

# A TEACHERS' GUIDE TO A SCHOOL-WIDE FOLK ARTS RESIDENCY:

**Losang Samten,**

Tibetan Sand Mandala Artist



WINNER  
2015  
Dorothy Howard  
Folklore and  
Education Prize

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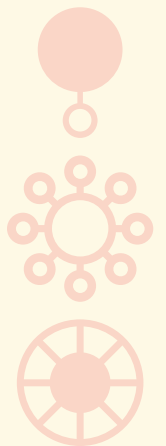
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*The teacher’s guide to accompany these grade-specific mini-unit lesson plans, as well as the support materials for this curriculum, are all available online through our websites.*

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- Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School
- Bartram's Garden

Though we, the curriculum development team, always seemed to meet on days with significant weather challenges in the winter of 2015, we were thankful to be surrounded by nature's beauty on the 45-acre National Historic Landmark site of Bartram's Garden. We wish to thank Zach Webber, Arts & Culture Programs Manager, Bartram's Garden for attending to our work needs from making internet and projectors available to finding and setting up space heaters. We extend a special thanks to Trish and Natalia who provided capable care of our children while we worked.

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We especially appreciate the efforts of all our peers who reviewed and provided feedback upon the concepts and the lessons that are included in this document. Their comments, provided at all stages of the process, kept us in touch with how well our portrayal of our conversations and thinking communicated.

And finally, we appreciate the sacrifices made by each of our families who gave up precious weekend time with us so we could gather and deliberate together without them.



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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Folk Arts – Cultural Treasures School (FACTS) and the Philadelphia Folklore Project's (PFP) teachers' guide for a school-wide folk arts residency. Here we share our experiences about an approach to education that we believe matters, our thinking about a set of concepts that shape our practice, and our deep appreciation for the knowledge and experiences that artist, Losang Samten, generously shares with the children at our school. This is a folk arts education curriculum for an artist residency. We present here the curricular framework, its scope and sequence, and summaries of all the learning activities. We invite interested readers to visit our websites where they will find detailed mini-unit plans and other resources for use with students in grades Kindergarten through eighth grade.

This folk arts residency curriculum has several unique features. First, it is a residency that occurs with the same visual artist every year. Second, the residency is structured to involve the whole school (more than 500 students) in interactions with the artist within classroom-sized groups of students. Third, the curriculum is designed as a nine-week unit of study, but it is delivered for only one week each year over a nine year period.

This curriculum also contains features that are found in many other folk art education curriculums. It is focused on the folk art of a community-recognized master of the art form of a particular cultural community. Curricular activities integrate with multiple content areas, which for our curriculum include - but are not limited to - the arts, social studies, language arts, science, math, and health. Activities are designed to arrive at understandings that are not housed in a particular academic content area commonly taught in schools, but are nonetheless transformational understandings that

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are important for developing lifelong learners. The activities in our curriculum, like many others in folk art education, develop inquiry skills within young learners that have applicability to learning inside and outside of school.

We furthermore recognize that our curriculum contains elements that overlap with peace education, multicultural education, and area studies. These are important overlaps, but our work is situated within folklife education and so we emphasize the folklife education approach throughout the document. We would love to hear how our work is of use to those who have come to our work to learn more about these related approaches to education.

This curriculum builds upon what we have learned while implementing this folk arts residency since 2005. It extends our learnings into a map that will guide the residency in the future. It is grounded in our experiences with Losang Samten as a folk artist in residence for the whole school for most of the years FACTS has existed. After hosting the residency for nine years, we dedicated time to reflect upon our learning and develop a curriculum that would ensure the students' learning with this artist fit into a systematic sequence. Working together as a team on this project also allowed us to examine our own evolving consciousness about folk arts education. We kept an emphasis on the understandings we seek for young learners to attain throughout their years of work with Losang by using the Understanding by Design backwards-mapping curriculum framework of Wiggins and McTighe (2011). We feel that concepts within the enduring understandings we developed have application far beyond the specific folk arts residency of this curriculum. We can see how these enduring understandings will be useful in shaping our other folk arts residencies. We anticipate that our work in crafting enduring understandings may have application and use within folk arts residencies in many other schools and educational settings.

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We now provide some of the context for the whole-school residency that is contained in this curriculum that will illuminate why we have chosen to work with Losang Samten and use this residency model. In December, when students everywhere in America are anticipating their family winter holidays and the long winter break from school, schools will mark the time of year with their own celebrations. At the Folk Arts – Cultural Treasures Charter School, December is a time to celebrate peace. The music program at the school presents a *Celebration of Peace* concert where students perform for their fellow students and family visitors. Each homeroom also presents some evidence of how they thought about peace or activities they did focused on working toward peace. Helping students develop peaceful ways of being in the world is one of the ways FACTS enacts a value of working toward a world that is more socially just.\* The school's focus on folk arts provides another avenue for student learning – learning about how peace is valued and expressed by different cultures and how folk arts can play an important role in working toward peace.

Not long after the school began in 2005, PFP and FACTS chose to invite Tibetan sand mandala artist, Losang Samten into the school to conduct a school-wide folk arts residency. This residency has been funded continuously from a mix of grant funds and school funds. The residency was structured to provide an opportunity for every child to interact with Losang as he created a beautiful work of art in



### Students recite the *FACTS School Pledge* daily

We care for one another and learn together. All people have a right to use their own languages and to honor their own cultures.

There is no limit to what we can learn. Creative expression is part of our lives and part of our school.

Our families and our elders know important things and we take time to learn from them. **We work to build a fair and peaceful world.**

We learn to help ourselves and our community. The earth is our home and we must take care of it.

We learn to be strong and act with courage.

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the foyer outside of the lunchroom. December was selected as the perfect time for this residency since the mandala creation process is a way Losang works on peace. When students observe Losang's creative process, the youngsters have an opportunity to deepen their understanding about the role folk arts can play in many things, including working on peace. Having Losang create and dismantle a mandala during a consecutive eight-day period allows each of the 18 homeroom classes to visit with him for at least one class period. Having Losang return each year to create a different mandala each time enables students to deepen their understandings and reinforce the importance of what their school values.

Although we have written this guide for use by an audience of teachers at FACTS, there are two other groups of educators who we feel could find this guide of value and use. The first group of educators includes those educators who are working with Losang Samten or another sand mandala artist from the Tibetan tradition. They will find here guidance in structuring systematic learning activities for various age students that take into account the specifics of this art form and its cultural context. The second audience is educators who are doing, or who seek to do, a school-wide folk arts residency. This document presents a model for developing learning activities that engage students more deeply with the artist, the art form and its cultural context. If any of our readers are planning to host a school-wide residency, they can find here a way of structuring it that helps teachers to support student learning about the artist, art form and cultural context even when there is limited face-time with the artist.

Though the ideal structure for working with folk artists in school residencies is to have core groups of students interacting with the artist multiple times to experience art making and learn about the artist, art form and its context, rarely do schools have sufficient

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funding to execute this structure with all students in a school. A common structure that schools currently use for bringing in a folk artist to interact with a whole school is the assembly program format. Assemblies tend to work better for performing art forms rather than visual art forms. The assembly structure does allow for all students to see the art form, but the stage and large audience limits interaction possibilities between the artist and students. Furthermore, an assembly setting does not allow for much differentiation for different ages of students in the material the artist(s) present.

In this teachers' guide, we present our model of a folk artist being in residence at the school for six days within a two-week time period. Our model has the emerging piece of art created in the residency available to everyone in the whole school during that time and the artist working with classroom-sized groups of students throughout each day until every homeroom has interacted with him at least once. This guide provides guidance to teachers to help the students focus their learning within the class period they have to interact with the artist. By situating the artist interaction class period within teacher-directed mini-unit lessons, the students' experience with the artist is maximized. Each mini-unit guides student learning toward gaining multiple enduring understandings about the artist, art form, or its context that are developmentally appropriate for their age. Our model contains a spiraling sequence that systematically revisits focus areas every three years. Ours is an annual residency model structure that uses the same folk artist year after year. This model allows for students to deepen and extend their relationship with the artist through sequenced instruction. Students have at least nine meaningful interactions with the artist throughout the years that build upon rather than repeat the same experience over and over.

