

INDIAN WEDDING RITUALS

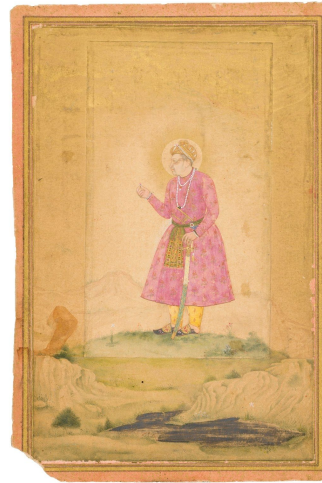
MEHENDI HANDS WITH BACKGROUNDS OF HAND BLOCK PRINTED FABRIC
ART AND WORLD HISTORY

GRADES: 6-8

BASED ON



Deccan/India
A Seated Lady Holding a Flower, Early 18th
Century
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Bimel, Jr. 1991.139



India
Standing Portrait of Akbar, Circa 1640-1650
Opaque watercolor, gold and silver on
paper
Gift of John J. Emery 1950.291

OBJECTIVES

- Students will be introduced to Indian culture by examining two Mughal images from the Cincinnati Art Museum's collection, *A Seated Lady Holding a Flower* and *Standing Portrait of Akbar*.
- Students will use technology to learn about the rituals, traditions and patterns of Indian weddings, including mehendi ceremonies.
- Students will trace their own hand on paper and then draw a detailed henna pattern on it, which includes their own initials.
- Students will design and carve their own block stamp and then print a repeated pattern onto fabric (or watercolor paper) to make a decorative background for their henna hand.
- Students will evaluate their art project using a self-assessment rubric.

CONCEPT

Indian weddings vary greatly due to religion and region, but all incorporate beautiful fabrics and rituals, such as the mehendi ceremony of painting detailed henna patterns on the bride's hands and feet. After researching and sharing what they have learned about traditions of Indian weddings, students will use Indian inspired patterns to design paper henna hands and backgrounds of printed hand stamped fabric or stamped watercolor paper.

MATERIALS

Water-based or Fabric Printing Ink
 Inking Plate
 Brayer
 Linoleum Cutter
 Post it® notes
 Speedy-Carve® block or other carving media
 Fabric (linen, cotton or polyester)
 Liquid Watercolor

Watercolor Paper
 Ink pads
 Embossing Powder (non-toxic)
 Foamcore or Matboard
 Xacto® knife
 Colored Pencils
 Iron
 Hot Glue Gun
 Heat Gun (optional)

VOCABULARY

Hand block printing- applying color to fabric by stamping a “block” to create a repeated pattern.

Motif- a design, symbol or theme, often repeated.

Mehendi- a pre-wedding ceremony in which decorative designs are applied to the bride’s hands and feet using a paste made of henna plants.

Ritual- ceremonial actions based on tradition and/or religion.

Mantra- a sacred utterance or sound that has spiritual powers.

Tolerance- recognizing and respecting the beliefs or practices of others.

Mughal- Indian empire (1526-1857), established by Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad Babur.

Akbar the Great- the third emperor of the Mughal Empire of India, who proclaimed tolerance for all religions during his reign.

