



**MUSEUM OF  
RUSSIAN ICONS**

# **Understanding Icons: Finding Meaning in Color**

**Grades 7 and 8**

by

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## **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 500 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 students who created them. 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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## **I. Pre-Visit Lesson**

### **Looking at Color Symbolism & Utilizing Color Theory**

**Age Group:** Grades 7-8

**Time Required:** 60 minutes

**Subject:** Language Arts, Visual Arts

#### **Lesson overview**

This lesson will introduce students to the symbolic meanings of color used by Russian icon painters. Other examples of paintings and everyday symbols will help illustrate the vocabulary that will be introduced. This lesson will help students understand color symbolism when they visit the Museum of Russian Icons. A hands-on activity will introduce students to the color wheel from the artists' perspective. Students will complete a color wheel which will be used as a reference for students in the post-lesson, mixing egg tempera.

#### **Learning objectives/target and criteria**

- Understand the symbolic use of color in religious icon paintings
- Learn new vocabulary terms such as color wheel, primary colors, secondary colors, and complementary colors.
- Understand color theory well enough to create any color

#### **Criteria**

Students will successfully create a color wheel with colored pencils. Students will learn the symbolic meaning of color in icon paintings and will be able to recognize these elements. Students will learn new vocabulary and utilize the vocabulary words in the worksheet provided.

#### **Skills Used by Students**

Students will gain vocabulary skills and visual art and language arts skills through this activity. Students will also use critical thinking as well as work together to practice group skills.

#### **Materials & Preparation**

- 3 colored pencils per student—must be red, blue, yellow (primary colors), color wheel template (Appendix 1, page 18) and worksheet (Appendix 2, page 19)
- Primary source materials included in packet and vocabulary list. Icons may be downloaded at <http://www.museumofrussianicons.org/forteachers.html>
- Color copies of images and symbols

#### **Introduction for the Educator**

The first part of the lesson will consist of a 5-minute introduction by the educator introducing color symbols in everyday life and some color theory (Appendix 1, page 18). The teacher will illustrate examples using images and everyday color symbols. New vocabulary will be introduced, such as warm and cool colors. The educator will ask students to participate in the discussion.

The second part of the lesson will consist of a 10-minute introduction by the educator reinforcing the meaning of color in icon paintings. The teacher will illustrate this by utilizing examples of images from the Museum of Russian Icons' collection (<http://www.museumofrussianicons.org/forteachers.html>). The teachers should then discuss the technique of Russian icon painting (grinding of minerals and egg yolk mixture, application of paint, and gesso on the board, etc.)

The third part of the lesson will consist of a 25-minute hands-on activity. The educator will introduce new vocabulary words such as primary, secondary and tertiary colors. The educator will hand out the color wheel (Appendix 1, page 18) and ask students to fill in the primary colors on the color wheel, then the secondary, and so on. Students will learn how to mix colors with the three primary colors. Each student will create a color wheel and save it to use as reference in the post-lesson, mixing egg tempera.

Part four will consist of a 10-minute worksheet students will complete. Students will reflect on what they have learned creating their own color wheel utilizing the new vocabulary. Students will complete the worksheet to be given to the educator at the end of the class (Appendix 2, page 19).

1. Introduction led by the educator introducing everyday color symbols and cool and warm color examples **(5 minutes)** Explain the definition of symbol (see Vocabulary).

Explain that color can be used to create a mood, create an atmosphere, emphasize a point, sell something or to communicate an idea. For example: on a traffic light, red means stop, yellow means slow, green means go.

Ask students if they can find other examples of color used as symbols in everyday life. Offer students the following examples:

- The colors of a nation's flag are usually seen as patriotic. Red, white, and blue symbolizes patriotism in the USA.
  - Colors can be associated with holidays or seasons: red and green for Christmas; blue and silver for Hanukkah; orange, red, yellow, and brown for fall; black and orange for Halloween.
  - A bright yellow smiley face expresses a happy moment, a person in a good mood, or a cheerful atmosphere.
  - Brighter colors such as red, yellow and orange represent warm colors not only with emotions but also with temperature. Cool colors are blue and green. Cool colors tend to have a calming effect. (NOTE: The teacher may want to pre-select some images that illustrate the different effects of colors and display them for this discussion. These can be from our daily environment, such as a stop sign or an American flag. They can also be examples of artwork such as van Gogh's *The Starry Night* and his *Sunflowers*, or paintings from Picasso's blue and pink periods.)
2. Introduce icons **(10 Minutes)** Give a brief history of the Museum and what students will see when they get there. Review what an icon is and how it is significant in Russian orthodox religion and discuss the process of making an icon using examples from the collection.
  3. Introduction lead by the educator reinforcing the meaning of color in Russian icon paintings. **(10 minutes)** Introduce how important color is in Russian icon paintings and that color associations and symbolism is part of the belief system of the Russian Orthodox Church: Gold is reserved for Christ and symbolizes divinity.
    - Red is one of the most frequently used colors in icons. This is the color of heat, passion, love, life and life-giving energy. For this reason red became the symbol of the resurrection - the victory of life over death. But at the same time it is the color of blood and torments, and the color of Christ's sacrifice. Martyrs, or people who suffer persecution and death for refusing to renounce a belief or cause, are depicted in red clothing on icons. Sometimes icons were painted with a red background as a symbol of the celebration of eternal life.
    - Blue indicate the infiniteness of the sky and is the symbol of an everlasting world. Blue also symbolizes Christ's true humanity.
    - White is the symbol of the heavenly realm and God's divine light. This is the color of cleanliness, holiness and simplicity. On icons, saints and righteous people are usually depicted clothed in white as righteous ones—people who were good, honest, and lived by "the Truth." In the same manner, white was used in the swaddling bands of babies, the shrouds of the dead and the robes of angels. Only righteous souls were depicted as wearing white.
    - Green is the color of natural, living things. It is the color of grass and leaves, youth, flowering, hope, and eternal renovation.
    - Brown is the color of the bare earth, dust, and all that is transient and perishable.
    - Black is the color of evil and death.

