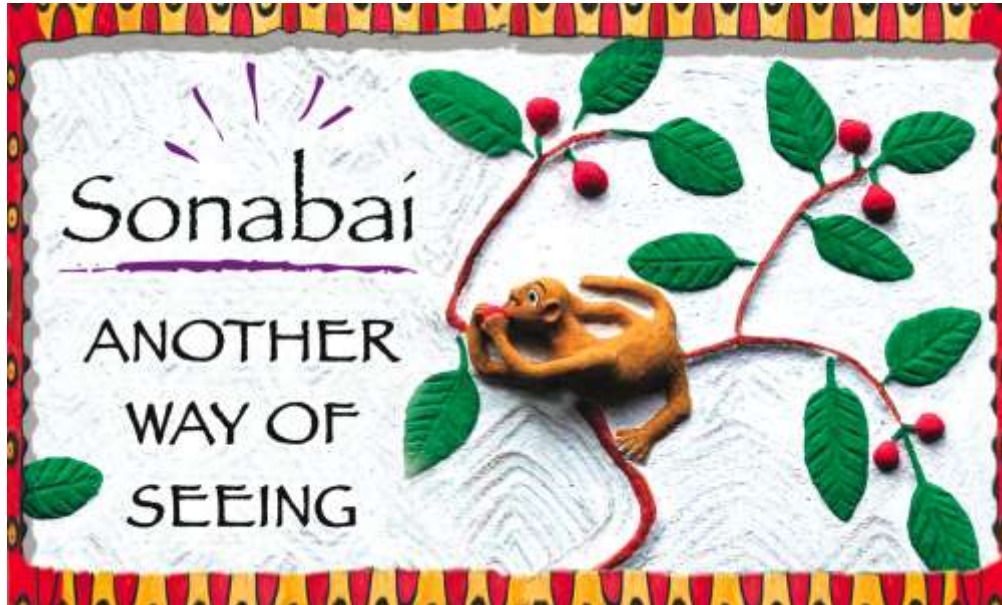


Teacher Exhibition Guide



Exhibition Introduction

SONABAI – Another Way of Seeing is the first exhibition in the western hemisphere to feature the art of a remarkable self-taught artist from India, who as a young bride, was forced by her husband to live in total isolation for 15 years. During that oppressed time, she saw only her husband and their one child, a son. Separated from the outside world, Sonabai populated the interior mud walls of her home with colorful, whimsical sculptures created exclusively from her own vivid imagination. Unfamiliar with any art outside the



limited decorations of her village, she invented a style all her own and unique in Indian art. When her confinement ended and villagers entered her home, they were astounded by her vision.

Although an essentially shy and withdrawn woman, Sonabai, with government encouragement, conducted workshops and taught many other artists her unusual techniques, strongly influencing their creativity. Today in the remote rural villages of her central Indian state, many other artists practice Sonabai's style. Through the necessity of expressing her own vision in the face of great adversity, Sonabai unintentionally improved the economy and welfare of her entire region.



Geographic Connection

Sonabai's remote village of Puhputra (marked in red) is in Surguja District, Chattisgarh, in the heart of central India. This rice-farming community is hundreds of miles from any major city. The tempo of life is slow in Puhputra, embedded in ancient traditions.

The women of Sonabai's village of Puhputra decorate their mud walls with a variety of floral and decorative designs sculpted in clay and painted with mineral pigments. Although this traditional craft is similar in technique to some of Sonabai's art, its style is entirely different.

Themes for Exploration

Creativity as Catharsis

The message of Sonabai's art is universal. Her story echoes the urgent need of humanity to express itself creatively. How can different creative expressions help each of us cope with the adversity in our lives?

Outsider Artists and Artist Environment-Builders

Sonabai was a self-taught artist who was not working in any art form traditional to her region. Artists like Sonabai are often referred to as "outsider" artists. What outsider artists might we have in our midst?

Rural India

The village of Puhputra, Sonabai's home, is in a remote, rural location. Approximately 70% of India's population resides in rural areas. How are rural and urban cultures different, both in India and in the U.S.?

Rice Cultivation

Rice is the primary crop grown in India. In Puhputra, a farming community, the rice crop is an essential part of villagers' everyday lives as they depend on it for survival. How has the rice been a vital part of world civilizations, both presently and in the past?

