



Art in Focus: The Legend of Krishna

A WORKSHOP FOR EDUCATORS
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Asian | Education

Acknowledgments

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A Note to the Reader

By Brian Hogarth

A Note to the Reader

Dear Educator,

We are pleased to present you with this new packet of posters on the theme of Krishna stories represented in South Asian paintings from the Asian Art Museum collections. The posters are accompanied by background materials prepared by Stephanie Kao, School Programs Coordinator, and suggested activities prepared by Alina Collier, Education Resources Coordinator.

Today we associate stories with movie characters, television programs, or well-loved illustrated children's books. But throughout most of human history, stories were committed to memory and meant to be recounted before a live audience. Storytelling still has the potential to move us when it is transmitted through the human voice with all its expressive potential.

Storytelling traditions abound throughout the many cultures of the world, and these traditions have provided the raw material for many of our great works of literature. Along the way, oral narratives, and written versions of these stories, have also provided rich possibilities for visual artists. Pictorial expressions of stories often take into account local narrative variations, as well as stylistic interpretations unique to the artists' environment.

India abounds with stories, so many of which recount the exploits of its innumerable gods and goddesses. Among these deities, Krishna—a descent or incarnation of the god Vishnu—is especially popular. Unlike some divine figures, who seem to appear in association with only a few important events, Krishna figures in a multitude of stories.

Historically in India, the increasing popularity of Krishna over the course of several centuries is associated with the rise of religious devotionalism. Devotionalism is the desire by worshippers to make a strong personal connection to a deity, and particularly to an image of that deity. The images that you see in these posters were often inspired by devotional literature, and they were usually commissioned for use in private settings as portfolios assembled in books or albums. As posters, the images have been blown up beyond their original size, so that students will be able to see many of the details more clearly. The originals are generally small in scale and intimate in appearance.

We hope that you will be able to use these images for a variety of purposes, relating them to your curriculum in language arts, mythology, world religions, and of course art. It is hoped that students find in the stories represented here timeless themes of childhood, heroic acts, love, selflessness, and duty.

Brian Hogarth
Director of Education
Spring 2006



Introduction to South Asian Painting

By Bindu Gude

Introduction to South Asian Painting

By Bindu Gude

South Asian painting traditions encompass a wide variety of regional styles, subject matter, and artistic techniques. In its most narrowly defined sense, the term “South Asian painting” refers to religious and secular works that were produced on paper or cloth for elite courtly patrons from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries. Paintings on palm-leaf are known from as early as the eleventh century, but these served as illustrations which were clearly secondary to the religious texts that they accompanied. In its most broad characterization, “South Asian painting” includes not only these earliest manuscript illustrations but also non-elite painting traditions such as those practiced by various South Asian villagers to this day.

The conquest of northern India by Muslim armies, beginning in the twelfth century, had a profound effect on South Asian painting which, until this period, had been restricted to the illustration of religious manuscripts on palm leaves. With the introduction of Muslim rule into parts of India came also the introduction of bound books, embellished with calligraphy and decorative ornament, and the establishment of studios versed in their production. By the sixteenth century, many of these workshops employed artists to create miniature paintings illustrating various literary works. At this time, paintings at South Asia’s Hindu courts indicate some adoption of the innovations introduced by Muslim manuscripts. Palm-leaf had long been abandoned in favor of paper, for instance, which provided a larger surface area for illustrations. Unlike Muslim manuscripts however, in which illustrations were integrated with the accompanying text, Hindu productions favored illustrations over the text, which was often inscribed on the reverse side of the paintings or reduced to a short verse placed above or below each illustration. Furthermore, Hindu manuscripts were never bound, unlike their Muslim counterparts. Instead, the individual leaves of a given manuscript were stacked and wrapped in cloth for safekeeping. The audiences for both types of manuscripts would have been the same, however. The small and delicate manuscripts were ideally suited to intimate viewing experiences involving the patron and a close circle of associates.

Paintings associated with South Asia’s Hindu courts display a bewildering variety of styles which are broadly understood as falling into two subgroups, Rajasthani—referring to works produced in



Stealing of the wish-fulfilling tree (detail), 1700–1800. India; former kingdom of Malwa, Madhya Pradesh state. Ink and colors on paper. *Gift of George Hopper Fitch, R1998.2.4*

Rajasthan and central India—and Pahari—referring to works produced in the Himalayan foothills. Both stylistic groups are considered distinct from contemporary Muslim painting styles of the mid-sixteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries.

In the most general terms, Rajasthani and Pahari paintings are less naturalistic in appearance than Muslim paintings, particularly those associated with the Mughal dynasty. Their pictorial space tends to be shallow, with little indication of depth. Backgrounds consist of large swaths of color against which the details of the illustration are highlighted with bright colors, bold lines, and decorative patterning. Whereas the naturalism of Mughal painting appears to reflect the greater Muslim interest in historical accuracy, Rajasthani and Pahari paintings express in their rejection of such naturalism an alternate world populated by gods, heroes, and heroines. Thus, colors are selected for their evocative potential and visual impact, and details such as the bodies of the gods are based on local visual formulas. The ultimate goal of such paintings, which are startlingly straightforward visual descriptions, is to present the clearest possible view of all the features of the story being illustrated. As South Asian art often employs continuous narration, in which several episodes from a story are illustrated in one scene, identifying labels are sometimes added to assist in the painting's comprehension.

To some extent, the subject matter and visual concerns which occupied South Asian court painters also informed village artists and continue to do so today. Works by the well-known painters from Mithila, which have been adapted onto paper from ritual wall paintings, indicate a continued interest in the life of the Hindu god Krishna. Poetry and literature describing Krishna's life are among the earliest surviving illustrated Hindu texts. Krishna's unwavering popularity over many centuries is due in part to the fact that this all-powerful god is presented in devotional texts with very human characteristics. In articulating tales from Krishna's life, Mithila painters adhere to the clarity of vision that Rajasthani and Pahari paintings also achieved.



Krishna in South Asian Painting

- The Divine Krishna
- A Journey of Devotion
- Sacred Texts

By Stephanie Kao

Krishna in South Asian Painting

By Stephanie Kao

Observed in intimate venues and set carefully in the hands of the viewer, South Asian miniature paintings illustrating sacred Hindu texts lure the eyes and, in turn, one's spirit into the vast and mysterious world of the divine. For contained within these compact pictorials, a pantheon of Hindu gods, and a myriad of supernatural beings, manifest themselves on earth to engage in divine play (*lila*) with human beings. Of these encounters, one god in particular has enraptured the minds and hearts of Hindus. This supreme being is Krishna (lit: "dark one"), the eighth incarnation (*avatara*; lit. "descent") of the Hindu god Vishnu, the preserver of the universe—identifiable by his luminous blue skin and lotus-petal shaped eyes, as well as a bejeweled peacock feather-crested crown, and yellow lower garment, that adorn him. It is in this princely form that Krishna reveals his divinity to the viewer, inspiring eternal devotion in all who invoke him.

THE DIVINE KRISHNA

The celebrated legends of Krishna are nuanced and complex—from his mischievous childhood antics and amorous boyhood encounters in the pastures of northern India, to his stately conduct as a prince, his spiritual teachings in the *Mahabharata* (Great Chronicle of the Bharata Dynasty), and his awe-inspiring presence as the Supreme Spirit. These legends have inspired Hindu art, poetry, and philosophy for more than two thousand years.

In the Hindu worldview, many believe there is one Supreme Spirit (the formless essence underlying the cosmos) that manifests itself in individual gods and goddesses. One such manifestation, a primary god in the Hindu pantheon, is Vishnu. As protector and preserver, Vishnu descends to earth to restore balance when harmony and order are threatened. In the present cosmic cycle, it is thought that Vishnu has appeared, in various guises, on ten primary occasions.

In most of Vishnu's incarnations, he appears on earth only briefly to remedy a specific problem. Twice, though, as Rama and as Krishna, he remains in the earthly realm for an entire human lifetime, undertaking many righteous acts. Krishna is considered a "full incarnation": a direct embodiment of Vishnu, and through him, endowed with the Supreme Spirit's pure resplendent power.

Throughout most of his existence on earth, Krishna lives in disguise, hiding his true divinity from those who encounter him. Only at select moments, critical junctures in his legend, does Krishna choose to reveal his true form. However, just as quickly, Krishna blankets his witnesses with a veil of illusion (*maya*) as shelter from the overwhelming experience—his omniscient four-armed form, as Vishnu, presents too splendid a vision to behold.

A JOURNEY OF DEVOTION

The chronicles of Krishna's life appeal to the most fundamental human emotions; embedded in the adventures of his legend are universal truths concerning devotion and the path to salvation. In the Hindu tradition, it is believed every soul exists in a perpetual cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsara*); and actions in one life can determine the state of the next (*karma*). The ultimate spiritual goal

of each individual being is to break this cycle by various means and achieve liberation (*moksha*) through union with the Supreme Spirit.

In his famous sermon the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna explains that release from the cycle of rebirths is attainable through three paths: the way of action, the way of knowledge, and the way of devotion. While the first two, traditionally reserved for the upper caste, require knowledge of ancient ritual and study of meditation; the path of devotion is direct, making salvation accessible to individuals of all castes. The caste system is the societal hierarchy in which birth determines ritual and social status. Ancient sacred texts outline the four castes in order from high to lower status: priest, warrior, cultivator and trader, and laborer. The lowest group (formerly known as untouchables and sometimes referred to as the “fifth” group) is considered outside this caste system. For those who worship Krishna, every individual, regardless of caste, can find liberation through ultimate surrender to and personal faith in him, the embodiment of the Supreme Spirit.

Krishna demonstrates his identification with, and concern for, the lower castes by the roles he assumes throughout his divine life. During the period that Krishna fulfills his preordained duty to destroy the demon King Kamsa of Mathura, the god is born into the warrior caste; but in order to hide his true identity, Krishna is raised from infancy to adulthood by a lower-caste family of cowherds. Even in his culminating role in the *Mahabharata*, Krishna serves Arjuna (the third Pandava prince) on the battlefield as his charioteer and counselor.

Among the roles that Krishna fulfills in his lifestory, it is as a divine cowherd that the god became the focus of a vital devotional movement. Inspiring a renaissance of lyrical ballads and imagery during the twelfth century, tales of passion with the cowherd girls, and especially with Radha, Krishna’s favorite, symbolize the devotional fervor experienced by Krishna worshipers. In the *Gita Govinda* (Song of the Cowherd), the Bengali poet Jayadeva captures the emotions between lover and beloved: flirtation, yearning, rapture, and bliss. Eloquent allegories, the longings of the gopis for Krishna express human desire and adoration for the Supreme Spirit.