Show the image of the icon Christ the Pantocrator, (Pantocrator means "Almighty" or "All-powerful"). Explain to students that Christ's inner robe is red crimson to signify for Orthodox believers his human blood shed and his sacrifice. His outer robe is blue representing Christ's humanity. In the icon, point out the gold halo. Gold projects light and is equated with the light of God.

Show the image of the icon Saint George and the Dragon.

Ask students what they think of the colors in the image. Explain to students that Saint George is depicted atop a white horse, killing the dragon. Saint George wears red, symbolizing his martyrdom. Red also denotes passion, appropriate for a saint who was a zealous defender of the faith. The white horse is a symbol of purity. The dark dragon is the traditional color used for Satan in iconography. The beast is symbolic of paganism and evil passions. The beast seems smaller than one would expect, but this is probably to show that evil is no match for good. In the right corner of the icon

is the hand of God descending to bless Saint George in his endeavor. It is also an indication that Saint George is acting as an agent of God's will. The gold background projects light and is equated with the light of God.

The educator shows the image of the icon Kazan Mother of God.

Ask students what they think of the colors in the image. Offer students some information if needed. One of the most common subject matters is Mary, the Mother of God, holding Jesus in her arms. This veil or head covering is usually red to show her suffering and her acquired holiness. Under her veil her clothing is blue, symbolizing her humanity.

4. Hands-on activity: The educator will lead the step-by-step process of creating a color wheel. **(25 minutes)** The educator will hand out the color wheel (Appendix 1, page 18) and the three primary colored pencils. Inform students they will be creating and mixing a color wheel, just as an artist would. Introduce students to the vocabulary term "primary colors."

Inform students that the purpose of a color wheel is to show all of the colors and their relationship to each other. The artist can use it as a reference for how color combinations work. In theory an artist can make any color out of the three primary colors.

Ask students to color in the appropriate spaces for red, blue, and yellow on the color wheel.

After the primary colors are filled in, introduce students to the definition of secondary colors. They are achieved by mixing two primary colors together.

- Ask students how they would create green (mixing yellow and blue)
- And then orange (mixing red and yellow)
- And then purple (mixing blue and red)
- Have students complete the appropriate circles for secondary colors

When the primary and secondary colors are completed, introduce students to the definition of tertiary colors. They are achieved by mixing a primary and a secondary color that are adjacent on the color wheel.

Ask students how many spaces are left to create tertiary colors (six). Have students complete tertiary colors.

- Red-orange
- Yellow-orange
- Yellow-green
- Blue-green
- Blue-purple
- Red-purple

When the color wheel is complete, introduce students to the definition of complementary colors. Ask students why an artist would use complementary colors in a painting: When placed next to each other, complementary colors make each other appear brighter, more intense. They are used to create balance in a painting. Complementary colors create a sense of excitement.

When the color wheel is complete, introduce students to the definition of analogous colors. Ask students why an artist would use analogous colors in a painting: To create harmony in a painting. Analogous colors create a mood of calm and peace.

Ask students: Why might an artist want to create a color wheel?

- Artists can use the color wheel to practice determining which colors are complementary or analogous colors.
- Communicate the appropriate color in a painting to create a symbolic meaning or feeling.
- Practice mixing paints to become more skilled at their work.
- Use less paint (supplies) and more creativity and enhance works of art.

Inform students the color wheel created will be used in a post-visit lesson later on.

5. Worksheet completion (**10 Minutes**) Students will reflect on what they have learned, creating their own color wheel and (Appendix 1, page 18) utilizing the new vocabulary. Students will complete the worksheet (Appendix 2, page 19) to be given to the educator at the end of the class.

## Extensions

Students design their own color wheel in a different format from the traditional wheel. Using mat board students can choose and draw a motif, and can work on color mixing clarity with paint (acrylic or tempera). Students will work on craftsmanship to create an interesting design.

## Curriculum Frameworks/Standards

*Strand: Arts Disciplines: Visual Arts: Topic: Methods, Materials, and Techniques*

1.7 *Use the appropriate vocabulary related to the methods, materials, and techniques students have learned and used in grades PreK-8.*

1.8 *Maintain the workspace, materials, and tools responsibly and safely. Topic: Elements and Principles of Design*

*Topic: Elements and Principles of Design*

2.7 *For color, use and be able to identify hues, values, intermediate shades, tints, tones, complementary, analogous, and monochromatic colors.*

*Topic: Critical Response*

5.6 *Demonstrate the ability to describe the kinds of imagery used to represent subject matter and ideas, for example, literal representation, simplification, abstraction, or symbolism.*

*Topic: Roles of Artists in Communities*

7.3 *Identify and describe careers in at least one art form.*

*Language Arts: Topic: Vocabulary and Concept Development*

4s.14 *Determine the meanings of unfamiliar words using context clues (for example, contrast or cause and effect stated in the text).*

13.20 *Identify and use knowledge of common organizational structures (logical order, comparison and contrast, cause and effect relationships).*

## Glossary/Vocabulary

Symbol	Something that stands for or suggests something else because of relationship or association; a visible sign of something invisible (lion is a symbol of courage); use of conventional or traditional signs in the representation of divine beings and spirits.
Color wheel	An illustrative organization of color hues around a circle, that shows relationships between primary colors, secondary colors, complementary colors, etc.
Primary colors	Red, blue, yellow the basic building blocks of color. All colors can be made from these three primary colors.
Secondary colors	Created by mixing the primary colors. (red + blue = purple, blue+ yellow= green, yellow+ red= orange)
Tertiary colors	Created by mixing primary colors with secondary colors.(yellow-orange, orange-red, blue-green red-purple, blue-purple, orange-red, yellow-green)
Complementary colors	The colors opposite on a color wheel
Analogous colors	Colors located next to one another on a color wheel.