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Since our teachers' guide is geared for working with a visual artist, we anticipate that schools working with folk artists in a variety of visual art forms will easily be able to find much in our model that is of use. We hope schools working with folk artists in performing art forms might also find many useful aspects within our model that could be applied to their folk arts residencies. Many schools may find our model of interest because of the fiscal constraints they face coupled with a desire to impact as many of their students as possible given the limited funds available. We have written this for our own use, but we hope other educators, whether working with Losang or some other folk artist, will use it making the modifications and changes they need to for their schools. We would be delighted if some of you might be inspired by our work to build other types of models for working with folk artists that you would be willing to share back with us.

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## OUR PROCESS

After years of hosting Teacher\* Losang, we teachers at FACTS wanted to streamline our folk arts curriculum in order to deepen student understanding, explore pathways for curriculum integration, and create a spiral of learning from Kindergarten to 8th grade. We wanted to harness the learning surrounding Teacher Losang as students examine his identity as a folk artist, his community, his art form, and the beautiful mandala he was making each year. We also wanted to expand our understanding about folk arts education through deeper discussions about how we were doing it with the Losang residency.

FACTS administration applied for and received initial funding to get this project started through a special program of the American Folklore Society. The funding made it possible for a group of FACTS educators to collaboratively work together with PFP's Education Specialist as a consultant to guide the process. FACTS teachers, interested and available to gather on Sundays in the winter of 2015, completed applications to be part of the project. The resulting team included teachers with classroom experience in all grades of the school and specialists with experience in English as a Second or Other Language, special education, and arts education instruction. PFP's Education Specialist had extensive experience in folk arts education curriculum development. With additional funding procured through PFP, the team was able to continue to work together one Sunday a month for four months.

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At FACTS, all adults in the building are given the title of *Teacher* in recognition of how every adult teaches every child. In this curriculum guide and its accompanying resources, we may include the title by either writing it out in full or by using its abbreviation of T.



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We began our collaborative process by envisioning what we wanted our students to take with them when they left our school. We considered the understandings we wanted them to have attained in the four focus areas of: the artist, the art form, the community and context, and the piece of art. Though student learning with Losang was foremost in our minds, we found that we had to think more generally about what folk artists could bring to students to arrive at a list of enduring understandings that we honed into a working list through deliberation.

We next interviewed Losang Samten to deepen our understanding of his art and its context. He generously shared stories of his experiences and explained the complex process of creating his art. Throughout our work together, Losang helped us consider more thoughtfully the relationship between the art form he practices and the Tibetan religion and Tibet's political situation.

Though we set the structure of the grades for the spiral of focus areas as a group, we could not sequence the enduring understandings without forming the age-appropriate essential questions.

“I have grown in many ways during this workshop. From the start when we spoke about Understanding by Design I began to have a greater understanding of how the framework works. When we shared about our concerns and our goals, we were able to focus our attention and efforts to developing a curriculum that would meet many of those needs. I really enjoyed working with my colleagues to generate ideas for the enduring understandings and it seemed almost magical how all the pieces fit together for the scope and sequence of the curriculum. Through this process, I've discovered what it means to listen actively to other's thoughts and concerns and how to work together to create solutions that we can agree on. I've also learned more about folk arts learning, especially in regards to the complexity of observation and the knowledge and skills observation can provide. I really enjoyed this process of learning and growing with everyone.”

-Fanny Tan, team member

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In the backwards curriculum design process we were following, the next steps were to create essential questions, assessment activities, and then the learning activities. The team broke into small groups that were reconfigured for each grade level to maximize the various types of educational expertise in the room. The small groups developed grade-specific mini-units to serve as a starting point for student learning in the sand mandala residency that teachers could expand upon to meet even more learning goals than just the ones we specified. The developers of this curriculum could only suggest other potential learning activities for further integration into various curricular areas because we could not know which mandala design a student might see when they were in any particular grade.

Developing these mini-units was a very dynamic collaborative process. Small groups would spontaneously involve the rest of the room in discussions surrounding issues such as ways to handle introducing the connection between Buddhism and the Tibetan mandala art form into public schools that have concerns about keeping a distance between church and state, or brainstorming other practices in children's lived experiences that involve impermanence (i.e. an elaborately cooked meal that is eaten, or a celebratory event that only takes place on a particular date) so children could do "me-to-we"\* activities to help them understand cultural processes.



