

Toys and Culture

Grades

Grade 1; Grade 3

Subjects

Visual Arts; History and Social Science

Introduction to the Theme

Culture in America has become a very complex system, combining the customary beliefs, social structures and traits of numerous societies, while at the same time developing its own unique culture. Cultures can include racial, religious or social groups, as well as national or ethnic communities and even institutions or organizations and special interest groups. Each of these groups uses various icons or symbols to represent assorted beliefs or hopes they have about the future. Looking at various cultural beliefs and how they manifest themselves in artwork illustrates the connections we have regardless of the culture we are from. In other words, art brings people together through a universal language.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Learn about other cultures and time periods through observation of children's toys from India, Scandinavia and USA.
- Discuss differences and similarities in the toys and decide if they are like their own toys, learning to compare and contrast what they observe.
- Discuss the cultures from which the toys come and decide if they are similar or different than their own.
- Select a non-electronic toy from today and research where and when it developed.
- Present their findings to the class.

Materials

- Reproductions of *Fire Wagon with Horse Team*, *Indian Horse on Wheels*, *Trondheim Viking Toy Horse*, *My Little Pony* and *Rocking Horse*.
- The library and the Internet for research.

Vocabulary

Review the following terms with students.

- Culture – the characteristic features of everyday life shared by people in a particular place or time.
- Surface decoration – something that decorates or beautifies the outside of an object.
- Image – a popular idea of something or someone.
- Design – a decorative pattern.

Discussion Starters

Students identify cultural and interest groups to which they belong and how that affects them. Use discussion starters to help students understand how cultures and their artistic expression relate to their own lives.

1. Share with your class the culture(s) of your ancestors.
2. To what other groups do you belong? What are some of the things members of your group know a lot about?
3. Are there some characteristics that all cultures share?

4. Do a person's superstitions come from his culture? List examples of superstitions. Do some cultures share superstitions? e.g. "God bless you" and "Gesundheit."

Lesson Steps

1. Ask the students to examine the reproductions and identify how the toys are alike or different from their toys.
2. Ask students to look at the reproductions a second time and think about the following questions.
 - a. Can you tell how these toys were made? Who do you think made them? What materials are they made of?
 - b. How are they different from your toys? How are they the same?
 - c. What is the surface decoration? Does it tell you about the culture that made these toys? What things are important to each group?
 - d. What do you think of these toys? Do you like the way they look? What can you tell about the children who played with these toys from these observations? Would you like to play with them? Do you think the children that owned them liked to play with them? Why or why not?
 - e. Notice when each of these toys was made. How has the image of the horse changed over the years and why?
3. Grade 3 – Research the cultures of India and Scandinavia and discuss how they are similar or different to our own. Does this explain why their toys are not the same?
4. Grade 3 – Ask each student to select a non-electronic toy from today and research where and when it developed and present what they learned to the class.

Extensions

Viking toy horse carving – after a wooden horse found in Trondheim, Norway dating from c. 1075 to 1125. See illustration.

1. Start with a piece of soft wood, about 6.5" x 3" x ½" or a bar of Ivory soap.
2. Draw the outline of your horse on the wood or soap.
3. Carefully use a carving knife (for older students), or a plastic knife for the soap, and carve the horse out of the material.
4. Carve the details of the mane, tail and ears.
5. Use a point to add depressions for the eyes.

Cork horse

1. Glue 2 corks together for the body and head.
2. Insert toothpicks into the underside of the body for legs. Use a large needle to make holes first, if necessary.
3. Cut his mane and tail from fringe or feathers and glue to his neck and back.
4. Cut ear shapes from construction paper and glue to the head. Cut a rounded square piece for the saddle and glue to the horse's back.
5. Tie a piece of string around the horse's face for reins.
6. Use a marker to draw on the face.

Standards

- **Grade One**

History and Social Science Content Standards for California Public Schools

1.4 Students compare and contrast everyday life in different times and places around the world and recognize that some aspects of people, places and things change over time while others stay the same.

1.5 Students describe the human characteristics of familiar places and the varied backgrounds of American citizens and residents in those places.

Visual Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools

Artistic Perception

1.2 Distinguish among various media when looking at works of art.

Creative Expression

2.3 Demonstrate beginning skill in the manipulation and use of sculptural materials.

Historical and Cultural Context

3.1 Recognize and discuss the design of everyday objects from various time periods and cultures.

3.3 View and then describe art from various cultures.

3.4 Identify art objects from various cultures and describe what they have in common and how they differ.

Connections, Relationships, Applications

5.2 Compare and contrast objects of folk art from various time periods and cultures.

- **Grade Three**

Visual Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools

Historical and Cultural Context

3.1 Compare and describe various works of art that have a similar theme and were created at different time periods.

3.5 Write about a work of art that reflects a student's own cultural background.

Aesthetic Valuing

4.1 Compare and contrast selected works of art and describe them, using appropriate vocabulary of art.

Connections, Relationships, Applications

5.4 Describe how artists (toy designers) have affected people's lives.



Horse Reel Fire Wagon, 1910

Cast iron, approx. 21 inches



My Little Pony, c. 1982



An antique rocking horse on a swing stand probably made between 1900 and 1920. Possibly by JR & T Smith.



Trondheim Viking Toy Horse
10th century, Norway
Wood, 5 inches