# Gargoyles and the Alter Ego

## Arts Education – Studio Arts 3D 10-12

## Learning Goal

To create a personally meaningful gargoyle that explores our identities, using  
ceramics techniques.

## Rationale

Adolescence is a unique journey of identity, exploration, and social-emotional development. As art teachers, we can guide students and help them tap into this period of intense creativity. Projects that focus on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) through visual art nurture students’ imagination and growth.

Youth often feel uncomfortable in their own skin; they may create external personas to help themselves navigate through awkward or painful experiences. In this lesson, students are invited to reflect on the aspects of their personality that they share freely with others and those they prefer to keep hidden. They are asked to explore their secondary or alternative personalities and will create a ceramic gargoyle in the likeness of their alter ego(s). Each student determines what private side(s) of their personality they will choose to explore and share through the art-making process.

Before launching into the creative process, students will learn about the historical role of gargoyles in different cultures and will see examples of the many forms that they can take, such as guardians, demons, beasts, angels, infants, animals, spirits, etc. The examples are designed to illustrate that possibilities are practically endless and to inspire students to come up with their own creative ideas.

This lesson can be adapted to include cross-curricular connections to Language Arts, Social Studies, and to other areas of Arts Education. There are references to storytelling, folklore, art history, and architecture. This lesson is also guided by the following First People’s Principles of Learning:

Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.

* Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational.
* Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
* Learning involves patience and time.
* Learning requires exploration of one’s identity.

### The Big Ideas

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Grade 10 | Grade 11 | Grade 12 |
| Artists communicate ideas, emotions, and perspectives through form.  Visual arts offer unique ways of exploring our identity and sense of belonging. | An artist’s intention transforms materials into three-dimensional art.  Artistic expression is an artist’s physical, emotional, and cognitive articulation of our humanity. | An artist’s intention transforms materials into three-dimensional art.  Aesthetic experiences have the power to transform our perspective. |

### Curricular Competencies

* Express meaning, intent, and emotions through 3D artistic works
* Demonstrate safe and responsible use of materials, tools, and work space
* Develop/reflect on personal answers to aesthetic questions
* Demonstrate awareness of/respect for self, others and place
* Create artistic works to reflect personal voice, story and values  
  (Grades 11 and 12)

### Content

* elements of visual art
* principles of design
* image development strategies
* materials, technologies, and processes for 3D artistic works
* creative processes
* physical properties and impacts of various materials
* symbols and metaphors

### Core Competencies

Communication, Thinking and Personal and Social Competencies are developed as students work to create personally meaningful gargoyles. Students will develop these competencies as they work on creating gargoyles.

### Communication

* Communicating
* Connecting and engaging with others
* Acquiring and presenting information
* Collaborating
* Supporting group interactions

### Thinking

* Creative Thinking
* Creating and innovating
* Critical and Reflective Thinking
* Designing and developing

### Personal and Social

* Social Awareness and Responsibility
* Valuing diversity

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### Materials

* High temperature clay
* Newspaper
* Work/ware boards, canvas covered boards
* Ceramics tools: pin tools, ribbon tools, wooden sculpting tools
* Rolling pins
* Sponges
* Lightweight canvas

### Teacher Preparation

* Set tables up in a U-shape with a demo table in the middle, or use a  
  demo mirror, or document camera
* Review classroom rules, health and safety while working with clay
* Throughout the project, protect the gargoyles; exposing the gargoyles to  
  air will dry them out

### On the first day…

* Review prior knowledge
  + Drying stages of clay
  + Geological origins of clay
  + Cultural connections to clay
* Discuss the learning goal and rationale for the project.
* Define “alter ego” and provide/invite class to share some examples.
* Deliver a PowerPoint presentation about gargoyles, speaking to their historical significance (including a brief review of the history of the plague  
  in Europe) and identify global connections between cultures  
  (see references below).
* Invite students to reflect on the aspects of their personality that they share freely with others and those they prefer to keep hidden. Reinforce that this  
  is not an exposé and students should choose aspects of their alter egos that they feel comfortable exploring and sharing. Students may reflect on the following reflective questions independently and/or with a partner:
* What parts of your personality do you share with others?
* How would others describe you?
* What parts of your personality do you hide from others/are  
  less visible to others?
* This project invites you to explore a hidden side of your personality through the process of creating a gargoyle in the likeness of your alter ego. What aspect(s) of your alter ego are you most interested in exploring through this piece of art?
* If (this aspect of) your alter ego was a gargoyle, what would they look like?
* At this point, students may begin to complete the “Exploring our Alter Egos” handout designed to support them in the creation of a unique gargoyle character inspired by their alter ego(s). (See handout below.)

