

THE
BRITISH
MUSEUM

Art & Design: Objects in motion



Painted rickshaw
Bangladesh
20th century AD

Guide for teachers 9

Art & Design guides for teachers

The collections of the British Museum have inspired artists for hundreds of years and are a rich source of ideas and stimulation for teachers and students alike. This series of ten guides is intended to help primary and secondary teachers to use the objects in the British Museum collections for teaching art and design. This will support students' research skills, knowledge and understanding in order to make their practical work more meaningful and contextualised.

Each guide focuses on a topic. Each topic is analysed through four or five themes, each of which is illustrated with a museum object, from different historical periods and world cultures. These topics, themes and objects have been specially chosen so that you and your students can use them as starting points to explore the collections further, either at the Museum or online. Each guide ends with points for classroom discussion and brief ideas for starting off activities and projects. The guides in the series are:

- 1 Containers
- 2 Sculpture
- 3 Textiles
- 4 Symbols
- 5 Celebration
- 6 The Natural World
- 7 Identity
- 8 Gods and spirits
- 9 Objects in motion
- 10 Death and the afterlife

All the objects have been taken from the Museum's online database, available through: www.britishmuseum.org/explore/introduction.aspx. There you can find high quality images which can be copied into your own presentations for the classroom or for students to download.

Contextual understanding

In order to develop their critical thinking, students should examine the following when considering any museum object:

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Origin: | Who made it? Where and when was it made? |
| Materials: | What is it made from? |
| Process: | How was it made? |
| Function: | What was it used for? |
| Meaning: | What does it mean? |

Once students have understood the context, they can analyse the form and decoration of the object which are usually determined or influenced by all these aspects.

World cultures

The guides are not based around a particular cultural or geographical region. If you wish to focus your study on, for example, objects from Africa then use the list below, where the guides which contain objects from particular regions have been grouped.

Africa

Death and the afterlife, Gods and spirits, Identity, Sculpture, Symbols, Textiles,

The Americas

Celebration, Containers, Gods and spirits, Symbols, Textiles, Natural World

Asia

Celebration, Containers, Death and the afterlife, Gods and spirits, Objects in motion, Sculpture,

Europe

Celebration, Containers, Death and the afterlife, Gods and spirits, Identity, Objects in motion, Sculpture, Textiles, Natural World

Middle East

Gods and spirits, Sculpture, Natural World

Oceania

Containers, Death and the afterlife, Gods and spirits, Sculpture, Symbols, Natural World

Cross-curricular topics

Citizenship

Many of these topics tap into citizenship themes such as local and national identity, globalisation and global issues, and the impact of the media.

History

The objects are from a variety of historical contexts and periods. Research and discussions about the use of clothing for status and the importance of symbols are central to exploring images as evidence in history.

Geography

Examining objects from specific cultures is an excellent way of understanding how humans interact and cope with living and surviving in different environments.

Religious Education

Many of these objects have some spiritual significance. Those relating to the afterlife and deities are ideal starting points for considering similarities and differences in belief systems..

Objects in motion

Although most museum objects are static in their displays, many are closely related to movement and motion. Drawings and paintings record moments of action while other objects are movable and only function when they are in motion. There is also the way in which artists suggest movement, through careful use of a brush or technique. By considering aspects of movement, we can bring the museum objects to life.

Action and drama

Paintings and drawings often depict moments from mythology or history by capturing a single moment. Movement can be suggested through body shape, expression and energy of the characters. This dramatic scene is taken from 'Heike monogatari' ('Tale of the Heike'), a war tale from 1185-1568 periods in Japan.

One story tells of a monk, Mongaku, who wanted to restore the Jingōji temple, and travelled far and wide to collect funds. When one emperor refused entry to his palace, he burst in and disrupted the palace entertainment. This scene shows one of the palace guards being thrown to the floor by Mongaku, who wields a dagger in his right hand and his scroll for requesting contributions in the other. He was eventually overcome and jailed. This action is suggested through the energy and pose of each character - as the guard's hat falls, Mongaku is just about to crunch down on him. Drapery and clothing are essential in demonstrating movement, which can clearly be seen in this vivid image.



Moving people around

In many parts of the world, especially in busy cities, cheap and quick forms of transport are essential for moving people and goods around. In many parts of Asia, the cycle rickshaw is the standard and affordable means of transport. They have been developed from a simple tricycle to include a canopy for people to sit under or to fill with boxes and objects. Almost every available surface on this rickshaw from Bangladesh has been intricately decorated. The panels are intricately painted while in other parts the patterns have been traced round cardboard templates, then cut from coloured plastic.

