. Challenge them to look for at least one other work in the Asian art galleries that reflects that theme in some way. How is it similar to or different from the works pictured here? What culture produced it, and how does it add to your understanding of that culture?

Compare & Contrast

Take students into both the “Indian Temple Room” and the “Chinese Temple Gallery.” Both of these museum galleries are composites, featuring architectural elements and artworks drawn from different original settings and brought together to give visitors the idea of being inside temple spaces. As a group, discuss similarities and differences between the two rooms. How do they differ in terms of the materials used, the types of imagery depicted, their sizes and shapes, and the overall sensation of being in each of them?



AFTER YOUR VISIT

Reflect

As a class, complete the modified K-W-L chart you began before your visit. Reflect on the new understandings you took away from the experience, and list them as what you **L**EARNED from your visit.

Connect

Use your museum visit as the springboard to a writing assignment. Have each student choose one Asian art object that they saw at the Nelson-Atkins (if they did the ***Keep Looking*** activity described above, they might wish to focus on the same object they examined in person). Drawing on what they learned at the museum and what they already know about the culture that produced the object, each student can then write a short narrative describing an imaginary “day in the life” of someone who might have owned it. Their narrative should include details about how, where, and when the person uses that object and why they value it.

As a final extension of the project, instruct students to illustrate their writing, incorporating into their illustrations motifs and stylistic elements they saw in the Asian art at the museum.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Masterworks of Chinese Art: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Colin Mackenzie

This book includes images and detailed descriptions of highlights of Chinese art at the Nelson-Atkins. Available in the ERC.

Masterworks from India and Southeast Asia: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Kimberly Masteller

This book features nearly 40 highlights of South and Southeast Asian art, with essays and an introduction to the history of the Nelson-Atkins collection. Available in the ERC.

The Story of India and The Story of China PBS, written and presented by Michael Wood

These documentary series detail the rich cultures and histories of India and China from ancient times to today. Available in the ERC.

Asia for Educators Columbia University afe.easia.columbia.edu

This web resource includes extensive timelines, primary sources, videos, and lesson plans related to teaching about Asia.

Asian Art Museum: Education education.asianart.org

This museum website features numerous multimedia resources and interactives related to Asian art, history, and culture.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts Standards (KS)

- Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Visual Art Standards (MO)

- Analyze and evaluate art using art vocabulary.
- Explain the connections between Visual Art and Social Studies.

History, Government, and Social Studies Standards (KS)

- The student will recognize and evaluate significant beliefs, contributions, and ideas of many diverse peoples and groups and their impact on individuals, communities, states, and nations.

Social Studies Standards (MO)

- Using a world history lens, describe how peoples' perspectives shaped the sources/artifacts they created.
- Analyze scientific, technological, intellectual, and artistic advancement to determine the legacy of the ancient civilizations.
- Describe how a people's culture is expressed through their art, architecture, and literature.
- Analyze the artistic and intellectual achievements of Americans at different periods in history.

Image credits from Page 3:

Each row from top, L to R: *Ritual Disc with Dragon Motifs (Bi)*, China, Eastern Zhou Dynasty (771—256 B.C.E.). Jade (nephrite), 6 1/2 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 33-81. | *Shiva Nataraja, The Lord of Dance*, South India, Tamil Nadu, Chola Dynasty (850—1278), early 13th century. Bronze, 34 1/4 x 27 1/2 x 13 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 34-7. | Ishizaki Koyo (Japanese, 1884—1947), *Vying Peacocks*, ca. 1929. Ink, mineral colors, *gofun* (white powdered shell) and gold on silk with *urahaku* (gold leaf applied to the reverse of silk) with wooden support, 67 1/4 x 170 3/4 inches. Purchase: Asian Art Acquisition Fund in memory of Laurence Sickman, 2014.51.1,2. | *Canopy Bed with Alcove*, China, Ming Dynasty (1368—1644 C.E.), 16th century. *Huanghuali* wood with 19th-century painted soft wood base and canopy, silk gauze curtains and silver hooks, 91 x 86 1/4 x 84 1/4 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 64-4/4. | *Tea caddy*, Japan, Momoyama period (1568—1615), 16th century. Seto ware; iron-glazed stoneware with ivory lid, 3 1/8 inches. Gift of Sadajiro Yamanaka, 33-10/19 A,B. | *Domestic Jain Shrine*, India, Gujarat, possibly Patan, 16th to early 17th century, possibly Gujarat Sultanate period (1407—1573). Wood, polychrome paint, gold leaf, mirrored glass, 70 x 57 5/8 x 7 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 32-136. | *A Scene from the Life of the Buddha*, Pakistan or Afghanistan, Gandhara region, Kushan Dynasty (1st century B.C.E.—299 C.E.), 2nd—3rd century C.E. Gray schist, 22 1/2 x 36 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 55-105. | *Central Asia Caravan Woman Rousing Her Camel While Nursing*, China, Tang Dynasty (618—907 C.E.), 8th century C.E. Earthenware with unfired coloring, 16 x 18 x 11 inches. Purchase: the Richard J. Stern Foundation for the Arts—Commerce Bank, Trustee, and Hall Family Foundation Endowment for the Oriental Department, 2002.7. | *The Korean Deity, Hôshô Gongen, at the Site of the Ruined Temple (Jinoji)*, Japan, Nambokucho Period (1333—1392 C.E.). Handscroll section mounted as hanging scroll: ink and color on paper, 48 1/2 x 27 1/4 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 60-14. | *Standing Buddha*, India, Gupta Dynasty (300—699 C.E.), ca. 400 C.E. Bronze, 14 5/8 x 5 1/4 x 4 1/4 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 44-13. | *Shakyamuni Buddha Attended by Bodhisattvas, Monks, and Apsaras—A Casing Slab from a Buddhist Monument*, China, Northern Wei Dynasty (386—534 C.E.), early 6th century. Buff sandstone, 27 3/4 x 25 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 51-27. | *Amida Nyorai (Amitabha Buddha)*, Japan, Muromachi Period (1392—1568). Lacquered and gilded wood, 110 x 84 x 58 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 31-141/1. | *Ganesha*, South India, Tamil Nadu, Chola Dynasty (850—1278 C.E.), late 10th—early 11th century C.E. Bronze, 23 3/4 x 11 x 7 7/8 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 62-14. | *Half of a Temple Drum Frame*, Japan, Heian Period (794—1185 C.E.), 1150—1200 C.E. Wood with traces of lacquer, paint, and gilding, 10 feet, 9 7/8 inches. Purchase: the Edith Ehrman Memorial Fund, F81-16. | *Model of a Multi-Storeyed Tower*, China, Eastern Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.—220 C.E.), 1st century C.E. Earthenware with unfired pigments, 52 x 33 1/2 x 27 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 33-521.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS RELATED TO ASIAN ART