The tales of Krishna entice the soul on a meandering journey of love and union. Primarily recounted as vignettes rather than as a simple linear narrative, Krishna’s stories mirror the stages of human life and corresponding relationships—parent and child (Yashoda and Krishna); lover and beloved (Radha and Krishna); friend and friend (Arjuna and Krishna)— and illustrate the intense sacred bonds that exist between all of humankind and the Supreme Spirit. In the hearts of devotees, Krishna is an emanation of all that is powerful and divine; and his legends reveal ultimate reflections of his love.

SACRED TEXTS

Accounts of Krishna’s lifestory in sacred Hindu texts date back some 2,500 years. It is not until later, however, in the Hindu epic the *Mahabharata* (Chronicles of the Great Bharata Dynasty; approx. 400 BCE–400 CE), that Krishna’s princely role is introduced. His famous sermon known as the *Bhagavad Gita* (Song of the Lord; approx. 400–300 BCE), appears in the *Mahabharata*. Further elaborations of his lifestory, from his miraculous birth and amorous adolescence to his fatefully ordained death are recorded in the *Harivamsha* (Genealogy of Krishna; 400–500), an appendix to the *Mahabharata*; and in the *Bhagavata Purana* (Sacred Legend of the Divine Krishna; 800–1000), which provides the fullest narration of Krishna’s multifaceted and wondrous life.



The Krishna Legend

- The Krishna Legend: An Introduction
- The Legend: Krishna's Childhood
Art in Focus: Krishna's Childhood
- The Legend: Krishna's Youth
Art in Focus: Krishna's Youth
- The Legend: Krishna's Adulthood
Art in Focus: Krishna's Adulthood
- The Legend: Krishna's Mature Life
Art in Focus: Krishna's Mature Life

By Stephanie Kao

The Krishna Legend: An Introduction

By Stephanie Kao

The life of Krishna illustrates the development of a divine and complex being. The intricate web of stories that comprises Krishna's life incorporates the historical development of his legend—one that was passed down through oral tradition, and then elaborated upon and recorded in sacred texts during a period exceeding a millennium.

Consistent throughout Hindu tradition and teachings is Krishna's accessibility as a personal god. His divine life mirrors that of a mortal, exhibiting many of the same joys and dilemmas associated with the transition from childhood to maturity. Although Krishna's fundamental religious teachings remain the same—illuminating the path of devotion to the Supreme Spirit—the means by which he conveys this wisdom adapts to illustrate the evolution of his human existence.

Krishna's legend begins in northern India. His birth takes place in the city of Mathura, which is ruled by a family of warrior caste. Mathura, a contemporary Indian city, is found on the western side of the Yamuna River, once adjacent to the ancient forests of Vrindavana (Brindaban). On the eastern side was a pastoral region inhabited by cowherds. To the north was the neighboring kingdom of Kurukshetra (contested between descendents of the Bharata dynasty).

Krishna's lifestory may be separated into four broad periods: childhood, youth, adulthood, and mature life. Krishna's childhood is marked by the following events: preordained divine birth; birth to a noble family, but raised by lower caste foster-parents to escape persecution by his uncle, the demon king Kamsa; first years spent in areas outlying the city with his brother Balarama; and defeat of demons sent by his uncle Kamsa who has ordered the slaughter of all male children. During Krishna's youth, he engages in romantic dalliances with the cowherd girls (*gopis*); establishes supremacy over certain ancient gods; and slays Kamsa in an epic battle set in the city of Mathura. Following the defeat of Kamsa, Krishna publicly acknowledges his noble birth, renounces his life as a cowherd, and assumes the duties appropriate to his princely position. Thereafter, Krishna embarks on many heroic adventures that define his adult life. He reinstates the rightful king to the throne of Mathura; defends the city against military attacks by a neighboring kingdom; moves all the inhabitants of Mathura to the city of Dvaraka (on the western seacoast of India) to escape siege from a foreign invader; and marries numerous wives and sires children. Delivering the great sermon known as *Bhagavad Gita* (a text within the Hindu epic the *Mahabharata*) can be viewed as the defining moment of his mature life. The *Mahabharata* records a catastrophic war between two branches of the Bharata family, the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Krishna is compelled to participate both as prince of a neighboring kingdom and relative to the Pandavas. Here, Krishna is not a physical participant in battle, but rather serves as counselor to Arjuna, one of the Pandava brothers and central figure. This last phase concludes with Krishna's return to Dvaraka where he decides his earthly mission has been fulfilled; and in accordance with prophecy, Krishna retires from earthly existence.

Encapsulated within each of these lifestory categories are collections of tales that reveal the development of Krishna's sacred nature. In the following thematic sections, the life of Krishna is observed both through legend and through religious art from India.

The Legend: Krishna's Childhood

There was a time when harmony in the world was disrupted by powerful demons who took the form of malevolent kings. Distressed by the evils that plundered the world, Mother Earth could no longer bear the burden. Assuming the form of a “depressed and piteously lowing cow,” she traveled to the heavens to plead to the god Brahma to rid the earth of these evil spirits.

She addressed the divinities:

At this present season many demons have overrun, and continually harass, the regions of mortals. The great asura [demon] Kalanemi, that was killed by the powerful Vishnu, has revived [in the form] of Kamsa.... Countless hosts of proud and powerful spirits, chiefs of the demon race, assuming celestial forms, now walk the earth; and, unable to support myself beneath the incumbent load, I come to you for succour. Illustrious deities, do you so act that I may be relieved from my burden, lest helpless I sink into the nethermost abyss.

from the *Vishnu Purana*, approx. 450

The demon Kamsa ruled over a kingdom in northern India, centered at the city of Mathura. He had seized power from his own father, the rightful sovereign. Under Kamsa's rule the people suffered terribly, living day to day in terror of his unrelenting persecution.

The god Vishnu, hearing her lament, assured Mother Earth that he would descend to the corporeal world and restore the balance of good and evil in the universe. Vishnu would take the form of a human and be born to a noble family. His father would be Vasudeva and his mother would be Devaki, the sister of King Kamsa. Vishnu plucked off one white hair and one black hair. The white hair would become the couple's seventh child, the divine Balarama, and the black hair would become their eighth child (an incarnation of Vishnu himself), Krishna, who would be destined to destroy the demon King Kamsa.

On the day of Krishna's parents' wedding, King Kamsa drove the couple's wedding chariot in a celebratory procession. Along this journey, a voice was heard from the heavens, which foretold that the eighth son born to Devaki would be the cause of the king's destruction. In fear, King Kamsa raised his sword above his sister's head, but was prevented from making the fatal blow by Vasudeva, who made King Kamsa an offer. In exchange for sparing his wife's life, he promised to surrender to the demon king all sons born to them. King Kamsa consented, but immediately imprisoned the couple, who would be held under close supervision.

Over the years, the couple bore six sons, each of whom they surrendered at birth to King Kamsa. To the parents' horror, Kamsa, in turn, killed each one. Vishnu, foreseeing the threat, transferred Devaki's seventh son from her womb to that of Rohini, Vasudeva's youngest wife. Rohini resided in a neighboring pastoral village under the care of Vasudeva's friends, the cowherd chief Nanda and his wife Yashoda. There, Rohini gave birth to a divine son named Balarama whose complexion was white like that of snow.

When Devaki became pregnant with her eighth son, her entire body radiated. At the stroke of midnight, in the confines of prison, she gave birth to a son named Krishna whose complexion was

blue like that of a “rain-bearing cloud.” He had eyes in the shape of delicate lotus petals. The infant wore a yellow garment and peacock feather–crested crown, and had four arms which held a conch, a mace, a discus, and a lotus flower. In this form, Krishna’s true identity, as an incarnation of Vishnu, was revealed to his human parents. The god then instructed Vasudeva to exchange him with an infant girl born that same night to the cowherd’s wife Yashoda. After delivering this message, Vishnu cast a veil of illusion over the parents and took the form of an ordinary child, thereby hiding, even to them, his divine nature.

Entrusted with this mission to save Krishna from the peril of King Kamsa, Vasudeva escaped from captivity. Placing the infant Krishna into a winnowing basket, and carrying it on his head, he traveled to the neighboring village. Vasudeva forged through heavy rains that caused the great Yamuna River to surge. While he was crossing, the waters rose higher and higher, reaching to Vasudeva’s head. The infant Krishna extended his toe and touched the water, causing it to gently recede. Thus the party was able to traverse to the opposite shore. Father and son arrived at Nanda’s home, where the baby Krishna was exchanged for Nanda’s and Yashoda’s infant girl. In the morning, Yashoda awakened to find a blue-skinned son resting next to her, but being under Vishnu’s divine enchantment, believed him to be her own.

When Vasudeva returned to the palace prison, the guards awoke to the cries of a baby. Thinking that Devaki had given birth to an eighth son, they rushed to inform King Kamsa. The king arrived promptly, swept up the infant, and attempted to hurl her against a stone. However, the baby flew from his hands and was transformed into the eight-armed goddess Durga; whereupon she announced to Kamsa that the divine child of the prophecy had been born elsewhere. The king released Vasudeva and Devaki from imprisonment, as they could no longer do harm. But being alarmed by the goddess’s revelation, he made a proclamation: All healthy young males must be slain.

In their village, Nanda and Yashoda celebrated the birth of their son Krishna. Unknown to them, King Kamsa employed demons to roam the countryside, instructed to destroy young boys. As an infant, Krishna was attacked by three such demons. These assumed various forms: a maiden, a cart, and a whirlwind. Krishna defeated them in turn.

When Krishna became a toddler, he conspired with his older brother, Balarama, and caused great mischief. They crawled through the mud, pulled the calves’ tails, and stole butter. On one such occasion, Balarama complained to Yashoda that Krishna had eaten mud. Yashoda approached Krishna to reprimand him, but Krishna insisted he had not eaten mud and opened his mouth as proof. Yashoda peered inside and was seized with amazement. Within the mouth of Krishna she beheld the entire universe; thus, his divinity was revealed. Krishna then cast a veil of illusion to once again disguise his true nature.

As a result of the demon attacks, the cowherd chief Nanda elected to move the villagers north to the forest of Vrindavana. Once resettled, Krishna, then five years of age, was given the responsibility of grazing young calves. Krishna and Balarama, while performing their duty as cowherd boys, were again attacked by three demons. These assumed the forms of a calf, a crane, and a giant snake. In each instance, Krishna prevailed.

