Family Activity: Dancing Gods
Provided by the Art Institute of Chicago Department of Museum Education

Introduction
Dance is an important part of Hindu culture. It is performed on many occasions, such as weddings, births, harvests, and religious processions. Classical Indian dance is drawn from Hindu myths and legends about gods. Hindus believe dancers bring luck because they carry these gods' blessings.

The statue at right shows Shiva (shiv-uh), god of destruction and creation, demolishing and re-creating the cosmos through dance. Shiva also creates with sound (the drum he carries in his upper right hand) and destroys with fire, seen in the ring of flames around him.

Like his father, Shiva, the well-loved god Ganesha (guh-nesh-uh), who has an elephant head and human body, loves to dance. One of Ganesha’s roles is to entertain his father and mother, Parvati (par-vah-tee), which he does by dancing.

Discussion Questions
• How many arms does Shiva have? Multiple limbs or heads of Hindu gods represent their supernatural powers.
• Ganesha is known as the remover of obstacles and bringer of luck. Before beginning a new school year or taking a test, Hindu schoolchildren call upon Ganesha for help. To what or whom do you turn to bring luck?
• Compare the surfaces of each sculpture. How are they different?

Activity
Make a dancing puppet.

Materials Needed:
• Posterboard
• Hole punch
• Brass fasteners
• Pencil
• Markers
• Glitter, confetti, scraps of cloth (for decorating)
• Glue
• Scissors
• Thin wooden dowels or sticks, about 8"
• Tongue depressor, about 6"

Steps:
1. Imagine a dancing character. Will he or she be human? An animal? A god or goddess? What kind of dance will he or she do?
2. Draw your character on posterboard. Be sure to draw moving parts (heads, arms, legs, or tail) separately.
3. Cut out the parts then add color and decoration to them.
4. Overlap the parts where they connect and punch holes there for brass fasteners. Attach the parts with brass fasteners.
5. Tape the tongue depressor to the back of the puppet. Tape the top of the sticks to the back of the moveable parts.
6. Make your puppet dance!

Glossary:

cosmos (n/adj)
universe; of or relating to the material universe of planets and galaxies outside the earth

Ganesha (n)
elephant-headed son of the Hindu god Shiva; remover of obstacles and Lord of Beginnings

Hinduism; Hindu (n; n or adj)
range of related religious practices and beliefs that have their origins in India and exist today in many areas of south Asia. Hinduism's three major deities are Brahma, the creator; Shiva, the destroyer; and Vishnu, the preserver of universal order. The supreme goddess is Devi or Parvati (consort of Shiva); a follower of Hinduism; of or characteristic of Hinduism

Parvati (n)
form of the great goddess Devi, whose name means "daughter of the mountain;" consort of Shiva

Shiva (n)
Hindu god of cosmic destruction and subsequent regeneration; one of the three major Hindu gods, who include Brahma and Vishnu