

Art: Symbols and Storytelling in Ancient Egypt

Art—Symbols and Storytelling in Ancient Egypt

Subject: Art

Grade Level: Middle School (Grade 8)

Duration: 5 days

Standards:

- **VA.68.C.2:** Assessing our own and others' artistic work, using critical-thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, is central to artistic growth.
- **VA.68.H.1:** Through study in the arts, we learn about and honor others and the worlds in which they live(d).
- **VA.68.H.2:** The arts reflect and document cultural trends and historical events, and help explain how new directions in the arts have emerged.

Objectives:

- Decode and apply ancient Egyptian artistic symbols to communicate meaning.
- Analyze how art served both personal and political functions in ancient Egyptian culture.
- Create original works that synthesize symbolism, storytelling, and design techniques.

Day 1: Decoding Ancient Egyptian Symbols

Materials

- Hieroglyphic symbol charts
- Papyrus-style paper or clay tablets

- Symbol key guides
- Pencils, markers, colored pencils
- Projector or smartboard for visual presentation

Hook - Code Breaker Challenge (10 minutes): Students are given a brief message encoded with hieroglyphs and use a symbol chart to decode it. This activates visual pattern recognition and primes them for symbolic thinking.

Introduction to Symbolism (10 minutes):

- Introduce Egyptian writing and visual symbolism, including cartouches, gods, animals, and color use.
- Show examples from the Met Museum and British Museum collections.

Direct Instruction (15 minutes):

Explain how symbols in Egyptian art told stories and conveyed status, power, and religion. Highlight the cartouche as a personal symbol of identity.

Guided Practice: Create a Personal Cartouche (15 minutes):

- Students use a symbol chart to select hieroglyphs representing their name or qualities.
- They design a cartouche using papyrus or clay-style materials.
- Teacher circulates to assist with symbol choice and layout.

Extension: Closure and Reflection (10 minutes)

- Students present their cartouches to the class and explain their symbol choices.
- Discussion prompts:
 - What did you learn about how Egyptians communicated ideas?
 - How do symbols help tell a story without words?

Day 2: Art as Power – Propaganda Posters in Ancient Egypt

Materials:

- Poster paper
- Markers, rulers, glue, scissors
- Images of ancient Egyptian wall art and modern propaganda posters
- Design rubric handouts
- Access to Getty and Google Arts & Culture for reference

Hook (5 minutes): Power in Art

Show both ancient wall art and modern propaganda posters. Discuss:

- What do these artworks have in common?
- How do visuals influence how we view leaders?

Introduction (15 minutes):

- Discuss how Egyptian wall art often glorified pharaohs, engineering feats, and divine authority.
- Introduce the idea of *art as propaganda*.

Group Analysis (10 minutes):

- In small groups, students analyze a poster or ancient mural.
- Use Getty Art Analysis tools to break down composition, color, symbols, and message.
- Share key findings with the class.

Independent Practice: Create a Symbolic Poster (20 minutes):

- Students choose a pharaoh or historical figure (e.g., engineer, scribe) and design a symbolic poster promoting their achievements.
- Must include 2–3 accurate Egyptian symbols and visual hierarchy.

Class Exhibition and Peer Review (10 minutes):

- Posters displayed around the classroom.

- Students do a gallery walk and leave constructive feedback using sticky notes or a rubric.

Assessment

- **Participation** in decoding challenge, group discussion, and gallery walk.
 - **Cartouche Design** demonstrating understanding of Egyptian symbols.
 - **Poster Project** with rubric assessing:
 - Accuracy of symbols
 - Creativity in layout and message
 - Clarity of symbolic storytelling
 - **Reflection Responses** showing synthesis of learning.
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Day 3: Designing Narrative Panels – Visual Storytelling

Materials:

- Storyboard templates
- Colored pencils, fine-tip markers
- Printed examples of Egyptian narrative art (e.g., Book of the Dead)
- Timeline strips, pencil sharpeners

Hook (5 min): Show a scene from the Book of the Dead and ask, "What story is this artwork telling without words?"

Mini-Lesson (10 min): Introduce the structure of sequential art and visual storytelling. Emphasize consistent character design, reading direction, and use of symbols.

Creative Activity (25 min):

- Students brainstorm a short story from Egyptian mythology or daily life (e.g., a journey down the Nile, a visit to the temple).
- Use storyboard templates to sketch 3–5 narrative panels.
- Focus on visual clarity, expression, and Egyptian-style forms.

Reflection (5 min): Students pair-share their panel and explain the sequence. Prompt: "How did you use symbols and design to move your story forward?"

Assessment: Story panel sequence showing narrative clarity and stylistic coherence.

Day 4: Collaborative Temple Wall – Group Symbolic Mural

Materials:

- Long butcher paper or bulletin board roll
- Chalk pastels, tempera paints
- Stencils for symbols and borders
- Reference sheets for gods, tools, animals, etc.

Hook (5 min):

- Play background music from YouTube (Valley of Time - Ancient Egyptian Ambient Music) and display images of temple walls.
- Ask: "If your class was a community in ancient Egypt, what would your temple wall show about you?"

Group Planning (10 min):

- Students form groups and brainstorm a theme: "A Day of Worship," "The Harvest Festival," "Building a Pyramid."
- Plan symbolic representations of events and people.

Mural Creation (25 min):

- Assign roles: sketchers, painters, designers.
- Students create their section, ensuring continuity in color palette and style.

Gallery Walk & Feedback (5 min): Class views mural and gives verbal or written feedback. Ask: "What part of this mural tells a powerful story?"

Assessment: Team participation, cohesion in design, symbolic relevance in the mural.

Day 5: Identity and Legacy Collage – Synthesis and Self-Reflection

Materials:

- Magazines, textured paper, fabric scraps
- Glue sticks, scissors, markers

- Identity word bank, collage templates
- Writing reflection worksheet

Hook (5 min): Ask: "What will people remember about you from your artwork? How does it reflect your values, like a pharaoh's legacy?"

Mini-Lesson (10 min): Review major Egyptian symbols, color meanings, and art forms used during the week.

Creative Activity (25 min):

- Students create a mixed-media collage representing their legacy.
- They must include: one Egyptian symbol, one personal object/image, and one visual metaphor.

Reflection (5 min): Complete a written prompt: "My collage shows who I am because..."

Assessment: Final collage project, written reflection, and class presentation (optional).