"Me-to-we" is a phrase that underscores the importance in folklife education of starting the exploration of culture with yourself and examining your own cultural experiences, then moving to explore the culture of others. *Me-to-we* explorations can occur easily in classrooms by asking students to remember and describe their own practices (*me*) and then look at the similarities and differences between their own cultural experiences and their classmates' experiences (*we*). *We* explorations can then expand to look at similarities and differences between a student's experiences and a folk artist's or community member's experiences. By

starting with an experience that the students have had in their lives that embody important elements of the artist's experience (i.e. with Losang, this could be things students do in their own lives that have impermanence as a feature), the students can find points of similarity and points of difference between their own and the artist's practices. *Me-to-we* increases the possibility of students developing nuanced understanding of their own and other's cultural practices and reduces the possibility of them considering what the artist does as exotic or strange. In folklife education lessons, *we* explorations could (continued on following page)

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be further extended to examine people's experiences in relationship to those they interact with in their folk groups, to relationships between folk groups within society, and to how all this connects with cultural processes undergirding human experiences more universally. Folklife education historian, Jan Rosenberg in her 2014 article *From "Me" to "We": Folklore*

*and Education, Three Early Twentieth Century Educators, and the Evolution of the Field of Folklore and Education*, points out how folklife education encourages and supports teachers' and students' understanding of being at once a cultural participant and a member of a wider democracy.

Drawing upon the greater expertise within the room added more dimensions to the mini-units. We kept a list of questions for Losang and interviewed him again weeks later when there was a break in his busy schedule. We got feedback from Losang on our learning activities as these developed and enlisted his help in creating support materials for the curriculum such as a PFP filming of Losang leading the dismantling process with one of his sand mandalas. We invited FACTS teachers who were not part of the team to serve as blind peer reviewers and provide thoughtful critique for our revisions of the mini-units. Getting feedback from so many on what we were developing was very important to us for we wanted to create a curriculum that could be of maximal use.

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## ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

Wiggins and McTighe (2011) consider enduring understanding as the primary goal when designing curriculum. By this they mean that instruction should be designed to develop and deepen students' ability to make meaning of learning via "big ideas" and to transfer their learning. In developing curriculum with understanding as the goal, the desired result is the starting point. Then the evidences of the development of understanding and the learning activity plan are designed in alignment with the goal. Wiggins and McTighe call this backwards mapping curricular development process they developed *Understanding by Design*.

When folk artists work with students, the youngsters have the possibility of developing many enduring understandings that have the potential for transference to both school and community situations. We decided to cluster enduring understandings into four focus areas: the art form, the artist, the community and context, and the specific piece of art. These focus areas are interconnected so students can develop understandings that overlap and cross them. Nonetheless, keeping these four focus areas separate assists with teaching manageable mini-units by fore fronting related sets of enduring understandings for students to learn. The enduring understandings we decided to place within each area of focus for student learning about folk art are not exhaustive – many more are possible. We also do not have any particular order for the enduring understandings we present in each focus area. The enduring understandings are labeled A, B, C, etc. to help readers cross-reference them within the mini-units for each grade. Our mini-units may not use all of the enduring understandings in each set. But we felt it important to keep them all since these enduring understanding will be of use in shaping curriculum in other folk art residencies at the school. Besides, students might discover other understandings in

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the process of working with an artist. We want teachers to be aware of and consider some of the possible enduring understandings that students might find.

Because we used *Understanding by Design* as the framework to create our mini-units, we first determined enduring understandings we wanted students to develop and then essential questions to help guide the students as they develop these big ideas in folk arts. The enduring understandings in the four focus areas are goals we want students to develop, but they are also intended to serve as foundational understandings that students can build upon as they pursue a lifelong involvement in exploring and learning in folk arts.

