

## Activity: Explore Symbolism

### PASS Objectives Addressed

#### Grade 4- The Arts

**Standard 1: Language of Visual Art - The student will identify visual art terms (e.g., architecture, contour, medium, mixed media, perspective, symbol).**

1. Know how works of art are made with respect to the materials, media, techniques, and sources of ideas.
2. Describe and use the principles of design: rhythm, balance, contrast, movement, variety, center of interest (emphasis), and repetition in works of art.
3. Describe and use the elements of art: line, color, form, shape, texture, value (light and dark), and space in works of art.
4. Discuss observations of visual and expressive features seen in the environment (such as colors, textures, shapes).

**Standard 2: Visual Art History and Culture - The student will recognize the development of visual art from an historical and cultural perspective.**

1. Describe and place a variety of specific significant art objects by artist, style and historical and cultural context.
2. Identify themes and purposes of works of art and artifacts in history and culture.
3. Demonstrate a basic knowledge of several fields of art such as painting, sculpture, drawing, computer graphics, printmaking, architecture, and fiber arts.
4. Identify how visual art is used in today's world including the popular media of advertising, television, and film.

#### High School- The Arts

**Standard 1: Language of Visual Art - The student will identify visual art terms (e.g., content, engraving, foreshortening, mosaic, perspective)**

3. Describe exhibitions of original works of art seen in the school or community.
4. Differentiate between art criticism and art reviews, recognizing that criticism is positive as well as negative in its evaluation of a work of art.

**Standard 2: Visual Art History and Culture - The student will recognize the development of visual art from an historical and cultural perspective.**

5. PROFICIENT: Identify major regional, national, and international collections of art.

**Standard 4: Visual Art Appreciation - The student will appreciate visual art as a vehicle of human expression.**

2. Demonstrate respect for their work and the work of others.

#### The Symbols included in *Beyond the Centennial*

*Beyond the Centennial* is rich with symbolism as described in the detail maps. Oklahoma symbols, such as Osage shield from the state flag, the state bird, animal, and tree help illustrate the story of Oklahoma. In addition, symbolism found in color and expression assists in the story. The following activities and discussion points will help student explore and understand symbolism.

## **Part 1: Vocabulary**

Symbol- a visual image that stands for or represents something else

Symbolism- the practice of representing things by symbols, or of investing things with a symbolic meaning or character

Symbolic- serving as a symbol for something (*\$ is symbolic of money*).

## **Part 2: Explore Symbolism**

### Talk about Symbols

A symbol is an object or a picture that stands for an idea. For example, a heart can stand for love, a lion or a sword can represent power, and the color red or a frowning face can symbolize anger. Many artists use symbols in their work.



This is a mixed media painting by Oklahoma Artist Tony Tiger. The painting is titled *Indian Falls Creek* and was part of an exhibit in the Capitol's East Gallery in April or 2010.

The repetitive triangular patterns towards the top of the painting are reminiscent of the clothing worn by the American Indian tribe Sac & Fox.

The circular patterns towards the bottom of the painting were created by the artist himself. It is his symbol for life. The smaller red dots in the center are symbolic of body; the blue circles represent the mind; and the larger gold circles stand for spirit. Body, mind, and spirit together represent life.

As a class, review what a symbol is and identify examples of symbols in *Beyond the Centennial*. Explain to students that a symbol brings to mind an idea. Over the years, a symbol tends to take on a meaning related to its history, function or appearance. For example, Mrs. Louise Funk Fluke, the designer of the Oklahoma state flag, knew that for most Native Americans a calumet (peace pipe) represents peace; likewise, an olive branch represents peace to most European-Americans. Criss-crossed together on the flag, these objects symbolize peace between the Native Indians and the European settlers.

Ideas can also be gradually transferred to an object over time. In this way, an object can take on new, sometimes unintended meanings. Tornadoes are violent and dangerous storms that occur often in Oklahoma. They can destroy miles of land within moments and can cause fear in many people. But, over time tornadoes have become a proud symbol of Oklahoma. Sports teams, mascots, and business in

Oklahoma use images of the tornado. The tornado, or twister, has come to be a symbol of strength, courage, and power. When you think about a tornado, you may simply think about a dangerous and scary storm, or you may think of your favorite sports team, or you may have personal feelings about tornados based on your own experiences. Symbols can mean different things to different people.

### **Part 3: The Universal “Every Man”**

Lead a class discussion about the central section of the mural.

- What does the central figure in the painting symbolize?
- Why are his arms raised?
- Why is he facing up?
- What is he holding?
- Why isn't there much detail on the man?
- Why is the man orange?
- Why is he in the middle?

Read a brief excerpt from the mural's description:

*The mural culminates in the center with the universal “Every Man” who represents every Oklahoman. Carrying the state in his hands, he metaphorically lifts Oklahoma, represented by the state's outline and Osage shield emblem from the state flag, upward into our boundless future.*

### **Part 4: Identify Symbols**

Ask the students identify as many symbols as they can in *Beyond the Centennial*. Have them identify each object and what that object symbolizes. Write their list on the chalkboard or large piece of paper.

More Oklahoma symbols may be found in your Oklahoma History textbook or through internet research. Have the class to continue to identify symbols of Oklahoma that are not in the mural.

Disburse the list of symbols among individual students or groups. Each student or group gets one symbol. Ask the students to further research their symbols and write a one page description about the symbol. Include descriptive facts, meanings and how the symbol properly represents Oklahoma.

### **Part 5: Create a Symbol**

Ask each individual student to create a symbol which represents them. Have them draw it on a piece of paper and then describe the symbol and how it relates to them. Each student may present their symbol to the class.