The shapes, scenes and patterns are drawn from film and popular media culture, as well as devotional symbols and idealised images of the Bangladeshi countryside. Fleets of rickshaws fill the streets in busy cities across south Asia and the bright colours are a central part of the urban landscape.



Movement through style

Movement is a term which is frequently used to describe images. Artists can convey movement through the visible brushstrokes, bringing us closer to the motion of painting. This example of Arabic calligraphy shares this quality. Ali Omar Ermes interprets quotations from classical Arabic poetry and writes them in his own style which uses bold expressive brushstrokes, the spattering of ink on the page bringing us closer to the quick movement of the brush. Lettering and calligraphy have been central to Islamic culture and art for centuries, as a major decorative form across a wide range of media.



Devotion through motion

When an object moves, the movement itself can form an important part of religious practice. This is a prayer wheel used by Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims and devotees. The large silver drum is decorated on the top with the Eight Auspicious Symbols: the lotus, conch, knot, vase, parasols, wheels, fishes and banner. Around the drum are moulded mantras or prayers, which are also written on pieces of paper inside the drum. Attached is a chain with a weight on the end. When the drum is held upright, the devotee swings the weight around the drum and it spins. This spinning repeats the mantra and gives the same benefit as saying the prayer out loud. Repetition of prayers, sometimes using rosary beads, is an important aspect of Buddhist devotion. This is a handheld example although larger drums line up in rows outside monasteries to be spun by devotees clockwise – which brings good fortune – whilst brightly coloured prayer flags with mantras written on them adorn Tibetan houses and the movement of the wind blowing through them also repeats the prayers.



Moving parts

In the 16th century, automated models were extremely popular amongst wealthy rulers in both Europe and Asia as objects of curiosity and status. This clock in the shape of a medieval galleon would have been rolled along a table at the start of a banquet. The figures of sailors wield hammers to chime the hours whilst soldiers process before the Holy Roman Emperor in front of the main mast. Music plays on a small organ and finally the cannons fire. The complicated mechanisms which allow this spectacular model to function are elegantly hidden behind the golden casing of the hull. The 'performance' of the ship would have been a great source of wonder and fascination amongst those attending the banquet.



General discussion

- What information can movements tell us? For example, with mime – can you tell what someone is doing simply from their actions?
- Using our senses, what evidence is there for movement around us? Try listening to hear what is moving nearby. Listen to cars, birds flying past, wind blowing through trees. What other senses indicate something is moving?
- Discuss technology and movement – how do gadgets, such as the ship from the 16th century and robots from the late 20th century become desirable objects?
- Consider the importance of vehicles as status symbols – compare the personalisation of the rickshaws with the way people care for and personalise cars. Often these are expensive items for the owner – how do they decorate them?
- Discuss the importance of movement in rituals and festivals; these stylised and particular movements are symbolic. Explore the range of movements and how relationships between devotees, objects and space differ with various religions and ceremonies.

Projects and activities

Primary

Human statues

Ask pupils to work in pairs and take turns at becoming statues in active poses – they must be still but show that they are active, e.g. by doing a sport. The other pupil draws their partner in motion.

Drapery

Use drapery to suggest movement – film pupils swirling around in different fabrics. Display the video on the whiteboard and pause it to show how movement can be captured through using moving fabrics.

Primary continued

Mobiles

Mobiles are named after the fact that their parts are 'mobile'. Design a mobile as a class. Using the internet, each pupil chooses a museum object designed for motion, such as the Tibetan drum, and creates a 2D or 3D version of it for the mobile.

Secondary

Movement

How do different styles of art convey movement? Draw a 'test sheet' of examples and consider which is most effective

Swift sketches

Make quick sketches in charcoal or pencil of a person walking, running or dancing. How does the fact that the model is moving affect the lines and style?

Photography

Explore how movement is captured in photography – either the speed of the camera is very fast – giving the effect of freezing, for example a droplet, or it can be slow – which creates blurring. Experiment with different ways of photographing motion and which is most effective for different subject matter.

Illustrations

Monk Mongaku from Heike Monogatari ('Tale of the Heike')

Iwasa Matabei

Japan

Edo period, early 17th century AD

height 36cm x width 58cm

Painted rickshaw

Bangladesh

20th century AD

The letter kaf

Ink on paper

Ali Omar Ermes

From Libya

AD 1991

Prayer wheel

Tibet

19th century AD

length 28 cm x diameter 11 cm

Automated clock in the form of a 'nef' or galleon

Hans Schlottheim

Augsburg, South Germany

AD 1585

height x 99 cm

Automated clock in the form of a 'nef' or galleon (detail)

Hans Schlottheim

Augsburg, South Germany

AD 1585

height x 99 cm

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