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## FOCUS AREA 1:



## THE ART FORM

*In this case:  
The art form  
of mandalas*

## SET OF ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

- A. Symbolism exists in art that reflects experiences, beliefs, values, morals, ideas, and virtues.
- B. Art reflects a shared experience of a time and place and impacts/ anchors societies.
- C. Art forms are taught. Each art form has its own methods and guidelines/ traditions, and its own aesthetics/ rules (e.g. who makes the art form, where it is made, etc.). The art form's meaning can change over time and this can be influenced by the artist (e.g. reason for why use each type of material).
- D. Art forms have a creation process and an object/product. Something can be learned from the process and the product (i.e. from a sand mandala and the dismantling of it).
- E. Context impacts the interpretation/experience of the participants and the artist (e.g. school setting verses temple, level of prior knowledge). Art forms can transform based on people and cultural influences.
- F. The art form serves as a record-keeper or place-holder of the history of a group of people and is a way to teach younger generations about the history of the group and self-identity.
- G. Art forms can be part of a reflective, spiritual, emotional practice.
- H. There is collective wisdom about the principles to live by that can be gained in interacting with a piece of an art form.

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## FOCUS AREA 2:



## THE ARTIST

*In this case:  
Losang Samten -  
the person*

## SET OF ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

- A. People have experiences we can learn from. Each individual has important knowledge and experiences that make them a cultural asset.
- B. Artists go through training to learn their art form. Learning an art form is a process that takes time to master.
- C. The artist's life and history affect his art form and vice versa. The pieces of art reflect the life experiences of the artist.
- D. The artist benefits from doing the art and helps bring peace to himself and those around him.

## FOCUS AREA 3:



## THE COMMUNITY AND CONTEXT

*In this case:  
The Tibetan  
communities and  
how mandalas are  
contextualized  
within them*

## SET OF ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

- A. Communities have artistic ways of sharing what is important to them. An art form can arise from the needs, history, resistance, struggles in a community.
- B. Communities have art forms that have external and/or internal audiences.
- C. Traditions change over time.
- D. Communities strive to maintain traditions despite challenges.
- E. Marginalized communities have different levels of challenges to maintain art forms and ways of life with groups of people actively working to destroy them (power structures in society).



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### FOCUS AREA 4:



#### THE SPECIFIC PIECE OF ART

*In this case:*

*Each year's sand  
mandala design  
i.e. the Wheel of Life  
or the Medicine Buddha  
Mandala for Healing*

#### SET OF ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

- A. Different communities can share common symbols and themes. There are different interpretations for a symbol based on culture/ background.
- B. No single piece of art stands alone. It has meaning. It is influenced by and impacts the culture, the artist's experiences, and the audience.
- C. Interpretation of the artwork is based on the perception of the audience/ individual. There may or may not be shared experiences of an artwork. There may be some commonalities within viewers' interpretations, but these are never exactly the same for all viewers and may differ from what the artist intended.

### SCOPE OF AN ARTIST'S KNOWLEDGE

*Tip for teachers in working with Losang (or any artist):*

- Teachers need not worry about striving to become 'expert' in the artist's knowledge - it's a partnership.
- An artist knows more than s/he could possibly share with your students in the limited time available.
- Help guide the artist toward aspects of his/her knowledge that will be most useful to share with the students in achieving a particular lesson goal.
- Be prepared for other enduring understandings or cultural processes to be revealed that are in addition to the ones you have planned for the students to work on in your lesson. This can happen because the artist might decide it is relevant or important to share other aspects of the art or additional contextual information with the students.



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## RESOURCES ABOUT LOSANG SAMTEN

[www.losangsamten.com](http://www.losangsamten.com) — Losang's own website is a valuable, primary resource and worth looking through to see what is contained on every page. On his website, viewers can find his story about leaving Tibet, becoming a monk and learning his art form. He has resources and links that can provide additional contextual information.

On Losang's website, viewers can find images and videos of some of his sand mandalas. Though he knows and makes many designs in the Tibetan tradition, Losang typically chooses to create a mandala of one of the following six designs for school residencies:

- Wheel of life
- Medicine Buddha for healing
- Wheel of time
- Wheel of compassion
- Light
- Peace

## OTHER RESOURCES

In the mini-units of this curriculum teachers may need to access particular information about Losang or particular images of his mandalas to support the learning activities. These are freely available through PFP's website [www.folkloreproject.org](http://www.folkloreproject.org), Losang's website [www.losangsamten.com](http://www.losangsamten.com), or FACTS' website [www.factschool.org](http://www.factschool.org).

