

# THEME FIVE: WHEN CULTURES MEET

## THEME IN LIFE

We all need to get along with others.

## THEME IN ART

Art can help us understand what happens when cultures meet.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

Groups of people living near each other often share many things. When they live, work, and play together, people usually develop similar ways of acting and talking, and similar ideas about what is good and important. As children grow up, they learn these shared ideas and ways of acting from older people. The word “culture” is a word for the shared ideas and ways of a group of people.

Sometimes when cultures meet, one group completely dominates the other. Sometimes the less powerful group manages to maintain its culture against all odds. And sometimes new ideas and activities are developed out of the mixture of different cultures.

Artworks can help us understand different cultures and can reveal what happens when they meet.

## KEY INQUIRY QUESTIONS

Question about Artworks:

LIGHT AND DARK: Do I see shading, or dull or dark colors in the artwork?

Questions about Artworks in Context:

ART MAKER’S INTENTION: Why did the maker want the artwork to look the way it does?

ARTWORLD CONTEXT: What art ideas, values, and activities were important to artists and art experts in the culture in which the artwork was made?

## KEY CULTURES

Renaissance

15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Century American (pre and post Conquest)



# A NEW HOME

Mawri forgot her sore feet, her hunger, and the cold. Only occasionally did tears fill her eyes as images of the last days in their old home flashed through her mind. She saw soldiers pawing through the cellar, grabbing all the food her mother had stored away for the winter. She saw pieces of blackened wood which had once been her great grandfather's hand-carved chair, burning in the soldiers' cooking fires. When she remembered all her friends and neighbors who had been killed or who were missing, she felt sad, but then fortunate. Glancing at her father and Ravak pulling the cart, and her mother trudging ahead through the snow, Mawri squeezed Little Bo's hand, grateful that her family was still alive and together.

At first the road was crowded with others struggling under heavy loads as they escaped the burning city. Then the days turned into weeks, and the crowd became smaller and smaller, as others turned off onto different roads or stopped at farms and villages along the way. Finally, they were alone. Mawri's mother and father approached many houses along the road hoping to get work in the kitchens or fields or mines. They were always turned away. Finally, a man in one of these houses told them of a city in the highlands to the north, a trading city where work could always be found.

The snow cover deepened, like Mawri's hopes and fears, as she worked her way up the frozen slopes toward the city walls. She and her family crept quietly through the gates trying not to attract attention. As they moved along the twisting streets, everything seemed so different from the straight, wide roadways of the city in which they had grown up. Almost all the houses were painted, but the familiar tile decorations, so common back home, were nowhere to be seen. And the people! How strange they were! Although Mawri and Ravak could understand some of their words, their speech was fast and somehow musical. Even the poor people wore dark, long cloaks with loose hoods, like nothing they had ever seen before. People stared at Ravak's hat and scarf and sometimes moved closer to get a better look at the carvings on their cart.

Sometimes Mawri's mother was able to understand the strange talk of these people. In the old city she had made friends with people who had come from different places. Some of the words in this strange place were familiar to her. So, with head lowered, she slowly approached a woman holding a baby. She tried to ask the woman about work. The woman stepped back not wanting to talk to a stranger. Finally, after Mawri's mother smiled at her baby and pulled Bo forward to meet the woman, the woman stood still, trying to understand this strange woman's words. At last, the woman pointed to tall spires in the distance, seemed to almost sing some answer about shops and work, and retreated through a doorway.

How strange those holy buildings with their spires had seemed at first. They were tall and slender compared with the magnificent domed holy place now in ruins in their old city. How strange were the holy women and men inside, who directed them toward the

busy street lined with workshops. The dressmakers had never seen embroidery like that on Ravak's scarf and Mawri's collar. When they learned that Mawri and her mother had done such fine needlework on their everyday clothes they immediately offered them both work in their shop. At first, it had been difficult to understand how the great cloaks were constructed, but they soon learned and were able to please the head seamstress with their fine needlework. Even though the skill demonstrated on their own embroidered clothes was respected, such fancywork was considered out of place in this city. The bright colors and fancy details were considered strangely foreign. Plain things were admired here. So Mawri and her mother were never allowed to use their embroidery skills on any of the fine cloaks made to order for the great families. Still they had paying jobs for which they were thankful.


Mawri's father also had good luck finding work. A cabinetmaker recognized his wood-working skills when he observed Mawri's father's cart. The people of this city thought his carvings were overly fancy too. He had to be content making cabinets that to him seemed too simple and plain. But he was happy. The family was able to rent a house near the workshop district and soon had enough money to buy the cloaks that still seemed so odd to them, but which they wore over their own clothes so they would fit in better with the other people of the city.