Warm colors        The colors on the yellow-orange-red side of the color wheel

Cool colors        The colors on the green-blue- side of the color wheel.

### **Resources and References (for teacher)**

1. Color wheel, Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color\\_wheel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color_wheel), 03-31-11, 23 March 2011.
2. *What you need to know about Color theory*, [http://painting.about.com/od/colourtheory/ss/color\\_theory\\_6.htm](http://painting.about.com/od/colourtheory/ss/color_theory_6.htm), 04-30-11, ©2011 About.com.
3. *How to distinguish the saints in art by their costumes, symbols and attributes*, de Bles Major Authur, Art and Culture Publications Inc., copyright 1925, pp 30-32.
4. *Understanding Icons*, [http://tars.rollins.edu/Foreign\\_Lang/Russian/underst.html](http://tars.rollins.edu/Foreign_Lang/Russian/underst.html), 4/30/11, © Alexander Boguslawski 1998-2005.
5. *Color Meanings, Not Always What You Expect*, <http://www.color-wheel-artist.com/color-meanings.html>, 04-25-11
6. Sacred art and Gilding studio, [http://www.heavenlyart.net/icon\\_technique.html](http://www.heavenlyart.net/icon_technique.html), 04-27-11, copyrighted © by Vivian Karayiann.
7. Icons, <http://buffaloah.com/a/DCTNRY/i/icon.html>, 4/29/11, © 2010 Chuck LaChiusa.
8. Orthodox Church in America, <http://www.oca.org/FSlives.asp>, copyright 1996, 04-15-11.

### **Supplemental Materials**

Color Wheel Template (Appendix 1, page 18)

Color Wheel Worksheet (Appendix 2, page 19)

Student Assessment (Appendix 3, page 20)



## II. In-Gallery Lesson

### Who is your Icon?

**Age Group:** Grades 7-8

**Length of Lesson:** 50 minutes

**Subjects:** Language Arts, Writing, Visual Arts

### Lesson overview

This lesson will help students learn to identify and define Russian icons and relate iconography to current pop or cultural icons of today. Students will create their own icon and present the meaning of their icon to their classmates. The museum educator will introduce new vocabulary words such as iconography, iconographer. The educator will also identify and define religious icons versus cultural icons and pop icons.

The curriculum connections/subject areas that will be covered: visual art & language arts

### Learning Objectives/Target

- Identify and define an icon (religious, pop or cultural).
- Utilize new vocabulary and write about their personal icon.
- Write short story or poem to describe their icon image

### Skills

- Students will be able to discuss the difference between a religious, cultural, and pop icon.
- Students will utilize new vocabulary in the presentation and written portion of the activities in this lesson plan.

### Materials & Preparation

- Colored Pencils and drawing paper
- Creating Your Own Icon worksheet (Appendix 4, page 21)
- Clipboards
- Primary source materials included in packet
- Vocabulary list

### Introduction

The first part of the lesson will include a 10-minute discussion about Russian icons: how to identify and define icons and who creates them. This discussion will take place on the first floor of the museum. Students will observe the icon wall on the lower level of the Museum for this discussion and have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. The museum educator will introduce new vocabulary words such as iconography and iconographer. The educator will also identify and define religious icons versus cultural icons and pop icons.

Part two of the lesson will include a 10-minute discussion on the second floor of the Museum about commonalities and symbolism within icon paintings using the religious icons of Saint Nicholas. Students will listen to the story of Saint Nicholas. Students will be asked to find and share commonalities found throughout this grouping of icons. The educator will discuss the symbolism of these commonalities.

Part three of the lesson is a hands-on activity. For 15 minutes students will be given blank paper and the Creating Your Own Icon work sheet to complete (Appendix 4, page 21). Students will create their own icons, answer questions on the worksheet, create three specific symbols for their icon and write a poem or short paragraph about their icon.

Part four; the final activity will be the last 15 minutes of the lesson. Students will be asked to share their icon image and explain the three specific symbols, and share their poem or paragraph with the group.

## Step by Step

1. Lead a discussion about icons, how people identify an icon and who creates an icon. **(10 minutes)** Welcome students to the Museum (stand in front of the icon wall on the lower level).

Ask students, what do you think a religious icon is?

As students participate in the discussion, offer some facts about religious icons as they are observing.

- Religious icons were painted as far back as the tenth century, when Christianity was adopted in Russia. Originally icons were only worshiped in churches – but they were eventually allowed for use in homes as well. These icon paintings depict a religious person or event, or illustrate a story from the Bible.
- Religious icons were important to the Russian Orthodox people because Orthodox religions teach that icons were directly inspired by God, and in some cases, they were said to be actually painted or delivered by saints themselves. These icon in turn help the Russian Orthodox people feel closer to God.

To connect students with contemporary icons of today, ask students to define the difference between a cultural icon and a pop icon. Offer students the definition and examples if they do not know.

cultural icon: (definition from Wikipedia.org) A representation of an object or person, or that object or person may come to be regarded as having a special status as particularly representative of, or important to, or loved by, a particular group of people, a place, or a period in history. Examples: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., President Obama, the Beatles.

pop icon: (definition from Wikipedia.org) A celebrity, character, or object whose fame in pop culture constitutes a defining characteristic of a given society or era. Although there is no single definitive test for establishing “pop icon” status, such status is usually associated with elements such as longevity, ubiquity, and distinction. Examples: Madonna, Elvis, Oprah, Andy Warhol, Lady Gaga, Christina Aguilera, Mickey Mouse and Michael Jordan.

Ask students, if they can think of any current cultural or pop “icons”? Ask students to give examples.

Ask students if there are any commonalities between the three types of icons? You can give the following examples if students need help:

- Icons represent someone or something of importance.
- Icons have distinctive features or symbols that many people recognize.
- Icons are worshiped or looked up to by groups or individuals.
- Icons represent something positive.

Ask students why they think the same term is used for each of these concepts. What is the significance of that?

Ask students, Who do you think creates Russian icons? Offer students the definition and facts about iconographers.

- An icon painter called an iconographer makes icons. Iconographer literally means “image writer” which means, one who revealed scripture and divine truths into visual images.
- Iconographers never consider their work to be an original creation so they usually did not sign their work. The only name that typically appears on the icon is the name of the saint or holy figure depicted.
- The icon painter never improvises or works arbitrarily, but rather paints purposefully, abiding by the dictates of church tradition.
- Most icons are blessed by a priest.
- An iconographer always abides by the traditional patterns or designs, which are traced onto the surface of the icon in order to create the desired image.

A typical icon is painted on wood

The wood is covered with a layer of gesso (a preparation of plaster and glue).

When the gesso hardens, the board is polished to create a shiny, smooth surface.

Using a stencil, the outline of the desired image is traced onto the board.

Then a background is applied.

When the background has dried, the painter creates the image or scene using pigments tempered with egg tempera.

After the painting is completed, it is typically covered with a layer of flaxseed or olive oil.

2. Lead a discussion about commonalities and symbolism in icons **(10 minutes)** Use the grouping of the Saint Nicholas icons on the second floor to discuss his story and significance.

Saint Nicholas was the most popular Saint in the Byzantine world and Russia. He continues to be the Patron Saint of Russia. He is particularly renowned as Protector of the Weak and Poor. Saint Nicolas is the historical inspiration for the contemporary figure of Santa Claus.

Allow students to look at the icons for 3 minutes.

Ask students to find and share commonalities found throughout this grouping of icons. To help students use an example such as: Notice the iconographer depicts all the images of Saint Nicholas images with a short white beard. Is there anything else you can see throughout these images of Saint Nicholas?

Remind students about the previous discussion about iconographers. Ask students why they are finding commonalities within these images. Define symbolism and point out commonalities or symbols students found within the Saint Nicholas icons:

- Nicholas is shown holding a sword in one hand and a "town" in the other hand.
- The sword represents his defense of Christianity and the town represents his love for his hometown of Myra in Lycia.
- Nicholas is typically depicted as an elderly man with a short, full white beard and balding head or high forehead, he is often wearing the omophor—a band of crosses worn about the neck and shoulders

Offer general symbols found in all Russian icons, using the icons nearby to point out these symbols.

- Features: faces of the saints have large, almond-shaped eyes, enlarged ears, long thin noses, and small mouths.
- For example: Jesus, the saints, and all the angels have halos. Angels (and usually John the Baptist) also have wings because they are deemed to be messengers.
- Symbolic colors: Gold symbolizes the munificence of Heaven. Red symbolizes divine life. Blue is reserved for human life; white is employed for resurrection and transfiguration of Christ.

Ask students if they can think of any symbols in their everyday life. Examples: Red means stop (stop light or sign), an olive branch in western culture represents peace and goodwill, the dove is a symbol of peace.

Inform students that symbolism found in each icon is well known among followers of the Russian Orthodox religion. Many worshippers immediately recognize the saint by the symbolism used by the iconographer.

3. Art activity will take place in the Museum **(15 Minutes)** Explain the art activity and hand out drawing paper and the Creating Your Own Icon worksheet provided (Appendix 4, page 21)

Reflecting on their own lives, ask each student to create their own icon with the colored pencils provided.

Relate the content of the artwork to the significance of icons in the life of a Russian Orthodox believer. The figures in an icon were thought to be models for how to live an admirable life. Ask your students to draw someone who they admire and who sets a good example for others. Students should incorporate symbols that reveal something about the person's life (For example, if the subject is a student, he or she might hold a book.)

Encourage students to sit on the floor or on the benches and remember to be respectful of other visitors. This is a chance for them to reflect quietly and use their creativity.

Ask students to meet in a specific area (of your choice, preferably a space where students can sit on the floor) in 15 minutes.

4. Each student presents their personal icon image, discusses the symbols used, and reads his or her paragraph or poem. **(15 minutes)** Gather all students in an area of the museum, preferably a space where students can sit on the floor. Call on each student individually and ask him/her to share the icon image they have created, read the three symbols an iconographer would have to use to create their icon and share the paragraph or poem they wrote. If the group is too large for everyone to have a turn in the allotted time, ask the student to choose one of those three things to share.

Thank students at the end of the presentation and invite them to return to the Museum again.

## **Extensions**

Students could work in groups and trade their newly created icon with another student. Students draw their classmates' icon according to 3 specific symbols on the worksheet. New images can be shared and comparison can be made with each other.