Teachers may wish to learn more about Tibet, the Tibetan mandala tradition and the Tibetan community in the United States. We invite teachers to start their research on these topics through Losang's website and PFP's website.

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# SCOPE AND SEQUENCE FOR ENTIRE CURRICULUM

The overall goal of the scope and sequence for this curriculum is to provide each grade level with a singular area of focus and corresponding set of enduring understandings. Three of the four areas of focus have been selected to spiral throughout the nine years of mini-units: the art form, the artist, and the community and context. Students will cycle through these areas of focus every three years. Every third year, when students study a focus area again, they will address a subset of that focus area's enduring understandings. Some enduring understandings will be addressed by students at multiple grade levels; others will be addressed only once. The enduring understandings not included directly in the mini-units are still available for student learning should teachers wish to use them. When an enduring understanding spans more than one grade level, the mini-units have different essential questions to deepen students' knowledge and understanding while avoiding repetition.

The fourth area of focus - the specific piece of art - while not in our scope and sequence can be included as a part of the residency each and every year. Because the design Losang creates changes each year, teachers are encouraged to take advantage of the meaning and symbolism of any given mandala to build additional learning activities for their students. For example, the medicine mandala lends itself to health units and the time mandala lends itself to math.

The scope and sequence graphics below outline the three main areas of focus and the set of enduring understandings featured within each grade that guide the spiraling mini-units of study for grades K-8.

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THE ART FORM



**Kindergarten**

A. Symbolism exists in art that reflects experiences, beliefs, values, morals, ideas, and virtues.

C. Art forms are taught. Each art form has its own methods and guidelines/ traditions, and its own aesthetics/ rules.

**3rd grade**

D. Art forms have a creation process and an object. Something can be learned from the process and the product.

**6th grade**

F. The art form serves as a record-keeper or placeholder of the history of a group of people and is a way to teach younger generation about the history of the group and self-identity.

G. Art forms can be part of a reflective, spiritual, emotional practice.

H. There is collective wisdom about the principles to live by that can be gained in interacting with a piece of an art form.

THE ARTIST



**1st Grade**

A. People have experiences we can learn from. Each individual has important knowledge and experiences that make them a cultural asset.

B. Artists go through training to learn their art form. Learning an art form is a process that takes time to master.

**4th Grade**

A. People have experiences we can learn from. Each individual has important knowledge and experiences that make them a cultural asset.

B. Artists go through training to learn their art form.

Learning an art form is a process that takes time to master.

D. The artist benefits from doing the art and helps bring peace to himself and those around him.

**7th Grade**

C. The artist's life and history affect his art form and vice versa. The pieces of art reflect the life experiences of the artist.

D. The artist benefits from doing the art and helps bring peace to himself and those around him.



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THE COMMUNITY  
AND CONTEXT



**2nd grade**

- A. Communities have artistic ways of sharing what is important to them. An art form can arise from the needs, history, resistance, struggles in a community.
- B. Communities have art forms that have external and/or internal audiences.

**5th grade**

- A. Communities have artistic ways of sharing what is important to them. An art form can arise from the needs, history, resistance, struggles in a community.
- B. Communities have art forms that have external and/or internal audiences.

**8th grade**

- C. Traditions change over time.
- D. Communities strive to maintain traditions despite challenges.
- E. Marginalized communities have different levels of challenges to maintain art forms and ways of life with groups of people actively working to destroy them (power structures in society).

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## MINI-UNITS OF STUDY

Nine sample grade-specific mini-unit plans along with the corresponding lesson plans make up the curriculum developed for use with this teachers' guide. There is one sample unit per each grade: K through 8. The mini-unit plans outline the enduring understandings, essential questions, knowledge, skills, and performance assessment that can be used. Each mini-unit also indicates its alignment with FACTS' Folk Arts Standards. The lesson plans contain a more practical sequence of instructional activities to explore the essential questions. Each mini-unit includes approximately four sessions of lessons that address instruction before, during, and after the visit with the artist, Losang Samten.

