

## Animals and Art (in-person tours)

Look for real and imaginary animals in works of art from around the world. Children can share what they see and know about animals and their habits. Explore how humans and animals interact, and hear stories with animals in leading roles.

### Theme: Animals on the Move

Animals are all around us and they are on the move! They may be looking for food or other animals, moving to new places, or having fun while swimming, flying, walking, dancing, and more. Or they may be working with humans to get things done! Discover the many ways that animals on the move are important to the world and to us.

### ARTWORK 1:

#### North America, United States

#### Rooster Weathervanes, 19th century

Copper, zinc, iron, pigments, 2004.177.14, 12, 4

#### Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)

1. Weathervanes have been around for over 2,000 years, and were first used in Greece and China. They move and spin around to show the wind's direction. Some have arrows at the bottom, but these vanes in Mia's collection don't have pointers. The rooster has been a favorite shape because its tail catches the wind and turns the head toward the direction from which the wind is blowing.
2. Other vanes include ships, arrows, horses, deer, and cows. (Point out more examples on a tablet or currently on display at Mia.) Weathervanes were used on ships to help them in sailing. They were also placed on top of homes, churches, and barns.
3. In Rome, the Pope declared that every Catholic church should have a cockerel (rooster) on its dome or steeple as a reminder of a story from the Bible: When Jesus was arrested, he said that his disciple Peter would deny knowing him three times before the cock crowed (see research resource below and Luke 22:33-34). The cockerels were visible from anywhere in town because of their high placement. The church also believed that the rooster depicted light and resurrection, making it even more symbolic to place on the exterior of a holy dwelling.
4. Immigrants on the move from Europe to America brought the tradition of the weathervane with them. These unique shapes, placed on homes or barns, have become a *nostalgic piece of Americana* (memories of the past related to American history or culture). While they were used for practical purposes at first, eventually weather vanes became art pieces that were larger and more detailed in their designs.

**Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)**

1. What type of animal has been used on this weathervane? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Why might you want to know the direction the wind is blowing? What types of activities rely on the wind? (sailing, flying kites, windsurfing)
3. What animal would you put on a weathervane that you'd like to see turning around in the wind?
4. Some people collect old items that remind them of American culture and the past. Do you have any favorite objects that you like to collect?

**Research resources;**

Wikipedia: [Weathervane](#)

Wikipedia: [Denial of Peter](#)

**ARTWORK 2:****China, Asia****Two camels and a groom, 618–90****Earthenware with pigments, 2004.205.1.1****Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)**

1. Camels don't particularly like to be ridden by humans. In ancient China, however, they were ideal for carrying goods to trade with others along many routes that made up what was called the Silk Road (show a map). These desert routes were too difficult to cross with carts and too dry and barren (very few plants) for horses, who require lots of food and water.
2. Camels are called the "ships of the desert" because they can travel long distances, for weeks at a time, without requiring food and water. To survive, they store fat, not water, in their humps.
3. A bearded groom rides a two-humped Bactrian camel, which is accompanied by a one-humped dromedary. The beard tells us he is not Chinese, but a foreigner from Mongolia or central Asia. The need for camels was great as the Chinese empire extended across most of central Asia during the Tang dynasty (618–907),
4. These ceramic camels were buried in the tomb of a person who became wealthy through trade. Only very important people would have such large figures in their tombs. They represent that this person would still rely on his camels to be on the move in the afterlife.

**Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)**

1. Look closely at these two camels, especially their faces. How would you describe their attitudes? How are these two camels alike? How are they different?
2. How can you tell that these camels are on the move?
3. Chinese artists could study the camels in the open air markets hundreds of years ago. Where could you go to study and draw animals today? What kinds of animals would you like to draw?

