

# The Cultural Lens

This is a complete classroom podcast project plan for “**The Cultural Lens**” — a cross-curricular, research-based podcast that blends anthropology, world cultures, art history, and literature. It helps students interpret cultural artifacts as reflections of belief systems, values, and historical moments. The plan is written in a clean, print-ready format suitable for classroom distribution or posting online.

**Focus:** Anthropology, World Cultures, and Art History

**Project Type:** Cultural Artifact Analysis Podcast

**Length:** 4–5 class periods

**Product:** 6–8 minute podcast episode

**Mode:** Small group (3–4 students)

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## Learning Objectives

Students will:

1. Examine cultural artifacts (visual art, literature, music, or ritual) as products of specific historical and social contexts.
2. Analyze how belief systems, geography, and cultural values shape creative expression.
3. Make interdisciplinary connections between art, literature, and history.
4. Synthesize research into an engaging podcast episode that demonstrates both academic analysis and creative storytelling.

### Standards Alignment (CCSS):

- RH.9-10.2 – Determine central ideas of a historical or cultural text or artifact.
  - W.9-10.7 – Conduct research to answer a cultural or historical question.
  - SL.9-10.4 – Present information clearly, concisely, and logically.
  - VA:Re7.2.Ia (National Core Arts Standards) – Analyze how one’s understanding of the world is affected by viewing, reading, or hearing others’ work.
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## Project Overview

*The Cultural Lens* encourages students to explore how human creativity reveals shared experiences across time and space. Each group selects a **cultural artifact**—such as a painting, sculpture, song, dance, poem, or ritual—and investigates:

- What does this artifact express about its society?

- What historical or social forces influenced its creation?
- How does it connect to other art forms or ideas studied in class?

The final podcast episode presents the artifact’s **story**—its creator, purpose, symbolism, and impact—while connecting it to broader cultural or literary themes.

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## Session Breakdown

### Session 1 – Selecting and Researching the Artifact

**Goal:** Choose a meaningful artifact and uncover its cultural background.

**Activities:**

- Students select a cultural artifact from teacher-provided examples or personal interest areas (visual art, music, poetry, architecture, ceremony, etc.).
- Research historical and anthropological context using reliable sources such as museum archives, cultural databases, or scholarly articles.
- Complete an **Artifact Analysis Sheet** that includes:
  - Title or name of artifact
  - Origin (time period, region, culture)
  - Creator or community (if known)
  - Materials, design, or form
  - Purpose or function (ritual, storytelling, political, aesthetic)
  - Cultural symbolism and interpretation
  - Connections to literature, philosophy, or historical events

**Sample Topics:**

- The Parthenon in Athens and civic identity in Ancient Greece
  - Japanese Noh theater and spiritual performance traditions
  - West African drumming rituals and communal storytelling
  - Diego Rivera’s murals and political art in post-revolutionary Mexico
  - The Navajo sandpainting ritual and healing symbolism
  - Pablo Neruda’s “Ode to Salt” as cultural celebration of labor and nature
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### Session 2 – Writing the Narrative and Discussion Script

**Goal:** Develop a script that tells the story of the artifact while analyzing its meaning.

**Activities:**

- Organize research findings into a narrative that combines storytelling and analysis.
- Include a clear thesis: what this artifact reveals about human culture or society.

- Structure the episode around three essential components:
  1. **Description:** What does the artifact look, sound, or feel like?
  2. **Interpretation:** What does it symbolize? What values or beliefs does it convey?
  3. **Connection:** How does it relate to broader cultural or literary ideas?

### Example Excerpt:

Host: “Today on *The Cultural Lens*, we’re examining the Navajo sandpainting ritual. More than art, it’s a sacred act of healing—each grain of sand placed with prayer. The temporary image symbolizes harmony between the physical and spiritual worlds.”

Speaker 2: “Anthropologists describe this as *hozho*—balance and beauty. When the ritual ends, the sand is swept away, reminding us that restoration, not permanence, defines healing.”

