

# A Study of Buddhism Through the Art of the Mogao Caves

## Class

High school art, art history, or religious studies

## Standards

1. CA Content Standards
  - a. Social Science
    - i. 6.5.5: Know the life and moral teachings of Buddha and how Buddhism spread in India, Ceylon, and Central Asia.
    - ii. 6.6.7: Cite the significance of the trans-Eurasian “silk roads” in the period of the Han Dynasty and Roman Empire and their locations.
  - b. Visual Arts
    - i. 1.2: Describe the principles of design as used in works of art, focusing on dominance and subordination.
    - ii. 1.5: Analyze the material used by a given artist and describe how its use influences the meaning of the work.
    - iii. 3.3: Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.
    - iv. 3.4: Research the methods art historians use to determine the time, place, context, value, and culture that produced a given work of art.
2. Common Core Standards
  - a. CCSS RH: 9. Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.
  - b. CCSS RH: 2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

## Organizing Questions

1. What is the origin of Buddhism and what are its main principles?
2. How was Buddhism received by other societies and how was it adapted to exist within various cultures?
3. What can the Mogao cave paintings tell us about Buddhism and its principles?
4. How do the Mogao caves show the cultural confluence that occurred along the Silk Road?

## Introduction

Through its long and rich history, China has shown itself to be the quintessential location for the exchange of ideas and goods. No other trading network symbolizes China as the crossroad of the world for global trade quite like the Silk Road. It was during this time that various ideas, political systems, and luxury goods were traded at an unprecedented rate in human history, and as many cultures met and melded together, China became the premier site of cultural confluence. This is evident in the emergence of new languages, practices, and luxury goods that came about as cultures came together along the Silk Road. One of the best examples of the spread of ideas and the subsequent merging of cultures along this trading network is Buddhism, a religion and philosophy that originated in India. Traveling monks and merchants can be credited with the spread of Buddhism. By the time the Mogao caves came into existence during the first century, Buddhism occupied a prominent role in the life and consciousness of the people of China.

In this lesson, students will gain a better understanding of Buddhism and Chinese artistic techniques by analyzing a selection of the Mogao cave paintings. First and foremost, students will learn about elements of visual art such as shape, movement/motion, and design, and use these as tools of examination to make inferences about Buddhist values. For example, students might examine the use of organic shapes to portray the physical features of the Buddha to deduce the virtues and values that the Buddha represents. Other students might choose to focus on the cave artists' use of movement and motion as a storytelling method. Students can also look at the paintings' design, specifically the use of emphasis and subordination, to extrapolate the role of Buddha Sakyamuni and his relationship to the other figures and dimensions presented in the paintings.

As their culminating assignment for this unit, students will apply the artistic and religious principles that they have learned to create their own pieces of art inspired by the art of the Mogao caves.

### **Objectives**

1. Revisit the basic tenets of Buddhism through the examination of the art in the Mogao caves.
2. Appreciate the aesthetics of Buddhist art.
3. Understand how artistic design is used to portray Buddhism.
4. Compose a written response to identify the basic tenets of Buddhism as seen in the cave paintings and how these are portrayed through the stylistic choices of the artist.

### **Materials**

1. Documentary and maps on the Silk Road
2. Copies of the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths, 1 set per student
3. Research templates of the main players of the Silk Road, 1 set per student
4. Note sheet on Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths\*\*, 1 copy per student
5. Note sheet on the elements of art (Shape, Movement/Motion, Design)\*\*, 1 copy per student
6. Pictures of Mogao Caves\*\*
7. Written Response Prompt, rubric, and sentence frames\*\*, 1 copy per student
8. Pencils, 2 per student
9. Erasers, 1 per student
10. Tempera Paints, varied selection in sufficient quantities for class
11. Brushes, sufficient quantities for class
12. Bristol Paper, at least 1 page per student

### **Equipment**

13. PowerPoint Slides\*\*
14. Projector\*\*
15. Websites of the Silk Road and its participants
16. Computers
17. Audio

### **Teacher Preparation**

1. Familiarize yourself with the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths.
2. Find a reputable website that students can use to research the main participants of Silk Road trade and the goods that they contributed.
3. Familiarize yourself with the art principles and terminology of the Elements of Art worksheets, i.e. shape, motion/movement, design, etc.
4. Select and print pictures of the Mogao caves that clearly demonstrate strategic use of space, lines, color and design.

