

SECTION 2

SYLLABUS FOCUS: ENGLISH

OVERVIEW

WHY GODDESS FOR ENGLISH?

The exhibition *Goddess: divine energy* is a rich collection of culturally symbolic artworks that can be read as visual texts. The exhibition itself also provides opportunities to investigate how we read visual texts of other cultures and recontextualise their purpose and meanings.

The tasks in this section of the education kit will allow stage 4 and 5 English students to:

- Read and identify cultural symbols in visual texts.
- Explore the audience, context and purpose of visual texts from other cultures.
- Respond to visual texts from other cultures.
- Compose different texts by responding to visual texts from other cultures.
- Attempt and evaluate different readings of the one visual text.
- Make links between texts from other cultures and our own culture.

Further background information related to the exhibition can be found in Section 1 of this education kit. Full colour, A4 reproductions of the key art works used for Stage 4-5 English can be found in Stage 3-5 Visual Art Section of this education kit.

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OUTCOMES TO BE ADDRESSED

VISUAL AND CULTURAL SYMBOLS

Stage 4

Students learn about:

- 10.5 different cultures and their common and distinguishing elements

Students learn to:

- 10.2 identify and explore the ways different cultures, cultural stories and icons, including Australian images and significant Australians, including Aboriginal Australians, are depicted in texts

PERSUASIVE GODDESSES

Stage 4

Students learn about:

- 10.10 Key cultural stories included Dreaming, myths and allegories, what they represent and the ways they have influenced other texts

Students learn to:

- 7.5 focus on and evaluate particular aspects of texts including storyline, perspective and cultural positioning

PERSPECTIVES OF POWER

Stage 5

Students learn about:

- the beliefs and value systems underpinning texts from different cultures

Students learn to:

- identify different reading positions and interpretations of particular texts and appreciate distinctions in meaning
- interpret texts from a range of perspectives and justify the interpretations

DIVINE WORDS

Stage 5

Students learn about:

- 10.9 the ways in which particular texts relate to their cultural experiences and the culture of others.

Students learn to:

- 10.5 respond to and compose text to demonstrate their view of the world by drawing on the texts of other cultures.

Visual and Cultural Symbols

Stage 4

Religions in many cultures are represented by only one God (monotheism). In the Hindu religion there are many gods and goddesses (polytheism). Each god or goddess has special attributes and purposes for the devotees of Hinduism.



Tree goddess (shalabhanjika)
INDIA, Karnataka, Hoysala period (c1000-1346)
chloritic schist, 87 x 44.5 x 24 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Felton Bequest
1963
HINDU



Vagdevi, goddess of speech 1800s
INDIA, Rajasthan
gouache on paper, 28 x 20.3 cm
National Museum, New Delhi.
Ajit Mookerjee Collection
HINDU



Durga c1990s
INDIA
poster print, 27.3 x 21 cm
Portvale Collection
HINDU

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- **Tree goddess (shalabhanjika):** There are several symbols in this image that symbolise trees and nature (e.g. The way the goddess is standing shows of her power to give life). What are three things in this picture that symbolise her as the goddess of trees/nature?
- **Vagdevi, goddess of speech:** There are several symbols in this image that symbolise speech (e.g. The small figures on her body are all in conversation with one another). What is another thing in this picture that symbolises her as the goddess of speech?

- **Durga:** There are several symbols in this image that symbolise power (e.g. The many different weapons show that she is a powerful warrior). What are three things in this picture that symbolise her as the goddess of power?

WRITING TASK

- Read the story of Durga slaying the buffalo demon:

Durga, slayer of the buffalo demon

Once upon a time, as the gods were engaged in their battle with the anti-gods, the buffalo demon Mahisha was the leader of the anti-gods. When the gods were defeated they were so furious that their energies came out of them one by one, and these energies (called shaktis in Sanskrit, a feminine noun) formed the goddess Durga ('Hard to Get'). The gods also gave her weapons broken off from their own weapons, as well as necklaces and earrings and garlands of lotuses. They gave her a lion for her mount, and the king of snakes gave her a necklace of snakes studded with large gems that cobras have on their foreheads. When Mahisha saw her he cried, 'Now, who is this?' and the battle began. Eventually, Durga lassoed him and tied him up. As she cut off the head of the buffalo, a man appeared, with a sword in his hand, and as the man came half-way out of the buffalo's open neck, she cut his head with her sword."

Markandeya Purana 80; the final portion is translated in O'Flaherty 1975: 247-249

- Imagine you are a journalist for *The Demon Gazette*. Write a short newspaper article describing the events of Durga, slaying the Buffalo Demon. Remember: your audience are demons who will view this act as a terrible crime. Your job is to empathise with the demon and not Durga.

EXHIBITION ACTIVITIES

- List as many other goddesses you can locate within the exhibition. Define the attributes of each goddess and what they represent. For each goddess, outline all the symbols you can identify that are associated with them.

Persuasive Goddesses

Stage 4

The Paradise of Tara is an important artwork image from Tibet, a country to the north of India, which presents Khadiravani Tara (a Buddhist goddess). Here Tara is seated in the centre of the image surrounded by a garden paradise.