When Krishna was eight years of age, and old enough to graze mature cattle, he one day found the herd ill and unconscious alongside the Yamuna River. They had drunk from a specific whirlpool, home to the giant serpent Kaliya and his wives. Kaliya’s venom was so poisonous it con-

taminated the waters and caused the nearby grass and trees to wilt. The fumes of his venom were so strong that they scorched birds who flew overhead. Krishna climbed a nearby tree and leapt into the poisoned waters. Soon, Krishna was entangled by Kaliya's mighty coils. Krishna expanded his body, breaking free from the serpent's clutch. He then danced with such force upon the serpent that the form of his sacred feet was imprinted on his head. Kaliya's wives implored Krishna to spare their husband's life. Granting their wish, Krishna banished Kaliya from the waters of the Yamuna to a far-away island in the sea where he could no longer bring harm to the villagers and animals.

Art in Focus: Krishna's Childhood



Yashoda rebuking Krishna for eating mud, approx. 1750. Possibly by Gurbaksha. India; former kingdom of Mandi, Himachal Pradesh state. Colors on paper. *Gift of George Hopper Fitch, B86D16*

As children growing up among the cowherds, Krishna and his elder brother Balarama are the source of a variety of village pranks. Frequently, these exploits involve recruiting their little cowherd companions in assisting with the pilfering of milk goods, especially butter—Krishna's preferred treat. In spite of protests from neighbors, victims of the boys' mischief, the boys' foster-mother Yashoda is overcome with love and cannot scold them.

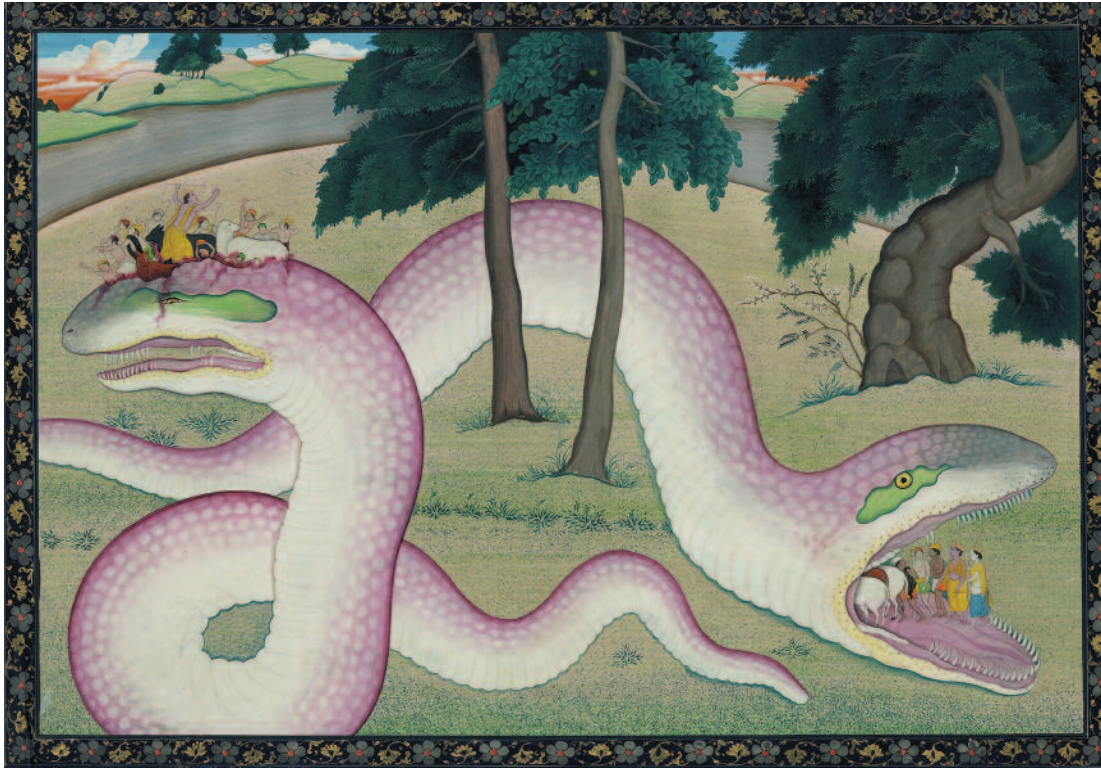
In this scene, Balarama (shown on the right) has informed Yashoda that while playing with friends, he witnessed his brother naughtily eating mud. Krishna steadfastly denies the deed and is about to open his mouth as proof. Yashoda tenderly reaches out with her left hand to wipe the toddler's mouth using a white handkerchief, fully expecting to find Krishna's mouth soiled with earth. Little does Yashoda know that she is about to behold the entire cosmic realm within her child's gaping mouth.

Krishna is shown kneeling in the center of a giant lotus in full bloom—its petals forming a halo around the blue-skinned god. In Hinduism, the lotus flower may represent the sun and cosmic renewal. This painting conveys the intense affection that exists between parent (Yashoda) and child (Krishna), and is symbolic of the unconditional love of a devotee toward the Supreme Spirit.

Yashoda then saw inside the mouth of Krishna the whole universe ... the ethereal dome, the heavenly quarters, the grand divisions of the earth with the mountains, the oceans and the mundane sphere, the atmosphere, the fire and lightning, the planetary system with the moon and the stars, water, light, the sky.... She saw inside his gaping mouth the vast and grand universe in its entirety....

From the *Bhagavata Purana*, 800–1000
Adapted from a translation by Tagare, 1978

Art in Focus: Krishna's Childhood



Krishna's victory over a snake demon, 1800–1900. India; former kingdom of Kangra, Himachal Pradesh state. Colors on paper
Gift of George Hopper Fitch, B84D9

At the age of five, Krishna is given permission by his father to herd calves. His divine charm and playfulness make Krishna a leader among the cowherd boys who eagerly join their herds with his on outings into the forest. In this scene, a giant snake demon plays a clever trick, imitating a mountain cave to attempt to devour the young cowherds and Krishna.

The story is told using a visual device known as continuous narration. On the right, Krishna together with “thousands” of companions and calves, are seen entering the snake demon’s mouth. On the left, the scene continues forward in time, separated by the tree trunks in the center of the painting, showing the boys and calves emerging from the demon’s exploding head.

Characteristic of paintings from the Kangra valley is the landscape composed of rolling hills—the rounded shapes mirrored in the snake’s body and arching Yamuna River in the background. The dominant size of the demon is emphasized by the small scale of the people and the surrounding environment.

The demon lay down on the way with a view to devouring them with an expanded mouth like the cave of a mountain. The lower lip extended to the earth and the upper touched the clouds and the ends were like expanded mountain caves. The teeth were like the summits of a mountain; the interior of its mouth was like darkness and the tongue was the road thereof.... Krishna, thinking how the life of this wicked one may be taken and those of the boys saved, himself at last entered into the mouth of that demon.... Being desirous of destroying it, he speedily increased his own form in the throat of [the demon]. Thereupon the throat of that huge-bodied demon was obstructed and his eyes burst out of their sockets. The wind inside his body was obstructed and being choked in full in no time it issued out riving the head of the demon.

From the *Bhagavata Purana*, 800–1000
Adapted from a translation by Tagare, 1978

Art in Focus: Krishna's Childhood



Krishna overcoming the serpent Kaliya, 1988. By Bauwa Devi, Indian. Colors on paper. Purchased with funds from the Society for Asian Art and General Acquisition Funds, 1999.39.16

As Krishna grows older, his responsibilities as the incarnation of Vishnu, restorer of universal order, begin to manifest themselves in a variety of ways. In addition to defending the cowherd villagers against King Kamsa's demon attacks, he also keeps watch over the environment, monitoring the delicate balance of nature in the idyllic forest of Vrindavana.

One of the most famous episodes in Krishna's life is his victory over the serpent Kaliya whose poisonous venom infected the Yamuna River making it undrinkable to animals and humans—threatening the livelihood of the local people. In this painting, Krishna has just emerged from the clutches of Kaliya's coils and proceeds to dance victoriously on top of the serpent.

Kaliya's vigor is indicated by his dominant size in proportion to Krishna—the serpent's body occupying the majority of the surface space in a giant tear-drop arch. Krishna's tremendous feat over the fearsome serpent is clearly communicated in his emphatically central position stomping on Kaliya's body, and by the action of his right hand that playfully yanks the tongues of six of the serpent heads (a seventh serpent head coils to Krishna's right).

This style of painting known as Mithila (named after the region of India where it originated) developed from a tradition of ritual wall and floor paintings created by village women in celebration of marriages and other festivals. In the late 1960s with the support of the Indian government, women from this historically underprivileged area were encouraged to transfer their works—characterized by highly stylized, geometric shapes and motifs—onto paper. As a result of this transition, women painters were inspired to incorporate broader subject matter that included personal life experiences and expressions of devotion.

Within its bed was the fearful pool of the serpent Kaliya, boiling with the fires of poison from the fumes of which large trees on the bank were blighted, and by whose waters, when raised by a gale into the air, birds were scorched.... Krishna decided to dislodge Kaliya for it was the purpose of his descent upon earth to reduce to subjection all such violators of law.... Laying hold of the middle hood of Kaliya with both his hands, he bent it down, and set his foot upon it, and danced upon it in triumph.... Trampled upon by his feet, as they changed position in the dance, the snake fainted, and vomited forth much blood.... Finding their serpent-husband collapsing under the infinite weight of Krishna its distressed wives folded their palms and sought asylum in Krishna who affords protection to all.

From the *Bhagavata Purana*, 800–1000
Adapted from a translation by Tagare, 1978

The Legend: Krishna's Youth

As Krishna grew older, the gods watched with envy his developing powers and irresistible charm. At the same time, Krishna also became aware of his influence among the cowherd villagers and in his adolescent mischievousness, directly challenged the ancient gods. One day, Krishna observed the villagers preparing for the annual sacrifice to Indra, the god of rain. Nanda explained that they worshipped Indra because his rainfall was what replenished the land. Unconvinced, Krishna then persuaded the cowherds to worship the nearby Mount Govardhana instead. The villagers took the offerings meant for Indra to the base of Mount Govardhana, and circumambulated the mountain with their cattle leading the way. Observing these proceedings, Indra was enraged and set upon them a torrential storm. At this, Krishna lifted the entire mountain top with the tip of his little finger, and under the mountain, the villagers and cattle took shelter. Seven days passed, and Indra finally acknowledged Krishna's divine supremacy.

