

Lesson Plan: Symbolic Tattoos 3

Inked History: Interpreting another's symbolic tattoo (Part 3 of 3)

Subjects: Social Studies, History, Art
Time required: 40-55 minutes

Grade-level: Elementary [4-5], Middle [6-8], High [9-12]
Related links: [Guampedia: Contemporary Tattoo](#),
[On The Question of Tattoo by Ancestral CHamorus](#)

Note: This lesson series may be completed with the previous exercise, or can be continued to include this section (which focuses on inter-cultural interpretations of symbols).

Objectives/Skills

- Students will, in groups or individually, compare their examples of symbolic tattoos and try to determine meaning without aid from the tattoo creator.
- Students will learn that interpretation without engagement is difficult, and that seemingly confusing symbols can have deep, significant meaning.

Questions or Assessment

- Was it difficult guessing what the tattoos meant?
- What information did you need to determine the meaning? Would you have been able to obtain this information without talking to the individual or group who created the symbolic tattoo?

Procedure

Teacher prep. None

Creating a Symbolic Tattoo (5 – 15 minutes)

1. In groups of 2-5, have students derive a symbolic tattoo that they would all agree to wear.
 - Ask them to do so quietly, because the symbolism of their design must remain a secret from other groups.
2. Alternatively, if time is an issue, skip part 1 and have student individual recall the tattoos they created in the previous lesson.
 - If they still have the tattoo (e.g. if it were done with Henna), then they can show their artwork as such.
 - Or, if the tattoo is gone, they should recreate it on a piece of paper.
3. Emphasize to students that they will be sharing their symbols, and as such, they should design something that they are willing to explain to their peers.

Sharing our Symbols (20 minutes)

1. Have students, in groups or individuals, partner up with two other groups/individuals.
2. Each group has 4 minutes to present their symbol to their two partnering groups/peers.
3. The partnering groups/peers must guess the meaning of these symbols during this time. As the instructor, you may decide to restrict the guessing to simple yes or no responses, or allow the tattoo-creating group to answer with more detail (e.g. “warmer”, or “colder”).
4. At the end of 4 minutes, the group/individual who created the tattoo has a two minutes to explain the meaning of their tattoo and address any questions their partnering groups/individuals may have.

Analyzing the Interpretation Exercise (10 minutes)

1. Ask students how the exercise went. Was it easy or hard?
 - List their descriptions on the board
2. Ask students why it was so hard to guess the symbolism of the object. Was it because they were unable to communicate with the person/people who created the tattoo?
3. Lead a brief discussion about the difficulty of understanding intentions and meaning without communicating with the creating entity.
 - Explain to students that it is difficult to understand the meaning of a symbolic tattoo without engaging with the community/individual that creates it.

Recap (5 minutes)

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

“Today we've practiced creating and sharing our symbolic tattoos. We tried to guess the meaning behind these symbols without the aid of speaking with their creators, and we've learned in the process that it's immensely difficult to do such. And, as we've learned from previous lessons, tattoos can have very significant meanings; so, it's important to understand the skin art of other communities and cultures through open communication.”

Ask students for their favorite parts of the lesson.