



## MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS

# Comparing and Contrasting

## Grades 3 & 4

### About the Museum

The Museum of Russian Icons was founded in 2006 as a non-profit educational institution by Massachusetts industrialist Gordon B. Lankton. The collection includes more than 400 Russian icons, the largest collection of its kind in North America, and one of the largest private collections outside Russia. The collection spans six centuries, and includes important historical paintings dating from the earliest periods of icon painting to the present.

The Museum is a fascinating place for teachers and students to explore. It offers discussion-based tours that engage students of all ages. The study of icons and Russian culture yields rich connections to a wide variety of curriculum areas, including history and social studies, art and art history, and English Language Arts. We can customize your classroom visit to meet your instructional goals and curriculum needs.

### About This Lesson

This lesson is one of a series developed by graduate students in Tufts University's Museum Studies program as assignments for the course Curriculum Development for K-12/Museum Collaborations. Special thanks to the students who created them: Tricia Augustine, Christina Ashton, Jennifer Cohen, Sarah Fitzpatrick, Jodi Larson, Juan (Klara) Zhang, Katelyn McLaughlin, Victoria Myers, Karen Riley, and Jennifer Zanolli. These lessons are works in progress intended to show educators the scope of educational opportunities that the museum can create for students.

Some lessons are designed to take place at the Museum, while others were created for teachers to use in the classroom. They can be printed out and used as is, or they can serve as a starting point for other lessons. The Museum looks forward to working with educators to tailor the experience for their students.

If you have written or developed a lesson plan about icons, the Byzantine Empire, Russian history or culture, or any other relevant subject and you'd like us to post it on this website as a community resource, please send it to the email address below and we will be in touch to follow up.

If you have questions or feedback about these lessons, or if you'd like to make arrangements for your students to visit the Museum, please contact Tara Young at [tyoung@museumofrussianicons.org](mailto:tyoung@museumofrussianicons.org) or call (978) 598-5000 x 13.

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MUSEUM OF  
RUSSIAN ICONS

## I. In-Gallery Lesson

### Difference Within the Same

**Target Audience:** 3rd-4th grade, 8-10 year olds

**Subjects:** Visual Arts, Language Arts

**Time Required:** 50 minutes

#### Lesson Overview

While exploring the history and purpose of Russian icons, students will learn about symbolism and the skills necessary to compare and contrast works of art. This lesson will fulfill Massachusetts State Visual Art and English Language Art standards for the intended audience, encourage a basic knowledge of symbolism, and expand the audience's knowledge of the subject.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able:

- Understand what a Russian icon is and how it would have been used.
- Understand how individual circumstances and preference can change an object.
- Build observation and critical thinking skills in participants through conversation and analyzing.

#### Materials & Preparation

- Statue of Liberty worksheet (Appendix 2a, page 12)
- Photo of the Statue of Liberty (Appendix 2b, page 13)
- Crayons
- Clipboards

#### Educational Information/History

An icon is a painting of a religious person or scene that is created to help form a link from the secular world to the spiritual world. They are sometimes called "windows to heaven." Because of their importance in Russian Orthodox religious ceremony, icons were meant to remain consistent from place to place or time to time. In fact, there are laws or canons that were established by the Church in 787 to prevent icon images from changing. Icon artists, or iconographers, were taught these rules through apprenticeships at icon workshops or through manuals.

However, while there are strict rules in icon painting, each work of art differs slightly. With new technologies, saints, and influences, each generation of iconographers could contribute to the subtle development of the genre. Additionally, each geographic area, school, era, and monastery had a distinctive style in icon painting.

#### Steps for the Educator

##### 1. Introduction to Icons (3-5 minutes)

Welcome the group to the Museum of Russian Icons and lead them to the main gallery. After the group gets settled into the space, introduce the history and purpose of religious icons. Specifically, explain that the word "icon" means image and that Russian icons were created to show images of a religious person or scene. In the Orthodox religion, the function of icons is to provide a link between the human world and the spiritual world. They are spiritual objects that would have been displayed in churches and in people's houses.

##### 2. Coloring Activity (12 minutes)

Briefly introduce the concept that icons of a specific person or scene look similar and are meant to repeat certain elements, such as a beard or scroll. After this is completed, hand out the clipboards and worksheets. Tell students that they can color the picture however they would like, but they have to include the three items that are listed in the "Rules" on the worksheet. Remind students to be respectful to other museum visitors and to not touch the

icons themselves. When finished, ask students how it felt to have to follow the rules when coloring. Do they follow other rules when they color?