When Krishna reached twelve years of age, he became the object of the cowherd girls' (*gopis*) adoration. Although Krishna appeared to be a young fellow, the cowherd girls knew in their hearts he was a god, and could not resist his attraction. One autumn night, Krishna lured the cowherd girls with the sounds of his melodious flute, away from their husbands and homes, deep into the forest. There they met, played in the Yamuna River, and danced under the moonlight. It was not long before the cowherd girls were filled with pride—each one thinking she was more beloved than the other. Krishna, displeased by their manner, decided they needed to be humbled, and he disappeared. With Krishna gone, the cowherd girls searched desperately in the forest calling out his name. They discovered that he had wandered off with his favorite cowherd girl (later known as Radha). The girls lamented the separation from their irresistible companion. Finally convinced of their sincere devotion to him, Krishna returned to conduct a special romantic dance (*rasa lila*) in which the cowherd girls held hands forming a large circle. Krishna then multiplied himself and appeared between every two girls, so that each thought she alone danced next to him.

Krishna and Balarama together faced further assaults from demons in the form of an ogre and a bull. Subsequently, Kamsa discovered Krishna's identity and location when a sage informed the demon king of Krishna's escape and substitution at birth. In response, Kamsa once again imprisoned Vasudeva and Devaki.

Aware of the location of Krishna's residence, Kamsa sent a horse demon and a wolf demon to destroy Krishna. When Krishna successfully vanquished them, King Kamsa devised another plan: he would invite cowherds from the village to Mathura, for the "sacrifice of the bow" celebration held in honor of the god Shiva. Krishna and Balarama would participate in a wrestling match during which Kamsa would have them killed.

Escorted by a local chief, who had secretly informed Krishna of King Kamsa's plan, the cowherds arrived in Mathura. To announce their presence, Krishna grabbed the gigantic bow of Shiva, snapped it in half, and then killed the soldiers who guarded it. The next morning, as Krishna and Balarama entered the wrestling arena, they were charged by a giant elephant and attacked by two of King Kamsa's greatest wrestlers. The divine brothers slew them all, after which Krishna jumped onto the raised platform where King Kamsa sat, seized the demon king by the hair, hurled him to the ground, and crushed him under the weight of his body. At last, the demon King Kamsa was destroyed and the people of Mathura, together with the gods in the heavens, rejoiced.

Art in Focus: Krishna's Youth



Krishna lifting Govardhana, approx. 1800. India; former kingdom of Datia, Madhya Pradesh state. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. Gift of George Hopper Fitch, R1998.2.8

When he is a teenager, Krishna's divine powers begin to attract the attention of the gods. In some instances, they challenge Krishna and his growing status among the villagers, and in other cases, it is Krishna himself who confronts the gods to establish his divine supremacy (as an incarnation of Vishnu). In this painting, Krishna is shown convincing the people of the region to stop their annual sacrifice to Indra, and instead to worship Mount Govardhana.

The story is told using a visual device known as continuous narration. On the left, the villagers are shown praying to the mountain, as well as to Krishna and Balarama (who stands by his side). The scene continues forward in time, on the right side of the painting where Indra can be seen (upper right corner) beckoning his army of rain clouds to bring forth a deluge of rain upon the people below as punishment. The rain is depicted as vertical, arching white stripes, and droplets of white paint. The force of the storm is further indicated by the trees that sway to and fro under the pressure of the downpouring water. In the center of the painting Krishna is shown raising Mount Govardhana under which the villagers and calves take shelter. The supremacy of Krishna over the god Indra is validated by the calves and villagers, who are shown looking upward in adoration of the blue-skinned god. Next to portions of this painting are notations further describing the episode to the viewer.

Soon, amidst dreadful roaring, destruction-bearing stormclouds as big as mountains began covering over the sky. The heavy clouds rampaged about like a herd of elephants. They slithered across the sky like crocodiles or snakes. They made the day like night. They flung down torrents not in separate drops but in streams, as though spouted from an elephant's trunk. To those below it seemed as though the very ocean, boundless and fathomless, had risen into the heavens.... Seeing the downcast faces of the herders and the havoc brought on the herds by this vast storm, Krishna became incensed. Then he thought exultantly, "I shall lift up Govardhana!" Krishna, whose strength was vast; Krishna, himself like a mountain; Krishna, Vishnu on earth, then calmly lifted up the hill with his hand. Loose rocks were sent crashing down, and trees were uprooted by the jolt. Its crags were revolving and falling all about, but the hill nonetheless ascended to the skies. "Does that hill have wings?" wondered the gods overhead.

From the *Harivamsha*, 400–500
Adapted from a translation by Hutchins, 1980

Art in Focus: Krishna's Youth



The Hindu deity Krishna and his beloved, symbolizing a musical mode (*Dipaka Raga*), approx. 1760. India; former province of Avadh, Uttar Pradesh state. Colors on paper. Gift of George Hopper Fitch, B84D7

This painting belongs to a series known as a *ragamala* (garland of musical modes), a fusion of classical Indian music, poetry, and painting. In this creative synthesis, Indian melodies are codified according to the specific mood, season, and time of day or night evoked by the music; poetry is set to accompany this music; and lastly paintings or visual interpretations are created to further articulate particular emotions. The male and female figures in these paintings are visual personifications of these musical modes—their relationships express love in both union and separation.

Originally, *ragamala* paintings and Krishna devotion were unrelated. However, over time the male figure in these paintings came to be associated with the blue-skinned god Krishna whose characteristics as divine lover embody the sentiments so delicately expressed in Indian classical music and poetry.

This *ragamala* depicts the melody of light or flame (*dipaka*), played during the evening hours, when a young man meets his beloved by candlelight. In this painting, Krishna and his lover rest against flower-patterned cushions on a white terrace. The couple sits in gentle embrace gazing up toward the darkened sky ornamented with wriggling waves of lightning, a symbol of fire and of the couple's inner passions.

The Legend: Krishna's Adulthood

With the destruction of King Kamsa, Krishna and Balarama proceeded to correct the demon king's wrongdoings. They released their parents from the palace prison, reinstated the rightful king to the throne, and claimed their appropriate status as princes. They became educated by a family priest in the manner befitting their warrior status; and under his guidance, quickly learned the sacred texts, as well as the arts of arms and warfare. Although the demon king Kamsa had been defeated, Krishna realized the people of Mathura urgently needed his protection, and he decided not to return to the forests of Vrindavana.

Not long after the rightful king took the throne, Mathura was attacked by the powerful armies of the king of Magadha. His daughters had been married to Kamsa, and on their behalf, he was taking revenge on Kamsa's enemies. After numerous assaults, the king of Magadha joined leagues with a ruthless foreign invader. Foreseeing untold deaths as a result of this joint attack, Krishna had the golden city of Dvaraka built (on the western seaboard of India), and had all of the inhabitants of Mathura transported there.

In Dvaraka, Krishna and Balarama decided it would be fitting to their status and stage in life to be married. Balarama married a princess, and Krishna took on numerous wives during a series of heroic adventures—the four primary wives being the princesses Rukmini, Jambhavati, Satyabhama, and Kalindi.

One day, the god Indra, the king of the ancient gods and Krishna's former adversary, now implored Krishna to assist him by slaying the demon Naraka who had seized precious valuables belonging to several gods. This demon had committed numerous other atrocities including kidnapping the maidens of earthly kings. Krishna agreed, and riding his mount Garuda (half-man and half-bird) to Naraka's fortress, beheaded the demon during an epic battle. Krishna retrieved the stolen items and released the 16,100 maidens held captive. Each of these women desired Krishna, and it was in this way he married all of them.

Krishna and his favorite wife, Satyabhama, then flew on Garuda's back to the heavens to return the gods' valuables. They were greeted with respect by some deities but scoffed at by Indra's wife. While in the courtyard, Satyabhama smelled the sweet fragrance emitted by a wish-fulfilling (*parijata*) tree and told Krishna she wanted it as her own. Krishna uprooted the tree and planted it on Garuda's back, whereby the guards exclaimed the tree was the favorite of Indra's wife, and that they had no right to remove it. Hearing the commotion, Indra descended and engaged with Krishna in a violent struggle over the coveted tree. In the end, Krishna was victorious and Indra repented. It was then that Satyabhama revealed her true intentions—to teach Indra's wife a lesson for her poor behavior; and although Satyabhama offered to return the wish-fulfilling tree, Indra insisted that Satyabhama keep it to enjoy in her garden in Dvaraka.

Art in Focus: Krishna's Adulthood



Stealing of the wish-fulfilling tree, 1700–1800. India; former kingdom of Malwa, Madhya Pradesh state. Ink and colors on paper. Gift of George Hopper Fitch, R1998.2.4

In Krishna's adult life, he establishes the city of Dvaraka and maintains his role as protector of his people. Krishna has long since shed his childhood mischievousness, and has become a cunning warrior-hero with numerous wives and children. His adulthood is replete with dramatic adventures that frequently revolve around the needs of his family and relatives. This painting, visually separated into an upper and lower panel, tells the story of the wish-fulfilling tree and the events leading up to its theft from Indra's heaven. At Indra's request, Krishna slays the demon Naraka who, among countless other evil deeds, had imprisoned princesses and stolen the earrings belonging to a goddess.

The lower portion of this painting depicts Krishna's rescue of the princesses, all of whom Krishna later marries.

Krishna entered the series of compartments and dwelling units of the demon's harem. He found there sixteen thousand and one hundred daughters of kings brought as captives.... Krishna sent them all to Dvaraka in palanquins. He dispatched along with them valuable treasure as well as chariots, horses and immense wealth. Krishna also sent sixty-four white, four-tusked, swift-footed elephants.

From the *Bhagavata Purana*, 800–1000
Adapted from a translation by Tagare, 1978

In the upper portion is a chronologically later scene depicting the theft of the wish-fulfilling tree from the god Indra. Krishna steals this tree at the urging of his third wife, Satyabhama. She says to him:

The enjoyers of the fruits of this tree have all their desires fulfilled thereby. The space at its foot is paved with corals, its huge trunk is all gold; it is covered with tender leaves of sapphires and the platform around it is built of shining lapis lazuli. It blossoms forth in ruby flowers and is laden with ripe fruits in the form of gemstones. It shines with the flower-filaments of diamonds. It is beautiful with hundreds of big branches of lustrous emeralds.... If I am really loved by you, the tree should be taken away to our city, O Krishna. Seeing me sitting under the shade of this tree, your other queens would look upon me as your beloved-most spouse.