Ascetic: One who practices self-discipline and abstention from worldly pleasures, often in pursuit of spiritual goals. Ascetics may remove themselves from society, forgo material belongings, and practice intense meditation.

Bodhisattva: In Buddhism, a compassionate being who is progressing toward or has achieved enlightenment but has chosen to refrain from entering nirvana in order to offer aid to all other beings seeking that goal.

Buddhism: A religion based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, also called Shakyamuni; it centers on following a path that will lead to the cessation of rebirth, suffering, and attachment. Buddhism developed in India around the 6th century B.C.E. and spread from there to Central and Southeast Asia, China, and Japan.

Calligraphy: The art of handwritten lettering. In China, it has traditionally been accorded even higher status than other visual art forms.

Cast bronze: A metal alloy (mostly copper) that is heated, poured into a mold, and then cooled to its final state. Several Asian cultures throughout history have produced highly refined cast bronze works.

Ceramic: An object made from clay that has been hardened through baking. China's ceramics tradition dates back millennia and has been influential both within Asia and beyond.

Confucianism: A system of beliefs and practices based on the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius, who lived in the 6th century B.C.E. and emphasized the importance of morality and respect for social order to maintain harmony in the world. It became the official state ideology of China during the Han Dynasty.

Daoism: A religious and philosophical movement that developed in China alongside Confucianism and taught that discipline and control only distort or repress one's natural instinct to flow with the natural stream of existence.

Dynasty: A series of rulers who are members of the same family or clan.

Enlightenment: In Buddhism, an awakening (or *nirvana*) to a complete and perfect awareness of the true nature of the universe. Siddhartha Gautama is believed to be the first being to achieve this awareness, and thereafter became known as Buddha.

Gandhara: An ancient kingdom (6th century B.C.E. through 11th century C.E.) located in what is now Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan. Due to its contacts with other civilizations, its art was influenced by styles of Greece, Rome, India, and Western Asia.

Ganesha: The elephant-headed son of the Hindu deities Shiva and Parvati.

Guanyin: The Chinese bodhisattva who embodies compassion, known in Sanskrit as Avalokiteshvara.

Inro: In Japan, an ornamental case used to hold small items and worn suspended from a waist sash.

Jade: A hard stone (actually two distinct types) prized in China for its beauty and physical properties.

Continued on next page

GLOSSARY OF TERMS RELATED TO ASIAN ART, continued

Jainism: One of the major ancient religions of India, it was propagated in the 6th century B.C.E. by an ascetic named Mahavira, who emphasized the practice of non-violence as a means toward salvation.

Kamadhenu: A cow goddess of Hinduism, she is venerated as the mother of all cows and has the power to grant wishes.

Ming qi: Figures, often made of earthenware or metal, that represent people, animals, and furnishings a person might have enjoyed in life and which were placed in ancient Chinese tombs for the dead to have in the afterlife.

Nirvana: The highest goal of Buddhism, it is a state of non-being and release from the cycle of rebirth. It represents complete freedom from craving, anger, and suffering. The final Nirvana at the time of death is the *Parinirvana*.

Samsara: The cycle of reincarnation or rebirth in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and other related religions.

Scholar-official: A Chinese government worker who had to pass a difficult qualification exam and who administered the emperor's commands and laws throughout the empire.

Shiva: One of the principal deities of Hinduism, he is understood as taking many forms both destructive and benign. His most common aspect is as the destroyer who remakes the universe.

Siddhartha Gautama: Also known as Shakyamuni, he is the key historical figure in Buddhism. Originally born a prince, he later realized the ultimate cause of suffering in this world and attained enlightenment. His teachings formed the root of Buddhism.

Social order: The division of society by rank or class.

Vishnu: A major deity of Hinduism, he is seen as the maintainer of the universe.



EDUCATOR RESOURCE CENTER

The ERC can help you expand your pre- and post-visit activities to connect your students' museum experience with your classroom curriculum. The ERC offers:

- Curriculum consultations
- Circulating resources
- Professional development workshops

Visit nelson-atkins.org/educators/resources for info.