INTRODUCTION

This guide produced by The Ringling Museum has been designed to complement the Embracing Our Differences curriculum. It highlights issues of identity injustice, personal responsibility, conflict, and compassion through a selection of artworks that encourage students to think about and grapple with the historic portrayal and role of women in the arts.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this teacher-guided tour, students will:

- Discuss the messages represented in each work of art and how those messages may be relevant to their own lives
- Understand the ways women have historically been portrayed and excluded from art, and what impact that has on the human experience today
- Engage with a variety of objects in The Ringling collection, building visual literacy and social-emotional learning skills

USING THE GUIDE

In today’s society, open and honest dialogue between individuals is more important than ever. We can foster social cohesion by inspiring dialogue that supports the development of a civil society, from its smallest unit—the individual—outward to the family, the school, the community, the nation, and the world.

This guide has been created in a modular form. There are three thematic modules Stand Up: Stories of Courage, A Seat at the Table, and Women on Display: Objectified Bodies, each which includes 3 works of art related to that theme. For each artwork, you will find a summary of its meaning, suggested discussion points, and an extension activity if you want to continue the conversation.

You do not need to follow any particular order when viewing these objects. Each thematic module can be adapted for any grade level, although the suggested guidelines and topics listed for each object may be helpful in selecting the right works for your group.

- **STAND UP: STORIES OF COURAGE** | Elementary
- **A SEAT AT THE TABLE** | Middle
- **WOMEN ON DISPLAY: OBJECTIFIED BODIES** | High
“You must never be fearful about what you are doing when it is right.”
- Rosa Parks

ANTONIO NEGRETTI, ESTHER BEFORE AHASUERUS

BACKGROUND
This painting tells the story of Esther, who heroically saved her people, the Jews, from certain destruction. Esther was married to the Persian king Ahasuerus (pronounced AY-haz-yoo-EER-uh), who didn’t know about Esther’s Jewish ancestry. When Ahasuerus signed a law that would massacre all Jewish people, Esther knew she had to stand up for her people. Here we see Esther begging for her people’s lives. Moved by her compassion, Ahasuerus reversed the decree to massacre the Jews. Esther saved her people by standing up for what she believed in.

DISCUSSION POINTS
There’s a lot going on in this painting! Let’s figure out the story we see here.

• Who do you think is the most important person in this painting? Why do you think that?
• What is happening in the background? How does that scene build the tension for what is happening with Esther and Ahasuerus?

Standing up for what’s right when there are dangerous consequences can be frightening and overwhelming. Esther summoned incredible courage by begging the king to save her people. If the king had been insulted by Esther’s request, not only would Esther lose her life, but all of her friends, family, and entire community would die as well.

• Imagine a time you had to show a lot of courage. What did that feel like?
• What support can you give your friends and family when they need to be brave?

Rosa Parks was a civil rights activist who deliberately broke racist laws, putting herself in danger, in order to make change. Parks said “you must never be fearful about what you are doing when it is right.” How was Esther’s decision the “right” one? How does this painting show her overcoming her fear?

Esther could have chosen to live the rest of her life safe in the king’s palace, pretending she wasn’t Jewish.

• What consequences would that decision have for Esther?
• Why do you think Esther made the decision she did—to stand up for herself and her community?

LEARNING EXTENSION
Acting out a painting is a great way to understand what all the characters are doing and feeling. Assign each student to a figure in the painting and ask them to pose like the painting. Make sure each student is at least 3 feet from the wall when acting out the painting. Ask students:

• How does it feel to be in this position?
• What is your character doing? Feeling? Going to do next?
ROSA BONHEUR, PLOWING IN THE NIVERNAIS (LABOURAGES NIVERNAIS)

BACKGROUND
This tranquil scene of oxen plowing a fertile landscape shows us the virtues of hard work and country life. The artist, Rosa Bonheur, was one of the leading animal painters of the 19th century, and intimately studied the natural landscape and the anatomy of animals on farms. As a woman, Bonheur faced several difficulties during her career despite her standing as an illustrious and successful artist. Bonheur studied animals in traditionally male spaces such as farms, auctions, and slaughterhouses. She also attained police permission to dress in man’s clothing, highly unconventional and widely disdained at the time. Rosa Bonheur stood up for her right to be an artist, to work instead of getting married, and to wear what she wanted.

DISCUSSION POINTS
This painting is very lifelike! Let’s look closely to see what we can discover about the painting.

• How many oxen can you find? How many working men?
• What actions are taking place in this painting? What work is being accomplished?

Rosa Bonheur was made fun of and bullied for the way she dressed. Due to her work studying animals outdoors and also due to her personal preferences, Bonheur chose to dress in men’s clothing and even had to obtain police permission to ditch the dress and wear pants.

• How do you think Rosa Bonheur felt when she was teased for the dressing in a way that felt right to her?
• How did Rosa Bonheur demonstrate bravery by wearing what she was comfortable wearing?
• Nowadays, people can wear whatever they want without being punished by the government. How would it feel to be told what you can and cannot wear every day?
• If you saw someone being bullied for the way they dress, what could you do to be an upstander instead of a bystander?

LEARNING EXTENSION
Back in the classroom, challenge students to research 5 women artists and their work. Explain why each artist was influential and find three works of art by each artist.

Join the conversation online this March with #5womenartists—an initiative by the National Museum of Women in the Arts that calls attention to the underrepresentation women have in the art world, and seeks to address that by asking the question, can you name #5womenartists?
Parvati

BACKGROUND
Parvati is an important deity in the Hindu religion as the wife of the god Shiva—the protector and destroyer of all evil. While her husband Shiva often gets most of the attention and reverence, Parvati is a courageous and heroic deity in her own right. Parvati is known as the mother goddess of beauty, love, fertility, marriage and devotion. In Hinduism, gods and goddess are reincarnated, or born again, many times—each with a different attribute and purpose in life. Parvati was reincarnated as the goddess Durga, the warrior goddess who fights demons and fiercely protects the good and peaceful.

DISCUSSION POINTS
Parvati transforms herself when those she loves are threatened. When her loved ones are in danger, Parvati changes from the peaceful goddess of love into a fierce goddess ready to protect against evil at all costs. Parvati stands up for people she loves—both to show compassion and to protect them.

• How does Parvati use her powers of transformation to protect herself and others?
• How is Parvati showing bravery or courage?
• When Parvati is the mother goddess of love and marriage, how might she stand up for what she loves? When she is Durga the warrior goddess, how does she stand up? What are the similarities between these reincarnations or characters?
• Is it easy to stand up for others?

Amy Tenney is the director of the National Attorneys General Training & Research Institute. She said “the world needs strong women. Women who will lift and build others, who will love and be loved. Women who live bravely, both tender and fierce.”

• What does Tenney mean by “women who live bravely, both tender and fierce.” How does Parvati show bravery in both her tenderness as the mother goddess and her anger as the warrior goddess?
• Tenney says that we must “lift and build others.” What are some examples of when you might need to be brave to “lift up” another person?

Learning Extension
He Chaozong (Chinese, active ca. 1610–1620), Guanyin as the Protector of Mariners. Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Porcelain, 20 1/8 x 6 1/4 x 5 1/4 in. Gift of Ira and Nancy Koger, 2001. SN11122.84

Most ancient cultures are pantheistic, meaning they worship many gods. In many traditions, a goddess typically represents compassion, love, and marriage. This gallery holds several examples of compassion goddesses including Guanyin, the Buddhist goddess of mercy and Parvati as the manifestation Uma, the Hindu Mother Goddess.

Why do you think these attributes of love and compassion are typically associated with women and goddesses instead of men and gods? What consequences does that have for real living women? For real living men? How does it take bravery to show compassion? What are you giving up or letting go when you are compassionate?
ALFRED STEVENS
A PORTRAIT GROUP OF PARISIAN CELEBRITIES

BACKGROUND
This painting is just one piece of a larger mural created for the world's fair held in Paris in 1889. It included all of the most important celebrities and public figures of the previous century. After the close of the fair, the large mural was divided into sections and dispersed. This section includes celebrities from the literary and performing arts, including the actress Sarah Bernhardt, who is wearing the white costume of one of the queen characters she played.

DISCUSSION POINTS
Looking at the details and people in this painting can tell us a lot about what and who was considered important when it was made.

• How many different personalities seem to be represented here? Who seems the most intimidating? The most aloof? The friendliest?
• What are you using to make these judgements? What can’t we know about these people just from looking at them?
• Who is missing from this painting? What does that tell you about the structure of 19th century French society?
• There are three women in this painting, the prominent actress Sarah Bernhardt (in white), Juliette Adam, novelist (in red), and an unknown woman (in blue). Why are there so few women? How do you think this representation changes in a group of politicians or lawyers?

Shirley Chisholm was the first African American woman in Congress (elected 1968). She was also the first African American and woman to run for the presidential nomination for one of the two major political parties (for general election, 1972). Chisholm was a strong advocate for women’s and civil rights.

• When Chisholm said “If they don’t offer you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair,” what did she mean?
• How does this quote apply to experiences you have had? What does it feel like to not be offered a seat at the table?

LEARNING EXTENSION
Discuss some of the ways people experience discrimination and exclusion.

• What are some of the dangers of not being represented?
• How does it feel to be excluded from something? What can you do to make sure others around you do not experience exclusion or discrimination?
ANGELICA KAUFFMANN, SAPPHO INSPIRED BY LOVE

BACKGROUND

Sappho (pronounced Saff-oh) was an ancient Greek poet born around 620 BCE. She was considered to be one of the greatest poets of the ancient world, and is one of the only women we know of who signed her name to her own work. Sappho wrote about themes of love and longing, power and persuasion. Here, Sappho is shown in the throes of inspiration by Cupid, the god of desire.

Angelica Kauffmann was an artist working in the 18th century. At the time, it was unusual for women to be painters. Women were not expected to have jobs and make their own income, rather, women's roles were confined to the domestic sphere of the home and child-raising.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Sappho wrote the following poem:

I asked myself
What, Sappho, can
you give one who
has everything,
like Aphrodite?

- What do you know about Aphrodite? What qualities do you associate with her?
- What do you think Sappho meant by this poem?
- If you had to write a poem about a powerful female figure, like Aphrodite, who would you choose? Why?

During her life it was highly uncommon for a woman to work as an artist but Kauffmann brought her own seat to the table. The high quality of her work spoke for itself, and she was an accomplished and respected artist.

- What professions have traditionally been held by men? By women?
- Why might professions have traditionally excluded a group of people based on their gender?
- How is separation of men's jobs and women's jobs being changed and challenged today?
- Think of some examples from your own life when you were criticized for doing something or liking something from what society might call “the wrong gender.”

LEARNING EXTENSION

Gallery 16

Joshua Reynolds (British, 1723–1792), John Manners, Marquess of Granby, 1766. Oil on canvas, 97 x 82 5/16 in. Bequest of John Ringling, 1936. SN389

Men and women have been confined to specific professions and roles across cultures and epochs. Women have traditionally been constrained to working in the home, including keeping a tight hold on family finances, child-rearing, cleaning, and cooking among other household chores. Men were expected to work outside of the home, marrying only when convenient or to improve their social status. Traditional men's roles such as serving in the army, working for the church, and becoming politicians, while providing more opportunities than their female counterparts, also limit men's ability to pursue their dreams. How do gender-defined jobs and roles limit individuals from pursuing their dreams? In what ways do women-defined roles and men-defined roles compare?
YAYOI KUSAMA, **INFINITY DOTS**

**BACKGROUND**

Yayoi Kusama was a leading innovator in the Pop Art movement of the 1960s. Originally from Japan, Kusama traveled to New York City to pursue a career as an artist. Kusama was an important member of the Pop Art movement, though Kusama claimed her ideas, such as repeating images, were appropriated by male artists who used them to great acclaim. In many ways Kusama was an outsider; she was a woman and Japanese and experienced mental health issues. This outsider perspective influenced Kusama’s work as an artist, channeling her energy to make work that is truly and recognizably her own.

**DISCUSSION POINTS**

Yayoi Kusama was born in Japan and moved to New York City to work as an artist and in part to avoid the traditional arranged marriage system that was expected of her back home. Even today, many women around the world are denied basic rights, like the right to choose career paths and who to marry.

- How do gender dynamics and roles play into Kusama's story? How do these socially mandated gender roles continue to affect people today?

Yayoi Kusama has struggled with hallucinations and other mental health issues her whole life. Women with mental health issues are often doubly ostracized by society. Even so, Kusama found inspiration from her obsessions to create mesmerizing works of art.

