

An Artifact Speaks • Artifact Information Sheet

Artifact Name: Statue of Ganesha

Time Period/Date: 2014

Culture/Religion Group: Hindu

Material: Polyresin

Reproduction? No



Background Information:

In Hindu belief, there are three main gods: Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. Ganesha was created and brought to life by Shiva's wife Parvati. The recorded story of his birth, his first meeting with Shiva, and how he ended up with the head of an elephant is the focus of the lesson *He Lost His Head*.

The statue of Ganesha included in this program's materials shows the god with many arms and hands. This is a common trait of artistic representations of Hindu deities. A variety of reasons are given for this:

- It shows that the god has strength beyond human strength.
- It shows that the god can accomplish many things at the same time.
- It allows the artist to show the many attributes of the gods, as they are often represented by things they hold in their hands or the ways they position their hands (*mudras*).

In this statue, we see the following of the many symbols that can be associated with Ganesha:

- An axe. This helps Ganesha to cut through obstacles and frighten off demons. Ganesha is the god that Hindus pray to when beginning a journey or large endeavor, as he removes obstacles and makes the way easier. He is often prayed to by students before they take exams.
- A bowl of sweets. Ganesha is known for his sweet tooth and is represented with a pot belly. The thin, sacred thread wound around his body is often shown as a snake, which once held the god's belly together after it burst open from too many sweets.
- A lotus flower. The god sits on a lotus throne and holds a lotus in his upper left hand. The lotus is respected because it emerges full of beauty from the muddy waters.
- The *abhaya-mudra*. This is the sign of protection and fearlessness shown by the position of the god's lower right hand.
- A mouse. Found at Ganesha's right knee in this statue, the mouse is Ganesha's mount.
- A broken tusk. One of the popular stories about Ganesha is that he broke off one of his tusks while writing down the text of the epic poem the *Mahabharata* as it was dictated by the sage Vyasa. According to one version of the story, Ganesha said he would sit and do the recording as long as Vyasa didn't stop in his dictation. Vyasa promised not to stop as long as Ganesha wouldn't write something down until he understood it. While writing, the pen Ganesha was using broke, but Vyasa kept talking, so Ganesha broke off his tusk to use as a pen.

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Sources:

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