

# Lesson Plan: Symbolic Tattoos 2

Inked History: Creating our own visual culture (Part 2 of 3)

**Subjects:** Social Studies, History, Art

**Time required:** 40-50 minutes

**Related links:** [Guampedia: Contemporary Tattoo](#),  
[On The Question of Tattoo by Ancestral CHamorus](#),  
[Symbolism in CHamoru Culture](#)

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

**Materials required:** Henna (optional), non-permanent markers (optional), paper and colored pencils

## Description

In this lesson, students will practice designing their own symbolic tattoos.

## Objectives/Skills

- Students will practice the previous lesson on symbolism and tattoos by creating their own symbolic tattoos.
- Students will discuss and learn the process of creating their own symbols.

## Questions or Assessment

- What ideas and intentions go into designing your symbolic tattoo?
- What are you trying to convey to the world? Is it personal, perhaps secretive? Or designed for others to understand?
- How does the process of creating a symbolic tattoo provide insight into the history of tattooing in the Pacific region?

## Procedure

### *Teacher prep*

Familiarize yourself with the application (and dangers of staining carpet) of henna if planning to use it in this lesson (optional).

### *Recalling the Previous Lesson (15 minutes)*

1. Ask students to recall the information from the previous lesson:
  - Specifically, ask them to list:
    - The significance of symbolic tattoos
    - Examples they remember
    - Symbols that are important to CHamoru culture ([latte](#), [slingstones](#), [sea turtles](#), [carabao](#), etc.)
2. Tie these lists together in a brief overview of the significant of symbolic tattoos to cultural systems (e.g. a means of remembrance, sharing affiliation, private/public honoring, etc). Explain that there are many powerful purposes to tattoos, and that the class will now create their own examples.

### *Creating our Own Symbolic Tattoos (20 minutes)*

1. Have students sketch ideas of their tattoos onto pieces of paper.
2. Walk around the class and encourage students to be creative.
3. If students are stumped, suggest they think about symbols that they are drawn to (favorite sports team, movie, brand, etc.) and encourage them to meld these symbols together or use them as a jumping-off point for their own unique symbol.
4. Once they have gotten a few ideas down (roughly 5-7 minutes), have students apply their tattoos onto themselves.
5. Have students draw their tattoos onto their skin in one of the following means:
  - If you (as a teacher) are brave enough, have them use henna. But be warned that it can stain clothes and floors permanently, and as such, should probably be done with smaller groups of older students.
  - Have students use non-permanent markers to draw (small) tattoos onto themselves. Or, if you do not wish to have students draw onto themselves, have them draw and color-in a tattoo onto a piece of construction paper, and apply it to their skin with tape.
6. **Note:** If using henna or markers to draw on students, you should check with your school's administration regarding this activity. You may need to have parental/guardian consent forms.
7. **Note:** During this part of the lesson, it is likely that students will become excited and loud. Remind them that this is an art activity and that they should focus on creating something memorable.

8. **Note:** At this point, if you are not planning to continue onto the third lesson, lead a sharing session where students volunteer to present their tattoos to the class, as such:
- Have a student display their tattoo, then have the class guess it's meaning. After some brief guesses, have the student explain the symbolic meaning behind their example of visual culture.

***Recap (5 minutes)***

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

“Today we've practiced creating our own examples of visual culture by creating symbolic tattoos. Using the information we learned yesterday about symbols and the practice of tattooing among our neighboring Pacific islands (that tattoos can have significant meaning to individuals and among people, and that they may serve numerous important purposes), we have participated in this same long cultural tradition by creating our own symbols of meaning. We've applied these symbols to our own skins in a form of (temporary) tattoo, and in the process, come to better understand the thinking and design that goes into the creation of every tattoo.”

Ask students for their favorite parts of the lesson.