

GRADES 6–12

TIME

One class period, 40–50 minutes

DEFINING SACREDNESS

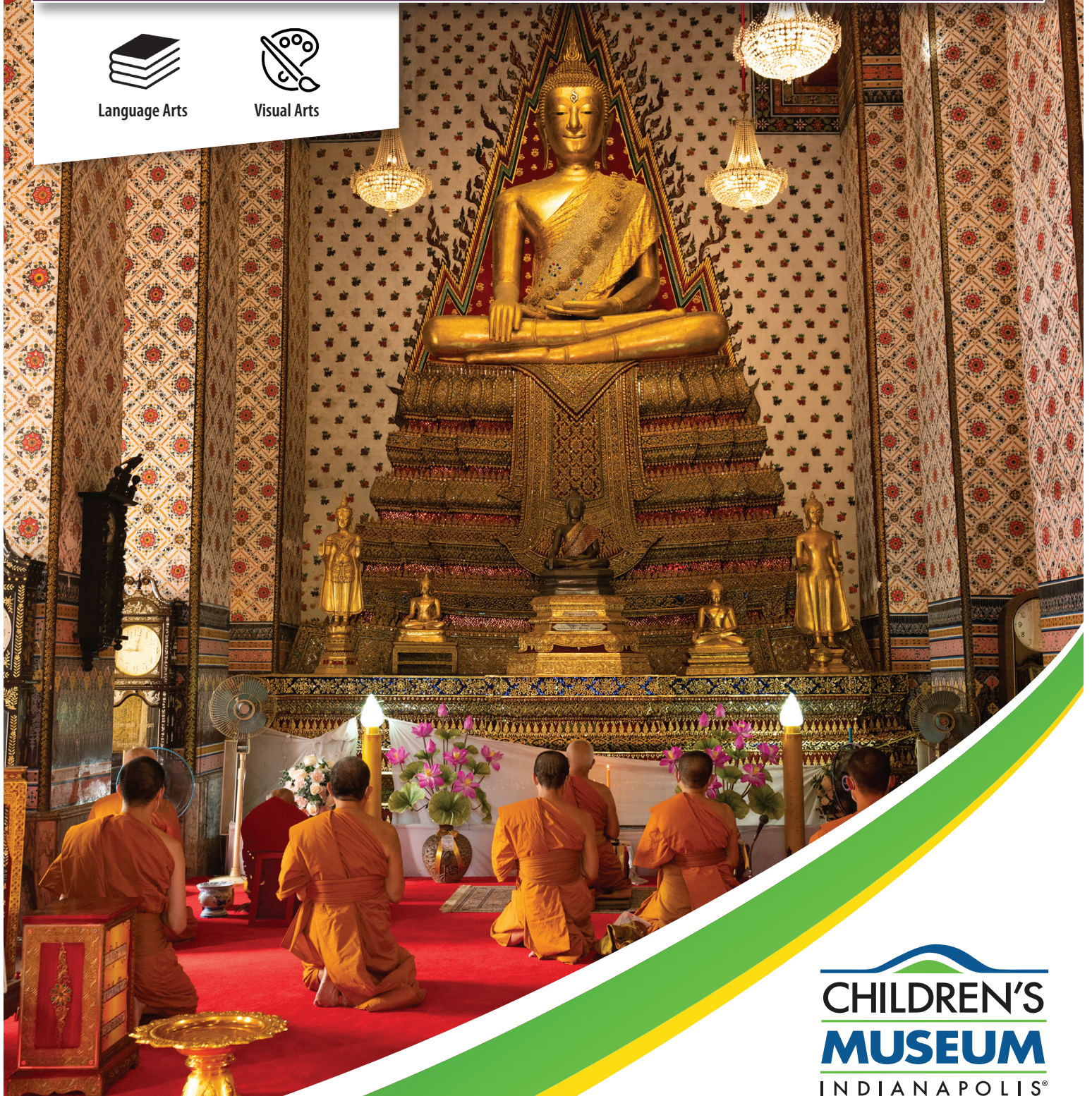
SACRED PLACES



Language Arts



Visual Arts



DEFINING SACREDNESS

The Children's Museum's lessons are designed to weave classroom experiences and museum education together. All lessons are interdisciplinary and can be used as individual classroom experiences or in combination to create a cohesive unit. Lessons are optimized when used in connection with museum virtual programs and field trips.