So far, no one seemed to mind that the newcomers did not go to the holy places on holy days. After some months, Mawri's family found three other families from their old city living in different parts of town. A girl in one of the families had been studying with the Holy Man before the soldiers came. She knew many of the ancient words and ceremonies. The four families met to worship in the ways they had learned as children.

With their jobs and a community of friends, everyone seemed to be making a new life in the new city except Ravak. He helped around the house and often took care of Bo, but he was restless. He spent hours walking idly about the city until finally he met other boys and began to feel he might make friends.

One day as Ravak sat passing time with his new acquaintances in the workshop district, one of the boys pulled a scrap of paper and a piece of charcoal from his cloak and began to draw. Every few moments this boy looked intently at a dog in a doorway, basking in the rays of the late afternoon sun. Having nothing better to do, Ravak watched as the drawing took shape. This new friend of his was making a picture very different from any Ravak had seen back home. After making a few light marks to sketch the shape of a dog on the paper, the boy began filling in some areas with dark, even strokes, making them almost solid black. He made other areas gray by gently rubbing the paper with the side of the charcoal and using his finger to even the tones. Then, little by little, he filled in the entire shape of the dog with differing shades of gray, carefully smoothing the edges together. As he worked on the dog, the boy did not ignore the background. Almost as if by magic, shadows appeared, then a floor and a wall. The boy had left a few areas white on the dog's body and a section of the floor. He hadn't touched these areas with his charcoal at all. Now they looked very white, as the rest of the drawing grew darker and darker.

Ravak could hardly believe what he was seeing. He'd seen pictures like this in some of the



houses when he helped his father deliver cabinets. They looked very different from the ones he knew as a child. Instead of the bright colors he'd always enjoyed looking at back home, the colors in these pictures were not always bright. Usually they were quiet colors; sometimes, only shades of gray. They didn't tell their stories with sharp, clear images, but instead shapes were lost and then appeared again as colors and tones mixed and blended. As Ravak grew used to these strange pictures, he began to be able to see that they created an illusion of space, space in which the solid-looking shapes could stand. He had wondered what great artist could create such magic. Now he saw that his friend, a mere boy, could make a flat paper seem to hold the space of a room and the solid form of a dog.

Able to control his curiosity no longer, Ravak broke the silence, "Where did you learn such magic?"

"Oh this?" answered the boy, "This is easy. My father is a master of painters and we enjoy drawing together at home when he has the time."

"Could your father teach me?" asked Ravak. The boy told him about the master painter's workshop and about how boys could learn to paint by becoming apprentices. At first, they must clean brushes and grind pigments. As the months and years passed, they would be taught the skills of the trade and perhaps, if they are very good, they might one day become master painters themselves.

Ravak always felt more comfortable when he was home and left his cloak on its peg by the door. He felt at home seeing his family in their embroidered clothes as they ate supper around the new carved table his father had just finished. But this evening, a week after he'd talked with the boy who drew the dog, Ravak was nervous.

Mawri had not seen her brother so excited in weeks and wondered what he had on his mind. As her mother and father finished their meal, Ravak raised his voice to speak. "I've made a new friend. His father is a master painter and my friend took me to his workshop. For the last five days I've been there watching and helping the apprentices. Today, the master painter invited me to take a place in his workshop as an apprentice. In return for teaching me how to paint marvelous pictures, the master painter has agreed to accept my labor and a table, eight chairs, and two cabinets delivered over a period of three years. I really want to do this. Will you help me?"

At first, Mawri and her parents were astonished. Ravak's eyes were glued to his parents, first one and then the other. They moved away to the fire and talked quietly. After they glanced quickly at Ravak, and smiled broadly at each other, he finally heard the words of agreement and approval he had so hoped for.

As the family sat together looking at the fire, they remembered the old city and all the people they missed back there. They knew it would be difficult to keep many of the ways that were so important to them, but they knew they would — somehow. Also that night, perhaps for the first time, as they thought about their futures, they began to think of the new city, not just as a place where they could live and work in safety, but as their own new home.

# ACTIVITIES

## UNIT ORIENTATION



Introduce students to the Theme Title, the Theme in Life, the Theme in Art, and the Key Inquiry Questions to help focus their attention as you (or they) read the story.

## STORY



Present the Story:

- Read or ask students to read *A New Home*.

## DISCUSSION OF THEME AND KEY QUESTIONS



Discussion of the Story's Theme:

Discuss how the story relates to the theme.

- Why did Ravak, Mawri, Bo and their parents leave the city in which they grew up?
- In what ways did the city where the family made their new home differ from the city they left?
- Why do you suppose the people in the new city treated the family as they did?
- How did the family keep their old ways alive?

