



Lesson Concept: Mosaic

Introduce students to the ancient Roman art of mosaics! They will learn about how mosaics were made and used in Roman houses and about the ancient Roman city of Antioch and its importance in the Roman Empire.

Grade Level:	Grades 3-5, Grades K-2
Collection:	Ancient Art
Culture/Region:	Rome
Subject Area:	History and Social Science, Visual Arts
Activity Type:	Lesson Concept

OBJECT INFORMATION



Section of a Floor Mosaic Depicting Fall

Romans often decorated their public buildings, villas, and houses with mosaics—pictures or patterns made from small pieces of stone and glass called tesserae (tes'-er-ray). To make these mosaics, artists first created a foundation (slightly below ground level) with rocks and mortar and then poured wet cement over this mixture. Next they placed the tesserae on the cement to create a design or a picture, using different colors, materials, and sizes to achieve the effects of a painting and a more naturalistic image. Here, for instance, glass tesserae were used to add highlights and emphasize the piled-up bounty of the harvest in the basket.

This mosaic panel is part of a larger continuous composition illustrating the four seasons. The seasons are personified as erotes (er-o'-tees), small boys with wings who were the mischievous companions of Eros. (Eros and his mother, Aphrodite, the Greek god and goddess of love, were known in Rome as Cupid and Venus.) Erotes were often shown in a variety of costumes; the one in this panel represents the fall season and wears a tunic with a mantle around his waist. He carries a basket of fruit on his shoulders and a pruning knife in his left hand

Section of a Floor Mosaic Depicting Fall,
3rd–4th century AD
Roman
Stone and glass tesserae, 70 x 40 in.
Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund

to harvest fall fruits such as apples and grapes.

Although some mosaics were applied to walls and even ceilings, most were placed on floors, serving as part of the architecture as well as the decoration in Roman buildings. The fourseasons mosaic was created around the mid to late third century and decorated the corridor next to two cubicula, or bedrooms, of a house. On the floor of the triclinium, or dining room, was another mosaic showing a drinking competition between Dionysus and Hercules. This "House of the Drinking Contest," as it was accordingly named, was in Seleucia, the port of the city of Antioch, capital of the Roman province of Syria. Antioch was one of the largest cities of the Roman Empire, strategically located between trade routes from Asia Minor to Europe. Many different goods were traded at Antioch including spices. When this site (in present-day Turkey) was excavated by archaeologists in the 1930s, some of the discoveries remained in Turkey while others were sent to various museums and universities that helped fund the excavation.



The Four Seasons, section of floor mosaic from the House of the Drinking Contest, 3rd–4th century AD, Roman, Stone and glass tesserae, 70 x 40 in, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund

ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

Have the students sketch out an original design for a mosaic. The image should be large enough so it can be "tiled" later. Alternatively, ask the students how they would represent one of the four seasons in a picture. Would they personify the season? What symbols would they use to represent that particular season? Have the students draw the season they wish to represent, then cut construction paper strips of different colors into approximately 1/8-inch squares. Have them wipe a glue stick on a small area of the image and place the squares on the image using their fingers or tweezers.

ACTIVITY 2

Ask the students to write a story about life in a house or villa in ancient Rome: What would the daily activities be? Who would live in the house? Ask them to describe how they would decorate the house with mosaics and paintings. Encourage the students to share their ideas about their mosaic, story, or drawing. Ask them to explain any symbols they have chosen and their reasons for selecting them.

ACTIVITY 3

Have students view a detailed map of the Roman Empire and locate the city of Antioch. It was located in a prime spot for trade between the lands of Asia Minor and those of the rest of the European continent. Students can discuss the types of things that might have been traded in the Roman Empire including Antioch. Encourage the students to share their ideas about their mosaic, story, or drawing. Ask them to explain any symbols they have chosen and their reasons for selecting them.

STANDARDS OF LEARNING

Visual Arts K.1, K.2, K.3, K.7.3, K.7.5, K.8, K.11, K.12, K.13, K.14, K.16, 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 1.7.3, 1.7.4, 1.8, 1.12, 1.13, 1.17, 1.20, 2.4., 2.5.4, 2.5.5, 2.11, 2.19, 2.20, 2.21, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.7.5, 3.13, 3.16, 3.19, 3.25, 4.2, 4.3, 4.5.4, 4.7, 4.18, 4.19, 5.1, 5.3, 5.5, 5.6, 5.9, 5.26

English K.1 a, K.2 b-g, K.3 a-f, K.8 a-d, K-11, 1.1, 1.2 a-e, 1.3 a-d, 1.8, 1.9, 1.11, 1.12, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.7, 2.8, 2.11, 2.12, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 4.1 b,e, 4.2, 4.4, 4.7, 4.8, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.8, 5.9

History K.3, K.4 b, K.4 c, 1.4 b, 1.4 d, 2.7, 3.1, 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8

Math K.12, 1.17