

PICASSO AND RIVERA: CONVERSATIONS ACROSS TIME

When Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Diego Rivera (1886–1957) met in Paris in 1914, they had a great deal in common. Both were Spanish-speaking expatriates (Picasso from Spain, Rivera from Mexico), and each had been trained in an academic tradition that emphasized the values of ancient Greek and Roman art. In Paris Rivera had embraced Cubism, a new style that emphasized the two-dimensionality of the canvas by reducing and fracturing objects into geometric forms. He was a great admirer of Picasso, one of the movement's creators, and the two quickly became friends. Their friendship, however, was short lived; they had a falling-out just a year later, in 1915, when Rivera accused Picasso of copying one of his techniques. Both eventually turned away from Cubism and, in the early 1920s, explored ancient art as a means to create a timeless yet modern visual language that could express who they were as artists.

Examining the influence of antiquity on Picasso's and Rivera's work, these curriculum materials address issues of identity and how art can help students connect with their own cultural histories. The essays demonstrate the value of traditions and cultures beyond the European canon, and reveal the creative potential of cross-cultural and cross-historical dialogue.

Although he began with conventional academic training based in the study of classical art, Picasso never stayed with one artistic style or framework for long. He did, however, frequently return to certain themes, addressing them in a new way with each approach. Soon after his permanent move to Paris in 1904, Picasso borrowed elements from ancient Iberian art in an attempt to reduce his style to its essentials. In 1917, after the development of Cubism, which rejected the traditional idea that an artist's goal should be to mimic nature, and the upheaval of World War I, Picasso visited Italy and took a renewed interest in the timeless values of ancient art. Like other European artists, Picasso turned to sculptures like *The Lansdowne Artemis* and *Protome of a Female Figure*. This resulted in his creation of unique works that blend antiquity and modernity,

as seen in *Three Women at the Spring*. With its classically inspired subject and forms, the painting pays homage to classical art yet simultaneously gives little attention to classical proportions or grace. The monumental work asserts Picasso's incontrovertible place in art history.

Unlike Picasso, Rivera drew upon an ancient past that did not hold a revered place in art history. While ancient Greek and Roman art was traditionally seen as the foundation of Western art history and the source from which all subsequent traditions grew, ancient Latin American art had been largely ignored, or dismissed as consisting of primitive and exotic oddities. When Rivera visited Italy in 1920, he sought out not only Italian art, including frescoes, but also pre-Columbian and early colonial Mexican manuscripts that had been acquired by Italian collectors. Upon his return from Europe to Mexico in 1921, Rivera delved into ancient Mexican art and became a passionate advocate for its legitimacy as a counterpoint to the canonized art of ancient Greece and Rome. Just as Picasso and other European artists were influenced by ancient Greek and Roman art, Rivera believed a Modern Mexican art should build on the aesthetics of pre-Columbian art. He drew from his own collection of Aztec and Maya artifacts, including works like *Water Deity (Chalchiuhtlicue)*, to reinforce this message in his work. He infused such paintings as *Creation of the Universe (La creación del universo)* and *Flower Day (Día de Flores)* with ancient Mexican iconography and forms, thus establishing himself and his work firmly within a Mexican tradition with deep roots.

Like Picasso, Rivera looked to antiquity as a catalyst for experimentation rather than as an end in and of itself. He combined Aztec and Maya forms with contemporary subjects to create a new, Modern Mexican aesthetic independent from European colonial influence, and in doing so he brought his country recognition and respect on an international scale. Meanwhile, Picasso looked to the past for renewal and sampled from ancient themes and forms, thus placing himself within a European tradition while also asserting his differences from it.

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THREE WOMEN AT THE SPRING

Pablo Picasso, summer 1921

THE LANSDOWNE ARTEMIS

Rome, 1st century BC or 1st century AD

PROTOME OF A FEMALE FIGURE

Tarentum (Taras), South Italy, 440–430 BC

With Cubism, Picasso questioned the fundamental conventions of Western art. Cubism rejected the idea that art should mimic nature and create the illusion of three-dimensional space, and replaced it with stripped-down, fragmented forms that emphasized the flatness of the canvas. Following the turmoil and devastation of World War I, Picasso was seeking a new visual language that stepped away from this fragmentation and emphasized continuity as well as modernity. Although elements of Cubism persisted in his work, Picasso began to look back to the time-honored principles of simplicity and tranquility as seen in ancient Greek and Roman art.

Three Women at the Spring is Picasso's first monumental painting in this Neoclassical style. In the painting, three women, themselves monumental, dominate a vaguely articulated rocky, clay-colored setting, filling the canvas with their statuesque forms. Fittingly for an image of three women collecting water from a spring, three ceramic water vessels resembling ancient amphorae (tall Greek or Roman vessels with handles) appear in the painting. Varying in size, they form a diagonal line from the lower left to the upper right corner of the canvas, leading the viewer's eye through the composition. The painting's palette is restrained to shades of gray-white, the color of ancient marble sculptures, and an earthy terracotta, the color of the material used for ancient vessels.