Students' Experience with the Theme:

Help students identify how the theme relates to their own lives.

- Who in class grew up in this area? In another city, town, or village? In another state? In another country?
- If you grew up elsewhere, what are some of the ways that life is different here from in your old home?
- Do you, or members of your family, continue to practice traditions passed on from a different culture?
- Do you know someone who speaks a different language?

Inquiry into the Story:

Use the key questions to further analyze the story.

- How would you contrast and compare the colors and tones that the family liked with the colors preferred in the new city?
- Why did the artists in the new city use fewer bright colors than Ravak saw growing up?
- What could artists in the new city do with various shades of gray and with subtle colors that artists in the old city were not trying to do?
- How did artists in the new city learn to make their special kind of pictures? Who taught them? What role did they play as they learned? Where did they learn?





### Inquiry into Students' Experience:

Use the key questions to help students make connections to their own experiences.

- Can you find bright colors and dull or pale colors in your classroom?
- Can you think of a time when you might want to wear black, white, or gray clothes, or clothes with dull or pale colors?
- Show students photographs of birds and flowers. Are there ways that white, pale, or dull-colored birds and flowers are beautiful?
- Have you ever seen a black and white movie or TV show? Why do you think that some directors still choose to work in black and white?
- As you look at the curved surface of an object or building, can you see how tones change gradually from lighter to darker as the surface turns away from a light source?
- Where could you go to learn how to make art?
- Have you ever seen an artwork made by people from another culture? Do you think artists in that culture learn about art in the same way as artists do in this culture?

## **TRANSFER TO DIVERSE CULTURES**



The following instructions are written for students who are able to work independently. If you teach younger students, the instructions offer helpful guidelines as you gather and present information in order to optimize transfer potential for your students. Depending on the grade level of your students and their access to appropriate library and Internet sources, you can choose to build transfer across cultures either 1) through student investigation or 2) through your own investigations and presentations to students.

### Inquiry about Artworks:

- Assign a team of students to locate reproductions of Renaissance paintings focusing on shading and their use of dull and pale colors (perhaps in contrast with bright colors). Ask students to display the reproductions for their classmates and point out dull and pale colors and examples of gradual change from light to dark. Assign other teams to similarly investigate Aztec codices, Mayan murals at Bonampak, or Incan featherwork focusing on contrast between light and dark and the choice of bright (or dull) colors.

### Inquiry about Artworks in Context:

- Assign a team of students to research information about Renaissance culture, focusing on the artworld of that time. Ask them to consider the following questions: Who were the important artists? Who (individuals and organizations) supported the arts? Where were the major art centers? What can you learn about an older artist teaching a younger one? How did the artworld of Europe (especially Portugal and Spain) benefit from the plundering and melting down of American gold artwork? How were traditional American artworlds affected by European conquest? Do any Aztec, Mayan, and Incan art traditions (perhaps in a new form) still survive today?

## TRANSFER TO STUDIO



Review the unit themes and key questions to help students transfer what they have learned to their own art making.

### Thematic artwork:

- Challenge students to relate the theme to their own experience or an imaginary experience to develop an idea for their own artwork. For example, students can ask family members to show them any artworks or craft pieces passed down from a different culture (scarf, wood carving, decorated box, wood carving, jewelry, dishes, etc.), or investigate the traditional art of another culture (the students' own ancestry or another). They can then make their own artwork borrowing ideas and/or technical processes from the art of another culture. CAUTION: Be sure to investigate the artworks' original purpose and function sufficiently so as not to unintentionally borrow sacred or otherwise special images and use them in a disrespectful way (for example, do not make toilet-paper-roll versions of Hopi katsina figures.)
- Set up a still life and teach students how to observe it and have them draw subtle lights and darks to create an illusion of solid form.

### Story Illustration:

- Since *A New Home* is not illustrated, you might consider asking students to use their imaginations to make their own illustrations, focusing on a scene from the family journey to the new city, new city cloaks, old city embroidered cloth, carved furniture, or the master painter and apprentices in his workshop.

### Exhibition:

- Display student artwork with Unit Information (Theme Title, Theme in Life, Theme in Art, and Key Questions), sample student reports, and reproductions of artworks from diverse cultures. If your students make story illustrations, display a copy of *A New Home*.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY TRANSFER



### Physics:

- How light travels and is reflected or absorbed by surfaces

### Life Science:

- How lower illumination causes surfaces to look not only darker but also duller than well-illuminated surfaces (rods and cones)

### World History:

- Scientific achievements of Mayan culture; administrative achievements of Incan culture; and imperial achievements of Aztec culture