This lesson invites students to reflect on the meaning of the word sacred and how the idea of sacredness is universal. At the start of the lesson, students will consider what makes a place sacred and, through art and writing, reflect on places that are sacred to them. Students will then have the option to discuss their sacred places with each other and identify common themes in their experience with the sacred. This lesson can be used as a standalone experience or to prepare students to visit the Sacred Places virtual or in-person exhibit.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- What does sacred mean?
- What makes a place sacred?
- What is my sacred place?

MATERIALS

- Whiteboard and dry-erase marker
- My Sacred Place handout (1 per student)
- Markers/colored pencils
- Pencils/pens

MADE POSSIBLE BY



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A private foundation since 1937

Lilly Endowment Inc. is a private foundation created in 1937 by J. K. Lilly Sr. and his sons, Eli and J. K. Jr., through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly and Company. While those gifts remain the financial bedrock of the Endowment, it is a separate entity from the company, with a distinct governing board, staff, and location. In keeping with the founders' wishes, the Endowment supports the causes of community development, education, and religion, and maintains a special commitment to its hometown, Indianapolis, and home state, Indiana. The principal aim of the Endowment's religion grantmaking is to deepen and enrich the lives of Christians in the United States, primarily by seeking out and supporting efforts that enhance the vitality of congregations and strengthen the pastoral and lay leadership of Christian communities. The Endowment also seeks to improve public understanding of diverse religious traditions by supporting fair and accurate portrayals of the role religion plays in the United States and across the globe.

INDIANA ACADEMIC STANDARDS

English Language Arts—.CC.1., 7.CC.1,
8.CC.1, 9-10.CC.1, 11-12.CC.1

Visual Art—Anchor Standard 1

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Define the terms *sacred* and *universal*.
- Discuss what makes a place sacred and discover that sacredness is a universal human concept.
- Reflect, through art and writing, on a place that is sacred to them.
- Respectfully explore the sacred places of their peers.



The Church of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist in Madaba, Jordan
This church was built atop ruins of ancient Christian places of worship in Madaba, in the heart of biblical holy lands

Examining the Word *Sacred*

PROCEDURES–ACTIVITY

1. Share with students that they are going to examine the word *sacred* and what it means to different people.
2. Discuss the following questions. See the sidebar *What does sacred mean?* for talking points.
 - a. What does *sacred* mean?
 - b. What makes a place sacred?

Emphasize that, while different cultures, religions, and individuals may experience the sacred in different ways, sacredness is something experienced by all people.

3. Explain that students will now have the opportunity to reflect on what their sacred place is.
4. Share the *My Sacred Place* handout. Explain that we all have our own sacred places, so students will complete this handout individually. Point out the parts on the handout:
 - a. Show the side that says “My Sacred Place”. Ask students to draw a picture of their sacred place here. Emphasize that a sacred place does not have to be connected to a religious or spiritual tradition, though it may be, and that students may celebrate any type of place that is important to them. See the sidebar *Drawing the Sacred* (page 4) for additional talking points.
 - b. Read the questions on the other side of the handout. Ask students to write their answers to these questions in the boxes provided.
5. Allow students time to work on their handouts individually. If students struggle to identify a place that is sacred to them, facilitate discussion using the prompts in the sidebar *Identifying Your Sacred Place* (page 4).
6. When students have finished working, ask if anyone would like to share what they wrote and drew about their sacred place. Emphasize that sacred places can be very personal and that students do not have to share. If needed, remind students to be respectful of others’ beliefs, practices, and feelings. (See the sidebar *Discussing the Sacred* (page 4) for additional talking points.) If you feel comfortable doing so, share about a place that is sacred to you.
7. If applicable, ask students to identify common themes in each other’s experience with the sacred. For example, different sacred places may evoke similar emotions, such as peace or awe. Reiterate that while we may experience the sacred in different ways, the idea of sacredness is universal. Encourage students to keep this idea in mind while learning about sacred places around the world.