## **Time**

Eight 50-minute class periods – two for instruction, one for research, one for art analysis, and four for art production

## **Procedures**

Day 1 – The Emergence of the Silk Road and its Main Players

Day 2 – The Main Tenets of Buddhism and its Spread

Day 3 – Dunhuang and the Mogao Caves: An Area of Cultural Confluence

Day 4 – Analysis of Mogao Art: Art Elements, Techniques, and Cultural Implications

1. Do now
  - a. Display an image of a work of art on your projector.
  - b. Ask students to analyze the image's prominent shapes and colors.
  - c. Have students make inferences about the media and tools that the artist used and the reasoning behind her or his aesthetic choices.
  - d. Challenge students to use their observations and inferences to determine the artist's message. Call on a few students to share their responses.
2. Direct instruction
  - a. Present your PowerPoint on the three elements of art: Shape, Movement/Motion, and Design. Have students take notes.
  - b. As a class, conduct a quick, informal assessment to make sure students have a basic understanding of shape, movement/motion, and design and how artists use these principles to convey an emotion or idea.
  - c. Pass out a See/Mean/Matter to the class, ensuring that each student has one copy of the chart.
  - d. Have students use their charts to analyze a caves painting. Students should observe how the cave artists used the three elements of art, and what those techniques communicate about Buddhist principles.
3. Analysis of art
  - a. Divided the class into three groups: 1) Shape 2) Motion/Movement 3) Design
  - b. Direct each group to analyze an image from the Mogao caves according to their assigned element of art. For example, the Shape group should discuss what kinds of shapes the artist used in her painting (i.e. primarily round, symmetrical shapes) and what they say about the subject (kind, welcoming, peaceful).
  - c. Have students take notes on their findings and make inferences about the message that the painting conveys, particularly as it pertains to Buddhism.
  - d. After each group has had a chance to analyze, discuss, and take notes on their assigned image, let each group select a speaker who will share out the group's findings.
4. Independent practice
  - a. Have each student select another cave painting for individual analysis. Ask students to compose a written response examining how the Mogao caves reflect the principles of Buddhism.
5. Exit slip
  - a. Have students write a short response to the following questions:
    - i. What was the most interesting thing you learned about the art from the Mogao caves?
    - ii. For your art project, what element of art would you like for focus on?

Days 5 – 8: Production of Art (Class Work Time)

## **Assessment**

1. **Formative Assessment: Writing Assignment** -- In a previous learning segment, students outlined the main tenets of Buddhism by reading Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths. They have also taken notes on their findings of Buddhism as seen in the Mogao cave paintings. For their formative assessment for this learning segment, students will select a cave painting. They will examine their selected painting and compose an evidence-based paragraph in which they explain the art techniques used by the artists. They will also explain how their selected piece articulates the main beliefs of Buddhism as seen in the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths.
2. **Summative Assessment: Painting** -- Students will have the option to create a replica of a segment of the Mogao caves OR they can create their original piece that utilizes the artistic techniques seen in the paintings at the caves and the main tenets of Buddhism.

\*\*Materials used in sample lesson.

## Buddhism and the Mogao Caves: Making Connections

Through your study of the Silk Road and the emergence of the Mogao caves, you learned about the spread of ideas in this trading network. Most notably, you familiarized yourself with the main beliefs of Buddhism and you learned how this system of beliefs was brought to China through the Silk Road. You also learned that the Mogao caves were used for the practice of this religion, and you had the opportunity to analyze the artistic elements of one of the paintings.

In a two paragraph written response, you will answer the following questions:

### What artistic elements were used in the Mogao caves? What do these caves paintings tell us about Buddhism?

**\*\*Use evidence from your knowledge on the *Four Noble Truths*, the *Eightfold Path*, and your analysis of your selected cave painting.**

#### Criteria for Success

Your response must....

- ✚ Clearly state the name and location of the cave you analyzed.
- ✚ Clearly state the element of art you noticed in your cave painting and two ways in which the artist used it.
- ✚ Cite TWO beliefs in Buddhism as listed in the *Four Noble Truths* and/or *The Eightfold Path*, and explain how these are shown in your selected cave painting.

Your assignment will be graded with the following rubric:

Passing			Not Passing	
5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/> Student completes a two paragraph written response on ONE Mogao cave painting. <input type="checkbox"/> Student clearly identifies cave number and provides a specific location. <input type="checkbox"/> Student clearly states and defines element of art used to analyze painting and he/she articulates how this element of art was used in TWO instances. <input type="checkbox"/> Student clearly states TWO beliefs in Buddhism as cited in the <i>Eightfold Path</i> and the <i>Four Noble Truths</i> , and he/she explain how these are portrayed in their selected cave painting in TWO instances.	<input type="checkbox"/> Student completes a two paragraph written response on ONE Mogao cave painting. <input type="checkbox"/> Student clearly identifies cave number and describes a general location. <input type="checkbox"/> Student states and gives a general description of the element of art used to analyze painting. Student articulates how this element of art was used in TWO instances. <input type="checkbox"/> Student states TWO beliefs in Buddhism as stated in the <i>Eightfold Path</i> and the <i>Four Noble Truths</i> . He/she explains how these are portrayed in their selected cave painting in TWO instances.	<input type="checkbox"/> Student completes a two paragraph written response on ONE Mogao cave painting. <input type="checkbox"/> Student gives a general location of the caves. <input type="checkbox"/> Student states the element of art used to analyze painting. Student articulates how this element of art was used in TWO instances. <input type="checkbox"/> Student states TWO beliefs in Buddhism. He/she explains how these are portrayed in their selected cave painting in TWO instances.	<input type="checkbox"/> Student completes a written response but does not meet the two paragraph minimum. <input type="checkbox"/> Student gives a general location of the caves. <input type="checkbox"/> Student states the element of art used to analyze painting, and articulates how this element was used in ONE instance in the painting. <input type="checkbox"/> Student states ONE belief in Buddhism. He/she explains how this is portrayed in their selected cave painting in ONE instance.	<input type="checkbox"/> Student did not complete assignment.

## **(Suggested Sentence Starters)**

### **Paragraph 1**

"I will analyzing cave \_\_\_\_\_ which is located in...

"The element of art most noticeable used in this cave is **(state your selected element of art here)**. This principle is used for the purpose of...

"This art element was used in many instances in cave \_\_\_\_\_. For example, this artist used **(state your selected element of art here)** in **(describe the section of the painting where this principle is used)**...

"Another area in which this principle is used is **(state your selected element of art here)** in **(describe the section of the painting where this principle is used)**...

### **Paragraph 2**

"These caves were used for the practice of Buddhism, and as a result, the paintings in the caves tell a lot about the basic beliefs of this religion. For example, one the beliefs shown in the caves as stated in the **(Eightfold Path/Four Noble Truths)** is...

"The artist of cave \_\_\_\_\_ portrayed this belief in Buddhism by...

"Another belief from the **(Eightfold Path/Four Noble Truths)** shown in the caves is...

"This was portrayed in cave \_\_\_\_\_ by ...

## Buddhism and the Mogao Caves: Making Connections

Through your study of the Silk Road and the emergence of the Mogao caves, you learned about the spread of ideas in this trading network. Most notably, you familiarized yourself with the main beliefs of Buddhism and you learned how this system of beliefs was brought to China through the Silk Road. You also learned that the Mogao caves were used for the practice of this religion, and you had the opportunity to analyze the artistic elements of one of the paintings.

In a two paragraph written response, you will answer the following questions:

### What artistic elements were used in the Mogao caves? What do these caves paintings tell us about Buddhism?

\*\*Use evidence from your knowledge on the *Four Noble Truths*, the *Eightfold Path*, and your analysis of your selected cave painting.

#### Criteria for Success

Your response must....

- ✚ Clearly state the name and location of the cave you analyzed.
- ✚ Clearly state the element of art you noticed in your cave painting and two ways in which the artist used it.
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## (Suggested Sentence Starters)

### Paragraph 1

"I will analyzing cave \_\_\_\_\_ which is located in...

"The element of art most noticeable used in this cave is (state your selected element of art here). This principle is used for the purpose of...

"This art element was used in many instances in cave \_\_\_\_\_. For example, this artist used (state your selected element of art here) in (describe the section of the painting where this principle is used)...

"Another area in which this principle is used is (state your selected element of art here) in (describe the section of the painting where this principle is used)...

### Paragraph 2

"These caves were used for the practice of Buddhism, and as a result, the paintings in the caves tell a lot about the basic beliefs of this religion. For example, one the beliefs shown in the caves as stated in the (Eightfold Path/Four Noble Truths) is...

"The artist of cave \_\_\_\_\_ portrayed this belief in Buddhism by...

"Another belief from the (Eightfold Path/Four Noble Truths) shown in the caves is...

"This was portrayed in cave \_\_\_\_\_ by ...



