

Lesson Plan: Symbolic Tattoos 1

Inked History: Learning about symbolism and tattoos (part 1 of 3)

Subjects: Social Studies, History, Art

Grade-level: Elementary [4-5], Middle [6-8], High [9-12]

Time required: 45 minutes

Related links: [Guampedia: Contemporary Tattoo](#), [On The Question of Tattoo by Ancestral CHamorus](#), [Ancient CHamoru Body Modification](#), [People of Pacific Cultures](#)

Description

Students will learn about the history of tattoos on nearby islands, and about the relative lack of tattoos on Guam.

Objectives/Skills

- Students will discuss the practice of tattooing as an art form.
- Students will learn about symbolism and relate this information to tattoos.

Questions or Assessment

- What significance have tattoos traditionally held among Pacific Islander communities?
- Why do you think it is not as prominent on Guam?
- Are tattoos art?
- How is symbolism used in tattooing?

Procedure

Teacher prep. None

History of Tattoos in the Region (10 minutes)

1. Using available resources, provide students with a history of tattoos in Pacific Islander communities.
 - **Note:** Guampedia has some good entries on tattooing (and the relative lack thereof) on Guam. For information regarding other islands, see Guampedia's People of Pacific Cultures and seek out textbooks, other online resources, or the resources listed in the for further reading in the Guampedia entries.
2. Ask students to share their understanding of the importance of tattoos.
3. List these ideas on the board.

Tattoos and Symbolism (15 minutes)

1. Guide students through a discussion on symbolism and artwork.
 - **Note:** This need not be an in-depth discussion. Most students will have already touched upon issues dealing with symbolism in both Language Arts classes and Art class. Use this time to gauge the classroom's understanding of these concepts, and help re-enforce them.
2. Ask students what symbolism means to them.
 - Most likely this question is too broad; however, it is useful to initially frame a topic in such a manner.
3. Follow-up with another question: What examples of symbolism can you think of?
4. List responses on the board.
5. With elementary and middle school students, spend additional time explaining and re-enforcing an understanding of symbolism. Emphasize the representation of ideas through a symbol.
6. With high school and advanced middle school students, expand upon their understanding of symbolism by having them identifying and analyzing examples in their recent course readings.

Tattoos, Symbolism and Guam (15 minutes)

1. Prompt students to discuss traditional symbols on Guam. Feel free to use the relevant article on Guampedia that focuses on this topic.
2. If conversation lags, ask students to list places on island where they have seen symbols. List these examples on the board. Then, working through the list, ask the class to call out the meaning or history behind each symbol.
 - With high school and advanced middle school students: Discuss historical symbols with the class, and the segue into an expanded conversation about modern symbols, their significance and power, and their predominance in contemporary culture. Some questions to consider:
3. Are people more/less/equally valuing of symbols today as they were in the past?

- From where does the power of a symbol come? Society at large? Creators of the symbol? Individual interpreters? Are symbols useful? Dangerous?

Note: There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. The exercise is simply seeking to prompt student into identifying and thinking critically about the symbols they encounter in daily life.

Recap (5 minutes)

Recap what we've done and learned in the lesson:

“Today we learned about the rich history of tattoos throughout many Pacific Island communities. We also discussed the interesting, relative lack of tattoos among CHamoru culture. Lastly, we began considering traditional symbols in Guam culture and theorized tattoo designs which could be appropriate for this history.”

Ask students for their favorite parts of the lesson.