

Lesson Plan: Royal Painting Workshop

Department of Museum Education

Suggested Grade Level: 1–3

Estimated Time: 1–1.5 hours

Introduction

The *Akbarnama (History of Akbar)* was commissioned by the powerful emperor Akbar, who ruled most of India in the 16th century. Considered his official biography, it was written by his close friend and biographer, Abu Fazl, and was designed and painted by masters of the royal workshop.

Students learn about Emperor Akbar and his support of culture by examining an illustration from the *Akbarnama*. They learn about Mughal illustration workshop practices and re-create those practices in their own version of an illustration for a royal biography.

Lesson Objectives

- Analyze a work of art
- Learn about workshop practices for Mughal manuscript painting in the 16th century
- Understand the meaning of horizon line and how its position affects composition
- Experience cooperative artmaking

Key Terms

- Akbar
- biography/biographer
- composition
- manuscript illustration
- Mughal
- horizon line
- foreground, middle ground, background

Instructional Materials

- Outline of illustration from the *Akbarnama* (for grades 1–3)
- White watercolor paper, 13 1/2" x 8"
- Pencils
- Markers and gold pens (for younger students)
- Tempera paint, including the color gold, water, and paintbrushes (for older students)
- Hole punch
- String or yarn
- Scissors

Procedures

Discussion

- Examine the illustration from the *Akbarnama* with students. Ask:
 - Where is Akbar? How do you know this?
 - How old does he appear to be?
- Follow the spiral composition from bottom to top and describe everything you see. What else is happening around the young Akbar?
- What colors do you see in the image?
- Define the term horizon line. For older students define foreground, middle ground, and background. Explain to students that a high horizon line is a common feature of Mughal illustrations. Ask:
 - How would lowering the horizon line change the composition?
 - How would it alter the painting's foreground, middle ground, and background? (older students)
- Explain that Akbar had a painting workshop in which artists worked on manuscript illustrations in teams. One artist drew the composition and others painted in the background, animals, or faces, depending on their special skills. Ask students:
 - Have you ever collaborated with others on a work of art? Describe your experience.

Activity

- Divide students into groups of four and have them decide on their specialties such as drawing the main composition (lead draftsman) and coloring faces, clothing, animals, landscape details, and the border design.
- For younger students: On the outline provided, have the elected draftsman draw a scene depicting an imagined ruler exercising a royal act. For older students: Have the draftsman create a royal scene on his or her own using a color printout of the illustration from the *Akbarnama* for inspiration.
- Ask students to consider the following questions as they work.
 - What is in the setting?
 - What will the ruler be doing?
 - Who will be watching?
- Encourage the lead draftsman to invite other artists in the group to provide input for the composition.
- In succession, have the other group artists contribute their talents to the drawing with markers and gold pens or tempera paint.
- Have groups share their illustrations with other groups in the class and discuss the stories portrayed.

Evaluation

Base students' achievements on their understanding of the artistic concepts introduced in the lesson, their creative work, and their ability to work well in teams.

Follow-up:

- If possible, allow students to view and discuss other illustrations from the *Akbarnama*. (For example, the book *Paintings from the Akbarnama*)
- Have students change roles and create a series of images about Akbar that form a manuscript. Ask students first to read examples of stories of the emperor and his witty and clever advisor, Birbal, on the India parenting Web site, www.indiaparenting.com/stories/.
- Have student groups choose a story to illustrate in the Mughal workshop manner. Remind them to design a cover for their story.
- When they have finished, have students punch three holes in the left edge of their compositions and bind them to resemble a Mughal manuscript.
- Create a temporary library of manuscripts for other student groups to see.

Glossary

background (*n*)

in art, part of a painting or drawing representing the space behind the figures or objects in the foreground

biography (*n*)

account, usually written, of a person's life; one who creates such an account

composition (*n*)

in art, the arrangement of formal elements, such as space, shape, and color

foreground (*n*)

objects or figures situated in the front of a composition of a painting or drawing

horizon line (*n*)

in art, the horizontal line that forms the apparent boundary between earth and sky

manuscript (*n*)

image made for a book, document, or letter that is drawn or painted by hand

middle ground (*n*)

in art, the portion of picture space that is behind the foreground but in front of the background

Mughal (*n*)

of the dynasty of Islamic emperors who reigned in India from A.D. 1526 to 1858

Illinois Learning Standards

Fine Arts: 25–27