Images used to analyze shape

Cave 328



Cave 112



Cave 390



Cave 158



Images used to analyze motion/movement

Cave 217



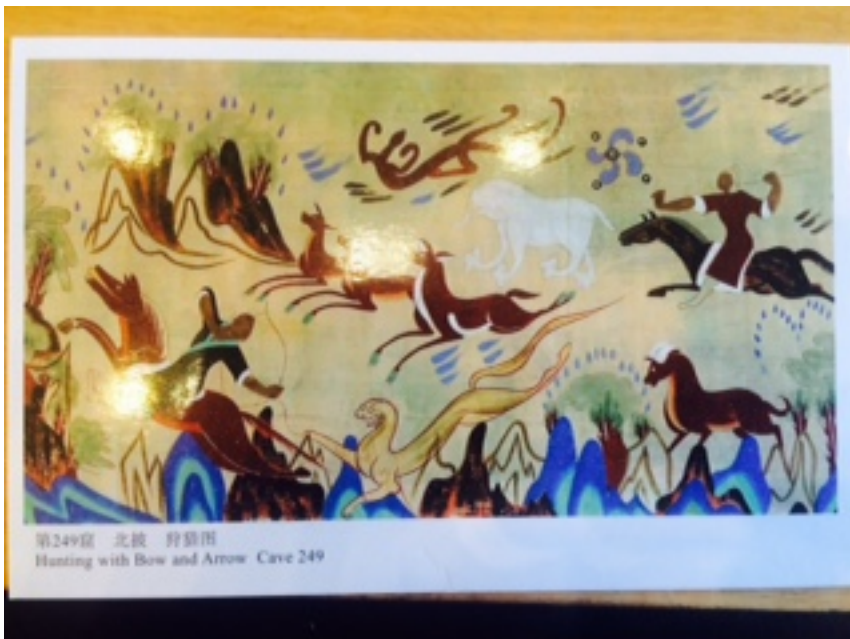
Cave 285



Cave 257



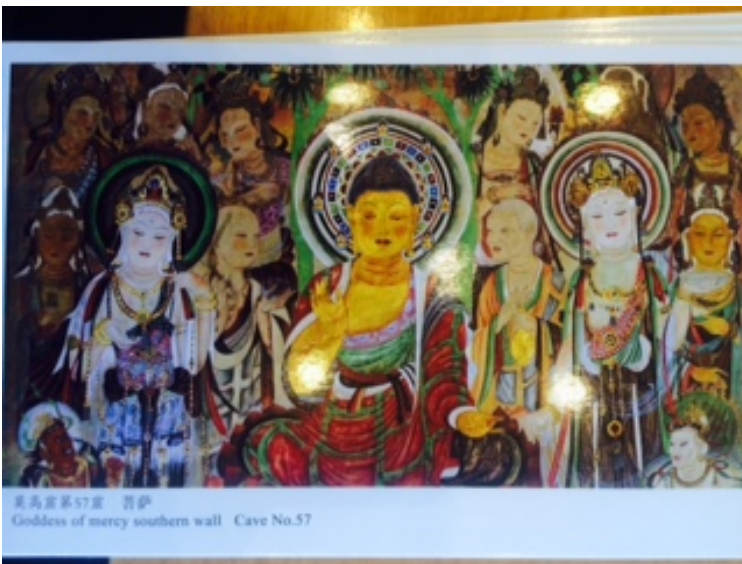
Cave 249



Images used to analyze dominance and subordination  
Cave 57



Cave 57



莫高窟第57窟 菩萨  
Goddess of mercy southern wall Cave No.57

Cave 14



第14窟 南壁：不空如来观音（晚唐）

Cave 409



Cave 419



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Main Beliefs of Buddhism

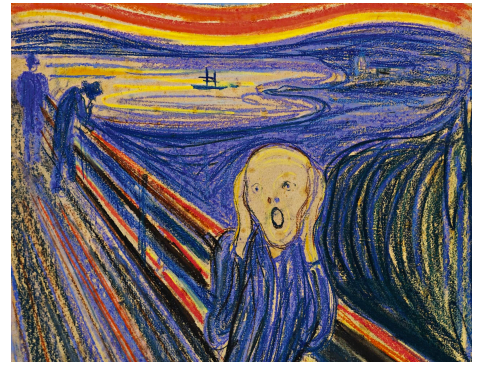
**Directions:** On the left had corner, write down the main beliefs of Buddhism as listed in the *Four Noble Truths* and the *Eightfold Path*.

<i>Eightfold Path</i>	How do the principles of the Eightfold Path show up in your selected painting?
<i>The Four Noble Truths</i>	How do the principles of the Four Noble Truths show up in your selected painting?



## Buddhism and the Mogao Caves

Do Now



### Elements of Art

#### Shape

There are two types of shapes. These are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

- **Organic shapes** are used to convey:
- **Geometric shapes** are used to convey:



#### Motion/Movement

Artists show motion and movement, by using the following:

- Diagonal Lines:
- Gestural Lines:
- Placement of Object:



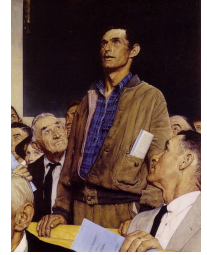


## Design

Artists select what a viewer sees and does not see through the use of \_\_\_\_\_.

Artists can use many techniques to \_\_\_\_\_. These include:

- Isolation:
- Contrast:
- Placement:



### Guided Practice Art Analysis

#### See

(Describe three ways in which the artist used ONE element of art.)

#### Mean

(What does this painting tell us about Buddhism?)