## **Curriculum Frameworks/Standards**

### *Language arts*

*Language - Questioning, Listening, and Contributing*

2.4 *Integrate relevant information gathered from group discussions and interviews for reports.*

*Vocabulary and Concept Development*

4.17 *Determine the meanings of unfamiliar words using context clues (definition, example).*

*Oral Presentation*

3.11 *Use appropriate techniques for oral persuasion.*

3.12 *Give oral presentations to different audiences for various purposes, showing appropriate changes in delivery (gestures, vocabulary, pace, visuals) and using language for dramatic effect.*

*Organizing Ideas in Writing*

23.8 *Organize information about a topic into a coherent paragraph with a topic sentence, sufficient supporting detail, and a concluding sentence.*

23.6 *Decide on the placement of descriptive details about setting, characters, and events in stories.*

*Standard English Conventions*

22.8 *Use knowledge of types of sentences (simple, compound, complex), correct mechanics (comma after introductory structures), correct usage (pronoun reference), sentence structure (complete sentences, properly placed modifiers), and standard English spelling when writing and editing.*

### *Writing*

19.20 *For imaginative/literary writing: Write poems using poetic techniques (alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme scheme), figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification), and graphic elements (capital letters, line length, word position).*

### *Visual Arts*

*Visual Arts - Observation, Abstraction, Invention, and Expression*

3.5 *Create symbolic artwork by substituting symbols for objects, relationships, or ideas.*

3.6 *Create artwork that employs the use of free form symbolic imagery that demonstrates personal invention, and/or conveys ideas and emotions.*

*Critical Response*

5.6 *Demonstrate the ability to describe the kinds of imagery used to represent subject matter and ideas, for example, literal representation, simplification, abstraction, or symbolism.*

## Vocabulary

Cultural icon	A representation of an object or person, or that object or person may come to be regarded as having a special status as particularly representative of, or important to, or loved by, a particular group of people, a place, or a period in history. Examples: Facebook, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., President Obama, the Beatles
Icon	(1) A usually pictorial representation: image; (2) a conventional religious image typically painted on a small wooden panel and used in the devotions of Eastern Christians; (3) an object of uncritical devotion: idol
Iconographer	Literally means "image writer" who translate revealed scripture and divine truths into visual images, writing/painting the icon with consecrated brushes, paints, and materials  An iconographer considers themselves to be believers first and foremost and artists second. The icon painter never considers his work to be his personal, individual artistic achievement, and thus he does not sign his work. The only name that appears on the icon is the name of the saint or holy figure depicted. The icon painter works with other icon painters in workshops and abides to a canon called the Podlinnik. This is a handbook of traditional patterns or designs, which are traced onto the surface of the icon in order to create the desired image. The icon painter never improvises or works arbitrarily, but rather paints purposefully, abiding by the dictates of church tradition.
Iconography	(1) Pictorial material relating to or illustrating a subject; (2) the traditional or conventional images or symbols associated with a subject and especially a religious or legendary subject. For example Icons have pictorial representations of Biblical scenes from the life of Jesus Christ, historical events in the life of the Church, and portraits of the saints. Icons are usually two-dimensional images.
Pop icon	A celebrity, character, or object whose fame in pop culture constitutes a defining characteristic of a given society or era. Although there is no single definitive test for establishing "pop icon" status, such status is usually associated with elements such as longevity, ubiquity, and distinction. Examples: Madonna, Elvis, Oprah, Andy Warhol, Lady Gaga, Christina Aguilera, Mickey Mouse and Michael Jordan.
Symbol	Is something such as a particular mark that represents some piece of information. Something that stands for or suggests something else because of relationship or association; a visible sign of something invisible (lion is a symbol of courage); use of conventional or traditional signs in the representation of divine beings and spirits. Examples: a certain color, shapes, specific facial features, posture or size.

## Resources and References

1. Brief Introduction to Russian Icons history, how they are made, characteristics of icon images: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/slavic/dept/WebBasedLanguage/Russian/Culture/RussianIconPainting.htm>
2. Characteristics of Icon paintings: [http://tars.rollins.edu/Foreign\\_Lang/Russian/underst.html](http://tars.rollins.edu/Foreign_Lang/Russian/underst.html)
3. Museum of Russian Icons, website: <http://www.museumofrussianicons.org/about-us.html>, 03-18-11, Copyright 2010 Museum of Russian Icons
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### **Supplemental Materials**

Creating Your Own Icon worksheet (Appendix 4, page 21)

Student Assessment (Appendix 5, page 22)



### **III. Post-Visit Lesson**

#### **Mixing Egg Tempera**

**Age Group:** Grades 7-8

**Length of Lesson:** 50 minutes

**Subjects:** Language Arts, Visual Arts

#### **Lesson overview**

This lesson will be a hands-on classroom activity. Student will learn how egg tempera was made and used by iconographers. Students will create and mix paint as an iconographer would have in the 1400's. The educator will introduce new vocabulary words (such as pigment, binder, translucent, and opaque). Previous vocabulary words from the Museum visit will be re-introduced (such as iconographer and icon) during the lesson. Students will also be able to experiment and utilize the new vocabulary using the newly mixed tempera paint.

The following curriculum connections/subject areas will be covered: Visual art, critical thinking, vocabulary, and material concepts.

#### **Learning objectives/target**

- Reproduce the properties of egg tempera paint
- Understand the different blending and drying times of egg tempera paint.
- Conduct experiments to mix and produce opaque and translucent egg tempera.

#### **Criteria**

Students will learn the step-by-step process of mixing egg tempera paint. Students will learn the properties needed to make egg tempera and experiment with ratios of those properties. Students will learn new vocabulary and utilize the vocabulary words in the worksheet provided.

#### **Skills Used by Students**

- Recalling past events at the Museum.
- Learning icon painting technique and its history,
- Exploring pigment and mineral mixing first-hand.
- Learning new vocabulary.

#### **Materials & Preparation**

Primary source materials included in packet, vocabulary list, eggs (1 per student plus extra for breakage), powdered tempera pigments - 3 primary colors, RED, BLUE, YELLOW, small mixing bowls (2 per student), small palette or paper palette (1 per student), paper towels, toothpicks, popsicle sticks for mixing (1 per student), plastic spoons (1 per student), water, paintbrushes (1 per student), heavy watercolor paper cut in quarters (1 per student), Color reproductions of Russian icons, pencils. The teacher should prepare some images of "pop culture" icons, such as celebrities, political or religious leaders, cartoon characters, fairy tale characters, etc. (These should be people/characters that students will immediately recognize.)