The women's hair echoes the stylized waves of the hairdos of Greek and Roman goddesses. Their draped tunics resemble the typical dress of a High Classical goddess, clinging to their thighs and chests

like that of *The Lansdowne Artemis*, a characteristic Roman copy of a Greek statue of a goddess. And the heavy pleats of the women's tunics call to mind the fluted columns of ancient Greek temples.

The subjects' poses are unnaturally frozen, and the contours of their faces and gowns are so exaggerated they appear carved rather than drawn. The women's features have been reduced to simple, regular geometric forms reminiscent of the early classical style visible in the *Protome of a Female Figure* (pictured here): vacant eyes with thick eyelids, prominent noses that proceed in a straight line down from the forehead, uninterrupted by a bridge or indentation of any kind, rounded chins, a slight pout, and generally full, stylized features. Not one of the women stands out as a distinguishable individual. They sit, lean, and stand perfectly still and stable, which is in stark contrast to Picasso's fragmented Cubist subjects. These women at the spring face one another, even reaching out to each other, yet they don't interact. Instead, they seem distant, modern manifestations of the three graces in Greek mythology.

Despite these classical references, Picasso remains firmly based in modernity, adding his own variations to these traditional forms. Every feature, from the women's eyes to their hands and feet, has been exaggerated and enlarged in a deliberate departure from classical proportions. The women's limbs are cylindrical; their necks and arms resemble the thick tubes of machinery rather than the elegantly proportioned limbs of antiquity. Their squat, robust forms imply that these are modern, earthy, grounded women, in contrast to the divine figures of antiquity. As a result, these women bridge times and cultures, bringing the calm dignity, elevated status, and permanence of antiquity into the twentieth century.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Compare *Three Women at the Spring* to the 1913 Cubist painting *Still Life with Violin* (<http://collections.lacma.org/node/252189>) by Picasso's friend and the cocreator of Cubism, Georges Braque (France, 1882–1963). How do these works differ in style and subject? How do they make you, as a viewer, feel as you look at them?
2. How does *Three Women at the Spring* differ from ancient Greek and Roman sculptures like *The Lansdowne Artemis* and *The Hope Athena* (<http://collections.lacma.org/node/229951>)? How much of these differences are because of their varied artistic mediums? Which qualities of sculptures can't be reproduced in paintings?
3. If the women in this painting came to life, what do you think they would be talking about? What do you think their tones of voice would be? Would they speak quickly or slowly? How would they move? What do you see that makes you say that?



Three Women at the Spring (Trois femmes à la fontaine)

Pablo Picasso, summer 1921

Oil on canvas

80 ¼ × 68 ½ in.

The Museum of Modern Art, NY, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Allan D. Emil, © 2016 Estate of Pablo Picasso/
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York



Lansdowne Artemis

Unknown, 1st century B.C. or 1st century A.D.

Marble

70 × 26 × 17 in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, William Randolph Hearst Collection (49.23.5a)

Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA



Protome of a Female Head

Tarentum (Taras), South Italy, 440–430

Terracotta

5 $\frac{5}{16}$ × 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

Gianfranco Becchina (Basel, Switzerland), sold to the J. Paul Getty Museum, 1982

Photo courtesy The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu, California

FLOWER DAY (DÍA DE FLORES)

Diego Rivera, 1925

WATER DEITY (CHALCHIUHTLICUE)

Mexico, Aztec, 1200–1521

After fourteen years abroad, Diego Rivera returned to his native Mexico in 1921 and set out to promote Mexican cultural development by conveying its history and revolutionary ideals to the masses through national art. *Flower Day* is the first in what became a series of artworks of Mexican flower vendors painted by the artist. It was also Rivera's first major painting to enter a public collection in the United States, having been acquired by LACMA's predecessor, the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science, and Art, in 1925.

In the painting, two Mexican women, one with a baby on her back, kneel before a flower vendor. The figures, Mexican peasants, are largely anonymous; only the flower vendor's face is visible. The vendor, bending forward, holds in his hands a bundle of green palm fronds (associated with Easter), and the woman on the left appears to be preparing to place a red wreath from the stack beside her on his head. A basket overflowing with oversize calla lilies tied to the vendor's back hovers over the composition, filling the upper portion of the canvas while conforming to its square shape. The women's white shawls associate them with the lilies, symbols of the Virgin Mary used in festivals around Easter time. On either side of the vendor, crowds of people wearing similar wreaths and carrying bundles of red flowers are barely visible. Besides these figures, what little background that can be seen is an indistinct gray. The painting's composition is dominated by the large, simple forms of the figures, the flowers and palm fronds in red, white, and green (the colors of the Mexican flag), and the lily stamens and the basket, both in yellow.

From their poses to their clothing, the figures in *Flower Day* directly reference the forms and iconography of ancient Aztec sculptures of female

deities like the *Water Deity (Chalchiuhtlicue)* pictured here. The compact bodies of the painting's subjects evoke figures carved from blocks of stone, and the women kneel before the flower vendor barefooted, just as countless Aztec sculptures of female gods kneel with their feet beneath them, turned inward so their toes touch beneath them. Rivera's women wear skirts and triangular shoulder capes, outfits that echo the traditional clothing of an Aztec noblewoman, as seen on the *Water Deity*. Even the face of the flower vendor echoes those of Aztec sculptures: ageless, geometric, symmetrical, and general rather than specific.