**Research resources:**

World History Encyclopedia Map of [Silk road routes](#)

### ARTWORK 3:

**Sowah Kwei, Ghana, 1954–99**

**Fantasy coffin, 1993**

**Wood, plaster, acrylic paint, 2010.72, ©1993 Sowah Kwei**

#### Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)

1. This coffin in the shape of a spiny lobster was made by Sowah Kwei, from Ghana in West Africa. This type of lobster is commonly caught in the warm waters off Ghana's coast. The coffin was pieced together from dozens of parts, covered with plaster, and sprayed with acrylic paint.
2. Among the Ga in Ghana, coffins made in fabulous shapes say something about the people for whom they are made—depicting a character trait, an occupation, a symbol of one's standing in the community, or what they hope to achieve in the afterlife. They move through the town, carried to the burial site in a procession that often includes joyous dancing and music.
3. To the people of Ghana, death is not an end, but a transition to the spiritual realm of their ancestors. Ancestors are forever considered members of the family. It is believed that if the deceased is properly honored, such actions secure spiritual favor for the family left on earth.
4. The range of remarkable coffins could include: an airliner, a Mercedes Benz, a canoe, a leopard, a chicken, a bull, a crab, an eagle, a camera, a Yamaha outboard motor (show pictures of some examples). A lobster coffin might be made for a fisherman. A chili pepper coffin might represent a person's personality: hot and temperamental, someone you don't mess around with.
5. Museums became interested in these colorful, intricately designed coffins. This one, called a "fantasy coffin", was made for a museum and never intended for burial.

#### Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. Look closely. What details of the spiny lobster did the coffin maker capture? A lobster's tale is made of several sections. How do you think the tail moves?
2. How do you think this lobster would get from one place to another? What do you see that makes you say that? (When threatened by a predator, the spiny lobster flexes its tail to escape backwards!)
3. The coffin usually tells something about the person for whom it was made. What do you think a lobster says about the person this coffin is for?
4. The Kane Kwei studio, now run by his nephew Sowah, will make a coffin in just about any shape you want. Some are made to be sold to museums and others are sold for burials. What kind of coffin would you request?

#### Research resources:

[Kane Kwei workshop](#)

**ARTWORK 4:****Indonesia, Asia****Ganesha, 10th–11th century****Volcanic stone (andesite), 2003.198****Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)**

1. This sculpture of the Hindu god Ganesha from the island of Java in Indonesia is carved from a single piece of volcanic stone called andesite. Ganesha sits on a base in the shape of a double lotus flower, a type of water lily.
2. Ganesha statues often decorate temples and appear in the homes of believers. Beloved and playful, he brings good fortune and success to daily activities. Hindus call on him to help overcome challenges, remove distractions, and protect them, especially when starting some new activity (such as a journey, a business, a marriage, or a new year).
3. The sculpture helps tell his story, including the time when his father replaced the boy's missing head with an elephant's head! (See the story below.) He loves sweets and eats them from a bowl in his lower left hand. His braided headdress shows a protective crescent moon and skull. His lower right hand grasps a broken tusk which, in one of many stories, he broke off and threw at the moon because the moon laughed at his potbelly! His upper right hand holds a rosary topped with a pomegranate, a symbol of abundance. In his upper left hand, he displays a battle-axe used to counter evil.
4. Ganesha does not always just sit around and eat. He loves to move and dance, which shows his joyful side. His dance helps remove obstacles and brings success to his followers. (Show an image of Dancing Ganesha.)

**Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)**

1. Take a moment to look at this sculpture. How would you describe Ganesha, the Elephant god? What seems real and what seems supernatural (outside of reality)?
2. Ganesha is holding symbols that tell his story. What symbols would you include in a sculpture of you to tell your story?
3. Ganesha provides a visual spiritual inspiration to people of Hindu beliefs. What objects in your life provide spiritual inspiration to you? Even in the United States, many people turn to Ganesha to help them move past things that are troubling them or preventing them from doing things. How do you remove obstacles or barriers in your life?