#### Matter

(Make an educated guess, what is the role of art in Buddhism? What function does it have?)



# A STUDY OF BUDDHISM IN CHINA THROUGH THE ART AT THE MOGAO CAVES

NATALÍ RAMÓN

# Agenda

- Unit Overview
- Standards
- Guiding Questions
- Learning Segments
- Overview of Lesson
- Activity
- Q&A

# Unit Overview

## A Study of Buddhism in China through the art at the Mogao Caves

### Main Themes:

- China, the crossroad for global trade
- China, a site of cultural confluence
- Art as a sacred text



# Standards

## Social Science

- **6.5.5:** Know the life and **moral teachings of Buddha** and how **Buddhism spread** in India, Ceylon, and **Central Asia**.
- **6.6.7:** Cite the **significance of the trans-Eurasian “silk roads”** in the period of the Han Dynasty and Roman Empire and their locations.

## Visual Arts:

- **1.2:** Describe the **principles of design** as used in works of art, focusing on **dominance and subordination**.
- **1.5:** Analyze the **material used by a given artist** and describe how its use **influences the meaning of the work**.
- **3.3:** Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the **issues of time, place, and cultural influence** are reflected in selected works of art.
- **3.4:** Research the methods art historians use to **determine the time, place, context, value, and culture that produced a given work of art**.

## Common Core Standards

- **CCSS RH: 9.** Compare and contrast **treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources**.
- **CCSS RH: 2.** Determine the **central ideas** or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate **summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas**.

# Guiding Questions

- What is the origin of Buddhism and what are its main principles?
- How was Buddhism received by other societies and how was it adapted to exist within various cultures?
- What can the art in the Mogao caves tell us about Buddhism and its principles?
- What is the purpose of art in Buddhism?

# Learning Segments

1. The Emergence of the Silk Road and its Main Players
2. The Main Tenements of Buddhism and its Spread
3. Dunhuang and the Mogao Caves: An area of Cultural Confluence
4. Analysis of Mogao art (art elements, techniques, and cultural implications)
5. Production of art

# Objectives

● In this lesson students will

- Revisit the basic tenements of Buddhism through the examination of the art in the Mogao caves.
  - Appreciate the aesthetic of Buddhist art
  - Understand how artistic design is used to portray Buddhism.
- 
- Compose a **written response** to **identify the basic tenements of Buddhism** seen in the cave paintings and how these are portrayed through the **stylistic choices of the artist**.



# Lesson(s) Overview

- Do Now

- Direct Instruction

- Elements of Art

- Shapes
- Movement and Motion
- Design

- Check for Understanding

- Guided Instruction

- Analyze a cave painting together

- Group Work

- Students select an element of art, and use it to analyze an assigned cave painting.
- Share out

- Formative Assessment

- Students select a piece of art from the caves.
- Compose an evidence based paragraph
  - Explain the art techniques used by the artists.
  - Explain what their selected painting says about the use of art in Buddhism

- Exit Slip

# Shapes



Organic  
Shapes

Geometric  
Shapes



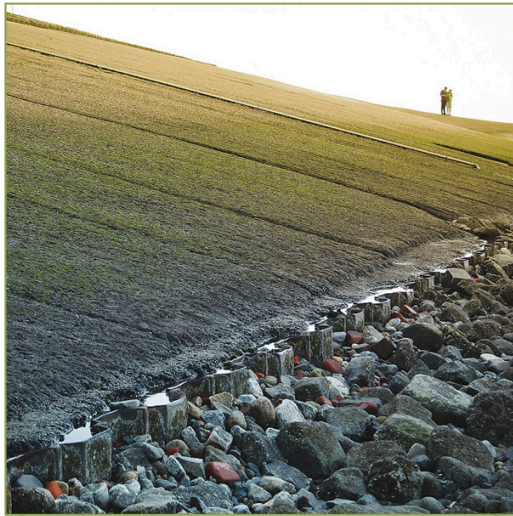
*Natural*  
*Flowing*  
*Soft*  
*Peaceful*  
*Organic*

