Visual and Performing Arts:  
Ceramic Lesson - "Contemporary Spirit Robes"

A multi-cultural lesson plan created by Denise Retter, student teacher, Roseville Unified School District, Roseville, CA

**Topic:** Symbolism and Ceremonial Robes

**Objectives:**

1. Students will be able to identify and interpret symbolism and its use in ceremonial robe adornment, in relationship to cultural heritage.

2. Students will create a contemporary ceramic ceremonial robe that incorporates symbolic elements, colors, and textures.

3. Students will analyze the aesthetic components of their finished works through written, or group critique.

4. Students will compare and contrast their finished projects, to the historical robes of their research.

**Purpose:** To understand the relationship of symbolism, its spiritual significance and the importance of robes in diverse cultures.

**Preparation for Lesson:** Teacher go to “Web search” and type in "ceremonial robes". There are approximately 3,500 Web sites for ceremonial robes. Teacher may also search through museum Web sites, for research use. Be aware of age appropriateness and content. Either groups of 4 to 5 may be assigned a country to research and develop information for use in project, or individuals may research their ancestral heritage and develop a symbolic design based on their research for the project. Teacher may also refer to *The Shining Cloth: Dress and Adornment that Glitter* (Victoria Z. Rivers, 1999, Thames and Hudson) or see [http://shiningcloth.ucdavis.edu](http://shiningcloth.ucdavis.edu)

**Activity # 1:** Students will be assigned in groups, or individually, a research assignment to find symbols from various countries and cultures, and write a two page narrative description of their findings. The writing assignment should include the following information:

1. Where is the country they researched?

2. When were the robes used?

3. Who made the robes? Who wore the robes?

4. How were the robes a sign of power? Wealth? Religion?

5. What materials were used to make the robes?

6. What symbols were used and what was their meaning?

7. What color was used, and what was its significance?

**Activity # 2:** Students will provide a representational image of the culture they researched. The picture will accompany the written assignment in Activity #1.

**Activity # 3:** Teacher will review and grade written assignment w/ image, based on a rubric that will, at minimum, address the 7 points above. Once teacher has determined that the students understand the concept of symbolism and ceremonial robes, students will begin work on their contemporary spirit robes.

**Activity # 4:** Students will create a contemporary ceramic robe, which will embody all of the concepts of symbolism, spirituality and ceremony, that they learned from their research, and translate that concept into contemporary terms. Students should draw an example of a
"contemporary spirit robe" before beginning work on their piece.

**Activity # 5:** When the robes are fully completed, the class critiques for aesthetic value represented by the work.

**Review and Closure:**

Students will individually present their completed ceramic robe and explain the significance of the symbolism used. Teacher will ask the following questions:

1. What did we learn about the robes and symbolism in the countries we researched? What things are similar? What things are different?

2. Do the symbols used look alike? Are there symbols that mean the same thing, but look different?

3. What are examples of contemporary robes? How did you determine what your robe would represent?

4. What are examples of other status symbols we see today?

5. How do they compare to the robes?