**There are many stories about how Ganesha got his elephant head, Here is one version:**

The goddess Parvati (PARH-vah-tee) created Ganesha as a son to keep her company while her husband, Shiva, was away from home. She formed Ganesha using clay from the riverbank or, in some stories, a skin softener made of tumeric (a yellow spice) that she scraped off her body. Parvati used her goddess powers to bring her son to life and was so delighted with him that she kept him always by her side. One day before her bath, she asked Ganesha to guard the doorway. When Shiva arrived home unexpectedly, he heard his wife in her bath and found a young stranger who would not let him in. Shiva became so angry that he cut off Ganesha's head in a fit of rage! When Parvati heard all the commotion, she ran out to find that her son was dead. She explained to Shiva who Ganesha was, and Shiva promised that he would bring the boy back to life with the head of the next creature that came along—which happened to be an elephant! Ganesha was alive and Parvati was happy!

**ARTWORK 5:****Probably Haida, North America****Rattle, 1850–1910, Cedarwood, leather, abalone, shell, pigment****The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial Fund, 75.55****Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)**

1. This animal was on the move during a Northwest Coast Haida religious and social ceremony. To prepare for the celebration, women made special clothing, while men carved wooden masks and accessories. A rattle like this is filled with small pebbles and shaken by a Native American man, in ceremonial dress, to help keep rhythm while he dances.
2. The rattle, shaped like a bird, represents the trickster Raven, who in a well-known story stole the sun from its hiding place and flew it into the heavens, creating the universe.
3. A tiny human figure rides on Raven's back and interacts with a smaller bird. See how his tongue joins to the bird's beak. This shows the human and animal worlds are connected. Humans and animals are moving in the world together.
4. The decorative shapes on the rattle are ones often used by Northwest Coast people. The geometric shapes include circles, squares, triangles, and rectangles. The organic shapes are curved and flowing like those found in nature.

**Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)**

1. Where do you see the trickster Raven on this rattle? Where is his head? Where are his wings? Where is the human figure on the sculpture? What do you think the man is doing?
2. What do you think the rattle would sound like when shaken? Let's make the sound together.
3. There are five different figures on the rattle. Let's find them together. Who do you think is most important? What do you see that makes you say that?
4. Look closely at the design of the rattle. Where do you see organic shapes? Where do you see geometric shapes?
5. Raven is one of the most well-known characters in Haida stories because of his actions. In the most popular story, he stole the sun from a box and flew with it into the sky to place it there. What stories about animals do you like?

**Research resources:**YouTube: [Raven dance](#)

**ARTWORK 6:**

**Newell Convers Wyeth, United States**  
**Bronco Buster, 1906, Oil on canvas, 70.62**

**Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)**

1. When this painting was made, animals were often used to sell products. Many examples come to mind that we still see today: Tony the Tiger, Trix Rabbit, and Smokey the Bear (show examples).
2. Photographs weren't being used yet in product ads. Instead, companies hired popular artists to create scenes of American life for advertisements that were printed in magazines and newspapers. N.C. Wyeth was known for images of people who settled in "The West," including explorers, cowboys, and pioneers.
3. Look for "Cream of Wheat for Breakfast" in the painting. In this image, the bronco rider holds on for dear life while the horse bucks beneath him. It would take a great deal of strength to stay on the horse. The image suggests that eating Cream of Wheat helped make him strong!
4. Bronco riding still happens today in competitive performances called rodeos. There is a debate about whether it is too dangerous for both people and animals to participate in this sport.

**Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)**

1. What happened right before this moment in the painting? What is going to happen next?
2. Why do you think the horse is moving the way it is?
3. Let's look at another painting by N.C. Wyeth with a man on a horse. How are the images similar? How are they different?
4. Companies use pictures to tell us about their products. This painting was made to sell Cream of Wheat, a cereal. What animals do companies use today to sell items on television, in magazines, and online?