WHAT DOES SACRED MEAN?

Sacred is an adjective used to describe something that is considered to be of great importance and therefore worthy of reverence or respect. Both communities and individuals can designate objects, texts, practices, and places as sacred.

A place is often considered sacred when a special event has happened there, an important object can be found there, or a life-sustaining element can be accessed there. People go to sacred places to perform important practices, find fulfillment, or to reach a new understanding. The experience of being in a sacred place can affect people in immediate and long-lasting ways that can potentially change their perspectives of themselves and the world.

While the word sacred is often associated with spirituality and religion, it can apply to a wide range of contexts. Many types of communities, both religious and secular, have places that are sacred to them. A sacred place also does not have to be a humanmade structure. Many people consider nature to be sacred, for example, and find fulfillment by spending time outdoors.

Individuals can also have places that are sacred to them alone and not tied to the beliefs or practices of a larger community. An individual can have multiple sacred places at the same time, both personal and within communities, and may value different places at different times in their life.

While different cultures, religions, and individuals may experience the sacred in different ways, the idea of sacredness is universal, meaning that it exists and is understood everywhere.

Discussing the Sacred

Learning about sacred places through the lens of real people can help us better communicate with our neighbors, leading to mutual understanding and respect. However, discussing sacred places publicly may be a new experience for some students and perhaps even for you. Below are a few tips to help guide the conversation.

- Some students may have strong feelings about their personal beliefs and practices. Emphasize and model that it is possible for us to maintain our own beliefs while listening respectfully to the beliefs of others.
- While sacred places can be community spaces, they are also deeply personal. Acknowledge that participants in this discussion may have a wide range of beliefs and practices and that individuals from the same faith system can experience the sacred in different ways.
- Some beliefs and practices shared during your conversation and while exploring the exhibit Sacred Places may be new to students. When presented with topics they find unusual or uncomfortable, some students may react in ways that could be considered inappropriate. If this occurs, calmly remind students to treat all people and their beliefs with respect, even when they are very different from our own.



VOCABULARY

• Sacred

• Universal

DRAWING THE SACRED

The experience of the sacred can sometimes be beyond words. Art can be a powerful tool for communicating stories, messages, and emotions that words alone cannot always express. Students' drawings of their sacred places may take a variety of forms. Their drawings may depict the place itself and/or what they do in this space. Their drawings could also be abstract representations of what makes the place sacred or how the place makes them feel. This art project is a great opportunity to discuss symbolism and explore how different faith systems use symbols in their practices. It can also serve as a springboard for discussion about how art can be used to evoke empathy and understanding.

IDENTIFYING YOUR SACRED PLACE

If students have difficulty identifying a place that is sacred to them, encourage them to reflect on some of the following questions:

- What places are important to me? Why are they important?
- Where do I go to recharge?
- Where do I go to think, learn, or grow?

If needed, remind students that their sacred place does not have to be a public one. Their own backyard or a room in their home can be considered sacred to them alone.

Left: Rapa Nui

On Rapa Nui, also known as Easter Island, giant stone statues called moai represent residents' ancestors. And like all things and all people, the moai contain mana, or spiritual energy.

Cover: Wat Arun in Bangkok, Thailand

For about 400 years, Buddhist followers have gathered at the temple Wat Arun to show respect to Buddha.

Photo Credits: Photos provided by The Children's Museum of Indianapolis

SACRED PLACES

NAME

MY SACRED PLACE

WHAT DOES MY SACRED PLACE LOOK LIKE?



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MY SACRED PLACE

WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

WHAT DO I DO AT THIS PLACE?

WHY IS THIS PLACE IMPORTANT TO ME?

HOW DOES THIS PLACE MAKE ME FEEL?

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