

COMMON CORE CONNECTION

THE SYMBOLISM OF ALLEGORICAL ART

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Intended audience Middle/High school English and World History

English/Language Arts text connections *Animal Farm, The Inferno, Beloved*

Time frame two 50 minute lessons

OVERVIEW

In order to understand and apply the concepts of allegory in art, students will first describe and then analyze four allegorical bronze sculptures created by Francesco Bertos that represent Africa, America, Europe, and Asia (which were thought to be the only continents in the early 18th century). Extension activities include either writing an explanatory paper synthesizing ideas about how certain continents are portrayed or creating an allegorical artwork that represents a location.

SUPPLIES

- Printed or digital copies of Allegorical Groups Representing Continents: Asia (54.660), America (54.657), Europe (54.659).
- Printed Copies of Description and Analysis Worksheet (up to 4 per student/group)
- Teacher copy of description of artworks
- Pens/pencils

ACTIVITY

- 1 Explain the concept of allegory to students. *Artists and authors alike have often used **allegory** to convey meaning in a symbolic, rather than literal, way. In allegorical works, artists and authors represent ideas, situations, messages (often political or moral), or historical events in a figurative manner that often requires deep interpretation.*
- 2 Lead students in the example of a detailed visual analysis of Africa (54.658) and have them follow along using the accompanying worksheet.
- 3 Using the worksheet, have students determine the symbolic significance of certain details of each sculpture. Suggested details are provided. Have students work together or individually to analyze the other three sculptures. Consider placing individual works of art at stations around the room. Have student groups analyze the art and rotate from station to station at set time intervals for this activity. Students should end at their beginning artwork to re-evaluate initial reactions.
- 4 Keeping in mind that these statues represent a European viewpoint from the early 18th century, ask students to evaluate each sculpture for bias.

POSSIBLE EXTENSIONS

- Have students compile their analysis into a formalized writing using the attached *Essay Structure Worksheet*.
- Have students create their own allegorical artworks using the attached *Create-Your-Own Allegorical Artwork* worksheet. Once students have finished creating their allegorical artworks, have students share their artwork **WITHOUT** telling other students what they have represented. Have students predict what location their classmates have represented.
- Search and analyze other allegorical artworks found at art.thewalters.org

EUROPE (54.659)



ASIA (54.660)



AMERICA (54.657)



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

DIRECTIONS

Examine how the different details of this sculpture portray a possible symbolic meaning. Use the chart and questions below to aid in your analysis.

EXAMPLE



AFRICA (54.658)

DETAIL FROM THE SCULPTURE	POSSIBLE SYMBOLIC MEANING
1 Stalks of grain	There are many stalks of grain and a lack of weapons. This may indicate that people from this continent were seen as peaceful farmers.
2 Lion	The lion seems to be cowering under the people. This may indicate that the African people have control over this animal.
3 Lack of detail	There are not many details in this sculpture. This may indicate a lack of understanding of people from this continent.



EUROPE (54.659)

DETAIL FROM THE SCULPTURE	POSSIBLE SYMBOLIC MEANING
① Eagle	
② Christian Symbol (ball with cross)	
③ Clothing	

ASIA (54.657)

DETAIL FROM THE SCULPTURE	POSSIBLE SYMBOLIC MEANING
① Dancing Figures	
② Hairstyles	
③ Spices (in the hands of the figures)	



Based on your observations, complete the following statement: I think that the artist's overall impression of the people from this continent is:

If you had to portray this continent today, what details would you use in your and why? What message would be portrayed about this continent?
How is this similar or different from the way Bertos portrayed the continent?

EXTENSION IDEA

EXPLANATION OF ALLEGORICAL ART *ESSAY STRUCTURING WORKSHEET*

PROMPT

Explain how Francesco Bertos creates a symbolic meaning/message about two continents through his sculptures.

POSSIBLE OUTLINE FOR YOUR PAPER

Introduction paragraph introduce the artworks and artists, as well as the concept of allegory. Thesis statement should explain what the meaning/message(s) of the two sculptures.

Body paragraph 1 describe the details of the first sculpture and explain what they symbolize and why.

Body paragraph 2 describe the details of the second sculpture and explain what they symbolize and why.

Conclusion paragraph pull all of your ideas together to form one last statement about how effective Bertos was in creating an allegorical representation of the two continents.

Name _____ Date _____

EXTENSION IDEA

CREATE-YOUR-OWN ALLEGORICAL ARTWORK WORKSHEET

Now that you understand how artists use allegory to convey ideas about different continents, you will create your own allegorical artwork that represents a place within the school.

❶ The concept/place/event/situation that I am representing: _____

❷ Details or features I will include to SYMBOLICALLY represent my concept. Be careful not to give it away too obviously!

DETAIL	SYMBOLIC MEANING
a.	
b.	
c.	
d.	

❸ I intend my artwork to have the following connotation (circle one): Positive Negative Neutral

❹ Use the space below or on the back of the worksheet to either sketch a plan for your work or to do your final drawing of your concept.

FOR TEACHER USE

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE DETAILS IN EACH OF THE ARTWORKS (FROM WWW.ART.THEWALTERS.ORG)

Africa the continent is depicted by people who, in a simple, peaceful way of life, gather grain from the fertile ground. A lion and a snake indicate the African continent.

Asia an older man carries a beautiful young woman and figures in dance-like movements surround them. They hold pieces of coral, plants, and spices. This limited view of a vast continent contrasts markedly with the complexity of the representation of America.

America the fierce and primitive nature of the New World is represented by the semi-nude female Native American warrior wearing feathers, who has shot an opponent with an arrow. She supports a man who stands on an alligator that looks strangely like a lizard. The gruesome detail of the little boy lifting a decapitated head on a spear refers to European assumptions about the practice of cannibalism in America.

Europe Jupiter, the king of the gods in Greco-Roman mythology, crowns Bellona, the goddess of war. Jupiter's eagle rests on objects used in war: canon, shield, and drum. Europe is thereby represented as being the leader of the world through her military prowess. The figure of Religion on the ground reveals that the Christian faith is the source of Europe's superior position.