We summarize each mini-unit here so you can get a sense of its contents and more easily see the scope and sequence that guide students into greater depth in understanding each year. The detailed mini-unit plans can be found on PFP's website [www.folkloreproject.org](http://www.folkloreproject.org). The mini-units are dynamic with FACTS teachers refining, adjusting and adding to them as they enact them with their students. We would like to provide teachers with the latest versions of the mini-units (and with new ones as teachers develop them for specific mandala designs) so we encourage teachers to download the latest version from PFP's website. Some lessons suggest teachers use certain instructional resources like photographs of Losang's mandala design elements, or videos of one of his mandala's being created or dismantled, or excerpts from Losang's life story. Such resources can also be found on PFP's and on Losang's websites.

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Kindergarteners will learn about the tools used to create a sand mandala and will learn that symbols are objects with meaning. They will compare the tools used to make art forms known to them with the tools Losang uses to make a sand mandala. They will hear a story about the Wheel of Life Mandala to learn of symbols used in mandalas. The students will then create their own sand mandala using similar tools and will create their own symbol using a circle.



First graders will focus on Losang as an artist. They will learn how, when, where, and why an artist learns a specific art form by comparing and contrasting their school experience with that of Losang's at a Tibetan monastery. The students will reflect on the purpose of practicing art by interviewing Losang during his visit. As a culminating project, the students will create a Venn diagram comparing Losang and themselves.



Second graders will reflect upon rituals in their own lives, the meaning behind these rituals, and feelings they may have during these rituals as they study the context of the mandala. They will learn the important ideas of mindfulness and impermanence through meditation and the dismantling process. Through video, read-alouds, and a visit from Losang, they will participate in the practice of meditation.



Third graders will learn about the process of creating a piece of art and the experience of creation and completion. They will learn the step-by-step process of how to create a sand mandala and record the information. Throughout the week, students will continue to observe and record the creation of the mandala and learn from the class representative the last step of dismantling. They will reflect on an experience of when they created something and share what the experience was like before, during and after the creation of the product. Students will reflect upon the importance of both the process and the product.

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Fourth graders will begin the process of thinking of themselves as learners and how cultural practices may change over time as they explore Losang's training and experience as a mandala artist. They will be exposed to Tibetan history and Losang's experience as a refugee in India using photographs and a powerpoint presentation. Losang will also visit the classroom and teach students a skill used in mandala-making.



Sixth graders will explore the sand mandalas through the lens of symbolism and collective wisdom. They will observe specific symbols used in Losang's mandalas and discuss the meanings and messages behind the designs. After an interview session with Losang, the students will select one symbol and reflect on its meaning. Then, each student will create their own symbol of peace accompanied by a caption. The unit ends with a gallery walk of peace symbols in time for a school-wide peace concert.



Fifth graders will discover two sides of the argument on whether or not a tradition should be shared and how sharing a tradition with a worldwide audience may impact the tradition. At the same time, fifth graders will learn about the political struggles between Tibet and China and will be guided through a loss-of-identity activity. They will learn about the reasons for and significance of Losang sharing the sand mandala with a worldwide audience. They will learn about the opposing perspective that wants to keep the mandala tradition within the Tibetan community. The fifth graders will take a stance regarding whether a tradition should be kept within a specific group and express the reasons for their choice in a persuasive essay outline.



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Seventh graders will explore how Losang's life experience affected him, both as a student of the art form and as a practitioner of the art form. Through group discussion, video and print materials and direct interview with the artist, students will come to understand how life experiences influence both the artist and the decisions the artist makes about his art. Through a focused observation of the piece of art (mandala), students will deepen their understanding of the artist's intentions for an audience. Students will be able to explain why Losang shares his mandala practice with as wide an audience as he can.



Eighth graders will explore how the practice of creating sand mandalas is a way to maintain Tibetan cultural practices. They will explore the resource of the exhibition *Tibetans in Philadelphia*, curated by the PFP and the Tibetan Association of Philadelphia, to help them explain why Losang and others work hard to maintain this, and other, cultural practices in the face of forces that are repressing Tibetan culture. They will also reflect on how the artist both maintains and interprets the art form over time.

