ANCIENT GOLD WORKING

NOTE TO THE TEACHER
Gold objects, including jewelry, utensils, masks, and sculptures used in ritual ceremonies, were made in abundance by the peoples of ancient Central and South America prior to the Encounter with the Europeans. Gold, never used as currency, was valued for its symbolic connection to the sun and the celestial realm. For a complete introduction to the history, technique, and style of ancient American gold wares, refer to chapter 2 of this manual. This lesson plan is geared toward grades 3 - 5 and may be adapted for older students by using additional materials and more elaborate structural plans.

OBJECTIVES
Through viewing exercises and discussion, students will become familiar with traditional design elements and functions of Central and South American gold objects. The hands-on component of the lesson will allow students to begin to understand the techniques of metalworking, especially repoussé. The follow-up activity will promote an understanding of the cultural context of the gold objects that were found in both domestic life and ceremonial rituals.

PREPARATION
Visit the galleries of the Art Institute on a guided or self-conducted tour to fully appreciate the scale and surfaces of the gold works. Use slides 11, 19, and 20 in this manual and any reproductions from books to discuss the objects in the classroom. Concentrating on depictions of human and animal forms as well as jewelry and domestic objects like utensils, identify the different shapes and design elements gold workers used. Using visual examples, discuss the lost-wax method of casting and the repoussé technique. Next, discuss how gold objects were used in the ancient Americas. Please note: this information, including the definitions of goldworking techniques, is outlined in chapter 2 and in the glossary of the teaching manual.

MATERIALS
light-weight cardboard, gold tempera or polymer paint, scissors, glue, cotton string, pencils and paper

CONTENT AND ACTIVITIES
Students should begin by cutting out a basic shape on heavy paper to use as a model. They may choose to design a mask, pendant, human form, or they may cut out the shape of an animal — snake, frog, jaguar, spider, etc. The legs and feet of animal and human figures can be folded so that they stand on their own. Once the basic shape has been determined, the paper pattern can be traced onto cardboard and cut out. All surface details are then added using either cut pieces of cardboard or string which is glued onto the main body. For example, round cardboard disks can be added for eyes while twisted string can form abstract designs. The raised components serve to illustrate the repoussé technique in which raised metal defines the detail. Once everything is glued into place, students can paint over their sculptures with gold tempera.

FOLLOW-UP
Ask each student to draw a scene in which their object is shown in use. For example, they may choose to draw someone wearing the mask or piece of jewelry, a room where the sculpture would be located, a ceremony in which their object would have been used, etc. Next, have each student discuss his or her work in terms of its function and design. Students can refer to their drawings to help illustrate their ideas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY