

Theme Six:

Powerful Families

Theme in Life

We all need the strength of a family.

Theme in Art

Art can express the power and pride of families.

Introduction to the Theme

Around the world, some families have grown richer and more powerful than others. Sometimes the head of a royal family rules many, many other families. Royal families often use artists to make special things for them like palace decorations and portraits. Some powerful families have clothing, furniture, and carvings to show how important they are.

Every family is powerful in its own way. Families do not have to be rich to have things that express their feelings as a family. Many families have photographs to capture special times. Some people share their family traditions by proudly passing down treasured objects from one generation to the next, such as quilts, painted furniture, or fancy baskets.

Key Inquiry Questions

Questions about Artworks:

TEXTURE:

What textures do I see in the artwork?

REPRODUCTION:

How is this reproduction different from the original artwork?

Question about Artworks in Context:

ARTWORLD VIEWER:

Who were the original patrons, users, or viewers and how did they understand the artwork?

Key Cultures

Native American Northwest Coast

Baroque and Rococo

West Africa

Lord of the West



Vallen

This morning Aunt Salina asked me when I wished to see the visitors from the Highlands. She didn't tell me when or where I should see them. When I told her I would see them at dinner, she didn't argue that the reception hall was more appropriate than the dining hall for receiving such important guests. After all these years, even she has begun to believe that I, Vallen, am the true Lord of the West, and that I make the decisions in my palace.

Ever since the old Lord, my father, was killed in battle when I was twelve, I have worn the blue and gold sash of the Lord of the West, but to Aunt Salina I have always been her sister's little boy. My mother died when I was born. I seldom saw my father who seemed always to be traveling through the Western Plains or leading his soldiers under the command of the king. It was Aunt Salina who taught me to hold my head high because one day I would be Lord. It was she who told me how my great, great, great grandfather had much pleased the king and that, as a reward, the king had made him Lord of the Western District. Mine is a fine old family. Even before we became Lords of the West, members of my family were welcome at the king's court. And now, the blue and gold banner of the Lord of the West hangs among the banners of the other powerful families in the king's royal entrance hall.

I have much to do before I dine with the Highland visitors this evening. I must approve the Counselor's choice of three new meadow masters and a mine superintendent. I must listen to an appeal for food by of a group of farmers who say the soldiers have ruined their crops, and I must be measured for a new cloak for the king's feast day.

Mawri

Mother tells me I must be very quiet and keep my eyes down while in the Lord's palace. It is a great honor that Mother will be making the Lord's feast-day cloak and I am to help her. During the four years since my family came to the city, Mother has proved her skill to the royal seamstresses and has been trusted for this important task. I'm proud to be her daughter. Here's Mother now. "Look at the blue and gold streamers flying in the wind above the palace towers. Are those the colors the Lord will have on his new cloak?"

"Yes," says Mother, "he will wear a long, pleated cloak with wide shoulders, and long

pleated sleeves. I wish we could decorate the striped trim with embroidery, but you know how these people dislike the sort of finery we so loved in our old home in the south. Shh...quiet now, the doorkeeper is coming to direct us to the side door.”

The doorkeeper has no smile to greet us. He doesn't even talk, but points down the alley to a servants' entrance. Inside we must wait until the Lord is pleased to make time to be measured. We may not talk or even sit, though there are benches by the door. We wear long cloaks, as does nearly everyone in the city, but my embroidered stockings are just visible above my shoes, and a maid has seen them. She points, laughs, and, not bothering to lower her voice, says to another maid, “Only a new-comer would wear such silly things.” Just then, the door to the Lord's chamber opens and both maids stop chattering mid-sentence and look down respectfully.

The Lord is so young. He can't be much older than I. As Mother takes his measurements, he is busy talking with his Counselor. He seems so sure of himself. He asks many questions, listens to his Counselor's advice, and then makes his own decision. I wonder silently as I take notes for my mother. Does he have friends his own age? Can he ever relax and just have fun? Must he be Lord all the time?

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It's our second visit to the Lord's palace. He will select the fabric for his cloak and sash and we must check a few measurements. As I pass the sample fabrics to my mother, I see the Lord is watching me. Did he smile, or did I just imagine it? He's watching me again as we pack our things to leave. This time he does more than smile, he speaks.

“Have you ever seen the Western Plains?” he asks.

I lower my gaze and answer, “No, sir, my family came from a city far to the south.”

“My father died defending the south for the king. Did you see the fighting?” he asks.

“We heard the battle outside the city and had to flee for our lives when the soldiers came,” I answer.

Now he steps away from Mother and says “I must go now, but I want to hear more about the southlands. Return tomorrow afternoon and we shall talk.” With those words, the Lord turns and leaves the chamber.

Vallen

Everyone says the newcomers from the south are dull, lazy people. But Mawri is not like that at all. When I first saw her I could see she was quick and clever. Her eyes sparkled with intelligence and interest even though she looked down respectfully whenever she wasn't taking notes, folding fabric, or helping with something.

Since she has come to visit me, I have learned of the terrors she survived in her old





home, of the long journey to our city, and of her family's struggles to make a life for themselves here. Her life is so different from mine. She has a father, mother, and two brothers. I have only Aunt Salina. I have servants to do everything for me. She can do so many things herself. But we are alike in many ways too. We like to talk, and plan, and dream.

I want to visit her family. I've heard so much about her father, the carpenter; her brother, the apprentice painter; and about her dear little brother Bo. But how can I go off with those people? I am Lord of the West, keeper of the Western Plains, member of the royal court. Aunt Salina would never approve. What would my friends say?

Mauri

Oh, I do like Vallen. He lets me call him by that name now, when no one can hear me. Sometimes I feel sorry for him. I think he's lonely. Everyone respects him and listens to him, but no one shares their feelings with him. He works so hard and worries all the time. Though he is hardly a man, he must rule the Western Plains with fairness and work tirelessly to bring prosperity to his people. He is strong, but not strong enough to stand up to his aunt and to his counselor. I know he wants to visit my family but he is afraid, afraid of what people will think, afraid to bring shame to his family.

I have made him a gift to show how much I care for him. In the city where I grew up, people loved fancy patterns and were proud to show them off. For weeks I have been embroidering a blue and gold sash. I have sewn tiny gold meadow flowers on the central gold panel and ripples of blue on the blue borders. Vallen told me that the gold and blue of the Lord of the West stand for the golden Western Plains and the two Great Rivers of the West. On my sash you can see the beauty of the plains and the power of the rivers. But will he wear it on Feast Day?

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The Feast Day is over. No newcomers were invited to the feast—certainly not a poor family like ours. We've heard the crowds at the Royal Palace all day. By now Vallen has dined with the king and his court. Perhaps he's on his way home to his own palace.

Is that a knock at the door? Who can be calling now? Father is opening the door. A young man is standing there introducing himself. Running his hand along a beautifully embroidered blue and gold sash, is Vallen, Lord of the West. He sees me, smiles and asks, "May I come in to meet your family?"

Activities

Unit Orientation



Introduce students to the Theme Title, the Theme in Life, the Theme in Art, and the Key Inquiry Questions to help focus their attention as you (or they) read the story.

Story



Present the Story:

- ✦ Read or ask students to read *Lord of the West*.

Discussion of Theme and Key Questions



Discussion of the Story's Theme:

Discuss how the story relates to the theme.

- ✦ How did Vallen's family come to be powerful?
- ✦ Who is Aunt Salina and what is her role in the family?
- ✦ What are the responsibilities of the Lord of the West?
- ✦ How could Mawri be proud of her family even though they have little and some people even laugh at them?

Students' Experience with the Theme:

Help students identify how the theme relates to their own lives.

- ✦ Who are the members of your family?
- ✦ How do family members help each other? What role does each play?
- ✦ Is there something special you are willing to share about your family?

Inquiry into the Story:

Use the key questions to further analyze the story.