Because they are peasants and not Aztec deities, the figures in *Flower Day* lack the distinctive headdress of the *Water Deity*, which consists of thick bands of cotton wound about her head, bordered by rows of balls and flanked by large tassels. This headdress would have identified her to Aztec worshipers as *Chalchiuhtlicue* ("she of the jade skirt" for the mountains that resemble jade-green skirts after it rains), a symbol of the water that irrigates the fields and gives life.

Sculptures like this one, which is from Rivera's personal collection, would originally have been installed in temples as objects of devotion. In *Flower Day*, the influence of *Water Deity* turns a chaotic marketplace scene into a solemn one, imbuing anonymous peasants with a quiet dignity and almost religious level of importance. There is a sense that Rivera has painted a picture that infuses the present with the gravity of the ancient past, reinforcing the Mexican people's ties to their illustrious Aztec heritage. In doing so, he elevates a small group of Mexican people into icons, symbols of Mexico's great heritage and bright future.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Why do you think Rivera chose to depict a mundane flower market scene? How does painting an everyday setting infuse it with more importance?
2. Rivera was interested in promoting Mexican history and ideals through a national art. What, if any, art or public images would you consider specifically American, successfully conveying America's history and ideals to the public? For example, the Statue of Liberty.



Flower Day (Día de Flores)

Diego Rivera, 1886–1957,

Oil on canvas

58 × 47 ½ in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Fund (25.71), © 2016 Banco de México

Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA



Water Deity (Chalchiuhtlicue)

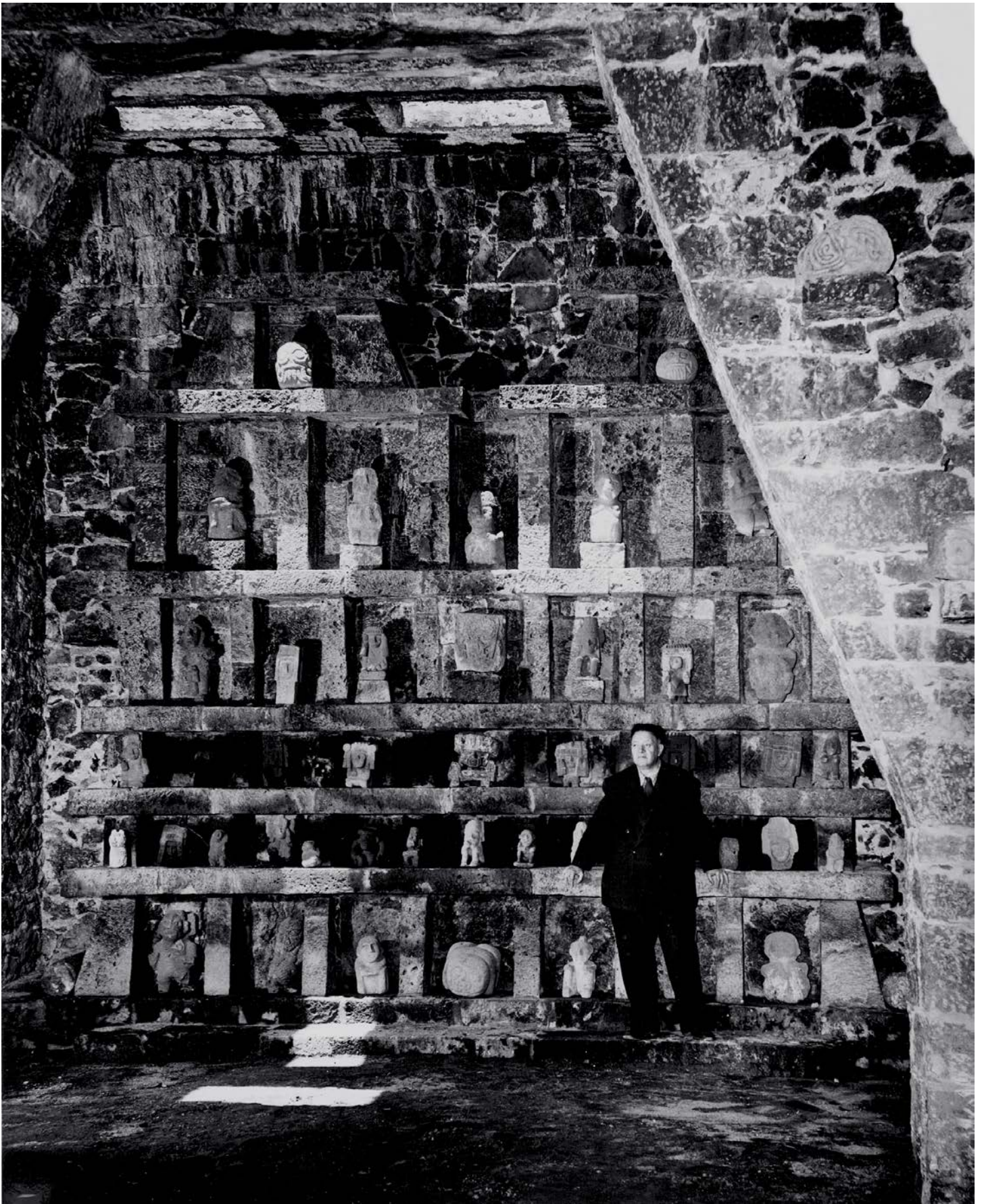
Mexico, Aztec, 1200–1521

Basalt

7 ⁷/₈ × 4 ³/₈ in.

