

Lesson 1: Introduction to the Mandala

Learning Outcomes

- Foster a sense of appreciation and understanding of the art and cultures of the greater Himalayan region.
- Cultivate a greater awareness of how afflictive emotions manifest in our lives.
- Discover how to incorporate Help Now strategies from the SEE Learning® Playbook to overcome afflictive emotions.

Primary Core Components

Attention and self-awareness, self-regulation, and interpersonal awareness

Recommended Materials

Plain white cardstock, blank templates of board games, pencils, markers, colored pencils, precut squares of construction paper in various colors, glue sticks, Scotch tape, scissors, Model Magic, and store-bought dice

Length:
50 minutes

Grade Levels: Upper elementary
school through high school

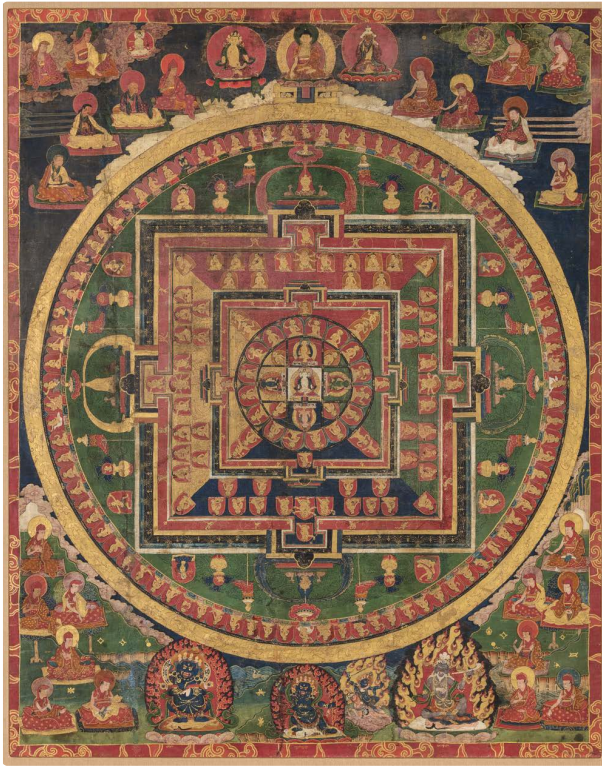
1. Check-In Activity

Welcome students. Explain that this series of lessons is intended to deepen their understanding of the mandala. There is a lesson dedicated to each quadrant of the Mandala Lab. This lesson focuses on the mandala as a whole. The Mandala Lab was designed to give us an opportunity to reflect on our emotions. By identifying our most difficult emotions, and brainstorming how to address them, we are better equipped to face life's challenges.

2. Presentation/Discussion

The term mandala means “circle” or “center” in Sanskrit. A mandala serves as a symbolic map of a universe. Each quadrant of a mandala is associated with a different cardinal direction, color, and element. Mandalas often depict heavenly palaces, with a deity featured in the center. Mandalas are used during prayer and meditation by advanced practitioners of Buddhism.

About the Sarvavid Vairochana Mandala



Saravid Vairochana Mandala; Tibet; 17th century; pigments on cloth;
Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art; gift of Shelley & Donald Rubin;
C2006.66.346

The Saravid Vairochana Mandala features an outer circle surrounding a perfect square, and four quadrants placed around an inner circle. Each colored quadrant represents a particular earthly element, cardinal direction, and buddha, or enlightened being.

The mandala depicts the palace of the Saravid Vairochana deity. Saravid Vairochana's retinue is around him. He is depicted with four faces. He is seated in a meditation posture. He is surrounded at the cardinal directions by four other buddhas.

These buddhas sit at the tips of the triangular quadrants, and together with the white central figure of Vairochana they represent the Buddhas of the Five Families or the Five Wisdom Buddhas. They help practitioners transform the five afflictive emotions of pride, anger, attachment, envy, and ignorance that cloud our worldview into the wisdoms and skills necessary to reach enlightenment. Each emotion and its corresponding wisdom serve as inspiration for the Mandala Lab.