From the *Bhagavata Purana*, 800–1000
Adapted from a translation by Tagare, 1978

A fierce battle ensues over ownership of the tree, in which Krishna is triumphant. In the top left portion of the painting Indra (depicted with “one thousand” eyes), is shown bowing in deference to the blue-skinned god. Krishna rides next to his wife on his mount Garuda and is rendered with four arms holding Vishnu’s attributes: discus, mace, conch shell, and lotus. The cluster of bees that surround Satyabhama, from the transport of the tree from Indra’s heaven to her garden terrace in Dvaraka, is symbolic of her attractiveness.

The Legend: Krishna's Mature Life

Once he was established as prince, Krishna became aware of rising conflicts between two branches of Bharata dynasty, the Pandavas and the Kauravas, who resided in the neighboring kingdom of Kurukshetra. When the Pandavas' father who was to inherit the kingdom died, their cousins the Kauravas began to employ trickery to depose the Pandavas. Krishna became involved in these affairs because of his relation to the Pandavas through his father's family (Kunti, the mother of the three eldest Pandava brothers, was Krishna's aunt). In addition, one of the Pandava brothers married Krishna's sister, Subhadara.

More than a decade would pass before tensions between the Pandavas and Kauravas reached their climax. The Kauravas had tricked the eldest of the Pandava brothers into gambling away his wealth and kingdom. The Pandavas were sent into exile and it was then that they consulted with Krishna on their plan of action.

The Pandavas and Kauravas began consolidating their forces, and finally a leader of the Kauravas, as well as the Pandava hero Arjuna, approached Krishna to fight on their side. Krishna offered them a critical choice—to have the services of himself as an unarmed counselor, or to have his army. The Kaurava leader chose the army, but Arjuna wisely selected Krishna.

On the eve of the battle, Arjuna requested that Krishna drive his chariot to the center of the battlefield between the opposing forces. Looking upon the Pandava and Kaurava armies about to engage in war, Arjuna was overcome with fear and despair. On the field, he saw relatives, teachers, and friends on both sides of the conflict. Arjuna put down his bow and arrow, and debated with Krishna his ethical dilemma—whether to do his duty as a member of the warrior caste, or to follow his personal duty as a member of a family that included his adversaries. He questioned the purpose of fighting, foreseeing that all would be slain. In response to this ethical dilemma, Krishna then delivered a sermon known as *Bhagavad Gita*, explaining to Arjuna that he had nothing to fear, since death affects only one's physical body, not the soul which is immortal. The most honorable action, he explained, is to do one's duty (*dharma*) without selfish concern for the fruits of one's deeds. Lastly, ultimate devotion to him (Krishna) is, in itself, a path to salvation. As proof of his divinity, Krishna revealed to Arjuna his true magnificent cosmic form. At sunrise, the epic battle began.

The Pandavas were victorious, albeit at a devastating price in life. Krishna returned with the Pandavas to their kingdom. On their arrival, the mother of the Kauravas was inconsolable, having heard that all of her children had died, and she cursed Krishna—prophesizing the destruction of his people. Thereupon, having completed his mission in protecting the Pandavas, Krishna traveled back to his own people in the city of Dvaraka.

One day in Dvaraka, a group of boys teased a gathering of brahmins. One boy, dressing like a girl, pretended to be pregnant and asked one of the brahmins to guess the sex of the child. Angered by his sacrilege, the brahmins informed the boy he would give birth to an iron club that would crush the people of Dvaraka. The boys rushed in panic to inform their king what had transpired, and when the boy did indeed magically bear an iron club, the king had it ground to powder and thrown into the ocean. He did not know that one long sliver remained, later devoured by a fish, and that deep in the waters the iron dust would transform itself into sharp reed rushes.

The gods descended to earth to tell Krishna he had successfully restored harmony in the world and beckoned him to return to the heavens. Feeling his divine purpose had been fulfilled, Krishna informed the gods that he would ascend to his celestial bode in seven days. However, in accordance with the dark prophecy, a form of madness overtook the people, and many fought in a drunken rage. When their weapons were exhausted, they grabbed the iron-tinged rushes from the shore. With these, the last blows were stuck and many of Krishna's compatriots died.

Krishna took refuge in the forest where he observed his brother Balarama sitting against the root of a tree. Balarama was in fact an incarnation of a powerful serpent, and now Krishna saw the serpent emerge from Balarama's mouth and return to the sea. Realizing that Balarama had retired from the earth, Krishna found a tree for himself to sit under and meditated, resting his foot upon his knee. Then, an arrow made with the sliver of the ill-fated iron club pierced his ankle. A hunter had found the sliver in a fish he had caught; and had constructed the arrow-tip from this sliver. Having been struck with the fated arrow, Krishna prepared to depart from this world. The hunter rushed to the god apologizing profusely—from the distance, he had thought Krishna was a deer. Krishna forgave him and sent him on a celestial chariot to the abode of the gods. The earthly Krishna having thus fulfilled his destiny to restore harmony within the world, prepared to reunite with his cosmic spirit. The waters of the ocean rose to engulf the divine city of Dvaraka, and Krishna, the magnificent blue-skinned god, departed his mortal body to ascend to the luminous heavens.

Art in Focus: Krishna's Mature Life



Krishna driving Arjuna's chariot, approx. 1750–1825. India; Kashmir state. Colors on paper. Gift of Margaret Polak, 1996.6

The defining moment of Krishna's mature life occurs in his role as charioteer and advisor to Arjuna, one of the Pandava brothers, in the Bhagavad Gita, a portion of the epic Mahabharata.

In this great war between two branches of the Bharata family, the Pandavas and the Kauravas, Krishna allies himself with the Pandavas agreeing to counsel the hero Arjuna on the battlefield on the condition that he, Krishna, does not physically engage in fighting. On the eve of the battle, Arjuna doubts his ability to harm his own kinsmen and questions whether victory is worth untold deaths. Krishna imparts to Arjuna the importance of fulfilling one's societal duty (*dharma*), acting without concern for the benefits of one's actions, and giving oneself entirely to Krishna (the Supreme Spirit). Krishna then reveals his true cosmic self to Arjuna as proof of his divinity.

The underlying power of the scene in this painting is that it takes place immediately prior to the moment of Arjuna's ethical dilemma. Here the Pandavas are shown having assembled their forces riding atop an army of elephants and horses. Arjuna sits confidently in his chariot, his bow hanging over his left shoulder and his right hand grasping two arrows. Krishna blows his conchshell horn in anticipation of the impending confrontation. The majestic regalia of this image is in dramatic contrast to what is about to take place: Arjuna setting down his weapons in anguish over the task that looms ahead.

Characteristic of miniature paintings from Kashmir is a profusion of colors especially pink, lilac, and crimson; the bodies of horses overlapping with raised forelegs; and lotus-petal motifs incorporated throughout the composition.

Standing on their great chariot yoked with white stallions, Krishna and Arjuna sounded their divine conches.... The noise tore the hearts of the Kauravas, and tumult echoed through heaven and earth.... Arjuna told his charioteer: "Krishna, halt my chariot between the armies! Far enough for me to see these men who lust for war." Arjuna saw them standing there: fathers, grandfathers, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, and friends.... Dejected, filled with strange pity, he said this: "Krishna, I see my kinsmen gathered here. My limbs sink, my mouth is parched, my body trembles, the hair bristles on my flesh.... I lament the great sin we commit when our greed for kingship and pleasures drives us to kill our kinsmen.... Saying this, Arjuna slumped into the chariot and laid down his bow and arrows, his mind tormented by grief.

From the *Bhagavad Gita*, 400–300 BCE
Adapted from a translation by Miller, 1998



Art in Focus: Suggested Activities for the Classroom

By Alina Collier

Art in Focus: Suggested Activities for the Classroom

By Alina Collier

The following section features discussion points and activities that complement the posters in this set.

Activities for each image are divided into three sections:

LOOK

Basic questions that encourage students to look closely at important features of the image.

THINK

Critical thinking discussion points that promote analysis and interpretation of the themes, key messages, artist's intent, and composition of each image.

IMAGINE AND CREATE

A selection of activities that includes writing exercises, art projects, or discussion points.

Because these activities have not been written for a specific grade level, you will need to adjust the content to the level of your students.



Yashoda rebuking Krishna for eating mud, approx. 1750. Possibly by Gurbaksha. India; former kingdom of Mandi, Himachal Pradesh state. Colors on paper. *Gift of George Hopper Fitch, B86D16*

LOOK

- What is unusual about the baby depicted in this painting? What is the color of his skin? Who is this baby?
- What is he wearing? What do you think his attire signifies?
- Where is the baby sitting? Is this unusual? Why or why not?
- What is the woman holding? What do you think she is doing?
- What kind of plants can be found in this painting?

THINK

The lotus has a special meaning in Indian art. As a flower that grows from muddy waters, the lotus symbolizes the beautiful or good rising above the impure. It remains a symbol of spiritual perfection. Today, it is the national flower of India.

- Why do you think the artist chose to depict Krishna sitting on a lotus?
- Why do you think stories of Krishna's childhood are very popular in India?

IMAGINE AND CREATE

ACTIVITY ONE

Objective: Students identify the characteristics of Krishna as a child.

1. Tell stories of Krishna's childhood. Some are included in this packet; additional versions are available through other sources. Please refer to the bibliography for suggestions.
2. After listening to stories about Krishna's childhood, each student lists at least five characteristics they would use to describe Krishna's youthful personality and adventures. Students also list a specific example to support each characteristic. Use **Activity Sheet A** as a guide for this activity.
3. Lead a classroom discussion with the students. Some discussion points are:
 - What are the most common characteristics of Krishna as a child?
 - Are these characteristics the same as/different than how you would describe a younger brother or sister?
 - What examples would you use to support your choice of characteristics?
 - Why do you think stories about Krishna's childhood are so popular?
4. Compare these characteristics of young Krishna to those of other literary characters. Ask students to name other famous children or childlike characters that have similar characteristics. What is it about these characters that is so endearing to audiences?

ACTIVITY TWO

Postcards and posters of young Krishna can be found throughout India. In this activity, the students create their own postcards to send to each other (or to exchange with another class).

Objective: Students illustrate their understanding of major events in young Krishna's life by creating postcards depicting Krishna as a child.

