

Symbolism and Women's Roles in the Caste System of India

Grade Level

None listed on word document

Theme

The artist in his or her environment
Curriculum Framework Emphasis
Social Sciences
The Arts

Common Curriculum Goals

Social Sciences

Historical Skills:

- 1) Understand, recognize, and interpret change and continuity over time.
- 2) Understand relationships among events, issues, and developments in different spheres of human activity (i.e. economic, social, political, cultural).

The Arts

Historical And Cultural Perspectives:

Distinguish works of art from different societies, time periods and cultures.

Understand how the arts can reflect the environment and personal experiences within a society or culture, and apply to one's own work.

Respond to works of art and give reasons for preferences.

Create a work of art by controlling essential elements and organizational principles to express an intended idea, mood or feeling.

Objectives

Understand the basic structure of the caste system in India.

Identify women's roles historically and presently in Indian culture.

Understand how artists use symbolism to represent meaning or ideas.

Define and describe the sari as the national garment of the Indian woman.

Understand the significance of the sari in Indian culture.

Materials

Access to a computer lab.

Sketchbook, 1 per student.

Sketching materials (pencils, colored pencils, pastels, etc.)

Betty LaDuke POAH videotape

Overhead transparencies of the paintings (or computer access for classroom display):

'Spring Ritual', 'Long Night's Journey', "India: Hindu Wedding".

Vocabulary

sari Varna

Mahatma Gandhi

Hindu

Brahman

jat or jati

caste

Sudra

Dalit

symbolism

Kshatria

Activities

It is assumed that students possess an introductory knowledge of the geography and culture of India prior to this series of lessons.

Part A: Introducing Betty LaDuke (45 – 60 minutes)

1. Introduce Betty LaDuke, an Oregon artist who has lived in Ashland for many years. Relate a brief biography of Betty LaDuke before gathering in a computer lab to explore Betty's website. Discuss the reasons for the study of this artist as related to India, the caste system in India, and women's roles in Indian culture. Although Betty LaDuke lives in Oregon, she has traveled the world extensively studying purposefully about women roles and women's artwork in other cultures. She utilizes that experience and knowledge in the creation of her artwork.
2. In the computer lab, students log on to Betty LaDuke's website, www.bettyladuke.com. It is beneficial to have the teacher demonstrate on a large screen, or be able to otherwise direct students to specific links while working on this website, and facilitate immediate discussion.
 - a. Home Page: Direct students to photo of Betty LaDuke.
Discuss what the artist is doing in the photograph and ask students to try to guess where this photo might have been taken.
 - b. Direct students to the column on the right of 'Circulating Exhibits.'
 - c. Click on 'Children of the World I.'
 - d. Scroll down and click on 'Album: Asia'.
 - e. View and discuss three photographs in this album of people in India: (can click to enlarge each as it is viewed)
 1. *Bua Devi and Children*
- note that the woman is wearing a sari; discuss
- discuss students' thoughts/ideas/impressions
 2. *Calcutta Children 2a*
- discuss students' thoughts/ideas/impressions
 3. *Calcutta Children*
- note that children are near a wall that has dung patties drying on it which will be burned for fuel. The people who have the job of collecting and drying the dung are part of a social caste in India which was in the past called the "Untouchables." (will discuss in more detail later)
- discuss students' thoughts/ideas/impressions
 - f. Click on 'Children of the World II' on the column on the right
 - g. Click on 'Album: Paintings'
 - h. Click on the painting, *India: Hindu Wedding, 1974* to enlarge.
 1. Briefly discuss the Hindu religion in India
 2. Talk about symbolism in artwork – what do you think the figures in this painting symbolize?
 - i. Click on the following links and direct students to locate the sketches that later became paintings:
 1. Dreaming Cows w/ Heifer International
Album: Uganda
Album: Rwanda
 2. Chiapas, Mexico: Land and Liberty
 - k. Provide free time for students to continue exploring the artist's website and artwork. Encourage students to click on artwork to enlarge (some will enlarge twice) to see more detail in the work.
3. Return to the regular classroom. Instruct students to take out their sketchbooks and do the following:
 - a. Provide 5 - 10 minutes for students to sketch one or more images that they recall from viewing Betty LaDuke's artwork on the website.

- b. Respond in writing in your sketchbook to the following question:
How does the experiences of an artist affect his or her artwork? Support your answer using specific examples from the Betty LaDuke website. Date your entry.

Part B: Betty LaDuke and Experiential Influences (45 - 60 minutes)

1. Review website exploration from last lesson orally.
2. Ask for a few volunteers to share their artwork from their sketchbook from the review of the Betty LaDuke website, along with answers to the question posed regarding how the experiences of the artist affect his or her artwork.
3. As they watch the video ask students to pay particular attention to where Betty has traveled, the experiences she has had, and how both have shaped her artwork.
4. Watch the Betty LaDuke video.
5. Discuss students' observations made as they watched the video.
6. Comment about and discuss with students Betty's travel to India and other countries, and her focus upon women and women's artwork in those areas.
7. In the next lesson, the focus will be on India, women's roles in that society, and how those roles have affected women's artwork.