3. Insight Activity

Instruct the students to read pages 10–15 in the SEE Learning® Playbook. A list of Help Now strategies is provided there. Then invite the students to turn to page 26 in the SEE Learning® Playbook and complete the exercises listed. Next, make a list of Help Now strategies as a class that can be used to overcome the afflictive emotions, which are described as “risky emotions” in the SEE Learning® curriculum.

4. Reflective Practice

Now direct students' attention back to the image of the mandala. Mandalas serve as blueprints or maps. Practitioners traverse the mandala in their mind during meditation. The journey towards enlightenment can be likened to a path that culminates in wisdom.

Explain that today we will be making our own board games to demonstrate the path of transforming our emotions. Students have the option of choosing one of the afflictive emotions and designing a game about personal transformation or they can incorporate all five afflictive emotions.

Explain that there are two options. Students can start with a blank paper and create a board game from scratch, or they can use a premade template. If students are having difficulty selecting an afflictive emotion to focus on, encourage them to choose the afflictive emotion that they struggle with the most or the one they are most curious about.

Instruct the students to write or draw the Help Now strategies they can use when they feel an afflictive emotion. Help Now strategies include counting backwards from ten to one, talking to a supportive friend or family member, and drinking a glass of water. When they land on a square on the game board that contains a Help Now strategy, they can advance a certain number of spaces.

In contrast, have them illustrate the behaviors that occur when a spark of a risky emotion becomes a dangerous forest fire. When they land on a square with one of these reactive behaviors, they will move backward on the game board.

As a bonus, when students land on a Help Now strategy, they can practice their favorite strategy. This will help crystallize the strategies in their minds.

Encourage the students to be creative about incorporating shortcuts and other fun rules into the game. Describe how they can make game pieces for each player using paper or Model Magic. State that they can use markers to add color and vibrancy to their games. Distribute dice to the students for playing the game.

5. Debrief

Ask the students to reflect on the process of making the board game. Invite students to share their completed board games with the class. Did labeling the squares deepen their awareness of the types of behaviors that can occur when we are stuck in an afflictive emotion? Did they come up with any additional Help Now strategies that they can use?

6. Follow-Up and Extension Activity About the Mandala Offering Set



Mandala Offering Set; Tibet; mid-20th century; gilt silver;
Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art; SC2012.71a-e

The mandala offering is a symbolic offering made by Buddhist practitioners. It is presented to teachers or deities. The mandala represents the entire universe. With this act of giving, the practitioner envisions offering all that is—both material and immaterial—to the universe. This act of giving is conducted for the purpose of purification and the accumulation of merit. It is beneficial in training the mind to let go of attachment.

Through this practice, one develops a deeper understanding of the people, places, and material things that we cling to in this world. The repeated practice of mandala offering helps the practitioner to transcend attachment and achieve true freedom.

Reflect on the people, places, and material things that you cling to in this world. The element associated with attachment is fire. When we become overly dependent on people, places, or things, it becomes like a fire that is burning out of control.

If you were to let go of an outcome that you are fixated on, how might that benefit you? What emotions would letting go elicit? Record your thoughts on the matter.

The Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art Core Values of Teaching

Social and Emotional Learning	Social, Emotional, and Ethical (SEE) Learning® values and skills play an integral role in our educational offerings.
Dynamic / Differentiated	We aim to meet our program participants at every education, knowledge, language, and creative skill level by dynamically differentiating our program lessons and activities for a variety of levels of learners.
Inquiry-Based	We follow an inquiry-based learning methodology that employs question posing and problem solving as primary ways to engage students in active and empowered learning.
Relevant / Relatable	As a global museum dedicated to the arts and cultures of the Himalayas, we strive to make our unique content relevant and relatable to the contemporary lives of our visitors and program participants.
Exploration-Focused	We challenge students to find their creative voices and visions through process-based art making that allows them to explore new types of material techniques, artistic processes, and creative ways of thinking and making.
Culturally Attuned	We actively collaborate with members of the Himalayan and Himalayan-American communities to ensure the most accurate and just representations of the Himalayan people, arts, cultures, religions, and histories in our programs.
Teamwork	We strive to create programs, activities, and a supportive learning environment that cultivates creative collaboration between peers and across all generations of visitors.

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