

ACTIVITIES

1. A looking activity to introduce the largest David Plate showing the Battle of David and Goliath

Display the poster of the largest plate to the group (or project the slide of the same plate) *without giving any information about it*. Ask each student, or small groups of students, to study the plate for a few minutes and to make notes about what appears to be happening in the three scenes. Then ask the class the following questions:

THE CENTRAL SCENE

- How does the artist draw our attention to the main characters in this narrative?
- What details identify the hero?
- Why did the artist place two figures on each side of the scene?

THE BOTTOM SCENE

- What is the final act of the battle?

THE TOP SCENE

- What is happening? (This depiction would not be familiar today. When the plates were made, however, visual symbols known to the audience clearly identified this event. The bearded man seated in the center holding a marsh grass is the personification of a river. His presence tells us that David and Goliath are speaking to each other across a river.)
- Does this part of the story occur before or after the battle? How can you tell?
- What details identify David and Goliath?
- What might the direction of their glances and the pose of their raised arms mean?
- Within a semicircle above there is a circle and crescent. What do they symbolize? Whose hand is that pointing toward David and what does the gesture mean?

Please note that the plates illustrated on the poster and the activity cards are reproduced at 80% of actual size.

2. An art activity

Talk about how the designer of the plate placed the beginning, middle, and end of the narrative in registers (or sections, stacked one after another).

Discuss the way he focuses our attention on the key actions and includes identifying symbols so that we can decipher the story.

(You may also discuss the meaning behind particular symbols and gestures in modern and ancient cultures that your students might be studying.)

Have each student choose a well-known narrative, whether religious or secular, from books or television. Ask the students to think about the key figures and events. Then ask them to draw, paint, or create on a computer a poster, without words, that combines several parts of the story.

Show each completed artwork to the rest of the class to see if the other students can guess what the story is. This activity can lead to a discussion about how we can convey the passage of time through images.

3. A writing activity

After discussing how the artist portrayed the battle between David and Goliath, suggest that the students write a narrative about David's life before his first meeting with the giant and what events might have happened in David's life after he killed Goliath.

4. An activity to introduce the other David Plates

Before showing your students the images of the eight other plates, ask them if they know anything about David's life before and after his battle with Goliath. Divide the class into eight teams. Give each team one of the activity cards face down so that they are unable to see the image on the front. Briefly summarize the biblical story using the excerpts provided in the Background Information, or ask each team to choose someone to read out loud the biblical passage on the back of each plate.

Then ask each team—as a group or individually—to draw a picture of the story that is told on the back of their plate *without looking at the picture on the front*. When they have finished, ask each team to turn their plate over and present their drawings to the class. Everyone can then join in comparing their renditions with those on the David Plates.

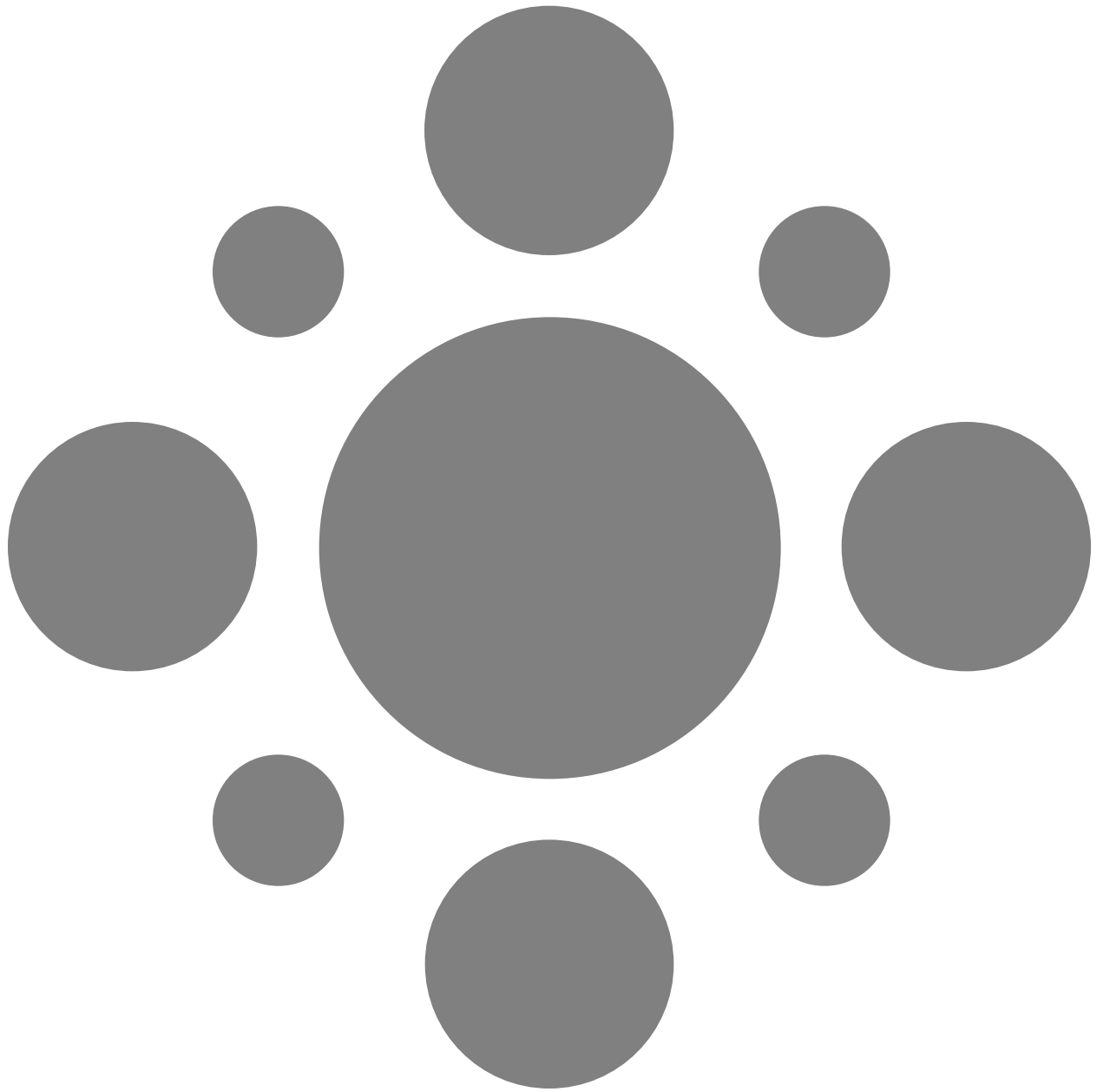
What key events did the designer of the plates choose to tell the story? How does the selection of key events on the plates differ from that made by the class?