The Paradise of Tara 1700s
TIBET
thangka, colours and gold on cotton,
61.6 x 53.3 cm
The Newark Museum, New Jersey,
purchased 1969 Felix Fuld Bequest Fund
BUDDHIST

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- Match the symbols and their meaning to the part of the artwork represent.

Lotus throne: a symbol of Tara's holiness and perfection.

Jewelled mansion: the focus of Tara's paradise.

Dancers and musicians: a symbol of celebration and victory.

The white parasol: a symbol of spiritual victory.

Angelic hosts on clouds: bringing offerings to Tara and welcoming people entering paradise.

Monk in a cave: a symbol of those left on earth to carry on religious and spiritual teaching.

Figures swimming: New arrivals to paradise.

Green: in Buddhism this colour symbolises compassion

- Choose another aspect in the artwork that is not outlined above. Draw it, label it and write your own possible symbolic meaning for it.
- Research the accepted symbolic meaning of your selection. How close were you? Discuss the idea of universal symbols. Discuss why some symbols translate across cultures, while other do not.
- How is this artwork advising people on how to get to 'paradise'? Define why you would want to go to 'paradise' when you die and what it might look like?
- The purpose of this text is to communicate and persuade. What is it persuading people to do? Who are the people that this image is trying to persuade?
- There are different types of Taras in Buddhism. Each Tara is identified by her colour and what she represents. The Green Tara is the goddess of compassion. The White Tara is the goddess of health. Describe the sort of symbols you would expect to see in an image of the White Tara?

EXHIBITION ACTIVITIES

- Locate another artwork, either a painting or a sculpture of Tara in the exhibition. List all the things you think this goddess is sharing with the audience about paradise.

Perspectives of Power

Stage 5

Durga is the Hindu goddess of strength. Durga is celebrated for her slaying of the Buffalo Demon.



Durga c1990s
INDIA
poster print, 27.3 x 21 cm
Portvale Collection
HINDU



Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection
Durga slaying the buffalo demon (Mahishasuramardini) early 900s
INDIA, Rajasthan
sculpture, red sandstone
140 x 63.5 x 25 cm
Purchased with funds provided by the
Art Gallery Society of New South Wales 1999
163.1999
HINDU

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- Compare and contrast the representations of the goddess Durga in these key artworks.

- Look closely and define the ways both artworks visually convey Durga's strength and power. How do these artworks convey:

a. Physical Strength b. Emotional Strength

- Durga is also known as "the inaccessible one". Outline how this is visually represented in the:

a. 20th-century poster b. 10th-century sculpture

- **Contextual reading:** It is important to remember that all the artworks in the exhibition have been chosen for presentation in an art gallery. These artworks can be read from multiple perspectives including a Hindu perspective, by taking into account the original intention of their making which can include the original context of their display, the audience they were intended for and the purpose for which they were made. Define and analyse possible readings of *Durga slaying the buffalo demon (Mahishasuramardini)* from a gallery audience and a traditional Hindu perspective.

- Define the role or purpose of the artworks when displayed in their original settings such as temples and their Gallery setting. Propose how and in what ways the meaning of the artwork changes for the different audiences, in the different contexts?

EXHIBITION ACTIVITIES

- Write a description of your experience walking around the exhibition and viewing the artworks.

- Write an imaginative, descriptive narrative about visiting a Hindu temple to pay homage to a goddess of importance to you. Concentrate on the personal, spiritual experience of being in the temple and standing in front of the holy icon.

Divine Words

Stage 5

Vagdevi is the Hindu goddess of speech. The image below is quite rare as she is usually defined by sound alone and not by a physical appearance.



Vagdevi, goddess of speech 1800s
INDIA, Rajasthan
gouache on paper, 28 x 20.3 cm
National Museum, New Delhi. Ajit Mookerjee Collection
HINDU

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- Sound is the most important aspect when worshipping Vagdevi. Chanting is associated with this goddess. Propose how this would affect your response and experience of the goddess artwork. Draw parallels between the use of sound in the worshipping experience and the use of speech in the exhibition experience.
- Analyse why if this artwork is a representation of speech, there are no obvious written words on or contained within the image.
- Vagdevi is closely associated with Sarasvati, the goddess of learning and music. Speech is highly revered in Hindu culture as an attribute of knowledge and understanding. Consider what you would define as attributes of knowledge and understanding in modern Australian culture.
- **Representation:** In our contemporary culture, writing and literature is regarded more highly than the spoken word. Develop and present a sacred image of a goddess of writing and literature in 2006 Australia.

Consider:

What would her appearance be?

What attributes and powers she would possess?

What symbols would identify her as the goddess of writing and literature?

What a person would need to do when worshipping her?

The name of your goddess.

EXHIBITION ACTIVITIES

Outline and explain how the Art Gallery of New South Wales has tried to communicate the religious and spiritual meaning of the images of *Vagdevi, Goddess of Speech* in the exhibition. Describe how this contributes to your understanding the artwork on a visual, intellectual, and emotional level.