3. Comparing **(15 minutes)**

Gather the group together around the icons of Saint Nicholas (Saint Nicholas icons can be replaced with any set of icons that the educator feels most comfortable with). Explain to the group that what they did is similar, in concept, to what icon painters would do. Essentially, icon painters would have to create their art within certain boundaries or "rules." Reiterate to the group what their rules were (torch, book, and crown). Then, using the example of Saint Nicholas, have students point out what is similar in all of the paintings depicting him (enlarged forehead, garment, crosses, house, beard). Once an example is given, briefly explain what that symbol would mean in the Russian Orthodox religion. Explain the concept of "symbolism" and define it.

4. Contrasting **(10 minutes)**

While still gathered around Saint Nicholas, have students examine their own worksheets and compare them to their classmates'. What do they notice that is different? When they notice something that is different, ask them why they think this difference occurred and then relate it to the icons. For example, students may recognize that some classmates used a different shade of green.

Ask them why they think this may have happened. Most likely they will respond by commenting on the availability of the colors and/or the personal preference of the student. The next step would be to relate this to icon makers and how they would have used the colors that were available to them.

5. Conclusion **(10 minutes)**

Once students are done comparing and contrasting, ask them to think about why icon painting was required to have such strict rules. Historically, we know this was to make sure that the iconographer did not alter the original meaning of the icon. Tell students that we have similar "symbols" that have strict rules. For instance, the American flag is a symbol that is universally recognizable in America. However if someone changed the colors, it would no longer be recognizable as an American flag.

Finally, engage students in conversation:

- Ask them why symbols are important to icon artists in their work; why are symbols also important to those viewing their work?
- What do they think symbolism stands for? Is it personal? Or directed towards a larger group?
- What are some other examples of symbolism in our world? Why is it important to have rules? Why might it not be important?

## Massachusetts Standards Addressed

### *Visual Arts*

Critical Response, 5.1: In the course of making and viewing art, learn ways of discussing it, such as by making a list of all of the images seen in an artwork (visual inventory); and identifying kinds of color, line, texture, shapes, and forms in the work.

Critical Response, 5.3: Describe similarities and differences in works, and present personal responses to the subject matter, materials, techniques, and use of design elements in artworks.

Purpose and Meaning in the Arts, 6.1: When viewing or listening to examples of visual arts, architecture, music, dance, storytelling, and theatre, ask and answer questions such as, "What is the artist trying to say?" "Who made this, and why?" "How does this work make me feel?"

### *Language Arts*

Questioning, Listening, and Contributing, 2.2: Contribute knowledge to class discussion in order to develop ideas for a class project and generate interview questions to be used as part of the project.

Oral Presentation, 3.3: Adapt language to persuade, to explain, or to seek information.

### **Student Assessment**

To determine if learning occurred during this lesson the following indicators should be examined: engagement, enthusiasm, and content. For engagement, were students actively participating in discussion and did they answer questions when asked? Enthusiasm could be measured by the number of students who were willing to answer the questions asked by the museum educator. Also, did students seem interested in what the educator was talking about? As for content, students should have been able to demonstrate their reasoning process in answering the educator's questions. If these indicators occurred during the lesson, it is possible to assume that some learning did happen within the lesson. To simplify things, a worksheet has been provided that educators can use to track each student on these different categories.

### **Further Information and Citations**

1. Lazarev, V. N. *"Russian Icon: From Its Origins to the Sixteenth Century"* New York; Liturgical, 1997.
2. Martin, Linette. *"Sacred Doorways: A Beginner's Guide to Icons"*. Brewster; Paraclette, 2002
3. *"Russian Icon History"* Museum of Russian Icons. 13 Mar. 2010.  
<<http://www.museumofrussianicons.org/icon-history.html>>
4. *"Short History of Byzantine Icon"*. Byzarticon. 17 Mar. 2010. 2003. <<http://www.byzarticon.com/eng/storia.htm>>
5. Quenot, Michel. *"The icon: window on the kingdom"*. New York; Vladimir's Seminary, 1991.