Museo Diego Rivera-Anahuacalli

Photo © Museum Associates/LACMA, by Javier Hinojosa



Diego Rivera at the Museo Anahuacalli, Mexico City
c. 1950s
Photo courtesy of Museos Diego Rivera-Anahuacalli y Frida Kahlo



Diego Rivera
c. 1950s
Photo courtesy of Museos Diego Rivera-Anahuacalli y Frida Kahlo

CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE (LA CREACIÓN DEL UNIVERSO), ILLUSTRATION FOR POPOL VUH

Diego Rivera, 1931

The *Popol Vuh* (Book of the People) is a compilation of the creation myths of the ancient Guatemalan Maya-K'iche' people. The stories of the *Popol Vuh* were originally passed down orally and then recorded in paintings and hieroglyphics. However, following the Spanish Conquest (1519–21), most Maya manuscripts were destroyed, along with the images of ancient gods they contained. Fortunately, the stories of the *Popol Vuh* were eventually recorded in the K'iche' language in an attempt to preserve them as well as the Maya-K'iche' culture.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Spanish conquistadors condemned works of pre-Columbian Mexico as products of the devil; in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these works were seen as admirable but incomprehensible products of a savage ancient civilization. For Rivera, a twentieth-century Mexican artist, these texts and images contained a magic and power that imbued all of Mexico with an ancient lineage and dignity. According to his daughter, Guadalupe Rivera, the artist kept a copy of the *Popol Vuh*, in Spanish, on his nightstand and, drawn to its visual and poetic beauty, read it so frequently that he could recite passages from memory.

In 1930 Rivera was approached by an American writer, John Weatherwax, who had translated the *Popol Vuh* into English and wanted to publish his translation accompanied by illustrations from Rivera. Traditionally, the stories of the *Popol Vuh* were recited aloud while a painter or scribe created accompanying images, so in the spirit of this custom, Weatherwax read the stories aloud to Rivera while he painted his illustrations. For visual inspiration, Rivera drew from the art and architecture of the ancient Maya city of Chichén Itzá, which he had visited in 1921, as well as several Maya texts that he had encountered in European collections, which had been sent to Europe from the New World by conquistadores and missionaries.

The *Popol Vuh* is filled with poetic imagery, dream-like allegories, and psychedelic visions; and these stylistic elements made their way into Rivera's watercolor illustrations. During his Cubist period, the artist had included multiple or contrasting viewpoints fragmented and then realigned within a single painting. Much as he did then, for *Creation of the Universe* Rivera collapsed into one image depicted figures and forms from different times and spaces. The forms are simple and flat, and the composition lacks any perspective or sense of real space; instead, the figures seem to float on a background of nothingness.

A mountain surrounded by water occupies the center of the composition. (The Maya-K'iche' people lived in a highland mountain valley, and the mountain was a common Mexican symbol, signifying a bountiful town, that was often used in indigenous maps.) Behind the mountain, but separated by water, lies a mountain range. In this context, the mountains surrounded by water represent primeval earth emerging from the still waters of the ocean before time and the sun were created, and the animals and vegetation on each mountain represent the beginnings of life.

Surrounding this central mountain range are six creator gods, manifestations of the two great creator gods: the Sovereign Plumed Serpent in the sea, referred to as the Giver of Breath; and the supreme god, Heart of the Sky, who appears in the story in the form of lightning. The gods' size and placement emphasize their importance, as well as their complete power over nature. Three of the gods, aspects of the Sovereign Plumed Serpent, are depicted as multicolored three plumed serpents hovering above the mountains in the upper section of the composition. In the lower register of the painting are three gods of different ages representing Heart of the Sky: the young god at the center whose adornments, including a sprouting headdress, evoke

the maize god; the elderly god in the right corner, whose blue hat and pelt evoke the Maya god of commerce, God L; and the god at the left, whose blue-and-white mask with prominent fangs and snout and big red circular eyes seems to be inspired by the Maya rain god, Chaac. All of the gods appear to be blowing life into the mountain scene.

Though the English-language edition of the *Popol Vuh* was never published, Rivera, believing in the project, continued to produce his related watercolor illustrations (twenty-four are known to exist). He also tried for many years to produce a Mexican edition, with no success.

DISCUSSION PROMPTS

1. Find examples of creation stories from other cultures and compare them. What do the stories have in common? How do they differ? How do these stories reflect the values of their respective cultures?
2. With his illustrations for the *Popol Vuh*, Rivera wanted to translate a complex poetic text that he loved into visual images. Find a poem that you love and think about how you would visually translate its text and style of writing into an illustration. How would you represent literary devices like alliteration, metaphor, simile, onomatopoeia, cacophony, dissonance, irony, point of view, rhyme, and tone in a visual artwork?
3. Have your teacher read a short story you've never heard before out loud to your class, and then record the story you just heard in written or visual form. Compare your visual account of the story with those of your classmates. Which elements of the story were retained? How does this exercise affect how you think about other stories that were originally transmitted orally, like the *Iliad*, *The Tale of Heike*, the Bible, and the *Popol Vuh*?



