



The Celebration Series: Lunar New Year



"Animals Like Us"

This Lunar New Year, we celebrate the Year of the Sheep and our connection with animals with a fun sheep art project based on discussions of French artist Jean Dubuffet's *The Cow with a Subtle Nose*.

The sheep, which represents year 2015, is one of 12 animal signs from the Chinese zodiac that is determined by the lunar calendar. It is believed people born in a particular year of the 12-year cycle displays the characteristics of the animal of the year they were born.

Like the Chinese, other cultures have held animals in various esteem, such as the Native Americans and bison, Inuits and whales, and ancient Egyptians and cats. From animal depictions in cave paintings to canoe carvings, humans reveal their vast connection to animals through art.

Use this lesson with your child to further explore his/her relationship with animals and pets. Which animal(s) does s/he connect most with? Of the 12 zodiac animals, which best resembles his/her personality? Do animals resemble us, experiencing feelings of hurt, anger, happiness, or sadness as humans do?

Discuss Jean Dubuffet's animal, and then create your own!

We hope you enjoy this special-edition celebration lesson. We encourage you to visit our website, www.artinaction.org, and try a free, more in-depth sample lesson.

Art in Action is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing art to children for over 30 years

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Artist Background: Jean Dubuffet



Jean Dubuffet
(1901-1985)

- Jean Dubuffet was born in 1901 in France. When he was 17 he went to Paris for art school, but he quit art school and decided to teach himself. Soon he gave up on art completely and instead he took over his father's wine business. Not until he was 41 years old did he become a painter again.
- He liked simple, primitive and untrained styles, and he was most interested in paintings that expressed an inner spirit of the subject of his painting. The most important features have been exaggerated, showing a caricature.
- He used an unusual painting technique of encrusting the surface of the painting with layers of paint and other materials. He combined almost any element with the paint surface, including cement, tar, gravel, leaves, silver foil, dust and even butterfly wings.
- He laid a stretched canvas on the floor, covering its entire surface with a thick layer of oil paint using a spatula, like icing a cake. On top of this he poured ashes, sand and coal dust. Then, using a palette knife, he etched the contours of the head and the rest of the features.

- The title of the work creates a humorous tension between what the viewer anticipated by the rather poetic description and what is actually confronted in the finished work with its primitive, earthy textures and skull-like gaze.

Art Discussion: The Cow With a Subtle Nose



The Cow With a Subtle Nose, Jean Dubuffet, 1954

What is this animal thinking about?

Do animals have feelings? How do they show their feelings? The big cow eyes seem to be looking straight at us as if asking a question. Is it lost, or hungry? What should we say to it? Would it be friendly if we talked to it?

How many colors did Dubuffet use in this picture?

The main colors are brown and green. There are many shades of brown in the cow. The blue of the cow's eyes is mixed with the brown. How many other colors are mixed with white or brown to make the spotted hide?

Is this picture of a cow realistic?

The cow looks like a cow, but not like a photograph of a cow. The artist, Jean Dubuffet, wanted to show the cow's feelings, not just what it looks like. Although the shape is like a cow, the edges are rough, not smooth like a cow's hide.

Where do pointy lines make the animal look scary?

The horns and tail are dagger-like, pointing off the edge of the picture. But most of the lines are round and smooth, making the cow look soft and gentle. The sharp angles of the horns and hooves remind us that a cow can hurt if it is angry or frightened.

How did he paint this picture?

Dubuffet was known for covering his canvas with many layers of paint and other materials such as sand and ash, before he painted. Where can you see the wrinkles of thick underpainting? Do you think the cow's spots were painted on or are they part of the junk he layered onto the canvas?

Is the cow beautiful?

In ancient Egypt a cow, Hathor, was called the goddess of beauty because of her beautiful eyes. This cow has big eyes. Do you think they are beautiful? Does the soft spotted skin look friendly to pet? Dubuffet liked to combine opposite feelings. The soft body is also huge and heavy. The big eyes are beautiful, but sad. Would you like to have a pet cow?

Art Project: Popcorn Sheep (20 mins)

Materials:

- 8.5x11 pre-printed sheep (template provided)
- Popcorn
- Glue
- Licorice, jelly beans, or gum drops



Supplies Variation:

Use cotton balls, colored pom-poms, buttons, beans, raisins, sequins

Instructions:

1. Glue popcorn "wool" onto the sheep. Paint glue on one section of the sheep and place popcorn on the glue.
2. Continue gluing popcorn to the body, head, and legs of the sheep.
3. Add two black pieces of candy for the eyes, and one for the nose. Place small pieces at the bottom of each leg for a hoof.

Sheep Template (not to scale)