### **Supplemental Materials**

- Student Assessment Worksheet (Appendix 1, page 11)
- Statue of Liberty Worksheet (Appendix 2, page 12)



## II. Post-Visit Lesson

### Primary Resources and Interviewing Post-Visit

**Target Audience:** 3rd-4th grade, 8-10 years old

**Subjects:** Language Arts

**Time Required:** 50 minutes

#### Lesson Overview

While conducting oral histories of individuals that have had an effect on them, students will learn the process of conducting primary research and presenting their findings in a clear summary. This lesson will fulfill Massachusetts State English Language Art standards for the intended audience, encourage a basic knowledge of primary research, and expand the audience's knowledge of summarizing.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate primary research skills and understand the importance it has for historians.
- Understand the importance of clarity in writing and presentation
- Reflect and use critical thinking skills

#### Materials & Preparation

- Oral Histories Worksheets (Appendix 4, page 15)

#### Educational Instruction/History

Conducting an interview, which is a one-on-one or small group question and answer session, is one way that historians gather firsthand accounts of an event. This type of research is called primary research and it relates to any study that is collected by going out and gathering the information yourself. Primary research is especially useful when a historian is investigating a new issue that has had little or no previous research. Additionally, conducting primary research is a useful tool for historians because it allows them the ability to get a first-person or fuller understanding of an event. Conducting primary research is also an excellent skill to learn because it can be useful in a variety of different settings including business, personal, and academic.

Russian iconographers, who were the artists that created icons, were not able to conduct primary research on their subjects. Instead, the Orthodox Church established what characteristics would represent a particular event or person in an icon. However, similar to summarizing an interview, these characteristics were established so that people could easily identify a saint to pray to.

#### Steps for the Educator

##### 1. What is an interview? (8-10 minutes)

Prepare students for their assignment by leading a discussion on interviews. The discussion should focus on what an interview is, the format for an interview, and why interviews are important for historians. Ask students what they remember about the Museum of Russian Icons and recall what they learned about portraiture, symbolism, and what made people recognize each Saint in icons. How were these traits similar to primary sources?

##### 2. Interview Homework (3-5 minutes)

Inform students that they will be using symbolism in a different way today by interviewing people they know. After students are comfortable with the idea of an interview, hand out the Oral Histories worksheet as a homework assignment. Explain to students that they will be interviewing an important person in their lives, such as a teacher, coach, sibling, or parent, and answering the questions that are on the worksheet. It may also be helpful to go over the worksheet to see if students have a question about the interview. Because students will have to contact and interview an important person in their lives, this assignment may take at least two to three days to complete.

3. **Writing Exercise (10-12 minutes)**

Using the interview answers as a guide, have students write a short two to three paragraph summary about the person they interviewed. Students should also include a brief sentence or two about why they choose that person to interview and how that person has had an effect on their life. Remind students that the summary of the person should answer the questions asked during the interview.

4. **Portraits through Symbolism (15-20 minutes)**

After students have their interviews and written paragraphs, have them read over their “descriptions” of their subjects and draw a portrait or make a collage to complement their written work. Encourage students to include symbolism within their artwork. (Symbolism could include a baseball hat if the person is a sports fan, the subject can hold a paintbrush if s/he is an artist, etc.)

5. **Class Presentation (15 minutes)**

After completing their written assignments, have students volunteer to present a summary to the classroom. Once a person has finished reading his/her summary, ask the class what they thought was the most important information discussed about that person and see if the group can guess what the symbolism in the portrait represents. Then ask a volunteer if these assumptions were correct. The purpose of this section is to get students to think about whether they presented their writing in a clear and direct way that made it easy for their peers to follow and understand.

6. **Conclusion (8-10 minutes)**

In the last section of this lesson plan, students will discuss the interview process. Some questions to consider asking students are:

- Did they find the interview process difficult or easy?
- Was it easy to summarize the person's answers into two or three paragraphs?
- Would they feel comfortable summarizing this person's accomplishments without the interview?
- Do they have a better understanding of how Russian iconographers portrayed a saint or story?

This would be a good opportunity to link what they did to the work of Russian iconographers. Specifically, iconographers would have to summarize clearly a saint's accomplishments in an easy to follow manner in their icons.

## **Massachusetts Standards Addressed**

### *Language Arts*

Research 24. 2: Identify and apply steps in conducting and reporting research:

- Define the need for information and formulate open-ended research questions.
- Initiate a plan for searching for information.
- Locate resources.
- Evaluate the relevance of the information.
- Interpret, use, and communicate the information.
- Evaluate the research project as a whole.

Writing 19.11: Write brief summaries of information gathered through research

Oral Presentation 3.5 - 3.5: Make informal presentations that have a recognizable organization (sequencing, summarizing)

## **Student Assessment**

The assessment for this lesson will revolve around the student's interview summarization and their informal presentations to the class. Specifically, were students able to gather the needed information about the interviewee to write their two to three paragraphs and did they present their information in an easy to follow method? Were their classmates able to guess the significance of the symbols? For those who did not present their findings, did they support their classmates and the lesson by participating in class?