Creation of the Universe (La creación del universo), illustration for the Popol Vuh
Diego Rivera, 1200–1521
Watercolor on paper
12 ¼ x 18 ⅞ in.
Museo Casa Diego Rivera, Guanajuato, Marta R. Gómez Collection, INBA. © 2016 Banco de México
Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F./Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Photo courtesy Museo Casa Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo, Guanajuato

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

STRIKE A POSE

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does the artwork of the past influence and inspire an artist?

GRADES

1–5

TIME

Two class periods

ART CONCEPTS

Figure drawing, proportions, influence

MATERIALS

Pencils, markers, colored pencils, and drawing paper

TALKING ABOUT ART

Look at *Three Women at the Spring*. Write down one word that describes the painting. Your teacher will make a list of these words on the board by calling on you and your peers to share what you wrote. Describe the clothing and poses of the figures. Who are they? Why do you think they are dressed that way? Why are they gathered together? What else do you notice about the painting? What colors do you see? How do they make you feel?

Take a moment to look at *The Lansdowne Artemis* and *The Hope Athena*. These sculptures are very old. Body parts are often missing from ancient sculptures because they are old and have traveled very far. Sculptures like *The Lansdowne Artemis* and *The Hope Athena* used to be very colorful, but their paint was lost with age so now we only see classical sculptures that are white and gray. What are they wearing? How are they posed? Why are they so large? Who might these figures be?

When sculpting figures, the ancient Greek sculptor Polykleitos used one part of the figure, part of the little finger for example, to decide the lengths of the arms, legs, and torso as well as the height of the figure using set ratios. Similarly, today artists often say that a drawing of a person should be 7 and a half heads long, so if you drew a person's head and then measured it, the length of that person's body would equal 7 and a half heads.

Compare the proportions of the *The Lansdowne Artemis* to those of the women in *Three Women at the Spring*. Write down all the similarities between the sculptures and the figures in the Picasso painting. Again share as a class or with partners.

How does the artwork of the past influence and inspire an artist like Picasso? How does the difference in medium (sculpture vs painting) effect the artworks?

MAKING ART

PART I: Choose a partner from among your classmates, and decide on a pose inspired by classical Greek and Roman sculpture like the women in Picasso's *Three Women at the Spring*. Do a gesture drawing (a quick sketch) of your partner's pose, and then some longer drawings of details like your partner's head and hands.

MAKING ART (cont.)

Hold out a ruler vertically in front of you at arm's length. Closing one eye, measure your partner's head with the ruler, and then use that unit of measurement to measure your partner's arms, torso, legs, and overall height (e.g. your model may be 7.5 heads tall) to get an idea of the proportions for your final drawing. Then switch with your partner, and pose for them while they draw you.

PART 2: Use your posed gesture drawing, detail drawings, and measurements to create a modern figure drawing that reflects the influence of antiquity. Begin by deciding how you would like to adapt your figure to modernize it. Will you model your figure's proportions after your partner's measurements, ancient Greek examples, or new proportions of your own making? Will your figure be stocky and squat or elongated and string-like? Will your figure wear a toga or modern attire? Will your figure be placed in a gallery setting or an everyday one, or will they simply hover on the page without a background? Will you use color or stay with the white-gray palette of the classical sculptures you see in museums? Be prepared to explain your choices and the reasoning behind them.

REFLECTION

Display your newly made artwork on the wall. How did it feel to pose like an antique sculpture? Did you feel powerful or self-conscious? How did seeing the artworks inspire what you just made? How have you modernized your drawing? Why did you choose the proportions that you did? How would you describe your drawing in one word?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SPEAKING AND LISTENING.1-5

1-5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners. 3-5.4 Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

CCSS.MATH.MEASUREMENTS AND DATA.1-3

1.2 Express the length of an object as a whole number of length units, by laying multiple copies of a shorter object (the length unit) end to end; understand that the length measurement of an object is the number of same-size length units that span it with no gaps or overlaps. 2.4 Measure to determine how much longer one object is than another, expressing the length difference in terms of a standard length unit.

CCSS.MATH.NUMBERS AND OPERATIONS.1-3

3.1 Understand a fraction a/b as the quantity formed by a part of size $1/b$.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

EXPLORING CULTURAL HERITAGE

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does your background and family affect who you are and how you identify?

GRADES

4–8

TIME

One–two class periods

ART CONCEPTS

Collage, 3D, pre-Columbian, Muralism, cultural influence

MATERIALS

8 ½ x 11 inch heavy paper or cardstock (assorted colors), pencils, markers or tempera paints, paint brushes, scissors, glue, bamboo skewers (stands for shapes), and thick cardboard scraps (base)

TALKING ABOUT ART

Visual artists often explore their social and personal identity in their practice. Through making art, they are able to construct a sense of who they are as individuals, as a society, or as a nation. Conventions and stereotypes are also questioned in art-making while exploring gender, nationality, and heritage.