PROCEDURE

1. With your class, discuss the customs and rituals of an American wedding. Some comments might include: the groom is not allowed to see the bride before the wedding; the bride wears white; the bride wears something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue; the ring bearer carries the ring, the flower girl throws petals, the father “gives away” the bride, the throwing of the bouquet and garter, throwing rice, decorating the car with tin cans and a “just married” sign, etc. Expect a variety of answers related to your region of the country, heritage and religious customs.
2. Have students work in pairs to research the traditions of Indian weddings based on its many religions. (Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and the Bahá’í Faith).
3. Give students time to compare what they have found about Indian weddings. Ask: “What similarities seem to exist between Indian weddings of various faiths?” Today, about 84% of Indians are Hindu and 12% are Muslim. Hindu weddings are very elaborate and can last three or more days. Brides in both Hindu and Muslim weddings traditionally wear red, symbolizing the rising sun, prosperity and fertility. One day before the wedding, both Hindu and Muslim brides have intricate henna designs applied to their hands and feet in the mehendi ceremony.
4. Show students an image of the museum’s *A Seated Lady Holding a Flower*, from the early 18th Century. Discuss what the woman is wearing. According to *Pride of the Princes* (pg.47) this seated woman wears “a green Sari” and “pink flowered trousers and a sheer white *kurta* with long sleeves, held at the waist with a gold belt. She wears many necklaces of pearls and jewels, visible through her *dupatta*, or scarf, which covers her head and encircles her body before falling down her back over her luxuriant hair. Her fingertips and the palm of her hand have been painted with henna to enhance their beauty.”

5. Discuss with the class the motifs that are repeated on the fabrics of this painting. Ask, "How do you think the fabric was made?" According to the Victoria and Albert Museum, "In India, printing patterns with wooden blocks is mainly associated with the north and west. Dress fabrics used small repeating floral patterns in several colours, requiring multiple blocks. Larger-scale motifs were printed for furnishings and tents." Show the V & A's short video about Indians carving a printing block. (See resources)
6. Tell students that for this art assignment, they will be focussing on repeated patterns and motifs used on Indian fabric and henna hands. They will begin by hand block printing fabric or stamping watercolor paper to create the illusion of printed fabric.
7. Have them first carve their own block stamp. They will draw a traditional Indian floral or paisley design or their own personal motif onto a Post it® note. They will then flip the note over and transfer the design to a piece of Speedy-carve® or a more economical block, such as a piece of rubber baseboard molding. The motif will easily transfer by rubbing the back of the Post it® note with the padded handle of a pair of scissors.
8. After receiving safety directions from the teacher, students will use a linoleum cutter to carefully carve away the area of the block that will not receive ink. They will use a brayer (rubber roller) to roll a small amount of ink on the carved motif. Have them test the image on paper. If the lines are not deep enough, they will re-carve them with a slightly wider blade and test again on paper.
9. When students are happy with the results, they will print the motif on fabric repeatedly to develop a pattern. One or several colors of ink can be used. When the fabric has dried overnight, place a piece of paper over the fabric and iron the design to "set" the ink. Wrap the fabric around a sturdy board such as foam core or matboard and adhere to the board with tacky glue or tape on the back.
10. Another option for this project is to print motifs on watercolor paper. First, apply a wash of liquid watercolor to the paper. Next, use your custom made stamp, a ready made stamp or found objects to stamp color using block printing ink or stamping ink. For a raised image, wet stamping ink can be sprinkled with a non-toxic embossing powder. With the supervision of the teacher, the embossing powder can be raised by heating with a heat gun.
11. Now that the background for the project is complete, the henna hands will be made. Students will trace one of their hands on paper with pencil. They will research designs found in the mehendi ceremony and then draw a detailed design on their paper hand using pencil. Since it is traditional for Indian brides to hide the initials of their groom in their wedding henna designs, students will hide their own initials somewhere in their hand design too. When the pencil design is complete, it will be neatly traced with Sharpie markers. The hand can also be made more realistic by shading with colored pencils. The completed hand drawing will be cut out with scissors. To add dimension to the piece, the hand can be glued to a piece of foam core and then carefully cut out with an Xacto® knife.
12. The finished hand can now be hot glued to the patterned watercolor background or the mounted piece of hand-made fabric.
13. As an extension to this lesson, the process of hand block printing on fabric can also be applied to other objects. Students can make a custom printed pillow for a gift or use larger pieces of fabric to print a scarf or even a sari. Advanced students could design and print motifs on fabric and then sew traditional Indian attire such as man's Sherwani or a woman's Lengha.

ASSESSMENT

Students will compare familiar wedding traditions from America to those of the Indian culture. They will participate in the research and class discussion about customs and rituals of Indian weddings of different faiths. They will make connections about the tolerance of all faiths in today's Indian culture which began in the Mughal period with Akbar the Great.