Introduction: The first part of the lesson will include a brief re-cap of students' visit to the Museum of Russian Icons. The educator will lead a discussion about what they saw and learned at the Museum. The teacher will review and ask questions about the definition of an icon, iconographer, symbols and the difference between cultural and pop icons as well. Students will have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion about their experiences and new vocabulary words they have learned. Educator will use the images of religious, cultural and pop icons he or she prepared.

Part two of the lesson will include the educator conducting a brief discussion on how icons are made. The educator will give a short introduction about the techniques used to create an icon and show examples of icons from the collection. The educator will inform students they will be creating their own egg tempera paint.

Part three of this lesson will consist of a 25-minute hands-on activity. The educator will demonstrate how to mix egg tempera paint with students. The educator will provide step-by step instructions for the participating students. Students will learn how

to separate the egg yolk, add water and pigments and mix the correct portions of properties to create egg tempera. The educator will introduce new vocabulary words while conducting the activity such as pigment, binder and translucent. The student will use the newly mixed egg tempera and experiment painting on watercolor paper.

Part four will consist of a 15-minute worksheet students will complete. Students will reflect on what they have learned mixing egg tempera. Students will complete the worksheet to be given to the educator at the end of the class.

## Step by Step

1. The educator will lead a recap of students visit to the Museum of Russian Icons **(5 minutes)** Ask students, what is a religious icon? A symbol? What is an iconographer?

Religious icon: a conventional religious image typically painted on a small wooden panel.

Symbol: is something such as a particular mark that represents some piece of information

Iconographer: an "image writer" or a person who paints religious icons.

Ask students if they remember what the difference between a cultural icon and a pop icon.

Cultural icon: A representation of an object or person, or that object or person may come to be regarded as having a special status as particularly representative of, or important to, or loved by, a particular group of people, a place, or a period in history. Examples: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., President Obama, the Beatles.

Pop icon: a celebrity, character, or object whose fame in pop culture constitutes a defining characteristic of a given society or era. Examples: Madonna, Elvis, Oprah, Andy Warhol, Lady Gaga, Mickey Mouse.

Use the images you've selected to help illustrate this definition of icons.

2. The educator will lead a discussion on how icons are made **(5 minutes)** Introduce the steps and process to make an icon:
  - The surface of a flat wooden board is covered with a layer of gesso. (define gesso for students, refer to Vocabulary)
  - The board is covered with a layer of canvas (a linen cloth) and then another coating of gesso.
  - When the gesso hardens, the board is polished to create a shiny, smooth surface.
  - Using a stencil, the outline of the desired image is traced onto the board.
  - Next a background is applied using egg tempera. (define egg tempera for students, refer to Vocabulary)
  - When this has dried, the iconographer creates the image or scene
  - When the painting is completed, it is typically covered with a layer of flax-seed or olive oil which temporarily enhances the colors, but after time, darkens.

Show examples of painted icons.

Inform students they will be mixing their own egg tempera.

3. The educator will lead a 25-minute demonstration on mixing egg tempera with students **(25 minutes)** Crack open an egg, and separate the yolk from the rest of the white. Place the yolk on a paper towel. Roll the yolk back and forth to remove the remaining white.

Then pierce the yolk sac with a toothpick and allow it to drain into a clean bowl.

Add about 1 teaspoon of water to make the egg yolk binder. (define binder for students, refer to Vocabulary)

Add an equal amount of the egg medium and dry pigment and mix well on paper palette. (define pigment for students, refer to Vocabulary)

Ask students what they notice about the pigments they have available

- They are the three primary colors

- Add small amounts of water at a time to dilute the paint.
- Practice, explore and experiment using the paint on watercolor paper, invite students to do the same.
- Encourage discussion:

Inform students that iconographers mixed egg tempera as needed, it could not be stored or saved for another day.

- Ask students to mix the three primary colors to mix the three secondary colors (purple, orange, green).
- Ask students to mix the three primary colors to mix the three tertiary colors (yellow-orange, orange-red, blue-green, red-purple, blue-purple, orange-red, yellow-green).

While students are mixing:

Inform students tempera paint is very durable and has been used for hundreds of years.

Ask students to notice how long it takes their paint to dry.

Ask students why iconographers had to use natural materials to mix paint. Oil paint was not invented until the late 1500s.

- Eggs were readily available as well as water

Ask students if they can think of where pigments came from?

- Pigments were made from minerals, clays, plants and insects.

Discuss/demonstrate the properties of transparent and opaque (define transparent and opaque for students, referring to the vocabulary list)

- Add more water to the mixture to demonstrate transparency and less to demonstrate opacity.
- Explain that iconographers could layer translucent paint over one another to create depth or shadows.
- Ask students to paint one square of an opaque color and one square that is transparent and show them to the educator when they are finished. Encourage students to experiment on the rest of their paper.
- For example: what happens if one color of paint is placed over another DRY spot of paint? Ask students what happens?
- What if students try to paint one color of wet paint into another color of wet paint on the paper? What happens to the color?

#### 4. Students complete worksheet and hand in at the end of class period. **(15 minutes)**

Handout the worksheet (Appendix 6, page 23). Ask students to reflect on the lesson and answer the questions.

Using their egg tempera, have students paint one symbol from their personal icon on watercolor paper. Students can share colors with their neighbors to enable a variety of colors.

Students turn in worksheet by the end of the class period.