Speaker 3: “That idea of impermanence echoes across world art—from Buddhist mandalas to Romantic poetry about nature’s cycles.”

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## Session 3 – Recording and Production

**Goal:** Record and edit the podcast with clarity and creative presentation.

### Activities:

- Record using school devices or free software such as Audacity, Soundtrap, or GarageBand.
- Use music or sound effects relevant to the culture or artifact when appropriate (for example, a short instrumental excerpt or natural sounds).
- Include an engaging opening line such as:  
*“Welcome to The Cultural Lens, where we explore how art reveals the heartbeat of civilization.”*
- Maintain a balance between narration, expert commentary, and discussion.
- Recommended episode length: 6–8 minutes.

### Suggested Episode Structure:

1. Introduction (1 minute) – Introduce artifact, time period, and theme.
2. Cultural Background (2 minutes) – Explain historical and social context.
3. Analysis and Interpretation (3 minutes) – Discuss symbolism, purpose, and meaning.
4. Connections and Reflection (1–2 minutes) – Relate to global ideas, literature, or modern parallels.

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## Session 4 – Listening and Reflection

**Goal:** Connect artifacts across cultures and time.

**Activities:**

- Play or share podcast episodes during a “World Culture Listening Showcase.”
- Peers complete a **Cultural Reflection Sheet**:
  - What culture or artifact was examined?
  - What did it reveal about human beliefs or values?
  - What modern parallels or lessons can be drawn?
- Conclude with a class discussion comparing recurring motifs such as identity, ritual, power, or beauty.

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## Group Roles

Role	Responsibilities
Host/Storyteller	Introduces artifact and guides listeners through the episode
Cultural Analyst	Explains symbolism, context, and interpretation
Researcher	Finds credible sources and verifies historical information
Producer/Editor	Manages recording, audio quality, and pacing

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## Suggested Source Collections

- **The Metropolitan Museum of Art – Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History:** <https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/>
- **Smithsonian Open Access:** <https://www.si.edu/openaccess>
- **UNESCO World Heritage Centre:** <https://whc.unesco.org/>
- **The British Museum Collections:** <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection>
- **Poetry Foundation:** <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/>
- **Google Arts & Culture:** <https://artsandculture.google.com/>

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## Assessment Rubric (20 points)

Criteria	Excellent (5)	Proficient (4)	Developing (3)	Beginning (1–2)
<b>Cultural Understanding</b>	Demonstrates deep insight into cultural and historical meaning	Clear and accurate understanding	Limited or surface-level explanation	Inaccurate or missing context

Criteria	Excellent (5)	Proficient (4)	Developing (3)	Beginning (1–2)
<b>Interdisciplinary Analysis</b>	Strong connections between art, literature, and social context	Clear interdisciplinary links	Some links made, but not fully explained	Minimal or no cross-connections
<b>Research and Evidence</b>	Uses multiple credible sources with clear citations	Uses a few solid sources	Limited or unclear sourcing	No credible evidence used
<b>Presentation and Delivery</b>	Engaging, clear, and polished recording	Mostly clear and organized	Uneven pacing or unclear sections	Disorganized or hard to follow
<b>Creativity and Engagement</b>	Thoughtful, imaginative storytelling enhances analysis	Some creative touches	Minimal creative effort	Lacks engagement or originality

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## Extension Options

1. **Museum Curator Series:** Compile episodes into a digital “audio museum,” with each group representing a gallery theme such as “Art and Power,” “Faith and Ritual,” or “Nature and Expression.”
2. **Local Culture Feature:** Record an episode about a local monument, mural, or community tradition.
3. **Comparative Episode:** Examine two artifacts from different cultures that express the same theme (for example, Egyptian tomb art and Mexican Día de los Muertos altars).
4. **Art + Literature Pairing:** Pair a work of art with a related poem or story, analyzing how both express similar ideas in different mediums.