Mexican culture and history are major themes and influences in Diego Rivera's art. In a style largely indebted to pre-Columbian culture, he created panoramic portrayals of Mexican history from Mexico's indigenous beginnings up to the Mexican Revolution (c.1910–1920) and post-Revolutionary present. Large, simplified figures and bold colors like those present in Aztec art characterize his native style. Like Maya *stelae* (tall, sculpted stone monuments), his paintings tell stories that seek to teach viewers about the greatness of Mexico's pre-Columbian past.

View and discuss Diego Rivera's *Flower Day* and the statue of the Aztec water deity, *Chalchiuhtlicue* included in the curriculum packet. What similarities do you notice between the two artworks? What types of shapes do you see (organic, geometric, abstract)? What messages or stories are being communicated in each work? Why do you think Rivera chose to include visual elements from pre-Columbian art?

MAKING ART

Begin by thinking of your own cultural heritage. Research your family tree and heritage, as well as any art or symbols associated with your heritage, by interviewing your relatives. Then, write a short reflection paper that describes what you've learned.

Inspired by Rivera's exploration of his Mexican heritage in his art, create a 3D collage self-portrait using simple geometric forms cut out of paper. The collage will integrate selected colors and images that represent your heritage, ethnicity, gender, and/or race.

This lesson will help you to:

- 1) Explore and learn more about your heritage and those of your classmates,
- 2) broaden your views on the diverse population that exists within your school, and
- 3) become more sensitive towards others' differences and uniqueness.

REFLECTION

Reflect on the art-making experience and respond to the following questions in oral form:

How is cultural heritage communicated and interpreted through works of art? In what ways does your collage reveal your cultural identity? What shapes, symbols, or patterns did you use? How would you describe the overall composition? What did you intend to communicate about yourself and your cultural heritage with this artwork? In what other ways can we illustrate and share our cultural heritage with others?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WRITING.4-8

4-8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

CCSS.ELA.LITERACY.SPEAKING AND LISTENING.4-8

4-8.1 Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners.
4-5.4 Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace. 6-8.4 Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details and nonverbal elements to accentuate main ideas; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

SAMPLE ARTWORK



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

REINVENTING ANCIENT FORMS

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Those who study ancient artworks will always have unanswered questions, but embracing the unknown can inspire curiosity and present the opportunity to explore one's identity and history.

GRADES

5–8

TIME

One class period

ART CONCEPTS

Historical and cultural context, medium, influence, and visual emphasis and attributes

MATERIALS

Graphite pencils, watercolor pigments, and both heavy stock and scrap papers

TALKING ABOUT ART

Look at ancient artworks from a variety of cultures including LACMA's *Lansdowne Artemis*.

<https://collections.lacma.org/node/229665>

<https://collections.lacma.org/node/229429>

<https://collections.lacma.org/node/207540>

<https://collections.lacma.org/node/172640>

<https://collections.lacma.org/node/179283>

Then conduct a detailed visual analysis of a few works, describing any adornments or attributes. Are there any characteristics that appear to be unique to that artwork or culture? What is emphasized in each piece? Taking a closer look will contribute to a better understanding of ancient sculpture. Discuss the contrast between monumental and durable materials (the marble and clay of ancient artworks) and fugitive and delicate ones (like pigments and paper).

MAKING ART

Draw upon ancient artworks to invent new expressive personalized drawings.

Familiarize yourself with select ancient artworks from a culture of your choice. Write down a list of basic known and unknown information. Then write what is unknown in the form of questions, i.e. Where was this found? Who is it? What was it used for? Ask as many questions as you can.

Think about the parts of the ancient works that are missing and imagine a short narrative explanation of what happened to these works to leave them in their current condition. Think of many alternatives: Were the losses caused by natural causes like erosion or human interventions like war or plunder?

Use a piece of scrap paper to create a brief notation of select details from one of the ancient artworks. Find the lines, shapes, patterns, colors, or forms that make that ancient artwork distinct to its culture.

MAKING ART (cont.)

Next create a composition that incorporates these details in an image that speaks to your life, either a scene from your life or an object that relates to your identity. Refer to what you've learned and wondered about the ancient artworks to help guide your choices and inspire you.

Transfer these ideas into a final form utilizing the watercolors and heavy stock paper. Add graphite lines and shading before, during and/or after applying color.

REFLECTION

Reflect on your drawing individually using the prompt 'Where am I in this piece?' or 'How am I in this piece?' before coming together as a class. What did you like about the work you did?

Can you tell what culture inspired the artwork just by looking at it? If so, what features do you recognize from the ancient works? Present your work to the class and explain its inspiration.

Reflect on the process as a class. How did it feel to be the one asking the questions? How do you feel now about asking questions?

Consider taking the reflection one more step with an activity: Use movement, performance or poetry to capture an additional aspect of the project.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SPEAKING AND LISTENING.5-8

5-8.1 Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners.