Curricular Connections & CA Content Standards

KINDERGARTEN-GRADE 2

- Locate India on a map and discuss the natural environment. Have students explore the lifestyles of its people based on the geography. (Social Studies: K.4, 1.2)
- Discuss Sonabai's courage and determination, the rules that she had to live by and how she made a difference in others' lives. (Social Studies K.1; 1.1, 2.5)
- Learn about the production and harvesting of rice in India and the United States, now and in the past. (Social Studies 2.4)
- Create an animal form out of papier-mâché. (Visual Art: Kindergarten - 2.2 & 2.7; 1st grade 2.3 & 2.5; 2nd grade 2.1 & 2.2)
- Paint a picture about your own family and neighborhood and discuss how Sonabai's art was connected to her community. (Visual Art: Kindergarten - 2.4; 1st grade – 2.8)
- Discuss how Sonabai's works show people doing things together. (Visual Art: Kindergarten - 3.2 7 3.3; 1st grade - 3.2)
- Read: *One Grain of Rice: A Mathematical Folktale*. (English-Language Arts.: 2.0 & 3.0, K,1 & 2)

GRADES 3-5

- Compare the physical and geographic features of California to that of India. Compare Pre-Columbian customs, folklore and traditions to those of contemporary rural India. (Social Studies: 3.1, 5.1)
- Learn about the production and economy that surrounds rice in India and the United States, now and in the past. (Social Studies 3.5)
- Read: *One Grain of Rice: A Mathematical Folktale*. (English-Language Arts: 2.0 & 3.0)
- Have students write a diary entry from the point of view of Sonabai both while she is living in isolation and then after she is no longer isolated. (English-Language Arts 2.1 - 3, 4 & 5)

GRADES 6-8

- Host a week in the classroom in which each day is devoted to learning about rice and its long-lasting contributions to world civilizations. Explore its impact on customs and traditions, economics, art, culinary traditions, literature and other developments around the world.
http://www.uni.edu/gai/India/India_Lesson_Plans/Rice_It_Feeds_The_World.htm
- Learn about Hindusim, the social structure of the caste systems and important aesthetic and intellectual traditions within the religion. (Social Studies 6.5)
- Write a letter from Sonabai to her fellow villagers. (English-Language Arts: Writing Applications 6th Grade - 1.1 & 1.2; 7th - 2.1; 8th – 2.1)

GRADES 9-12

- Write the introduction to Sonabai's autobiography using the 1st person perspective. (9th - 12th Writing 2.1)
- Create a short video or a blog inspired by women's domestic art, outsider artists or artist environment-builders. (9-12 visual arts 2.6)
- Explore Sonabai's biography and her work and discuss her influence on her community and the national and international impact of her work. Then consider Sonabai the following:
 - What is universal about Sonabai's work?
 - What was the relationship between the artist and her process?
 - What do you think were her intentions in creating what are considered works of art?
 - How do you and other viewers interpret her work and how do they impact you?

Compare Sonabai and her work to that of another "outsider artist" or artist-environment builder such as Sam/Simon Rodia or Niki de Saint Phalle. (9-12 visual arts 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2 4.3)

Kohler Arts Center (outsider artists and artist- environment builders) - <http://www.jmkac.org>

Intuit – the Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art <http://www.art.org/index.html>

Create a Bas-Relief Sculpture in the Style of Sonabai!

Adapt for different grade levels

Materials:

1-2 in. wide bamboo or cardboard strips approx. 1 ft. long
 Newspaper
 Water
 Bag of white all-purpose flour
 Bucket or bowl for mixing papier-mâché
 String - *optional*
 Masking tape
 Tempera paint - *optional*

Procedures:

Making a *jali* (a lattice work screen)

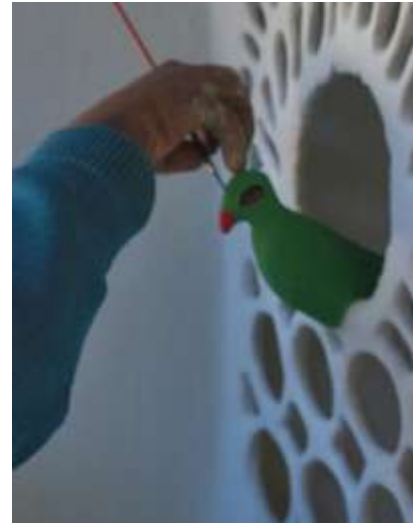
1. Take a thin strip of bamboo/cardboard and overlap edges to form a circle. Double up a piece of string and tightly tie it around the overlapped pieces of bamboo/cardboard using a clove hitch knot. If you are using cardboard, you may use masking tape to join the pieces instead.
<http://www.realknots.com/knots/hitches.htm#mastworp>
2. Tear newspaper into strips that are about 6 inches long and 2-3 inches wide.
3. To make papier-mâché paste, add 2 parts water to one part flour, mixing as you go to remove any lumps. The resulting paste should be the consistency of thick glue.
4. Submerge a few strips of newspaper at a time into paste mixture.
5. Wrap paste-covered strips in sections around the circle until it is completely covered. Repeat this step two or three times. Set aside to dry.