Part C: The Caste System of India (60 minutes)

1. Display a transparency of Betty LaDuke's artwork, *Spring Ritual*, on an overhead, or on a computer screen visible to students.
Read aloud quotes from Betty LaDuke, *An Artist's Journey from Oregon to Timbuktu*, <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/waaw/LaDuke/spirituality.html>, as you display the artwork. "...I left home, alone, for a one-month journey to India. Besides my sketchbook, I had a guidebook to temples and historical sites from New Delhi, the capital, to Bombay and Calcutta." "En route the land spread like a precious patchwork quilt divided among many families. Farmers and oxen merge with the land in **Spring Ritual**, as they plow and prepare the soil for planting."
2. Display a transparency of Betty LaDuke's artwork, *Long Night's Journey* on an overhead, or on a computer screen visible to students.
"Monsoon rains and rivers containing the ashes of the diseased nourished the land. This was startlingly evident at the funeral pyres in Benares along the shores of the Ganges where the corpse, wrapped in a bright saffron sari, was cremated and the ashes deposited in the Ganges. In my painting **Long Night's Journey**, the body is set free and the soul is reborn."
3. Display a transparency of Betty LaDuke's artwork, 'India: Hindu Wedding' on an overhead, or on a computer screen visible to students.
"In Bombay, I was invited to attend a **Hindu Wedding**. The bride wore a traditional bright red sari while the groom, educated in the United States, was dressed in a Western suit. I symbolized wedding expectations, for the bride to have many children, by the imposition of a cow mask above her face, while the groom already dreamed the male child sitting upon his shoulder. In his hands the groom holds harness reins that encircle the bride."
 - a. Discuss Betty's quote regarding her painting, 'India: Hindu Wedding'. Consider the following questions:
 - Why does the groom dream of a male child?
 - Why would the bride have a cow mask above her face?
 - Explain why the groom would be holding reins that encircle the bride.

- What does this painting tell about the importance and roles of men in Indian society versus those of women?

4. Introduce and discuss the caste system of India, referring to the following websites

for information: (<http://adaniel.tripod.com/religious.htm>) and (<http://teachers.eusd.k12.ca.us/mguerena/castewebquest/index.htm>)

- Note that there were men and women in each caste, and that the caste system was brought about by the Hindu religion.
- Although the caste system was initiated in Hindu beliefs, it includes non-Hindus as well.
- Discuss in detail the outsiders to the caste system, the people once known as the “untouchables.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_caste_system)
- The first three varna (castes), the Brahman, Kshatria, and Vaisi) had economic and social rights which the Sudra and Untouchables did not have.
- Each varna and also the untouchables are divided into many communities called jat or jati.

5. In the sketchbook:

- Draw and label a chart identifying the four social castes in Indian society and the untouchables, indicating the Brahmans at the top of the social order, and the untouchables, or Dalit, at the bottom. Title the page, “The Caste System of India.” Date your entry.
- Define each caste and the untouchables, and list possible professions of people in that caste.
- Draw a sketch next to each caste illustrating that particular social group.

Part D: Women's Roles in India (60 minutes)

1. Place on the overhead or write on the chalkboard, and read aloud the quote from *Abstract: Status of Women in Indian Society*, (<http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Huma/HumaSing.htm>).

“The worth of a civilization can be judged by the place given to women in the society.”

2. Consider the following questions:

- What does this quote mean to you?
- Do you find truth in this quotation? Explain.
- What is the place given to women in American society?
- Does the place of women in American society change based upon economic status? Location? The family of origin or local culture? The person's ancestral national origin?

3. Discuss the role of women in Indian society from past to present.

References:

Abstract: Status of Women in Indian Society, (<http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Huma/HumaSing.htm>)

Status of Indian Women and the Role of Legislation

(http://www.ourkarnataka.com/Articles/indianwomen_law.htm)

- In ancient India, women held an equal status to men. Women were educated the same as men, and women held a variety of positions in society, including scholars and poets. Women were involved in religious ceremonies alongside the men, and an unmarried man was considered “incomplete.”
- During Medieval times, with the beginning of Muslim rule in India, the status of Indian women changed dramatically. They were then seen to be inferior to men. Young girls were subjected to arranged marriages, wives were only allowed to work in the home, women were not allowed to own property or inherit the property of their father, widows were not allowed to remarry at all, and a Hindu widow was often expected to cremate herself on her husband's funeral pyre in order to fulfill her true role as wife.