1. Using the Internet, search for popular images of baby Krishna (a Google image search for "baby Krishna" produces some good results). Alternatively, you can purchase postcards and posters from stores with "global" merchandise (in the Bay Area, stores on Haight Street in San Francisco or Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley would be good places to start).

Examples of popular-style images can be found at:

<http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan/Programs/sac/Outreach/smithposter/krishna.asp>

2. Have each student illustrate his or her favorite story or event from Krishna's childhood on a postcard. There is no right or wrong way to depict the story. Each artist can have a personal interpretation of the story. Encourage students to be creative and use their imaginations!
3. When students are done, the completed postcards can be exchanged for sharing and comparison.

ACTIVITY THREE

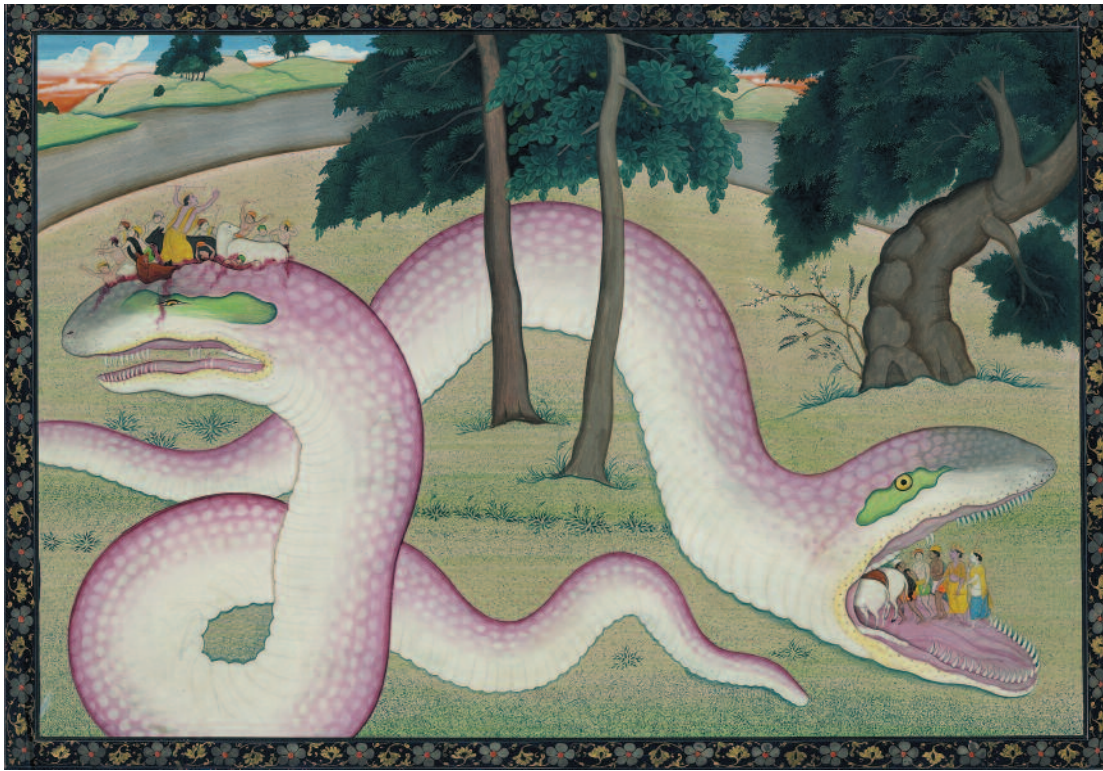
Objective: Students illustrate their own interpretation of the "universe" that Yashoda saw in Krishna's mouth.

1. Read the following passage (also found in the introductory portion of this packet):

Yashoda then saw inside the mouth of Krishna the whole universe... the ethereal dome, the heavenly quarters, the grand divisions of the earth with the mountains, the oceans and the mundane sphere, the atmosphere, the fire and lightning, the planetary system with the moon and the stars, water, light, the sky... She saw inside his gaping mouth the vast and grand universe in its entirety...

From the *Bhagavata Purana*, 800–1000
Adapted from a translation by Tagare, 1978

2. Have students illustrate what they think Yashoda saw when Krishna opened his mouth.



Krishna's victory over a snake demon, 1800–1900. India; former kingdom of Kangra, Himachal Pradesh state. Colors on paper
Gift of George Hopper Fitch, B84D9

LOOK

- What animal is the main subject of this painting? What characteristics do you associate with this animal? What other animals do you see?
- What are the people doing?
- Describe the setting of this scene. Where does it take place?
- Where is Krishna? How can you tell?

THINK

Some Indian paintings use continuous narration to depict in one image multiple events that occur over a span of time. To a viewer unfamiliar with this type of presentation, it may appear that the events are taking place all at once. In this example, the painting seemingly depicts two serpents. However, upon closer inspection, you can see that the same human figures appear twice; walking into the serpent's mouth on the right and bursting out of the same serpent's head on the left. These events are not simultaneous and happen over a period of time. This is an important detail to point out to students.

- Look closely at the people in this painting. Where in the painting can you find the people? What is unusual about where they appear?

IMAGINE AND CREATE

ACTIVITY ONE

Objective: Students research individual Hindu demons and create profiles of their chosen characters to be expressed in the format of a “Wanted” poster.

1. Many stories feature a classic conflict between the “good guys” and the “bad guys.” Who is portrayed as the “bad guy” in this poster?

Divide the class into five to six groups and assign each group a specific demon from Hindu mythology.

2. As a group, students must research their chosen demons and identify the following:

- What is his/her name?
- What does he/she look like? (a physical description)
- Where can he/she be found or where was he/she last seen?
- What deeds and activities is the demon known for?
- What are the demon’s principal characteristics?

3. Create a “Wanted” poster of your assigned demon. Don’t forget to include a color picture!



Krishna overcoming the serpent Kaliya, 1988. By Bauwa Devi, Indian. Colors on paper. Purchased with funds from the Society for Asian Art and General Acquisition Funds, 1999.39.16

LOOK

- What animal is depicted in this painting?
- What words would you use to describe this kind of animal?
- Do you think this animal is dangerous or friendly? What makes you think that?
- How has the artist simplified the shape of the animal?
- What do you think the man is doing? Describe his emotions(s).

THINK

Religious and magical images were traditionally painted on the walls of houses throughout the Mithila region of Bihar state in India.

- Why would someone want to paint special images on the walls of her/his house? Where else have you seen a painting on a wall?

This is a very popular and well-known Krishna story.

- Why do you think this story is so popular?
- How is Krishna portrayed in this story?

IMAGINE AND CREATE

ACTIVITY ONE

Objective: Students compare and contrast different depictions of the same story.

Due to its popularity, this incident is depicted in many different styles and mediums. In this activity, students compare and contrast different depictions of the same story including their own interpretations.

1. Tell the story of Krishna subduing the demon Kaliya to the students without showing the image. You can paraphrase the story from the background information in this packet or use a version from one of the suggested story books (in the bibliography).

Suggest that students close their eyes and focus on visualizing the story.

2. After they have heard the story, have the students spend no more than five minutes sketching how they would depict this story in a picture. They may choose to draw any scene or the entire story in any style they choose.
3. Show the poster to the students. Start a discussion with the students comparing their images to the one in the painting.
 - How are they the same/different?
 - What part of the story was most commonly depicted?
 - How important or unimportant is the setting or background?

Ask for volunteers to describe how they decided to draw their particular scene.

4. Show other images of the same event from the Asian Art Museum collection (see activity sheets C, D, E). Compare and contrast these with the previous images.

ACTIVITY TWO

Creating a Mithila-style painting

Objective: Students identify the characteristics of Mithila paintings and create their own Mithila-style paintings.

Mithila-style paintings were traditionally painted by women. However, in recent years men have also taken up the art as the demand grows for this style of painting. To the people of Mithila, the painting of these images can be a devotional or meditative act which brings the painter close to the deity being painted.

1. Look at several examples of other Mithila-style paintings from the Asian Art Museum collection (activity sheets F, G, and H).
 - What are the characteristics of Mithila-style painting?
 - What colors (if any) are used?
 - Are the figures drawn with lifelike features?
 - How are human figures positioned?
 - How is empty space filled in each painting?
 - How are the borders of the paintings decorated?
2. Read about another event in Krishna's life from this packet. You will create your own painting using Mithila-style characteristics.
3. Before you draw or paint your Mithila-style image, clear your mind and take a couple of deep breaths. Be calm and silent as you work on your image. Painting the image is sometimes an act of worship for the people of this region of India. Although your painting will not carry the same meaning for you, we should be respectful and paint the image while thinking good thoughts.
4. Draw/paint your selected story in the Mithila style, making sure you are aware of the characteristics we identified earlier. These paintings may look simple, but you might discover that they are rather difficult, but fun, to create.
5. For a longer, more comprehensive unit on this topic written and field tested by Bay Area teachers, please refer to:

<http://www.ias.berkeley.edu/orias/Mithila/OverviewMithila.htm>

Some common characteristics include:

- Faces of animals and people have wide open eye(s), often drawn in profile.
- Leaves or flower motifs are used to embellish the background, leaving very little negative space.
- Figures are sometimes outlined by a double line, shaded with diagonal lines.
- Everything including the border, flower motifs, central figures, etc. is outlined in black.
- If color is used, earthy tones such as brown, green, red, and yellow are used.

These are just some general characteristics. There are also differences resulting from artists' personal taste, family and professional background, and regional style.



Krishna lifting Govardhana, approx. 1800. India; former kingdom of Datia, Madhya Pradesh state. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. Gift of George Hopper Fitch, R1998.2.8

LOOK

- Where is Krishna? How can you identify Krishna? What does he seem to be doing?
- What are the villagers doing? How would you describe their emotions?
- What animals are depicted in this painting?
- Look at the sky. If you were a reporter, what would the weather report be for the evening news?

THINK

- Look at Krishna as he lifts the mountain. How does he feel? How can you tell?
- Why would Krishna be able to lift a mountain? What does this say about him?
- Cows are considered to be sacred animals in India. What is happening to the cows in this image?

IMAGINE AND CREATE

ACTIVITY ONE

Objective: Students demonstrate that they understand the concept of point of view through the retelling of this story.

1. Discuss the concept of point of view with the students. Point of view is how a person views a situation or an object.
2. Rewrite the story from the perspective of other characters in the story. The students can choose to write from the perspective of Indra, or of a farmer from the nearby village. Rather than simply retelling the story, encourage students to write the story as though they are the characters. Ask the students to write about how their chosen characters feel about what is happening in this story. Some sample prompting questions are included below.