*Anger*  
*Rigidity*  
*Mathematical*  
*(Often) Man-made*

# Movement and Motion



GESTURAL LINES



DIAGONAL LINES



PLACEMENT OF OBJECTS

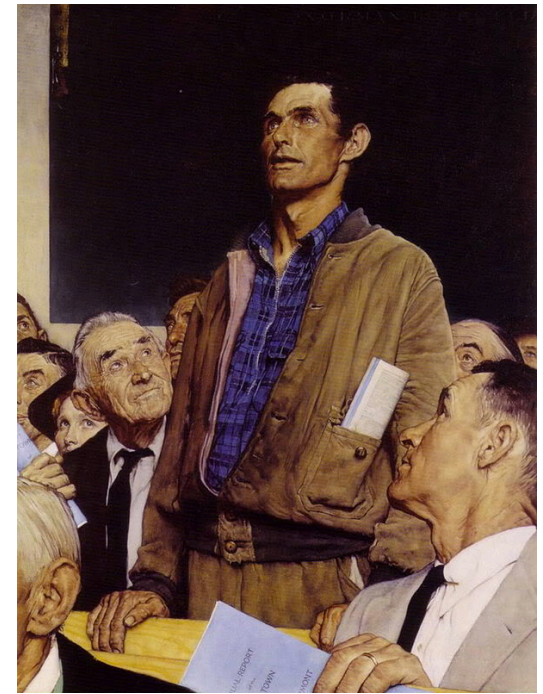
# Design

*Emphasis & Subordination*

Highlight focal point



*Isolation*



*Contrast*



*Placement*

# Art Analysis

## See

(Describe three ways in which the artist used your assigned element of art.)

## Mean

(What does this painting tell us about Buddhism?)

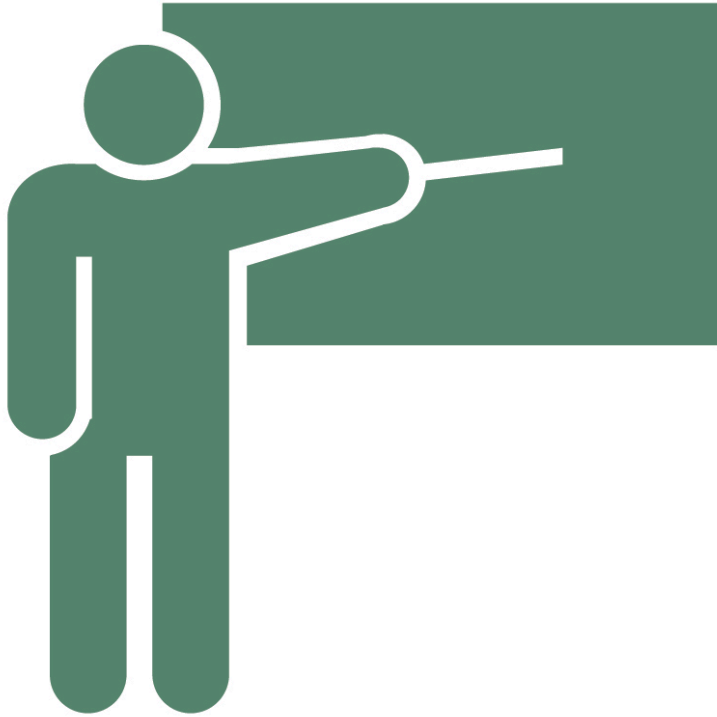
## Matter

(Make an educated guess, what is the role of art in Buddhism? What function does it have?)





林宏第25窟 寺地 观无量寿佛经图 魏文杰 姜友道 曹其武 郭忠恕 画



# Groups

**Marisela**

**Crista**

**Vivian**

**Mike**

**Echo**

**Susan**

**Thomas**

**Beth**

**JLo**

**Connie**

**Karen**

**Amelia**

**Eric**

**Olga**

**Hugo**

**Cherie**



# Share Out

“My group examined cave\_\_\_\_\_

“Three details we noticed in our painting were....

“We believe the message of this painting is....

“Our group believes the role of art in Buddhism is....



# Do Now – 5 minutes

3-4 COMPLETE Sentences

1. What is the most noticeable thing about this painting? What drew your eye to this specific part of the painting?
2. What message/emotions do you think this painting is trying to communicate? What specific details are used to communicate this message/emotion?



# Lesson Objectives



- In this lesson you will
  - Revisit the basic beliefs of Buddhism
  - examine of the art in the Mogao caves.
  - Understand how artistic design was used in the caves.
  - Compose a written response to identify the basic beliefs of Buddhism in the cave paintings and how these are shown through the use of artistic design.

# Agenda

- Elements of Art
- Check for Understanding
- See/Mean/Matter
- Written Response

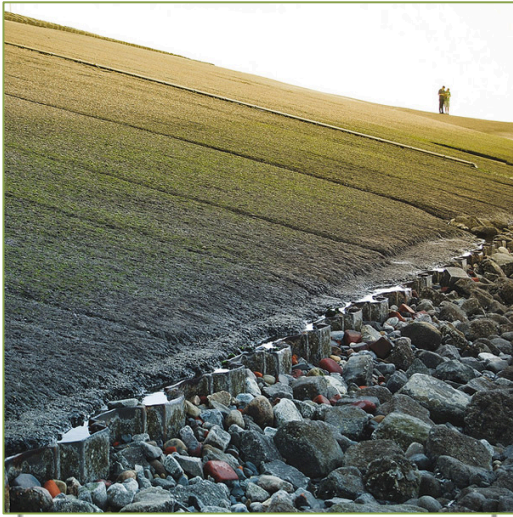
# Shapes



*Natural  
Flowing  
Soft  
Peaceful  
Organic*

*Anger  
Rigidity  
Mathematical  
(Often) Man-made*

# Movement and Motion



DIAGONAL LINES

Allow the eye to follow the path of the diagonal line, **MOVING** our vision from one place to another.



