

## Hofstra University Museum JPMorgan Chase Art Travelers through Time: Literacy and History through Art



Head of Buddha  
ca. 16th century  
Thailand  
Sandstone  
Gift of Herman Kahn  
HU 69.8

**WHAT:** Head of Buddha

**WHERE:** Thailand

**WHEN:** ca. 16<sup>th</sup> century

**WHY:** Buddhism, the 4<sup>th</sup> largest world religion, was founded by Siddhartha Gautama (ca. 563-480 B.C.), a Prince of India who set out to discover meaning in the suffering he witnessed. He believed that by destroying greed, hatred, and delusion, which are the causes of all suffering, people can attain complete peace or enlightenment. Once Siddhartha found enlightenment, he began to spread his philosophy and became known as "Buddha," meaning "awakened one" or "enlightened one." His teachings have spread around the world. Buddhism has no unique doctrine, no single authority (god), and no single sacred book.

Sculptures of the Buddha are used to inspire or guide meditation or spiritual journeys. The style in which an image of Buddha is depicted varies according to where and when it was created. The works were often influenced by the art people brought with them from other countries. The *Head of Buddha*, a fragment of a larger work, is an example of the 16th century "Thai ideal."



Buddha sculptures have meaning from head to toe! The *Head of Buddha* has tight snail-shell curls leading up to a traditional crown of hair (*ushnisha*) and perhaps to a flame-like element projecting above the head (broken from this piece). Thai depictions of Buddha often featured this flame, the equivalent of the halo in the Christian tradition. It symbolizes the emanation of light from the Buddha. His half-closed eyes show him in a state of meditation: looking outward and inward. His elongated earlobes hear what is needed in the world.



## Vocabulary

**Fragment**

**Meditation**

**Tradition**



## **CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

### **Art Activity:**

Students can explore Buddhist art of different Asian countries. Compare how various artists have depicted the image of Buddha. Create a classroom collage of the different ways he has been depicted over time and place. What is similar and what is different?

**Geography:** Students can work in small groups. Assign each group a major religion in Asia, such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. Students conduct research (see link to map below) and answer the following questions:

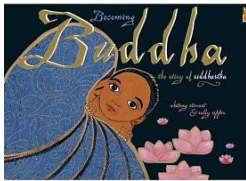
- In what region of Asia was this religion first founded?
- In what countries is this religion most prevalent?
- How many people in Asia practice this religion?
- Explain some of the fundamental beliefs of the people who practice this religion

Then each group of students can present their findings to the class. As they present, note on a large map of Asia where each religion was founded and where it currently is practiced.

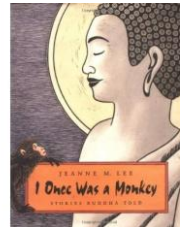


## Resources

### Related Children's Book



**Becoming Buddha: The Story of Siddhartha**  
By Whitney Stewart  
Read the traditional story of the life of Prince Siddhartha.



**I Once Was a Monkey: Stories Buddha Told**  
by Jeanne M. Lee  
This book is a colorful introduction to Buddhist fables.

### Web Links



**Map of Asian Religions**  
[www.wadsworth.com/religion\\_d](http://www.wadsworth.com/religion_d)



**The Buddha, a Film by David Grubin**  
<http://www.pbs.org/thebuddha/>