### Over the next few classes…

* Give students time to smooth and reconnect with clay, while developing a vision for their gargoyles.
* Provide demos for students and allow students to move at their own pace. Demonstrate:
* draped slabs over molded newspaper, dividing the  
  face and facial proportions
* hollowing out the eye sockets and skeletal features
* noses, brow bones, chins and cheeks
* eyeballs and eyelids
* Emphasize the importance of health and safety while working with clay (i.e., silica dust). Cover projects well by spraying them lightly and wrapping them in several layers of soft plastic.

Mid-way through the project, provide an opportunity for students to reflect on  
their process and learning.

Possible reflective questions:

* How is my skill level and technique evolving with practice?
* How am I learning more about myself and my alter-ego? Examples....
* How am I making this project personally meaningful?
* What discoveries am I making, either technically, visually or personally?

This point in the project is also a good time to have students participate in a gallery walk and talk. Students may share their work with others explaining “What is working for me is… What is not working for me is...”. This is an opportunity for students to give and receive formative feedback from their peers.

### Optional activity: Two Stars and a Wish

As a class, conduct respectful group critiques that encourage growth. Artists should have an opportunity to speak to their work – what they are hoping to achieve and represent with their gargoyles. Feedback from peers should be strength-based and helpful. The teacher may wish to pose the following questions to encourage positive dialogue:

* How has the artist effectively “expressed meaning, intent, and emotions through their artistic work?”
* How are they “demonstrating awareness of self through this artistic work?”

### Stars

* What is the strength of this piece and why?
* What do you personally like about this piece, and why?
* What aspect do you feel is most creative? Effective?
* Wish
* If you were to improve one thing, what would it be? How would  
  you improve it?

### In the final days…

* Demonstrate how to hollow out the back to avoid cracking and kiln explosions. Show students how to use a tool to measure thickness in several areas, especially the nose.
* Hair, horns and other head adornments should be added last.
* Finish with holes on either side of the head for threading wiring though after the firing. This will allow the gargoyle to be mounted or hung.
* Allow four days for projects to dry slowly under a light layer of plastic.
* Remove plastic for the last two days of drying. More drying may be needed.
* Load kiln for a cone 06 bisque firing.
* Candle overnight then allow at least 14 hours to fire. Thicker work needs a slow firing to avoid cracks and explosions from unevenness, trapped air bubbles or thick areas such as the nose.
* Allow a day to cool then unload.
* Complete gargoyles with layered washes of oxides and stains. Alternatively, acrylic paint washes can be used but it is important to note that the more they layer, the deeper the effect.
* After bisque firing, students may add found objects to decorate  
  their gargoyles.
* Showcase students’ gargoyles with framed “Exploring our Alter Egos” handouts.

## Additional Assessment Tools

### Visual Journals

Students may keep a daily Visual Journal to document questions, reflections, progress and personal goals. Visual Journals can be used when experiencing a creative block, after clean-up, or while taking a reflective break from building their projects. Teachers may wish to review student journals to gain greater insight into how students are progressing with their work and identifying where additional support may be needed.

### Teacher’s Observational Notes

Teachers may track student engagement by observing and noting how often the student is:

* on task and focused
* applying techniques and skills that were illustrated during teacher’s demonstration
* stretching their abilities by taking risks; learning new techniques; applying creative self-expression
* respecting and caring for tools, materials, equipment, workspace through correct handling, maintenance and cleaning

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### Student Self-assessment of Curricular Competencies

* Express meaning, intent, and emotions through 3D artistic works
* Demonstrate safe and responsible use of materials, tools, and work space
* Develop/reflect on personal answers to aesthetic questions
* Demonstrate awareness of/respect for self, others and place
* Create artistic works to reflect personal voice, story and values (Grades 11 and 12)

I can express meaning, intent, and emotions through 3D artistic works.

For example, I achieved this by

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I can demonstrate safe and responsible use of materials, tools, and work space.

For example, I achieved this by

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I can develop/reflect on personal answers to aesthetic questions

For example, I achieved this

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I can demonstrate awareness of/respect for self, others and place

For example, I achieved this by

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I can create artistic works to reflect personal voice, story and values (Grades 11 and 12)

For example, I achieved this by

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## References

**Visual Journaling**  
 [www.1000journals.com](http://www.1000journals.com/)

Nightmares in the Sky: Gargoyles and Grotesques by Stephen King and f-stop Fitzgerald. Viking Studio Books, 1988

Canadian Artists as references:

**Kathy Venter**<http://www.kathyventer.com/>

Bob Kingsmill  
<http://www.kingsmillpottery.com/>

### International Artists as References

**Walter S. Arnold**  
<http://www.stonecarver.com/gargoyle.html>

Arnold also has a Q & A section for teachers:  
<https://www.stonecarver.com/teachersqa/>

**Dan Reeder**  
<http://gourmetpapermache.com/>

**Rosslyn Chapel, Scotland**<http://learning.rosslandchapel.org.uk/articles/list/C1>