Writing from Indra's perspective:

- Why do the villagers make offerings to you?
- Why are you angry at Krishna?
- How do you feel when the villagers do not make offerings to you?
- What did you think when you saw Krishna lift the mountain?

Writing from the villager's perspective:

- Why do you make offerings to the god Indra?
- What do you do for a living? Why is it important to appease the god of rain?
- What do you think of Krishna when you meet him?
- What do you think of his ideas? Do you choose to follow his suggestions? Explain why.

ACTIVITY TWO

Hindu worship is a central theme of this painting. Here, Krishna convinces the villagers to worship the mountain instead of Indra.

Throughout India, Hindu deities are worshipped everywhere from large temples to smaller shrines in the home or along the road. In this activity students explore how and where Hindus worship.

Suggested materials:

“The Hindu Temple” (4 minutes, produced by the Asian Art Museum) or “Puja: Hindu Devotion” (30 minutes, produced by the Smithsonian)

1. Watch the video entitled “The Hindu Temple” or “Puja: Hindu Devotion.” Both video programs are available for loan from the Resource Center at the Asian Art Museum.
2. After watching the videos, lead a discussion about Hindu worship in India.
3. Where do Hindus worship? Name all the different places where Hindu shrines and altars can be found.
4. What is puja? What kinds of offerings are made as part of a puja? List the items you would bring to a Hindu temple or altar to worship.
5. Think of a time you have made an offering to honor someone. Whom did you choose to honor? What kinds of offerings did you make? Why did you choose to make an offering?

An offering to deities is commonplace in many religions. Simple acts of worship such as lighting a candle, burning incense, or leaving food for a deity or ancestor happen on a daily basis all over the world.

Be sure to encourage students to think of more secular offerings that might be made such as cookies and milk left for Santa Claus.

ACTIVITY THREE

Objective: Students demonstrate their understanding of this Krishna tale by writing and performing a play based on the story.

1. Discuss scriptwriting with the class. What roles are needed for this play? What role can a narrator perform? How will you represent the mountain and forces of nature?
2. Divide the class into two groups. Each group collectively writes a script to be performed. Each student must speak at least one line in the play. Encourage students to think of creative ways to portray their characters. For example, the student who plays Krishna can wear blue clothing to distinguish himself from the others. If time allows, encourage students to make props.
3. Devote one class period to the performance of the two plays.



The Hindu deity Krishna and his beloved, symbolizing a musical mode (*Dipaka Raga*), approx. 1760. India; former province of Avadh, Uttar Pradesh state. Colors on paper. Gift of George Hopper Fitch, B84D7

LOOK

Look at the setting of the painting.

- What time of day is it?
- How many people are in the painting? Is there anyone else around?
- How are the figures positioned?

THINK

- Describe the buildings in this scene. Is there anything special about these buildings? Who would live in a building like this? Give reasons to support your answer.
- What are the figures looking at in the sky? What is providing the light in this scene? How does this affect the mood?

IMAGINE AND CREATE

ACTIVITY ONE

Objective: In this activity, students discuss mood and how it can be conveyed in music, visual arts, and literature.

1. Distribute **Activity Sheet B** and write three columns on the board (music, poetry, painting).
2. Play a sample of an Indian raga. Recordings are available through most public libraries.

A raga is an improvisational piece of music with a particular structure and certain emotional connotations. Because there are many different ragas, it is unlikely that you will be able to find the specific raga associated with this painting. However, most ragas will give students a feel for the type of music that inspired this painting. Suggested artists include Ustad Allaudin Khan Saheb, Ravi Shankar, or Ali Akbar Khan.

As they are listening to the music, ask students to list words that come to mind as they listen to the music. List examples of the students' responses on the board.

3. Read aloud one of the selected Indian poems from **Reading Excerpt A**. Ask students to list words they would associate with this poem.
4. Show the painting of Krishna and his beloved. Ask students to list words they would associate with this painting.
5. What were the most common words used by the class? Write them on the board.
6. Show the painting again. What is the mood of this painting? What were the clues that lead students to identify a mood for this painting? What techniques did the artist use to convey a mood to the viewer? What makes this a “romantic” scene?
7. Now review the words that the students chose earlier in the lesson. Which of these words match the mood in the painting?
8. Have the students compose a poem about this painting. Pay close attention to the mood of the painting. Your poem should convey the same mood. Alternatively, students may compose a poem about Krishna in his role as a romantic lead.

ACTIVITY TWO

Objective: Students express a mood through an illustration inspired by a song of their choice.

1. Ask students to identify emotions that can be expressed through music.
2. Play a favorite song or piece of music that is meaningful to you. Choose a song that you would feel comfortable discussing with the students. Ask students for their reactions to the song. What kinds of emotions did they feel as they listened to the song? Share your reactions to the song with the students.
3. Ask students to think about a favorite song that makes them feel a very strong emotion such as love, joy, sadness, anger, etc.

What emotions does this song evoke for you? What is the mood of this song? What techniques does the artist use to convey that mood? Think about the tempo, lyrics, pacing, volume, tone of the instruments, or other characteristics of the song.

4. Illustrate this song in a picture. How would you visually depict this song for someone who is unable to hear the song? The point of this exercise is to evoke the basic mood and feeling of the song. Your painting does not need to be a literal interpretation of the song.



Stealing of the wish-fulfilling tree, 1700–1800. India; former kingdom of Malwa, Madhya Pradesh state. Ink and colors on paper. Gift of George Hopper Fitch, R1998.2.4

LOOK

- Who are the main figures in this painting? How can you tell?
- Where is Krishna in this painting?
- What animals can be found in this painting? Where in the world can these animals be found (in their natural habitat)?

THINK

- Compare this painting to others you have seen in these exercises. How does this painting depict multiple stories in one space?
- What is the major mode of transportation? Who is being carried? Why are they being carried? What does that say about their status in society? What is the modern-day equivalent of this mode of transportation?
- Why would the artist choose to paint these two stories about Krishna? What do these stories say about Krishna?

IMAGINE AND CREATE

ACTIVITY ONE

Heroic acts are a popular topic in the mythology of any culture. These heroic figures are often called upon to use their superhuman strength and special powers to rescue the world from demons and catastrophes. With his many tales of heroic deeds, Krishna is no exception. His feats are legendary and well-known throughout India.

Objective: Students identify the acts and characteristics that make Krishna a heroic figure in India. In addition, students explore the general qualities that define a hero and heroic deeds.

1. Lead a discussion about the term hero. Ask students to identify words that they associate with the word hero.
2. Ask students to name fictional characters they consider to be heroes. What characteristics do they have? What did they do that defines them as heroes?
3. Ask students to define a heroic act. What characteristics define a heroic act?
4. Krishna is considered to be a heroic figure. List Krishna's heroic characteristics. Has he performed heroic acts? If so, what were they and what makes these actions heroic?
5. Write about someone you consider to be a hero. Include the following information in your report:
 - Who is this person? Is he/she living or deceased? Include information about the person's background, profession, etc.
 - Describe at least one heroic act this person performed.
 - List at least three character traits of this person.
 - Why do you consider this person to be a hero?

Students often name fictional superheroes in their definition of heroes. Encourage students to recognize that heroes can be historical figures (living or deceased) and people from their own community.

ACTIVITY TWO

This painting depicts two events from Krishna's life. Instead of using one pictorial space to tell a single story, the artist has chosen to divide the canvas into multiple sections to tell two stories. Indian miniature paintings sometimes depict in one image multiple scenes that happen over a period of time. (See the "Krishna's victory over a snake demon" painting.)

In this painting, scenes from different stories are divided up into boxes. This format may seem familiar to students who read comic books.

In this activity, students create their own illustrations inspired by this style of Indian painting.

1. Look at this painting. How does it tell a story? Does the structure of this painting look familiar to you?
2. Think of a time when you felt like a hero.
 - What happened?
 - How would you tell that story using only pictures?
 - Think about the major scenes that you need to tell your story. Sketch them out on a piece of paper.
3. Take the major scenes from your story and illustrate them in a painting similar to this example. You can divide the painting into different sections (any size or shape) to tell your story. Remember that your story has to be told without the use of any words. Divide your painting into at least three areas.



Krishna driving Arjuna's chariot, approx. 1750–1825. India; Kashmir state. Colors on paper. *Gift of Margaret Polak, 1996.6*

LOOK

- Where do you think these people are going? What are they carrying? What leads you to your conclusions?
- What animals do you see in this painting? How are they decorated? Why do you think they are dressed this way?

THINK

- Who are the most important people in the painting? How can you tell?

IMAGINE AND CREATE

ACTIVITY ONE

Dharma and Duty

Objective: Students become familiar with the Hindu concept of dharma as it is expressed in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Notes for the teacher:

Dharma is a multilayered, complex concept and belief that does not have a direct English translation. Although difficult to fully explore in a single lesson, it is one of the main themes of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and as such must be discussed when considering this important Hindu text. This activity attempts to make *dharma* understandable for students unfamiliar with Hindu texts or beliefs. In doing so, we have simplified the explanations. Be aware that to Hindus and scholars of the *Bhagavad Gita*, this simplified explanation does not capture all the facets of dharma.

As you discuss the selected passages, it should be expected that students might jump to the conclusion that this sacred text advocates violence. However, the *Bhagavad Gita* was not intended to be a discourse on violence, nor should it be interpreted as such.

Barbara Stoler Miller, who authored the translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* used in this packet, quotes Trappist monk Thomas Merton's essay "The Significance of the *Bhagavad Gita*":

"Arjuna has an instinctive repugnance for war, and that is the chief reason why war is chosen as the example of the most repellent kind of duty."

Mahatma Gandhi, one of history's most respected and well-known advocates of nonviolence was deeply influenced by this text. In an article, he writes,

"I do not believe that the Gita teaches violence for doing good. It is pre-eminently a description of the duel that goes on in our own hearts. The Divine author has used a historical incident for inculcating the lesson of doing one's duty even at the peril of one's life. It inculcates performance of duty irrespective of the consequences; for, we mortals, limited by our physical frames, are incapable of controlling actions save our own. The Gita distinguishes between the powers of light and darkness and demonstrates their incompatibility."

—*Young India*, February 23, 1921

It should be noted that there is no singular interpretation for the meaning of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Even in India, the text is constantly being debated, studied, and reinterpreted by scholars, religious figures, and laypeople.