Students will assess their own henna hand with a printed background using the self-assessment rubric. Six criteria, including hand shape, henna design, shading, block design, block printing and use of materials and tools, will be assessed as beginning (4 pts.), developing (6 pts.), accomplished (8 pts.) or exemplary (10 pts.).

NATIONAL STANDARDS

Visual Arts

Standard 4 Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

Level III (Grade 5-8)

Benchmark 2 Understands the historical and cultural contexts of a variety of art objects.

World History

Standard 28 Understands how large territorial empires dominated much of Eurasia between the 16th and 18th centuries.

Level III (Grade 7-8)

Benchmark 4

Understands the political and religious influences on the development of the Mughal Empire (e.g., relations between Muslims and Hindus in the empire, the effectiveness of Akbar's governing methods and religious ideas in comparison to other Mughal emperors.)

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

World History

Have the class view the museum's *Standing Portrait of Akbar*, Circa 1640-1650. The third ruler of the Mughal Empire, Akbar the Great, believed that all religions should be tolerated. He also believed that a ruler should treat all believers equally. He ended a tax on non-Muslims and moved many Hindus to positions within his government. Ask students to compare this type of religious tolerance to the India of today. Ask "What other nations accept people of diverse religions? Do you think America's policy of religious tolerance has changed in the 21st century?" Defend your answer.

Language Arts

Middle school students can read Kathryn Lasky's, *Jahanara, Princess of Princesses*. This Newbury Honor book details the "the sumptuous wealth and the unforgettable drama within the Mughal Dynasty of seventeenth-century India, through the diary of Princess Jahanara, daughter of Shah Jahan." Another book to read with middle schoolers is *Homeless Bird* by Gloria Whelan. Thirteen year old Koly is getting married. When she finds that her parents have pledged her to a sickly boy with wicked parents, she has no choice but to proceed with the traditional arranged wedding. She manages to forge her own future, "and a life, like a beautiful tapestry, comes together for Koly- one stitch at a time."

RESOURCES

Akbar the Great, Emperor of Mughal India

<https://www.thoughtco.com/akbar-the-great-of-mughal-india-195495>

Bridal Mehndi | Latest Mehndi Design 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZvm70aHZTQ>

Easy Henna Design for Beginners | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MlkHNehkHKc>

The Fabric of India (The Victoria and Albert Museum)

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/the-fabric-of-india/nature-and-making/>

Finding Tolerance in Akbar, the Philosopher-King

<https://www.huffingtonpost.com/craig-considine/finding-tolerance-in-akbar-3031746.html>

Hindu Rites and Rituals <https://www.thoughtco.com/hindu-rites-and-rituals-1770058>

Hindu Weddings <https://www.brides.com/story/hindu-wedding-ceremony>

Indian Weddings <https://www.culturalindia.net/weddings/wedding-traditions/index.html>

Indian Wedding Traditions <http://www.bridebox.com/blog/amazing-indian-wedding-traditions/>

Intro to Block Printing on Fabric <https://youtu.be/Un2DUWn3FLE>

Lasky, Kathryn *Jahanara, Princess of Princesses*. Scholastic, 2002. Ages 9 - 12. Lexile: 810.

Modern Designs from India <https://www.utsavfashion.com/contemporary>

Smart, Ellen S. & Daniel S. Walker. *Pride of Princes: Indian Art of the Mughal Era in the Cincinnati Art Museum*. 1985.

Staples, Suzanne Fisher. *Shiva's Fire*. HarperCollins, 2000. Ages 10 and up. Lexile: 990.

A Traditional Indian Wedding in America https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmWeUL_J-oI

Tomlinson, Heather. *Toads and Diamonds*. Henry Holt, 2010. Ages 11 and up. Lexile: 820.

Whelan, Gloria. *Homeless Bird*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2000. Ages 10 - 13. Lexile: 800.



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