GESTURAL LINES

Convey energy, catch the actions of a moving figure.

Figures are portrayed in action, rather than stiffly in one place .



PLACEMENT OF OBJECTS

# Design

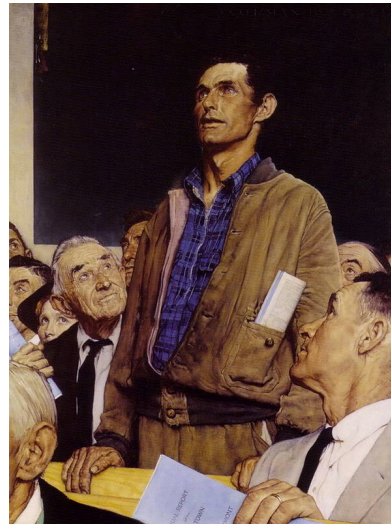
## *Emphasis & Subordination*

Highlight focal point



*Isolation*

**Focus on a figure by pulling it away from the rest of the group.**



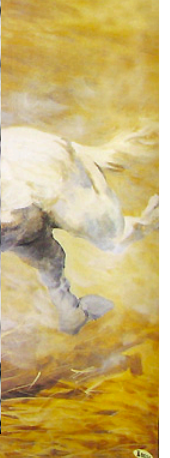
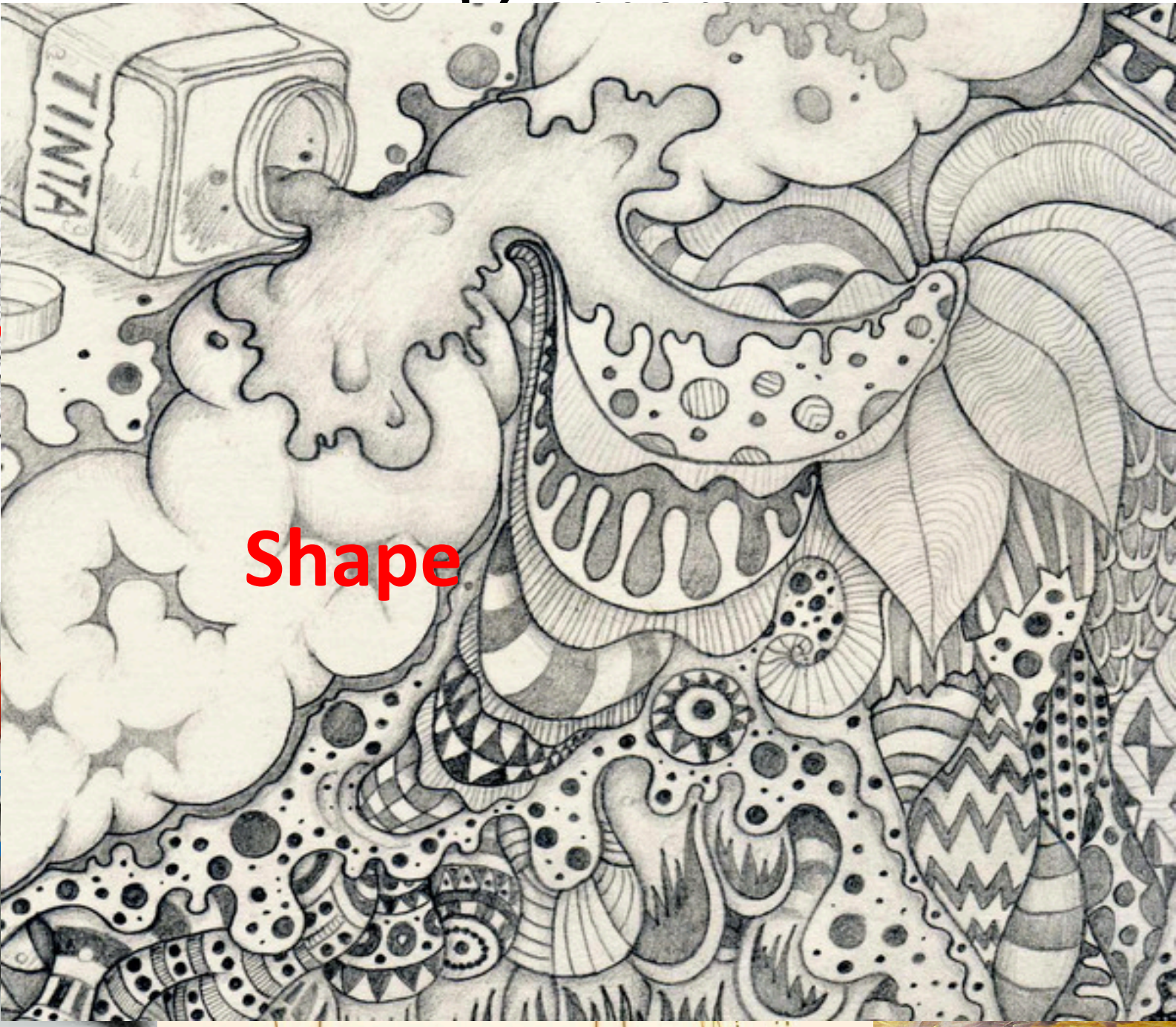
*Contrast*