- Legally, the role of Indian women in the present is dramatically different. Women have the same opportunities as men educationally, socially, and economically. Realistically, though, women are often still viewed as inferior to men, and are still subject to discrimination. Also, the practice of providing a dowry by the family of a woman being married is still in effect and continues to create social and economic problems for women and families.
4. Display a transparency of Betty LaDuke's artwork, 'India: Hindu Wedding' on an overhead, or on a computer screen visible to students.
- Define symbolism: The practice of representing things by means of symbols or of attributing symbolic meanings or significance to objects, events, or relationships.
- Consider the following:
- As you view this painting for a second time, think about what you have learned about the social castes in India, and how women have been treated and thought of in Indian society.
- Reflect upon the meaning of the symbols Betty LaDuke chose to use in this painting.
5. In the sketchbook:
- Title a clean page of the sketchbook, "India: Hindu Wedding, by Betty LaDuke."
 - Date your entry.
 - Make a sketch of the painting.
 - Identify the symbols used in the painting.
 - Write a paragraph or more explaining the roles of women in Indian society, and how Betty LaDuke's painting reflects that position.

Part E: Other Curriculum Connections

Reading:

- Read the novel, *Homeless Bird* by Gloria Whelan. A well-written novel about Koli, a 13-year old girl in India who is arranged to be married to a stranger. She is soon widowed and abandoned by her new husband's family. She must find a way to support herself, and learns to sew beautiful and original embroidery designs onto saris. Read an excerpt from this book at www.amazon.com.

Art, Culture, and Writing:

- Study the importance of the sari in Indian culture. View examples of saris online at (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sari>), (<http://www.sarisafari.com>).
- Have each student design a pattern for embroidery which tells a story or symbolizes something from the student's knowledge.
- Create the embroidery on a square of cloth.
- Display each embroidered square with the student's written work explaining the design.

References

Books

India: The Culture, by Bobbie Kalman
Homeless Bird by Gloria Whelan.
The Sari Shop by Rupa Bajwa

Articles

Untouchable, National Geographic Magazine, June 2003.

Websites

Wikipedia: Indian Caste System: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_caste_system
The Sari Shop: <http://www.sarisafari.com>

Webquest: Experiencing India's Caste System:
<http://teachers.eusd.k12.ca.us/mguerena/castewebquest/index.htm>

Betty LaDuke: www.bettyladuke.com

Women Artist of the American West;

An Artist's Journey from Oregon to Timbuktu: <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/waaw/LaDuke/index.html>

Girls Without Power: <http://www.indiatogether.org/2006/mar/wom-intlday.htm>

Maharaja's New Year gift: <http://www.indiatogether.org/2006/jan/ksh-air.htm>

'Poster' women: <http://www.indiatogether.org/2006/apr/wom-photo.htm>

Behind the lessening of true potential: <http://www.indiatogether.org/2006/may/opi-potential.htm>

Status of Women in Indian Society: <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Huma/HumaSing.htm>

Status of Indian Women and the Role of Legislation:
http://www.ourkarnataka.com/Articles/indianwomen_law.htm

POAH Online: Betty LaDuke: http://www.poahonline.org/bio_laduke.html

Vocabulary Definitions

Brahman, also Brahmin - A member of the highest of the four major castes of traditional Indian society, responsible for officiating at religious rites and studying and teaching the Vedas.

caste - Any of the hereditary, social classes or subclasses of traditional Hindu society, stratified according to Hindu ritual purity, especially the Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra castes.

Dalit - In India's caste system, a Dalit - formerly known as untouchable - is a person outside of the four castes, and considered below them, including such people as leather-workers and street handicrafters.

Hinduism - A diverse body of religion, philosophy, and cultural practice native to and predominant in India, characterized by a belief in reincarnation and a supreme being of many forms and natures, by the view that opposing theories are aspects of one eternal truth, and by a desire for liberation from earthly evils.

jat or jati - A Hindu caste or distinctive social group of which there are thousands throughout India; a special characteristic is often the exclusive occupation of its male members (such as barber or potter)

Kshatriya - A member of the second highest of the four castes of traditional Indian society, responsible for upholding justice and social harmony, and including people in governing and military positions.

Mahatma Gandhi - Political and spiritual leader during India's struggle with Great Britain for home rule; an advocate of passive resistance (1869-1948)

sari - An outer garment worn chiefly by women of India and Pakistan, consisting of a length of lightweight cloth with one end wrapped about the waist to form a skirt and the other draped over the shoulder or covering the head.

Sudra - A member of the lowest of the four major castes of traditional Indian society, comprising artisans, laborers, and menials.

symbolism - The practice of representing things by means of symbols or of attributing symbolic meanings or significance to objects, events, or relationships.

Varna - The name for the original social division of Vedic people into four groups (which are subdivided into thousands of jatis)