5.4 Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.READING.5-8

5.9 Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g., mysteries and adventure stories) on their approaches to similar themes and topics. 6-8.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

TRANSFORMING STORYTELLING WITH TECHNOLOGY

ESSENTIAL QUESTION	How can technology inform new approaches to storytelling?
GRADES	6–12
TIME	Two or more class periods
ART CONCEPTS	Storytelling, filmmaking, character design, set design, illustration
MATERIALS	iPads (open to Stop Motion Studio), bristol paper, a variety of colored and patterned paper, markers, watercolor pencils, scissors, and gluesticks
TALKING ABOUT ART	<p>Look at Diego Rivera’s <i>Creation of the Universe</i> illustration depicting the creation story of the Maya, the <i>Popol Vuh</i>. The <i>Popol Vuh</i> is an ancient and sacred text that depicts the creation of humankind according to the K’iche’ people from the area now known as Guatemala. Traditionally, passages from the <i>Popol Vuh</i> were read aloud while a painter created images inspired by the text, and Diego Rivera used the same method for his illustrations. Read the passage from the <i>Popol Vuh</i> that inspired <i>Creation of the Universe</i> (parts 1–3 of the attached summary). Can you identify narrative elements in the illustration? What aesthetic choices did Rivera make when translating the narrated text into visual images and why do you think he made these choices?</p> <p>Discuss ways in which artists over time have interpreted ancient stories and myths. How have inventions and advancements in art technology brought forth new approaches to storytelling? If you could create an animation inspired by Rivera’s <i>Creation of the Universe</i>, how would you represent the various elements of the story? What tools would you use to portray your vision?</p> <p>Learn about several user-friendly apps for filmmaking in the classroom including Stop Motion Studio and iMovie. Stop Motion Studio is a free, easy to use app that allows you to give your character creations the illusion of movement through frame by frame images. iMovie is a video editing platform which allows you to add sound, music, effects, and narration.</p>
MAKING ART	<p>PART I: Discuss the <i>Popol Vuh</i> and look at a short summary of the story to look at for reference material. Create a stylized illustration of a character from the <i>Popol Vuh</i>. When finished, cut out the character and choose a colored or patterned paper background for your stop-motion video.</p> <p>PART II: Collaborate as a group and take turns experimenting with the iPad and Stop Motion Studio app to create mini stop-motion animations of the characters. Lay out your character on your background and take turns filming from above using the iPad (making sure only the characters and background are in the frame). While other students in your group move the characters slightly, capture each frame with the iPad to create an animated sequence. Once the stop motion videos are complete, upload them to iMovie to add effects, narration, music, and/or sound.</p>

MAKING ART (cont.)

OPTIONAL: The *Popol Vuh* may be broken up into chapters with one group of students assigned to each chapter. You can then create an animated/ stop-motion video interpreting your assigned chapter. Once each group is finished with their chapter of the story, all the stop-motions may be gathered together in iMovie as a single film that tells the story in order from the first chapter to the last. Materials other than paper, such as clay, paper-mache, etc. may also be used to build the characters.

REFLECTION

Share observations, challenges, and ideas relating to using technology as a medium for storytelling. How has viewing different interpretations of the *Popol Vuh* affected how you think of the story? Does seeing these different interpretations make you think of how other classic stories may have changed through multiple interpretations over time?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SPEAKING AND LISTENING.6-12

6-12.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners. 6-8.2 Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study. 9-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats. 9-12.5 Make strategic use of digital media in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.READING.6-12

6-8.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details. 6-8.7 Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium. 9-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. 9-10.6 Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States. 9-12.7 Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment. 9-10.9 Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work.

SAMPLE ARTWORK



EXCERPTS FROM THE POPO VUHL

PART I

The ancient world had its beginnings here in this place named Quiché. The sea was calm. The sky was empty and silent. There was not, then, anything in fact. Only the sea. There were no people, no animals, no fish, no birds, no mountains, no forests. The face of the earth has not yet appeared. Alone lies the expanse of the sea, along with the womb of all the sky. Only the god of the sea, Plumed Serpent, and the god of the sky, Heart of Sky. Luminous they were in the water, wrapped in Quetzal feathers and Cotinga feathers. In their essence, they were great sages, great possessors of knowledge.

PART II

Heart of Sky and Plumed Serpent were both great knowers and great thinkers. They talked, they thought, they worried. They joined their hearts and their thoughts.

Plumed Serpent: "We will create life!"

Heart of Sky: "But how? How will we make the earth?"

Plumed Serpent: "If we remove much of the water, the earth will rise from the sea."

Heart of Sky: "Earth."

With one word, the trees spread across the mountains, and great woods and forests were formed. Just like a cloud, like a mist, was the creation and formation of the Earth.

PART III

Then they pondered further beyond the creation of Earth and thought of wild animals, guardians of the forest.

Heart of Sky: "Deer. Bird. Puma. Jaguar. Serpent. Rattlesnake. Fish. Monkey. Coyote. Parrot. Crow."

And with his words, the animals filled the Earth and the Sea.

Plumed Serpent: "Look at the wonderful animals we have made! Now these creatures must thank us."

Heart of Sky: "They must tell our great story to the other gods so we will be honored."

Plumed Serpent: "Speak! Don't moan or cry out!"

Heart of Sky: "Name our names! Praise us! Speak now!"

But they did not succeed in talking like men. They just rattled and croaked and howled.

PART IV

Heart of Sky: "We must try again."

