

## OBJECT STUDY ROOM--stop 1

The Mahābhārata is one of the two major **Sanskrit epics** of **ancient India** (circa, 9th-8th centuries BCE, about the time scholars believe Homer created the *Odyssey*). It is a powerful epic that presents sweeping visions of the cosmos and humanity and intriguing and frightening glimpses of divinity.

In ancient India the five **Pandava** brothers are cousins of the **Kauravas**, that is, opposing branches of the same family. The Pandavas are driven by light, the Kauravas driven by darkness, though they both exist somewhere in the grey area between good and evil. The men are raised together, but from the beginning there are difficulties. The Kaurava's malice displays itself most dramatically when they take advantage of the eldest Pandava, Yudhishtira, in a game of dice. The Kaurava's 'win' Yudhishtira, all his brothers, and even the Pāṇḍavas' common wife. They humiliate the Pandava's and drive them into exile in the wilderness for twelve years.

After their banishment, inevitably, a war will follow, a war that will shake the foundations of the Earth. Before the final battle, Krishna shares with Arjuna (one of the Pandava's and a master archer), the knowledge of the Bhagavad-Gita, a Hindu sacred text.

After the battle and the death of Krishna, the Pandavas take the great journey to the heavenly realm. Only the eldest reaches the gates of heaven alive although he will not enter without his brothers.

This banner, made in Bali, shows the game of dice from the Mahabharata (UMMA accession number 1976/2.19).

In groups of 3-4, discuss what you think Yudhishtira is thinking as he casts the die. Consider the perennial tension between the families, the understanding Yudhishtira has of his attraction (addiction?) to gambling, his responsibility to his family, his knowledge of the final outcome: war that will shake the foundations of the Earth. After 5-10 minutes, each group will report out to the other groups.

## LOWER LEVEL CASES--stop 2

Look at these two photographs or the Tyree Guyton painting of two faces for a minute or so. Select one to focus on for this stop.

Look at your selected image. What emotion comes to mind when you look at this person? Name the emotion in the space below. Write down details you see in the portrait that might be evidence of this emotion. For example: Fear = stiff posture, shifting eyes, pinched mouth, pale skin; sadness = mouth turned down, shadows, slumped or sagging shoulders.

After you have identified an emotion related to this portrait, take time to free write about this person. Don't worry if your writing doesn't connect exactly to what you know about the image.

Make new connections! Consider one of the following points of view as a starting point:

1. Third person, outside the frame. Describe details. What do you observe?
2. Third person omniscient, outside the frame. What does she/he feel given what you know?
3. Third person, involved in narrative process. Write about the activity of studying the portrait.  
"I sat staring at his face, wondering if..."
4. First person, inside the frame. "I feel like..."
5. Interview with sitter. What are you looking at? for? Why are you..."

### PRINT STUDY-- stop 3

These three prints show quite different views of military conflict.

#### **Dmitri Baltermants, *Battle for Kamenka Village, Near Moscow, 1941, 2012/2.67***

This photograph, by a Russian journalistic, documentary photographer, shows soldiers in the pitch of battle during WWII, likely during Nazi Germany's invasion of Russia in 1941. The capture of Moscow, Russia's capital, was seen as vital to the success of this invasion. Hitler believed that once the heart – Moscow – had been cut out of Russia, the whole nation would collapse.

#### ***The Death of Dara, from the Shahnama of Firdausi, 1963/1.64***

The manuscript page is from the Persian/Iranian *Shahnameh*, or 'book of kings,' which was a mythological and historical epic valorizing the history of Persia/Iran. This image shows Alexander the Great--a Greek/Macedonian military hero--cradling the head of Darius--a great emperor of Persia in the 6th century BCE, on his deathbed.

#### ***Râmâyana manuscript, folio 101: Demon Armies Pour Out of Ravana's Castle, 2002/1.166***

The Ramayana is one of the most ancient and enduring epics of Indian literature. The tale revolves around **Rama**, a human manifestation of the great Hindu god Vishnu and his antagonist, **Ravana**, the powerful king of Lanka (modern Sri Lanka). Rama, is an emblem of enduring Indian ideals of kingship, duty, and fidelity. Ravana, sometimes shown as the personification of evil, is shown here as regal and noble: multiple heads and arms notwithstanding, he is handsome and dignified. In this painting Ravana, in his golden castle, is sending forth his pastel colored demon warriors to repel Rama's attack.

Divide yourselves into three groups of 6-7. Each group will reflect on one image and discuss how conflict is presented in their image, what is its nature or personality; then discuss the function of that type of representation for the type of publication in which it appears. One person from each group will jot down a few notes on this page recording your group's thoughts.