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## SKILLS OF FOLK ARTS EDUCATION

*A residency with a folk artist provides rich opportunities for students to develop their skills in investigating culture. Here are some of the skills of folk arts education that students utilize and develop in this curriculum:*

### **Observation**

Objective (record)  
Subjective (respond)  
Reflection  
Perspective shifting

### **Interviewing**

Questioning  
Listening

### **Conceptual terms for understanding culture**

Ex: traditions, folk group,  
worldview, rules

### **Analysis**

Patterning and categorization  
Comparison and relationships

### **Meaning making/ explaining**

Enduring understandings  
Cultural processes

### **Representation**

Oral  
Written  
Drawn/Visual

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## SCHEDULING WHEN TO TEACH THE MINI-UNITS

The mini-unit lessons can be conducted during any time block of teachers' choosing as the lessons connect to various content areas, such as English Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Art. Some suggested time blocks for FACTS teachers to conduct these lessons are morning meetings, Circle of Power and Respect (CPR), and FACTS class. The lessons and discussions that take place align well with the structure of morning meeting and CPR so these are ideal blocks to conduct the lessons. The mini-units are designed to occur at the same time as Losang's residency, but pay attention to which day of his residency is best suited for each mini-unit plan. Some grades should visit with Losang at the very beginning of his residency, so those mini-units must be started before Losang arrives in order for students to be prepared for their time with him.

## STRUCTURING THE CLASS VISIT WITH LOSANG

The session each class has with Losang is a time for the students to observe him while he practices his art form *and* a time to expand the students' area of investigation. The way that teachers structure this time is up to them and what Losang does with the students depends upon what teachers ask of him. Here are some suggested tips to do as the host teacher of this residency that could contribute to students having a maximally productive session with Losang.

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Teachers could consider beginning their students' session with Losang by:

- seating students around the mandala
- introducing students to Losang
- setting the tone and expectations for student behaviors during the session with him
- informing Losang about the focal area the students have been covering and aspects within it that they would like to explore further with him
- discussing with Losang the activities that you as the teacher would like him to do with the students in the limited time they are together with him (as mini-unit suggests and/or see the list below)
- being an active participant in the session by helping facilitate student participation in sharing, speaking with or asking questions of Losang
- jumping in throughout the session to help students behaviorally if they might be struggling
- reminding students to express gratitude at the session's end

It is possible that the planned activities teachers have prepared for their students to do with Losang (such as interviewing or drawing) will not require the whole class period they have scheduled with Losang to complete. This becomes a great opportunity to adjust plans and add some activities that help students see with a new lens or perspective. For example, there is always great value in having students practice their observation skills by watching Losang work.

Here are some other suggested activities teachers could ask Losang to do with their students:

- guide students in an experience with meditation
- tell stories: either personal narratives from his lived experiences or stories that connect to some aspect of that year's mandala design
- answer questions students might have
- explain the sections of the mandala or other specific design elements
- listen to students share a selection of their explorations into their me-to-we experiences about a specific topic
- guide a few students to make short lines or circles of sand using the "chakpo" tool
- teach the students a chant, song or dance

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## NEXT YEAR AND BEYOND

At the end of a teacher professional development workshop on folk arts education that was held at FACTS, one of our colleagues commented on how much she liked that this approach to education starts with questions, works through all this “stuff”, and gets learners back to more questions. Her observations about folk arts education could describe this team’s experience in creating this curriculum too.

We have gotten to a point where there is so much more we want to know. What modifications should we make after unit plans are implemented? How will mini-units involve specials teachers? How does the sand mandala tradition connect with the recent explorations within Tibetan Buddhism in investigating its connection to science? What other lessons and insights into the world could students learn from each sand mandala? How could the Tibetan sand mandala’s tradition of teaching architectural design inform the creation of a math mini-unit? How can we apply the instructional practices of folk arts education in other units of study to reinforce student inquiry skill development and knowledge of other cultural traditions?

Armed with this curriculum, we anticipate the coming of winter when Losang will return to FACTS and the students will engage again in the mini-units. We look forward to seeing what new understandings our young charges will develop and what new insights and questions about guiding student learning we will develop.

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