Plumed Serpent: "We will try to make a human being who will give us praise and respect. A provider. A nurturer."

And they talked and they thought and they decided to make men out of the mud that remained when earth and sea were divided. But it came undone and crumbled. It became sodden and mushy. It fell apart and dissolved. Its head was not set apart properly. Its face could only look in one direction. Its face was hidden. Neither could it look about. At first it spoke, but without knowledge. Straightaway it would merely dissolve in water, for it was not strong.

**EXCERPTS FROM
THE POPO VUHL (cont.)**

PART V

Heart of Sky: "We must try again."

Plumed Serpent: "Let us consult the great and wise god and goddess, Grandfather and Grandmother of Light. They will be able to guide us."

So they journeyed beyond the heavens to visit Grandfather and Grandmother of Light.

Plumed Serpent: "Great god and goddess, we have tried to make creatures who will speak our names, honor us and give us praise. We have failed so far! The animals growl and hiss, the mudmen babble. Who will tell our story? Who will remember how the earth began?"

Grandmother of Light: "Wood! You must carve the faces and bodies in wood! Let them sing your praises and give you the respect you deserve!"

Their legs were not filled out, Nor their arms. They lacked blood and sweat. They did not possess their hearts nor their minds. They walked without purpose.

Plumed Serpent: "Speak!"

Heart of Sky: "Name our names! Praise us! Speak now!"

Plumed Serpent: "What a horrible noise! There is nothing in their minds! There is nothing in their hearts!"

And so, Plumed Serpent and Heart of Sky harnessed the waters and a great flood covered the earth to destroy the wood people.

PART VI

Heart of Sky: "What are we to do? The animals cannot sing our praise, the mudmen dissolved, and the woodmen had no hearts or minds."

Plumed Serpent: "Look at the mountain in the distance. What do you see coming towards us?"

Heart of Sky: "I can see clearly now! Fox, coyote, parrot, crow!"

Fox: "We bring you great news! We have found ears of yellow corn and white corn."

Coyote: "This is the ingredient you have been looking for to create human flesh!"

Parrot: "The mountain we have just come from is thick with corn."

Crow: "Hundreds of plants grow there, strong and straight and tall."

And they rejoiced then over the discovery of the marvelous mountain, filled with yellow and white corn.

Plumed Serpent: "Let us grind the corn nine times! And let us add water to make the flesh!"

Heart of Sky: "Man."

And with that, the first true humans that could think and speak and praise were created from corn.

Heart of Sky: "Our praises will finally be sung!"

RESOURCES

ONLINE RESOURCES

Khan Academy: Latin American Modernism
<https://goo.gl/t6pS5c>
Resources about Latin American Modernism, specifically in regard to Diego Rivera are offered through this link's videos, lessons, and short quizzes.

The Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc.
<http://www.famsi.org>
The website is an invaluable tool for pre-Columbian studies and principal source for research of ancient cultures.

NOVA: Cracking the Maya Code
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/cracking-maya-code.html>
The film is not available for streaming, but the site includes a series of links to resources relating to Maya culture and hieroglyphs.

Picasso Administration: Site Map
<http://goo.gl/XZ4fyy>
This website includes video interviews, artwork analyses, and links to blogs, articles, and journals on Picasso.

"Popol Vuh. Maya creation myth"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqOnnFY9Xxk>
This animated Popol Vuh also presents paintings from classic Maya pottery (in seven parts).

BOOKS FOR STUDENTS

Diego Rivera: His World and Ours
Duncan Tonatiuh
This book introduces Diego Rivera and his art to children age six to nine.

Pablo Picasso: Meet the Artist
Patricia Geis
This interactive book presents Pablo Picasso to young readers age eight to twelve, and explains how his art evolved over his lifetime.

The Ancient Maya
Jackie Maloy
This illustrated introduction to the ancient Maya world is a great resource for students grades two through four.

Popol Vuh: A Sacred Book of the Maya
Victor Montejo and Luis Garay
The *Popol Vuh* appears here in an authoritative, illustrated version by noted Maya anthropologist Montejo, who has captured all the drama and excitement of one of the world's great creation stories.

BOOKS FOR TEACHERS

Diego Rivera: A Retrospective
Cynthia Newman Helms
This volume illustrates Rivera's life and work from his early years of study in Spain to his later efforts to establish a truly Mexican style.

Diego Rivera: Art & Revolution
Luis-Martín Lozano, Agustín Arteaga, and William H. Robinson, eds.
This catalogue focuses on the visual traditions and cultural idioms of Rivera's oil paintings.

The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture: Greek Sculpture and Modern Art from Winckelmann to Picasso
Elizabeth Prettejohn
This book argues that the modern study of ancient art and the making of modern art are inextricably intertwined.

Picasso and Rivera: Conversations Across Time
Michael Govan and Diana Magaloni
Presenting valuable insight into the trajectory of the art of Picasso and Rivera, this catalogue draws connections between these two powerful figures, who transformed modern art.

A Pocket Dictionary of Aztec and Mayan Gods and Goddesses
Clara Bezanilla
This illustrated guide to the key gods and goddesses in the Aztec and Maya pantheon tells the fantastic stories of their bitter battles and explains their roles in Aztec and Maya mythology.