5. An activity to learn about the function and display of the David Plates

Begin a discussion about the function of the plates:

- What kind of person would have owned the David Plates?
- Could David's victory over Goliath have had a personal meaning to the original owner?
- How were the plates used?
- How might they have been displayed? (Answers are provided in the Background Information)

Spread the nine plates on a large table or tack them randomly on a large board. Discuss the chronological order of the plates and arrange them that way. Then show the students the Christogram on the opposite page. Ask them to put the plates in order according to this pattern. Compare their arrangement of the plates with the one that is thought by art historians to be most likely (see back cover of this booklet). This is only one possible arrangement; any other order the group has decided upon is valid if the students have good reasons for it.



CHRISTOGRAM

KEY WORDS

anoint

to designate or bless through the ritual act of rubbing or pouring oil upon someone

chasing

the art of ornamenting a metal surface with indentations by striking small blunt tools with a hammer

chlamys

a wide, short cloak often worn by horsemen

Christogram

a combination of a cross and the Greek letter chi, or χ , making one of the types of monograms meaning Christ

colonnade

a series of evenly spaced columns that support horizontal beams and often a roof structure

dextrarum junctio

in Latin “the joining of the right hands” during a Roman marriage ceremony

engraving

incising (scratching) a design on the surface of metal with a thin, sharp tool

heifer

a young cow that has not yet given birth

imperator

the Latin word for general, from which the word emperor is derived

Justinian I

early Byzantine emperor who ruled from 527 to 565 A.D.; his armies reconquered former imperial Roman territories including North Africa and Italy

Philistines

rivals of the Israelites for control of the Palestine region

punch (punching)

a slender, tapered tool with a design cut into its point; by tapping the other end, the design is stamped into the surface

relief sculpture

any work in which figures project from the background; in low relief the figures project only slightly and in high relief the figures project at least half of their natural circumference

Sasanian Dynasty

the Sasanians ruled Persia (Iran) and much of Southwest Asia from 224 to about 651 A.D.; they were the last native rulers of this region before the Muslim conquests

sparsio

the money distributed to the Roman people by high officials at games they sponsored

tablion

badge of office in the form of a richly woven or embroidered patch of cloth applied to cloaks

RESOURCES



All biblical excerpts in this resource are taken from Metzger, Bruce M., and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, New Revised Standard Version*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

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Barrett, Tracy. *Anna of Byzantium*. New York: Delacorte, 1999.

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Laiou, Angeliki, ed. *Byzantium, A World Civilization*. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, 1992.

Weitzmann, Kurt. *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979.

Wander, Steven H. "The Cyprus Plates: The Story of David and Goliath." *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 8 (1973): 89–104.

Video: *The Western Tradition*, parts 15 and 16. Santa Barbara: Annenberg/CPB project, 1989.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Web site:
www.metmuseum.org/explore/byzantium/byzhome.html

What do you think?

We would love to hear what you think of this edition of *A Closer Look*. Did you adapt the activities to suit your particular needs? How did the students respond to the activities? Your observations will help us improve our educational resources.

Please send your comments to:

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Thank you.