

THE WALTERS ART MUSEUM COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

CERAMIC SYMBOLS

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinion.

OVERVIEW

In this activity, students will explore the use of symbols in historic and contemporary ceramics.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Images of *Wine Jar with Carp Among Water Weeds and Lotuses* ([WAM 49.1917](#))

Images of *Sleeping with the Fishes*, Roberto Lugo, 2018

GUIDING QUESTION

How do artists use images as symbols in works of art?

ENGAGEMENT

Early porcelain ceramics are over 2,000 years old and some of the first evidence of porcelain pieces come from the Eastern Han Dynasty in China. Fine kaolin clay is shaped by hand or on a pottery wheel before being air dried and heated, or bisque fired, in a kiln. Decorative elements are painted on the surface using colored glazes and the piece is fired in the kiln a second time at a high temperature where the mixture of clay particles and melted clay form a strong and translucent finish.

This ceramic porcelain jar from the Ming Dynasty was used to hold Chinese rice wine that would have been dipped out from the large mouth at the top of the jar. Near the mouth is a border of red, yellow, and blue panels inspired by Tibetan paintings that were common during the Ming Dynasty. The main decoration are images of water plants and large fish called carp, a symbol for wealth. The word for fish in Chinese is “yu” and the word for wealth is also “yu”, so fish were often associated with wealth and given as traditional wedding gifts. At the top of the lid is a brightly colored knob shaped like an onion- another clue that the jar may have been used for celebration or given as a wedding gift.

This ceramic jar created by contemporary artist Roberto Lugo was inspired by the Ming Dynasty Wine Jar with Carp Among Water Weeds and Lotuses. Roberto Lugo is a potter, activist, culture-maker, rapper, poet, and educator. In his ceramics, Lugo combines traditional techniques and forms with contemporary color palettes and subject matter that reflect his experiences as an artist of color. He utilizes traditional ceramic techniques and decoration along with elements of graffiti and symbols that represent contemporary themes and current events connected to his lived experience. This piece illustrates Lugo’s interpretation of the fish theme as it is connected to imagining himself killed and put under water.

LOOKING AT THE OBJECT WITH STUDENTS

- Describe the lines, shapes, and colors used to decorate the objects.
- Describe and discuss the materials, tools, and techniques used to create the objects.
- Compare and contrast the objects. How are the ceramic jars similar? How are they different?
- What is a symbol?
- What symbols can you identify in the work of art? What do you think they represent?
- How can the meaning of an image or symbol change in a different context?

EXTENSION

- Brainstorm and research symbols from different cultures or time periods.

- Create your own work of art using symbols that are inspired by your life and a historic material, technique, or subject.
- Discuss contemporary artists that are inspired by historic materials, processes, or subjects. Examples include Kehinde Wiley, Cindy Sherman, or Raul de Nieves.
- Visit 1 West Mount Vernon place to explore additional ceramics from the Walters' collection and contemporary works of art by Roberto Lugo.
- Download the [1 West Mount Vernon Place app](#) to hear contemporary artist Roberto Lugo talk about his work.



Wine Jar with Carp Among Water Weeds and Lotuses ([WAM 49.1917](#))



Sleeping with the Fishes, Roberto Lugo, 2018