Creating a 3D Papier-Mâché Sculpture

6. Begin forming sheets of newspaper (by crumbling and folding) into an animal or human form small enough to fit into the hoop you've created out of bamboo/cardboard and papier-mâché. As you go, apply masking tape to retain the shape that you are creating.
7. Repeat step 3 (if needed) and step 4.
8. Wrap paste-covered strips around your sculpture in sections, creating 2-3 layers, until it is completely covered. Set aside to dry.

Connecting the *Jali* and the Sculpture to Create a Bas-Relief

9. Place the small sculpture inside the bottom of the circle and either tie it into place with string or adhere with masking tape.
10. Repeat steps 3 and 4.
11. With long strips of paste-covered newspaper, connect the base of the hoop to the base of the sculpture by wrapping pieces underneath the hoop and over the sculpture in several directions. Repeat this step several times until the connection is strong and then set the piece aside to dry.
12. *For more advanced students* – Create *jali* forms in multiples of 3; 9 circles is optimal. Connect these forms in the same manner as indicated in the directions for step 11. This will result in a *jali* wall/screen similar to those that Sonabai created in her home.
12. *Optional* - Once the piece is dry, apply tempera paints in a variety of colors and patterns to embellish the work to your liking.



Extensions to Be Adapted for Different Grade Levels:

Science: Create pigments for paint made of natural dyes such as soil, minerals, etc.... Learn about how rice grows.

Math: Read *One Grain of Rice*, a variation of the trickster tale “Sissa and the Troublesome Trifles”, to explore multiplication and square roots. Explore ratios as they apply to papier-mâché and water and paint pigments.

Music: Find out about traditional instruments from India.

Theater: Act out a folktale from India. Develop a theatrical production or skit that dramatizes the events of Sonabai’s life.

Dance: Watch a recording of Indian dance, particularly a dance relating to the harvest season. Learn specific dance moves and rhythms.

Art: Explore women’s domestic art, outsider artists and artist-environment builders. Imagine that you can reinvent your own environment. What inspires you? What materials do you use? Create a drawing or a model of the environment that you’ve created.

Language Arts: Consider Sonabai’s situation of being isolated for 15 years from everyone but her husband and child. How would you react to the same situation? Think of the challenges that you have faced in your own life. How did you cope with these challenges? How can creative expressions help us cope with adversity in life? Address your reflective answers to these questions in a journal entry.

Web Resources:

Mingei International Museum – exhibitions <http://www.mingei.org/exhibitions/detail.php?EID=151>

Sonabai website <http://sonabai.com/>

Lesson plan on India and rice http://www.uni.edu/gai/India/India_Lesson_Plans/Rice_It_Feeds_The_World.htm

Intuit – the Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art <http://www.art.org/index.html>

Kohler Arts Center (outsider artists and artist-environment builders) <http://www.jmkac.org>

Author’s web companion to *Wonderful Towers of Watts* with classroom activities and discussion points.

<http://www.franelessac.com/docs/teachersnotes/Wonderful%20Towers%20of%20Watts.pdf>

Ultimate Paper Mache <http://ultimatepapermache.com/sitemap>

Website of Stephen Huyler, exhibition curator <http://www.stephenhuyler.com>

UCLA site on Indian culture <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/MAIN/site.html>

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Demi, *One Grain of Rice*. New York: Scholastic Press, 1997.

Stephen Huyler, *Sonabai - Another Way of Seeing*. Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2009.

Patricia Zelter, *Wonderful Towers of Watts*. Illustrated by Frane Lessac. Honesdale, PA: Boyd Mills Press, 2005.

Ulrich Krempel, *Niki’s World: Niki de Saint Phalle*. New York, NY: Prestel Publishing, 2004.



Sonabai, her daughter-in-law and granddaughter sculpt a work together out of organic materials.



A sculpture created by Sonabai's family at her home in Puhputra.



Sonabai's depiction of the rice harvest.



The courtyard of Sonabai's home with her embellishments.



A bas-relief *jali* depicting figures and animals, among them, the Hindu deity Krishna playing the flute.