

GRADE LEVEL

9-12 Beginning Studio Art class (Painting, but may be adapted to other media)

ORGANIZING QUESTIONS

- How do visual images tell stories?
- How do we understand traditional narratives of the Buddhist caves, especially in the West, without much familiarity with the original stories?
- How do different compositional strategies impact viewer interpretation of narrative?

INTRODUCTION

The lesson “Borrowing from Dunhuang Bodhisattvas: Composition and Story” introduces the idea of Bodhisattvas in Buddhist art through a brief study of Dunhuang cave paintings. We will focus on understanding the role of Bodhisattvas in cave painting, particularly as a departure point for creative expression. Students will first write about personal experiences of stressful times, when they wanted outside help. We will then discuss Bodhisattvas in the cave narratives, with particular attention to composition. After a discussion of compositional choices, students will create three sketches to be discussed as a class. Our class critique will guide students towards a final plan for their projects. A mid-point project critique will further clarify students’ intentions, giving them feedback to complete their work.

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will

- Learn about the role of Bodhisattvas in Buddhism
- Assess how character placement/position in a painting can tell a story
- Appreciate the universality of composition in the art-making process
- Examine how different compositions impact viewer’s understanding of narrative
- Critically analyze their peers’ work

MATERIALS

- *Borrowing from Dunhuang Bodhisattvas: Composition and Story* (public) PowerPoint
- Paper for writing (can be lined) and sketches (unlined) (3 pieces for each student)
- Pencils
- Timer
- Acrylic paint (at least red, yellow, blue, black and white. At least 3x as much white as other paints)
- Paintbrushes (at least one per student- preferably synthetic)
- Palettes or paper plates for students to mix paint
- Brush cleaners or cups to rinse brushes
- Sink to clean brushes
- Paper towels or rags for brush cleaning
- Canvas boards, cardboard, wood or other painting surface (preferably 11x14” or larger)
- Aluminum foil (to cover palettes)

Optional but helpful materials:

- Smartphone or other digital camera

- Whiteboard or large paper (to write critique questions)
- Document projector to enlarge student sketches during critiques
- Standing or table easels
- Graphite paper for transferring sketches
- Masking tape to attach sketches to painting surface
- Dish soap to clean brushes
- Scissors or x-acto knives to alter sketches
- Color pencils
- Reproductions of Buddhist art (preferably in color)

Books:

Du, Doucheng, and Shuqing Wang. *Dunhuang & Silk Road*. Shenzhen: Sea Sky Pub. House, 2005. Print.

Fan, Jinshi, and Yongzeng Liu. *Appreciation of Dunhuang Grottoes: A Selection of 50 Caves: From the Mogao Grottoes, Yulin Grottoes and Western-Thousand Buddha Grottoes*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Fine Arts House, 2007. Print.

Whitfield, Roderick, Susan Whitfield, and Neville Agnew. *Cave Temples of Mogao: Art and History on the Silk Road*. Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute and the J. Getty Museum, 2000. Print.

EQUIPMENT

- Laptop, preferably with internet access
- Projector

Teacher Preparation

- Familiarize yourself with the PowerPoint presentation and troubleshoot technology in the room.
- Practice the writing exercise and come up with examples that are relevant to your student population (so that you can add them to the conversation).
- Create at least two zones for different art materials. For example, you may wish to have a “dry” area for drawing and a “wet” area for painting. In this configuration, pencils, paper and any other drawing materials separate from anything that involves water. Organize the materials in order of their use in the lesson. You may also want to label paintbrushes and paper plates with student names to give cleanup accountability.

Time

- Introduction – one 50-minute period
- Sketch discussion – one 50-minute period
- Mid-point critique- one 50-minute period
- Final critique- one 50-minute period
- In-class work time – 9 50-minute periods

Procedures

1. Greet your students with some kind of quick group activity to prepare them to engage with new material. This could be a simple breathing activity or a quick response question (for example: ask them to name a scary situation, a favorite person or something that comforts them).
2. Start the PowerPoint presentation and review the day's plan. Ask students to respond to the short writing exercises. (Approximately 3 minutes for each question) Give them examples that are relevant to their lives.
3. Ask students about the relationship between the figures in slide 6. Allow all answers as long as students explain their reasoning. Explain the donor relationship detailed in slide notes.
4. Review definitions of bodhisattvas.
5. Locate Dunhuang on map and explain the importance of the location in Buddhism.
6. Display examples of Bodhisattvas in Dunhuang caves. Lead a discussion about the similarities and differences between them.
7. Utilize notes and the diagram to illustrate the difference between a Buddha and a Bodhisattva.
8. Discuss different ways in which hope is illustrated in a physical object. Use examples in PowerPoint, augmented by your personal experience and student examples.
9. Display different images of drowning. Ask students how they can relate to these depictions of stress. (Slide 30-33) Discuss how artist decision impact viewer interpretation (angles, composition, light, use of facial expression, etc.)
10. Call attention to how compositional elements contribute to the sense of danger in slide 31.
11. Ask students what elements best illustrate academic stress (slides 32-38). Explain how compositional decisions highlight the mood of the images.
12. Discuss images of crowds and travel with the students (slides 39-45). Prompt them to come up with descriptive titles for the work. Encourage them to consider what other compositions could have been chosen and how that would alter viewer perspective of the work.
13. Begin discussion of project requirements:
 - Includes a helper/hero
 - Includes cloud or other pattern
 - Includes flower
14. Assist students with the creation of three sketches. Make sure that they include a definitive edge for their composition that does not default to the middle of the page.
15. When students have completed three sketches, collect all of them in a central location for group discussion. Insure that all students can see the work and contribute to conversation. On the board, write guiding questions for the discussion. (For example: Why is this sketch the strongest? How could danger be better illustrated? How would you title this work?) Ask students to contribute questions for the conversation and write these on the board. At the end of the discussion, all students should have a plan for the project.

16. During studio days, conduct individual and table discussions about work in progress. Ask students to contribute helpfully to the conversation.

17. After five studio days, collect the work for a mid-point critique. Ask each student to create two questions for the class. Lead a discussion that helps students finish their work.

18. Circulate around the room to help students complete their project. Suggest how they could best represent their ideas. Refer students to relevant professional artists' work.

19. After four additional studio days, lead a final critique. Note the trajectory of the work, where important decisions were made in the creative process. Assist students in giving valuable feedback to their colleagues.

Assessment

- Writing exercise (May I help you?)
- Participation in slide discussion
- Three sketches for Bodhisattva project
- Participation, sketch critique
- Contribution of class questions for all three critiques
- Mid-point critique progress
- Contribution of two personal questions for mid-point critique
- Participation, mid-point critique
- Participation, final critique
- Final painting project evaluation