Although the *Bhagavad Gita* may seem daunting to teach, it is a critically important text and we encourage you to discuss its impact on Hindu society and thought with your students.

1. Begin with a general discussion about religious texts. Ask students to identify religious texts they are familiar with. Many students should have heard of or studied texts such as the Bible, Torah, Koran, or the *Tao Te Ching (Dao De Jing)*.
 - What do these texts have in common?
 - Why are they important to the culture(s) that revere them?
 - Are these texts guides on how to live and/or behave?
 - As society and cultures change over time, do you think that interpretations of the meaning of these texts change as well? Why or why not?
2. Introduce the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of the most important Hindu texts. Please refer to the background information earlier in this packet, as well as consulting the textual passages at the end of this packet.
3. Show the poster of Krishna and Arjuna on their chariot.

In this scene from the *Mahabharata*, Krishna accompanies Arjuna as he heads into battle against his brothers. Arjuna is reluctant to enter this battle because he knows he will be forced to fight against people he loves. This image portrays the discussion between Arjuna and Krishna, which would become the basis of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

- Why would someone want a painting depicting this moment?
4. Write the word *dharma* on the board. Ask students if they have ever heard of this word before. Please note that some students may have heard of *dharma* used in the Buddhist context. Although derived from the same term, the word takes on a different meaning in the Hindu context.
 5. Because there is no single word in the English language that would encompass the entire meaning of *dharma*, explain to students that we are focusing only on one aspect of dharma and how it relates to Arjuna's obligation to "do his duty."
 6. Gavin Flood writes that *dharma*

"has been variously translated as 'duty', 'religion', 'justice', 'law', 'ethics', 'religious merit', 'principle', and right'." He goes on to say, "*Dharma* is an all-encompassing ideology which embraces both ritual and moral behaviour, whose neglect would have bad social and personal consequences."

Barbara Stoler Miller explains:

“Derived from a Sanskrit form meaning ‘that which sustains,’ within Hindu culture it (*dharma*) generally means religiously ordained duty, that is, the code of conduct appropriate to each group in the hierarchically ordered Hindu society.”

7. Distribute **Reading Excerpt B**. This passage details Arjuna’s internal conflict.
 - What is the dilemma that Arjuna is facing?
 - Who are his enemies in this battle?
 - Why does he not want to fight?
8. Distribute **Reading Excerpt C**. In this passage, Krishna tells Arjuna that the soul can never be harmed by what happens to the physical body.
 - What is the “self” that Krishna refers to in this passage?
 - Can the “self” be killed or harmed?
 - What happens to the “self” if the body is killed?
9. Distribute **Reading Excerpt D**. In this passage, Krishna explains *dharma* to Arjuna.
 - According to Krishna, what is Arjuna’s *dharma*?
 - What are the consequences for Arjuna if he does not follow *dharma*?
 - Why are these serious consequences?
 - In the previous passage, Krishna spoke of the “self” and how it does not die regardless of any harm that afflicts the physical body. How does this passage support Krishna’s urging Arjuna to fulfill his duty and fight?
10. Writing assignment (two options):
 - A. Students write their own interpretation of the conversation between Arjuna and Krishna in modern language.
 - B. Students write their reactions to the passages they have read. What is their understanding of *dharma*?
11. Possible discussion topics for upper grades:
 - A. Think about the duties that are expected of you.
 - What is your definition of duty?
 - What is your duty as part of society?
 - What is your duty as a member of your family?

- Do you have specific cultural duties that you must follow?
- Is it difficult to fulfill your duty?

Remember, in the context of the *Bhagavad Gita*, duty is more than a household chore. It is a behavior that society as a whole expects you to follow.

B. Is there ever a time when you would consider violence to be just? Give examples.

Reading Excerpt A

In Praise of Krishna: Songs from the Bengali

Translated by Edward C. Dimock, Jr. and Denise Levertov

Anchor Books, New York, 1967

POEM 1

*I who body and soul
am at your beck and call,
was a girl of noble family.
I took no thought for what would be said of me,
I abandoned everything:
now I am part of you,
your will is my will.
O Madhava, never let our love
seem to grow stale—
I beg you, let the dew
not dry on our flowers,
that my honor not be destroyed.*

*When he heard these words from her beautiful mouth, Madhava bowed his head.
He knew he held the flower of her life in his keeping.*

POEM 2

*Beloved, what more shall I say to you?
In life and in death, in birth after birth
you are the lord of my life.
A noose of love binds
my heart to your feet.
My mind fixed on you alone, I have offered you everything;
in truth, I have become your slave.
In this family, in that house, who is really mine?
Whom can I call my own?
It was bitter cold, and I took refuge
at your lotus feet.
While my eyes blink, and I do not see you
I feel the hearth within me die.*

POEM 3

*Let the earth of my body be mixed with the earth
my beloved walks on.*

*Let the fire of my body be the brightness
in the mirror that reflects his face.*

*Let the water of my body join the waters
of the lotus pool he bathes in.*

*Let the breath of my body be air
lapping his tired limbs.*

*Let me be sky, and moving through me
that cloud-dark Shyama, my beloved.*

Reading Excerpt B

The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War

Translated by Barbara Stoler Miller

Columbia Books, New York, 1986

FIRST TEACHING, 28–31

Krishna, I see my kinsmen
gathered here, wanting war.

My limbs sink,
my mouth is parched,
my body trembles,
the hair bristles on my flesh.

The magic bow slops
from my hand, my skin burns,
I cannot stand still,
my mind reels.

I see omens of chaos,
Krishna; I see no good
in killing my kinsmen
in battle.

34–36

They are teachers, fathers, sons,
and grandfathers, uncles, grandsons,
fathers, and brothers of wives,
and other men of our family.

I do not want to kill them
even if I am killed, Krishna;
not for kingship of all three worlds,
much less for the earth!

SECOND TEACHING, 4–7

Arjuna

Krishna, how can I fight
against Bhishma and Drona
with arrows
when they deserve my worship?

It is better in this world
to beg for scraps of food
than to eat meals
smeared with blood
of elders I killed
at the height of their power
while their goals
were still desires.

We don't know which weight
is worse to bear—
our conquering them
or their conquering us.
We will not want to live
if we kill
the sons of Dhritarashtra
assembled before us.

The flaw of pity
blights my very being;
conflicting sacred duties
confound my reason.
I ask you to tell me
decisively—Which is better?
I am your pupil.
Teach me what I seek!

Reading Excerpt C

The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War

Translated by Barbara Stoler Miller

Columbia Books, New York, 1986

SECOND TEACHING, 18–26

Krishna

Our bodies are known to end,
but the embodied self is enduring,
indestructible, and immeasurable;
therefore, Arjuna, fight the battle!

He who thinks this self a killer
and he who thinks it killed,
both fail to understand;
it does not kill, nor is it killed.

It is not born,
it does not die;
having been,
it will never be;
unborn, enduring,
constant, and primordial,
it is not killed when the body is killed.

Arjuna, when a man knows the self
to be indestructible, enduring, unborn,
unchanging, how does he kill
or cause any to kill?

As a man discards
worn-out clothes
to put on new
and different ones,
so the embodied self
discards
its worn-out bodies
to take on other new ones.

Weapons do not cut it, fire does not burn it,
waters do not wet it,
wind does not wither it.

It cannot be cut or burned;
it cannot be wet or withered;
it is enduring, all pervasive,
fixed, immovable, and timeless.

It is called unmanifest,
inconceivable, and immutable;
since you know that to be so,
you should not grieve!

If you think of its birth
and death as ever-recurring,
then too, Great Warrior,
you have no cause to grieve!

Death is certain for anyone born,
and birth is certain for the dead;
since the cycle is inevitable,
you have no cause to grieve!

Reading Excerpt D

The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's Counsel in Time of War

Translated by Barbara Stoler Miller

Columbia Books, New York, 1986

SECOND TEACHING, 31–37

Krishna

Look to your own duty;
do not tremble before it;
nothing is better for a warrior
than a battle of sacred duty.

The doors of heaven open
for warriors who rejoice
to have a battle like this
thrust upon them by chance.

If you fail to wage this war
of sacred duty,
you will abandon your own duty
and fame only to gain evil.

People will tell
of your undying shame,
and for a man of honor
shame is worse than death.

The great chariot warriors will think
you deserted in fear of battle;
you will be despised
by those who held you in esteem.

Your enemies will slander you,
scorning your skill
in so many unspeakable ways—
could any suffering be worse?

If you are killed, you win heaven;
if you triumph, you enjoy the earth;
therefore, Arjuna, stand up
and resolve to fight this battle!

Activity Sheet A

Directions: List a characteristic of young Krishna in the left-hand column. In the right-hand column, list an example that demonstrates that characteristic.

CHARACTERISTIC TRAIT	EXAMPLE

Activity Sheet B

Instructions: As you view an artwork from the Asian Art Museum or listen to a musical excerpt or poem, list words that come to mind. The words can be adjectives, nouns, verbs, phrases or anything you can think of.

Don't overthink this exercise; the main point of this activity is to write down words that immediately come into mind. Remember: There are no right or wrong answers!

MUSIC	POETRY	ART

Activity Sheet C

Krishna overcoming the serpent Kaliya, approx. 1800-1960. Southern India. Wood. *The Avery Brundage Collection*, B61D51+



Activity Sheet D

Krishna overcoming the serpent Kaliya, approx. 1400-1500. India; reportedly from Sundaraperumakoil, Tanjavur district, Tamil Nadu state, former kingdom of Vijayanagara. Bronze. *The Avery Brundage Collection*, B65B72



Activity Sheet E

Krishna overcoming the serpent Kaliya, approx 1964. India. Ink and colors on paper. *The Avery Brundage Collection*, B82D5



Activity Sheet F

Sadhu in the forest, 1981. By Jogmaya Devi, Indian. Colors on paper. Purchased with funds from the Society for Asian Art and General Acquisition Funds, 1999.39.39



Activity Sheet G

Radha and Krishna under Kandab tree, 1985. By Kapoori Devi, Indian. Colors on paper. *Purchased with funds from the Society for Asian Art and General Acquisition Funds, 1999.39.47*



Activity Sheet H

Govind Maharaj with His Friends on Horse to Kamaru Kamakhaj. By Shanti Devi, Indian. Colors on paper.
Purchased with funds from the Society for Asian Art and General Acquisition Funds, 1999.39.23





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Map of India

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