**Research resources:**

News article: [Rodeo safety](#)

(gives information about bull riding; also applies to bronco riding)



**ARTWORK 7:****Pablo Picasso, Spain, 1881–1973****Baboon and Young, 1951****Bronze, 55.45**

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**Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)**

1. When a mother baboon is on the move, she often might have a baby in tow. Baboons are born with an instinct to grasp or grip tightly with both hands and feet, which allows them to cling to their mother's chest and belly as she runs or jumps through trees and brush. The baby can do this almost immediately after birth. After several weeks, they begin to ride on her back in an upright position, like a jockey.
2. Baboon babies are intelligent, alert and curious. Within a few weeks the youngsters begin to explore their world by climbing, running and jumping. They spend lots of time with their peers in active and exciting playgroups overlooked by several moms.
3. Pablo Picasso may have shown this parent-child relationship because he was a father of young children at the time. He had a son, Claude, and a daughter, Paloma. He often made artworks about parenthood that included humans and animals with babies.
4. Many everyday objects appear in this sculpture: two metal cars, undersides together, form the baboon's head; a round earthenware pot, with its high handles, makes up the torso and shoulders; and what appears to be a curving steel spring forms the backbone and long tail. The rest of the body and the figure of the baby were modeled from clay.
5. We do not know for certain what all the objects were that Picasso used. A plaster cast was made from the model, and then the cast was used to make a bronze sculpture.

**Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)**

1. Look closely. What words would you use to describe the relationship between this parent and baby? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Baby baboons can run, jump, and climb when only a few weeks old. How is this different from the way human babies move?
3. Take a moment to look around the sculpture. What everyday objects might Picasso have used to form the baboons? (The baboon's head is made by attaching two toy cars together; accept any other ideas.) What do you see that makes you say that?
4. Think about someone you love and care for. How do you show them you love them? How does that make you feel? How would you show that in a work of art?

**Research resources:**YouTube: [Baboon video](#)

**ARTWORK 8:****Christi Belcourt, Michif (Métis)****It's a Delicate Balance, 2021****Acrylic on canvas. 2021.30****Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)**

1. Christi Belcourt is a Michif (Métis) visual artist whose art explores and celebrates the beauty of the natural world and reflects the traditions and the knowledge of her people. Belcourt says about her art: "This wondrous planet, so full of mystery, is a paradise. All I want to do is give everything I have, my energy, my love, my labour – all of it in gratitude for what we are given. I'll never be able to give back enough. . . . My love for this world, and my love for everyone and everything is what drives me."
2. Plants and animals move and live together in the natural world. All the parts are connected and rely on one another, including humans. As the title of the painting suggests, everything is in "a delicate balance."
3. This painting shows how, for Native communities, all beings—plants, animals, insects, microbes—are related to one another, and to be treated with respect and care. Belcourt is a community-based artist, environmentalist and advocate for the lands, waters and Indigenous peoples (original people of a particular place). She depicts beings that are currently threatened, endangered, or close to extinction in Mia's backyard, the Upper Midwest (see research resources below).
4. Belcourt paints these creatures as if she were beading them on hide, drawing upon designs and motifs found in Michif beadwork. Each dot is painted individually, representing a single bead. She carefully depicts the natural world filled with blossoming flowers, leaves and other greenery, and the animals living within that world.

**Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)**

1. Look closely at this painting. What types of animals do you see among the plants and in the water?
2. How do you think humans impact the environment and animal habitats (where animals live and move around)?
3. Many artists use their work as a way to express their feelings about issues that are important to them. Belcourt says, "I think art is a vehicle and it is powerful in its ability to communicate what, sometimes, plain words cannot. Art can be used to seek justice and raise awareness so that change can happen. So the role of the artist is not only as an artist, but as a leader." How would you use artwork to express what is important to you?

**Research resources:**

A document is being produced that identifies many of the plants and animals in the painting and what their endangered status is.