**Focus on a figure creating a visual difference (such as color, size, texture, shape, etc).**



*Placement*

**Place a figure on the canvas and use lines/shape/color to draw your eye to the focal point.**



**Shape**

**Mov**

**Em**  
**Sub**



# Art Analysis

## See

(Describe three ways in which the artist used ONE element of art.)

## Mean

(What does this painting tell us about Buddhism?)

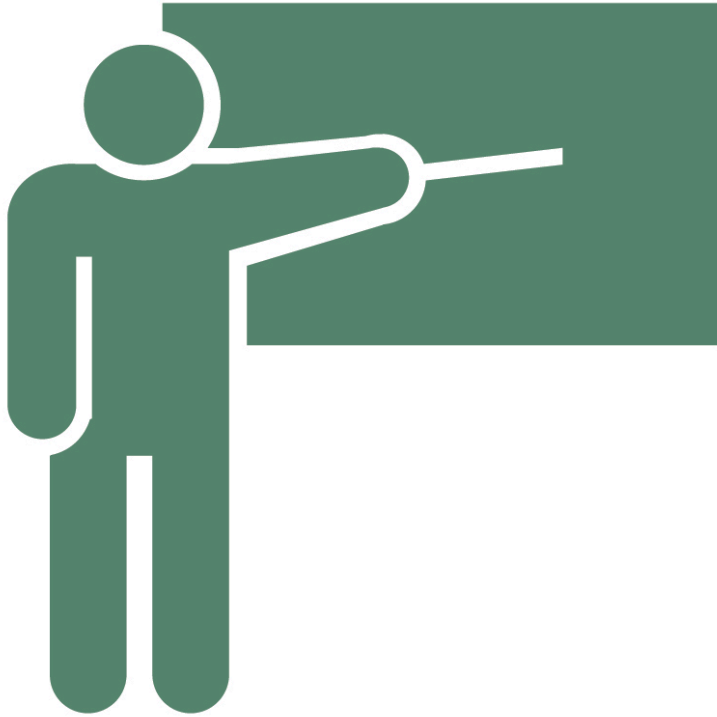
## Matter

(Make an educated guess, what is the role of art in Buddhism? What function does it have?)





林宏第25窟 于地 观无量寿佛经图 魏文杰 姜友道 曹其武 郭怡 画



# Share Out

“My group examined cave\_\_\_\_\_

“Three details we noticed in our painting were....

“We believe the message of this painting is....

“Our group believes the role of art in Buddhism is....



# Independent Practice

*Select ONE cave painting, and ONE art principle. Use a See/Mean/Matter chart to analyze your piece. You will use this analysis for your written response.*

<b>See</b> (Describe three ways in which the artist used ONE element of art.)	<b>Mean</b> (What does this painting tell us about Buddhism?)	<b>Matter</b> (Make an educated guess, what is the role of art in Buddhism? What function does it have?)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Main Beliefs of Buddhism

**Directions:** On the left hand corner, write down the main beliefs of Buddhism as listed in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

#### *Eightfold Path*

--

How do the principles of the Eightfold Path show up in your selected painting?

--

#### *The Four Noble Truths*

--

How do the principles of the Four Noble Truths show up in your selected painting?

--

# Written Response

*What artistic elements were used in the Mogao caves? What do these caves paintings tell us about Buddhism?*

Your response must....

- Clearly state the name and location of the cave you analyzed.
- Clearly state the element of art you noticed in your cave painting and two ways in which the artist used it.
- Cite TWO beliefs in Buddhism as listed in the *Four Noble Truths* and/or *The Eightfold Path*, and explain how these are shown in your selected cave painting.



1. What was the most interesting thing you learned about the art from the Mogao caves?
2. For your art project, what element of art would you like for focus on?