### **Vocabulary**

Egg tempera	A permanent fast-drying painting medium consisting of colored pigment mixed with an egg yolk and water. Tempera paintings are very long lasting, and examples from the 1st centuries AD still exist. Egg tempera was a primary method of painting until after 1500 when it was superseded by the invention of oil painting. Egg tempera dries quickly and must be mixed precisely or it may crack when drying. Egg tempera cannot be stored and must be used immediately.
Pigment	A powdered substance that is mixed with a liquid in which it is relatively insoluble and used especially to impart color to coating materials (as paints) or to inks, plastics, and rubber
Binder	Used in tempera paint typically the yolk of an egg.
Gesso	A white paint mixture consisting of a binder mixed with chalk, gypsum, pigment, or any combination of these. It is used in artwork as a preparation for any number of substrates such as wood panels, canvas

and sculpture as a base for paint and other materials that are applied over it.

Opaque                    Impenetrable to light; not allowing light to pass through.

Transparent            Fine or sheer enough to be seen through

## **Extensions**

Allow students to paint the icon they created from the museum visit in tempera paints. Compare and contrast the color pencil drawings materials to the tempera painted icon. What do students prefer? Which one is more challenging?

## **Curriculum Frameworks/Standards**

*Strand: Arts Disciplines: Visual Arts - Topic: Methods, Materials, and Techniques*

- 1.7     *Use the appropriate vocabulary related to the methods, materials, and techniques students have learned and used in grades PreK-8.*
- 2.9     *For texture, use and be able to differentiate between surface texture and the illusion of texture (visual texture).*
- 1.8     *Maintain the workspace, materials, and tools responsibly and safely.*

*Topic: Critical Response*

- 5.6     *Demonstrate the ability to describe the kinds of imagery used to represent subject matter and ideas, for example, literal representation, simplification, abstraction, or symbolism.*

*Strand: Connections - Topic: Purposes and Meanings in the Arts*

- 6.3     *Interpret the meanings of artistic works by explaining how the subject matter and/or form reflect the events, ideas, religions, and customs of people living at a particular time in history*

*Topic: Questioning, Listening, and Contributing*

- 2.4     *Integrate relevant information gathered from group discussions and interviews for reports.*

*Topic: Vocabulary and Concept Development*

- 4s.14   *Determine the meanings of unfamiliar words using context clues (for example, contrast or cause and effect stated in the text).*

*Topic: Materials, Tools, and Machines*

- 1.1     *Given a design task, identify appropriate materials based on specific properties and characteristics.*

*Topic: Communication Technologies*

- 3.4     *Identify and explain how symbols and icons are used to communicate a message.*

## **Resources**

Tempera Workshop: <http://www.temperaworkshop.com/technique/technique4.htm>, 04-21-11, all content ©2011 temperaworkshop.com

Daniel Smith Paints, <http://www.danielsmith.com/content-id-105>

True Art, using tempera paint, [http://www.trueart.info/egg\\_tempera.htm](http://www.trueart.info/egg_tempera.htm)

Besty Porter, tempera artist, <http://www.betsyporter.com/color-recipes.html>

Tempera Workshop, <http://www.temperaworkshop.com/technique/technique4.htm>

Wikipedia, Tempera paint, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tempera>

Egg Tempera demo, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUmzLewk5dk&playnext=1&list=PLC0B8F4819F15A8D3>

Painting, Egg Tempera, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeEkzyz5DUM>

How to paint an Icon (The Angel Hesychia: Advanced Techniques), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwugNykQWtY>

Monastery Icons - How to Paint an Icon, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V\\_1JP41cp1g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_1JP41cp1g)

Iconography, painting in fast mode [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0\\_t1-5yz3A&NR=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_t1-5yz3A&NR=1)

What is Icon?< [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UWmJdAm\\_u4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UWmJdAm_u4)

Earth Pigment Company, <http://www.earthpigments.com/art/artists-egg-tempera.cfm>

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Gesso, Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gesso>, 04/15/11, 18 March 2011

Russian icons, Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian\\_icons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_icons), 4/16/11, 9 April 2011

Egg tempera making workshop, How to make egg tempera paint with an egg yolk and powdered pigments and water, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUmzLewk5dk>

## Supplemental Materials

Activity Worksheet (Appendix 6, page 23)

Student Assessment (Appendix 7, page 24)