- How does our society discriminate against disabled and vulnerable populations?

- Why do you think women have been particularly targeted for mental health discrimination?

**LEARNING EXTENSION**


Joan Mitchell was another contemporary artist who was not always offered a seat at the table. Mitchell, whose work can be found further inside this gallery, was a leading painter in the Abstract Expressionist movement, exploring color in new and dynamic ways. Mitchell disdained people calling her a “woman artist” and insisted she be referred to as an artist—the same as her male colleagues.

- We don’t usually discuss male artists using the phrase “male artist,” but it is common to note on a woman’s gender when discussing her as a “woman artist.” Why do you think we use the phrase “woman artist”? What connotations does that have about the art and the artist?
Throughout history, women’s bodies have often been the subject of artwork—most of which was created by male artists for male audiences. In art, we call that the “male gaze.” When women’s bodies are put on display by an artist, does that mean the woman is objectified? How do you decide if an artwork is celebrating the female body or exploiting it?

**SISTO BADALOCCHIO, SUSANNAH AND THE ELDERS**

**BACKGROUND**

This is a story of blackmail. Susannah thinks she is alone taking a bath when two male elders appear and try to coerce her into sexual relations. They tell her that unless she gives in to them, they will spread a lie that they saw her with a young lover who was not her husband. The punishment for committing adultery was the death penalty, so Susannah is faced with an impossible choice: sleep with the two men who are threatening her or have them spread the lie that she has already committed adultery. It is only after the elders are cross-examined separately that they are exposed as liars and Susannah is saved.

**DISCUSSION POINTS**

This story was a popular subject for artists in the 16th century, ostensibly because Susannah was a heroine who symbolized justice, righteousness, and loyalty to her husband. However, her story was used by artists as a pretext for depicting a young, attractive, nude female body.

- How is the story depicted in the painting?
- How did the artist convey each of the characters?
- What is the mood of this scene?
- Do you think the artist wants us to feel sympathetic to Susannah? Why or why not?

Though this painting was made in the early 17th century, it still resonates with us today, though perhaps in a different way than the artist and original audience anticipated. Today, sexual harassment is being challenged and confronted like never before.

- What do you know about the #metoo movement? How would you define it?
- How has this movement changed or challenged your own feelings about sexual harassment?

*Continued on next page*
LEARNING EXTENSION

Gallery 8

Fede Galizia (Italian, 1578–1630), *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, 1596. Oil on canvas, 47 1/2 × 37 in. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Polak, 1969. SN684

Compare *Susannah and the Elders* with the painting of the heroine Judith by artist Fede Galizia to the left. Judith’s story also comes from the Old Testament. The Assyrian General Holofernes became enamored with the beautiful widow Judith. She seduced him, and then, along with the help of her maidservant, used his own sword to decapitate him, and in doing so, saved her town from being destroyed by Holofernes and his army.

Judith was considered a hero, even though she committed an act of murder. How are the judgments passed on Susannah and Judith different? How does consent and power dynamics play into these stories?

The painting of Judith was done by female artist Fede Galizia who was working at a time when nearly all other painters were men. Galizia has signed her name on the blade of Judith’s sword. How do you think Galizia wanted us to feel about Judith? What do you see in the painting that helps you decide?
GIUSEPPE GHEZZI, JUDGMENT OF PARIS

BACKGROUND
The Judgment of Paris tells how the Trojan War started. When the goddess of discord, Eris, tossed a golden apple to the gods as a gift for the fairest of them all, three goddesses claimed the prize. The gods couldn’t decide which goddess was most lovely, so they asked Paris, a Trojan prince raised by shepherds to judge the beauty competition—an impossible task. Each goddess attempted to bribe Paris into choosing her: Aphrodite offered Paris the love of Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world. Athena promised Paris valor, fame, and the ability win every war he waged, while Hera the queen of the gods offered Paris riches and kingdoms. Paris chose Aphrodite and the love of Helen and it was his conquest of Helen (who was married to the Greek king Menelaos) that sparked the war between the Greeks and the Trojans.

DISCUSSION POINTS
Three goddess wished to be considered the most beautiful of them all, and each attempted to bribe Paris into giving them the golden apple.