- ✦ How do you imagine Vallen's pleated cloak might feel? Mawri's stockings?
- ✦ Describe different textures of cloth from which Vallen might have chosen for his new cloak.
- ✦ Can you imagine how Vallen's gold-on-gold and blue-on-blue sash might feel if you could touch it?
- ✦ Do you think some of the details of the embroidery might be lost in a photograph of the sash?
- ✦ How do you suppose important guests felt when they saw their family banners hangings in the king's royal entrance hall?
- ✦ Do you suppose the serving girls who kept the hall clean felt the same way about the banners?
- ✦ How do you suppose Mawri felt about her embroidered stockings?

Inquiry into Students' Experience:

Use the key questions to help students make connections to their own experiences.

- ✦ How would you describe differences in the textures of the fabrics that you

are wearing?

- ✦ Can you point to various textures in the classroom? Touch some. Do they feel the way you expected them to feel just by looking at them?
- ✦ Can you think of a time when someone made (or purchased) something just for you? Or when you made (or purchased) something especially for someone in particular?
- ✦ What do you think about when you're doing something for someone else and not just for yourself?
- ✦ Have you ever seen a photograph or an advertisement before you saw the real thing and were surprised at the difference?
- ✦ What do you suppose are some of the ways that reproductions (photographs and posters) of artworks are different from the original artworks?

Transfer to Diverse Cultures



The following instructions are written for students who are able to work independently. If you teach younger students, the instructions offer helpful guidelines as you gather and present information in order to optimize transfer potential for your students. Depending on the grade level of your students and their access to appropriate library and Internet sources, you can choose to build transfer across cultures either 1) through student investigation or 2) through your own investigations and presentations to students.

Inquiry about Artworks:

- ✦ Assign a team of students to locate reproductions of Pacific Northwest Coast family crest (totem) objects, such as blankets, chests, masks, and poles, looking especially for interesting textures. Have them display the reproductions for their classmates and describe how they think the objects would feel if they could touch them. Assign other teams to similarly investigate Baroque and Rococo artworks. Have them look for artworks that they think have textures that would be interesting to touch (jewelry, furniture, sculpture, etc.) and paintings or drawings that imitate different textures (silk, flowers, pearls, lace, etc.).

Inquiry about Artworks in Context:

- ✦ Assign a team of students to research clan systems and family structures in one or more Pacific Northwest Coast cultures (such as Haida, Bella Coola, Tsimshian, or Kwakiutl). Have them learn about how certain families own rights to certain animal images and their stories. Ask your students to investigate how potlatches (give-away events) earn status for wealthy families and how artworks are used at these events. Assign other teams to similarly investigate famous Baroque and Rococo painters and the wealthy people for whom they made their artworks. Have them explain how the artists might have made choices in their artworks to please their patrons and, if possible, report the original locations where the artworks were displayed.

Transfer to Studio



Review the unit themes and key questions to help students transfer what they have learned to their own art making.

Thematic artwork:

- ✦ Challenge students to relate the theme to their own experiences or an imaginary experience to develop an idea for their own artwork. For example, ask students to make a family emblem or crest from cloth using contrasting textures (fabric, beads, feathers, sequins, etc.). You might want to limit students to one, two, or three colors to help them focus on texture. Ask students to consider making the emblem as a gift for a family member. Ask them to consider how their choices might be different depending on the person for whom they make the emblem (brother, sister, parent, grandparent). Photograph (or photocopy) some or all of the emblems and ask students to compare the reproduction with the original artwork pointing out what features are lost in the reproduction. Making a textured frame for a family photo is another idea.

Story Illustration:

- ✦ Since *Lord of the West* is not illustrated, you might consider asking students to use their imaginations to make their own illustrations, focusing on the king's entrance hall with its banners, Vallen's sash, Mawri's stockings, or Vallen at Mawri's door after the feast.

Exhibition:

- ✦ Display student artwork with Unit Information (Theme Title, Theme in Life, Theme in Art, and Key Questions), sample student reports, and reproductions of artworks from diverse cultures. If your students make story illustrations, display a copy of *Lord of the West*.

Interdisciplinary Transfer



Photography:

- ✦ Lighting, backdrops, angle of shot, and other factors that can affect reproductions of two-dimensional and three-dimensional artworks

World Cultures:

- ✦ Clan systems and extended families, matrilineal and patrilineal family structures, feudal systems, inherited titles and property