### PRIMARY COLORS (P)

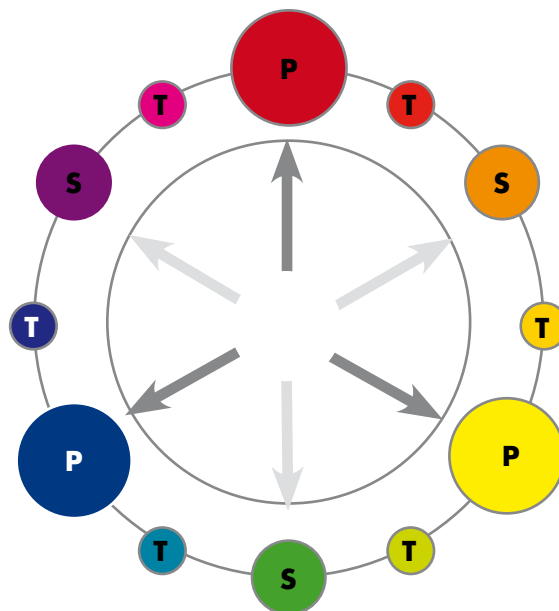
red  
yellow  
blue

### SECONDARY COLORS (S)

orange  
green  
purple

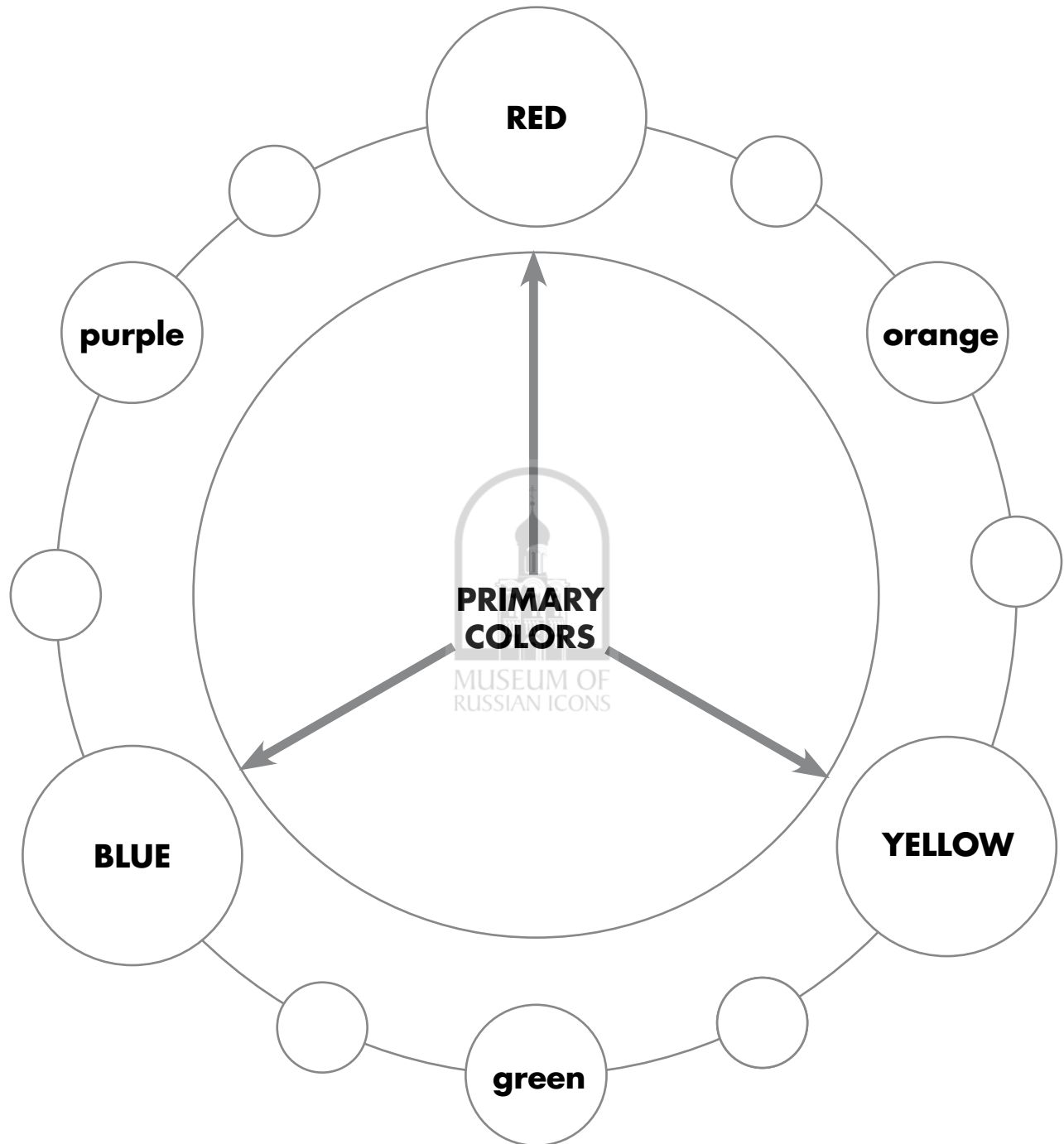
### TERTIARY COLORS (T)

red-orange  
orange-yellow  
yellow-green  
green-blue  
blue-purple  
purple-red



**Appendix 1. Pre-Visit Lesson: Looking at Color Symbolism & Utilizing Color Theory: Color Wheel Template.** Copy and distribute one to each student.

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_



**Appendix 2. Pre-Visit Lesson: Looking at Color Symbolism & Utilizing Color Theory: Color Wheel Worksheet.** Copy and distribute one to each student.

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

When using the color wheel, answer the following questions:

How many primary colors are there?

What are they?

How many secondary colors are there?

What are they?

How many tertiary colors are there?

List three tertiary colors.

1.

2.

3.



Choose three colors on the wheel. List them, and the emotions you associate with them, here:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ How does this color make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ How does this color make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_ How does this color make you feel? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_



**Appendix 4. In-Gallery Lesson: Who is Your Icon?: Creating Your Own Icon.** Copy and distribute one to each student.

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

Draw your own icon on the paper provided. Select a person you admire and who inspires others by setting a good example.

What is the name of your icon?

Is this a cultural or pop icon, or is it someone you personally know?

Explain why this icon is important or meaningful to you (2 or 3 sentences):

If an iconographer were to paint your icon, name three specific symbols they **MUST** use. These should also be included in your drawing above. For example, if your image is of your brother who plays soccer, draw a soccer ball in the picture to indicate that this is a pastime that he enjoys, and list it below.

1.

2.

3.



Create a short story or poem about your icon (1 paragraph). What is special about your icon? Why would others be interested in your icon?



**Appendix 6. Post-Visit Lesson: Mixing Egg Tempera: Activity Worksheet.** Copy and distribute one to each student.

**Student Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

What happened when you added a small amount of water to the pigment and egg?

What happened when you added a large amount of water to the pigment and egg?

What surprised you the most about mixing tempera paint?



How do you think an iconographer used opaque or transparent egg tempera in an icon painting?

What have you learned about icon painting?

Out of all the museum lessons what have you enjoyed the most?