• What motivations might the goddess have for wishing to win the beauty competition? What do they have to gain and to lose?
• The artist is depicting Paris as he judges the competition. The three goddesses are in varying stages of undress, hoping to tempt Paris into crowning them the winner. Why do you think the artist is showing the goddess undressing? How does this contribute to the story being told? How are their bodies being used to determine the goddess’ worth?
• Even after seeing the goddesses undress, Paris could not determine which goddess was the most beautiful. All three goddess resorted to bribery to win the prize.
  • Why do you think the goddesses bribed Paris? If this is a beauty competition, what do they stand to gain by bribing the judge?
  • What do you know about the body positivity movement? How might you interpret this painting through the lens of that movement?
  • Paris ultimately chose Aphrodite, who bribed him with Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world. What are your thoughts on this as the winning bribe? How do you think Helen, who was already married, might have felt about the arrangement?

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GIUSEPPE GHEZZI, JUDGMENT OF PARIS

Continued

Attributed to Juan Bautista Maino (Spanish, 1581–1649), Narcissus, c. 1600-10. Oil on canvas, 45 x 56 3/8 in. Museum purchase, 1969. SN885

This painting tells the story of Narcissus, a beautiful young man who was desired by almost everyone he met, male, female, and mythological creature. When he spurned the advances of the nymph Echo, she became heartbroken and wasted away until only her voice was left. To punish him for his cruelty, Nemesis, the goddess of revenge, led Narcissus to a clear pool where he fell in love with his own reflection. Narcissus pined away after his own image until he died, and his body was transformed into the white narcissus flower.

Men, women, and nymphs all fell in love with Narcissus for his great beauty. Homosexuality was a normal aspect of ancient Greek life—many men took male lovers before marrying a woman and starting a family.

- Depicting women’s bodies in art as objects of sexual desire for male audiences is called the male gaze. In what ways do we see the male gaze extended upon Narcissus? Would you say his body is being objectified?
- Both Narcissus and the goddess Aphrodite in Judgment of Paris are in the same degree of undress. What impressions do we have of Aphrodite as compared to Narcissus? What, if any, differences do you notice about how the painting may have been used?
Gaston Lachaise, Elevation

BACKGROUND

In 1903, French artist Gaston Lachaise met Isabel Dutaud Nagle, a married American woman, while they were both in Paris and they quickly fell in love. Lachaise followed Nagle back to the United States in 1906, and they moved to New York City together in 1912. They eventually married five years later. Throughout their relationship, Nagle served as Lachaise’s muse, embodying his ideal interpretation of the full-figured, robust female nude.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Let’s study the sculpture as a work of art, discovering meaning as we observe.

- Why do you think the artist chose to portray the woman with her eyes closed?
- How would you describe this woman’s gesture?
- The woman shown here is obviously nude. Is her body on display for us to consume, or is it a more private work of art? Do you consider this to be a celebration of the female form, or is it objectification?

Lachaise depicted Isabel’s body over and over again in his work, and he was deeply in love with her. Isabel for her part posed for her husband’s work often, knowing the artwork would be on public display, and loved him boundlessly in return.

- Does knowing the backstory of this artwork change your interpretation of it? Why or why not?
- How would you describe this artwork using contemporary vocabulary? How do our views today shape how we interpret this artwork?

LEARNING EXTENSION

Courtyard


We’ve been discussing objectification of the female form in art, but women are not the only nude figures we see in the museum. The Courtyard is filled with bronze casts of famous Greek, Roman and Renaissance sculptures. In Ancient Greece and Rome, depicting the human form in the nude was an expression of reverence as artists sought to express the perfection of the soul through the perfection of the body. Renaissance artists, such as Michelangelo, imitated the classical sculptures, celebrating and idealizing the human form.

- Compare the image of the nude David with the image of the nude Isabel Dutaud Nagle. How does the mood of each sculpture compare? Do you feel different seeing the legendary David nude compared to the real woman Isabel? Why or why not?
- What’s next? How can the art world, and the way we look at art, move from a position of objectification to empowerment and celebration? How do the conversations we have about the female form in art change the narrative about women’s roles in art?
The Ringling is proud to partner with Embracing Our Differences to advance conversations about issues of diversity and inclusion through the transformative power of the arts.