## **Further Information and Citations**

1. Driscoll, Dana Lynn and Allen Brizee. "What is Primary Research and How do I get Started?" Purdue University. 17 April 2010. Web. 30 April 2010.

2. *"Russian Icon History"* Museum of Russian Icons. 13 Mar. 2010. Web. <<http://www.museumofrussianicons.org/icon-history.html>>

**Supplemental Materials**

Student Assessment Worksheet (Appendix 3, page 14)

Oral Histories Worksheet (Appendix 4, page 15)



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### III. Art Workshop

#### Symbolic Self-Portrait Workshop

**Target Audience:** 3rd-4th grade, 8-10 years old

**Subjects:** Visual Arts, Language Arts

**Time Required:** 70 minutes

#### Lesson Overview

While exploring the history and artistic style of Russian icons, students will create self-portraits that combine both elements of Russian icon painting and symbolism. This lesson will fulfill Massachusetts State Visual Art and English Language Art standards for the intended audience, encourage a basic knowledge of symbolism, and expand the audience's knowledge of Russian icons.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Understand what a Russian icon is and the stylistic elements of an icon
- Self-reflect and use critical thinking skills
- Participate in a group using collaborative skills

#### Materials & Preparation

- Large-scale images of icons. Images for educational use may be found on the Museum website.
- Paper
- Self-portrait worksheet (Appendix 6, page 17)
- Drawing and coloring implements (Pencils, crayons, and colored pencils)
- Mirrors

#### Educational Instruction/Background

An icon is a painting of a religious person or scene and that is created to serve create a link between the human world and the spiritual world. They are sometimes called “windows to heaven.” Because of their importance in Russian Orthodox religious ceremony, icons were meant to stay consistent from place to place or time to time. Therefore, some elements are common to all Russian icons. The elements that will be discussed in this lesson are psychological perspective, symbolic colors, and facial characteristics. The following is a description of each of these elements:

- Psychological perspective (also called “hierarchical scale”): This is an artistic perspective that is based on the principle that the most important figure in the artwork should be the largest and most centrally placed. This perspective is used to attract and focus the viewer's attention on the most important facts.
- Symbolic colors: Iconographers use certain colors to symbolize particular themes or elements in their artwork. Some common colors are green (new life), blue (baptism or a sign of heaven), deep red (Jesus' blood), purple (royalty), gold (divinity and magnificence), and white (purity or God's presence).
- Facial Characteristics - Portraits in Russian icons have large, almond-shaped eyes, enlarged ears, long thin noses, and small mouths. Iconographers did this to indicate that each sensory organ on the individual had ceased being a normal organ after the individual received the Divine Grace.

#### Steps for the Educator

1. Introduction to Icons **(3-5 minutes)**  
Welcome group and introduce the history and purpose of religious icons. Assuming students have already had a tour of the collection, this discussion will be a review.
2. Common Elements of Icons **(8-10 minutes)**  
Using images from the gallery that show a single person, such as the Saint Nicholas or the three-handed Mother of God icon, explain some common elements of icon painting. Discuss:
  - Positioning and facial characteristics of the saints; ask students to act out these physically

- Iconographers' symbolic use of color.
  - Explain to students how each icon of a different person has symbols that represent something about the saint's history. Examples of this symbolism will depend on the particular icon used in demonstrating the different icon elements.
  - Perspective. Perspective is a way of suggesting distance or depth in a painting or drawing. It is how we can tell if something is close to us, or far away from us. In icon paintings, the perspective is different from what we see in our everyday life. The paintings seem "flat". The person is usually in the front center of the painting, and is the largest part of the painting.
  - The images we see in the icon paintings have many similarities. The faces have almond shaped eyes, larger than average ears and a small mouth. We also notice that many icons are holding something special or meaningful in their hands.
3. **Brainstorming Symbols (5 minutes)**  
Have students brainstorm at least two items that represent an achievement or personal aspiration that they have accomplished or wish to accomplish in their life. If students are having trouble, refer back to the icon examples that were previously provided. Another method to explain this concept is to suggest a personal achievement and then explain what might visually represent that accomplishment. For instance, a portrait holding a diploma may visually represent graduating from high school or college.
4. **Drawing Self-Portraits (20 minutes)**
- After brainstorming, students will be instructed to use the worksheet template to create self-portraits that incorporate their brainstormed symbols and at least one element of icon painting that was previously discussed. What methods or characteristics have been used in icon painting? How can aspects of icons be translated to one's own self-portrait?
  - The worksheet will help students to quickly create a basic portrait form. They will be adding elements to the template to create a full self-portrait. Make sure students understand the use of symbolism and that everything they add to their portrait will, in a sense, stand for something else. For example, they may choose the color yellow because for them it symbolizes happiness; they may draw a mountain in the background because they love to ski.
  - If students seem to need more direction for this step, you can provide a list: ask them to include two objects that represent hobbies or interests; one object that represents something about their family or town; and one or two colors that represent a feeling.
5. **Group Discussion (10 minutes)**  
When students finish drawing their self-portraits, divide students into small groups of either four or five. Instruct each student to discuss and explain their symbolic self-portraits to their small groups. This process is to help develop students' skills of self-reflection.
6. **Conclusion (5 minutes)**  
Gather the group together again and have a brief discussion on whether or not it was easy to assign a meaning to an object for their self-portraits. After a brief discussion, ask if they would find it easier or harder to assign a symbol to another person's story. Explain that assigning a symbol to represent a person is what Russian iconographers did in images of saints.

### **Massachusetts Standards Addressed**

#### *Visual Arts*

Critical Response, 5.3: Describe similarities and differences in works, and present personal responses to the subject matter, materials, techniques, and use of design elements in artworks.

Purpose and Meaning in the Arts, 6.1: When viewing or listening to examples of visual arts, architecture, music, dance, storytelling, and theatre, ask and answer questions such as, "What is the artist trying to say?" "Who made this, and why?" "How does this work make me feel?"

Concepts of Style, Stylistic Influence, and Stylistic Change, 8.3: Perform or create works inspired by historical or cultural styles

### *Language Arts*

Discussion, 1.2: Follow agreed-upon rules for class discussion and carry out assigned roles in self-run small group discussions.

Questioning, Listening, and Contributing, 1.2: Follow agreed-upon rules for class discussion and carry out assigned roles in self-run small group discussions.

Oral Presentation, 3.3: Adapt language to persuade, to explain, or to seek information.

Oral Presentation, 3.5: Make informal presentations that have a recognizable organization

### **Student Assessment**

The assessment for this lesson will revolve around the student's self-portraits. Specifically, were students able to incorporate at least one icon characteristic in their portrait and were they able to give enough supporting detail to their group to support their individual style and symbolic choices? Group cooperation should also be tracked since this is a skill that is crucial to develop during this age range.

### **Further Information and Citation**

1. Lazarev, V. N. "Russian Icon: From Its Origins to the Sixteenth Century" New York; Liturgical, 1997.
2. Martin, Linette. "Sacred Doorways: A Beginner's Guide to Icons". Brewster; Paraclette, 2002
3. "Russian Icon History" Museum of Russian Icons. 13 Mar. 2010.<<http://www.museumofrussianicons.org/icon-history.html>>

### **Supplemental Materials**

Student Assessment Worksheet (Appendix 5, page 16)

Self-Portrait Template (Appendix 6, page 17)



**Appendix 2. Sketching Rules—In-Gallery Lesson: Difference Within the Same.** Complete this drawing of the Statue of Liberty using the Rules noted at the bottom of the page. Then color in your picture.



## **RULES**

1. The Statue must be holding a book
2. The Statue must be holding a torch
3. The Statue must be wearing a seven-pointed crown



**Appendix 2b. Sketching Rules—In-Gallery Lesson: Difference Within the Same.** Photo of the Statue of Liberty.





## Appendix 4. Oral Histories. Post-Visit Lesson: Primary Resources and Interviewing.

### Oral Histories

Choose someone who has had significant role in your life (for example: parent, sibling, coach, or teacher) and conduct an interview with that person that answers the following questions. Hint: it may be helpful to write down their answers since you will be asked to summarize your research in class.

Interviewer's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee's Name \_\_\_\_\_

What was school like for you as a child? What were your best and worst subjects?

Of all the things you learned growing up, which do you feel was the most important?

What accomplishment are you the most proud of?

What is/was your job and how did you choose it?

What is the one thing you most want people to remember about you?





**Appendix 6. Art Workshop Lesson: Symbolic Self-Portrait.** Example

Name \_\_\_\_\_

What symbols represent **you**? Write at least 2 ideas here:

Create a self-portrait to incorporate your symbols and one element of icon painting.

