Who? Mughal Court Artists, India
What? Akbar Riding on an Elephant (Mughal Miniature Painting from the Akbarnama) (Watercolor and Gold on Paper, 12 3/4 x 7 ¾ inches)
When? C. 1590-95, Reign of Akbar
Where is it now? Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Why is this artist/artwork important? Mughal miniature painting demonstrates ways in which art can be used to tell a story. The paintings from the Book of Akbar (Akbarnama) exemplify the flourishing of art and culture under the Mughal emperors, who assembled large workshops of artists dedicated to the creation of magnificent paintings illustrating the lives and accomplishments of historical figures.
Mughal Miniature Painting:

Information Sheet: This lesson is not about an individual artist. It is about a type of art that flourished in India during the 16th-18th centuries and about depicting a narrative. While there are individual artists associated with Mughal Miniature paintings, this lesson does not focus on such. It introduces students to the concept of the artistic workshop, collaboration, and specialization.

--Mughal Miniatures were paintings that were intended as illustrations to stories
--The subjects of miniature paintings were often drawn from: Fables, literature, poetry, legendary events and achievements of the Mughal Emperors and other historical personalities.
--Mughal Miniatures were not intended to be framed and hung on walls. Many were part of books. These were small and often included the text of the story within the illustration.
--Others were large and bound in albums, which were brought out on special occasions.

Mughal miniature paintings were produced at large workshops within the Mughal Court. The Mughal ruler Akbar (reigned 1556-1605) was a great supporter of the arts. He had studied drawing as a young man. During his reign, he brought in artists from other places—mainly Persia, where there was a rich tradition of miniature painting—and set up a large imperial workshop with more than 100 painters at the court.
--He also had his artists copy illustrations from European books

Akbar felt that pictures could teach and entertain. He had his artists work on large elaborate projects that were for the imperial library. One project was to illustrate the "Hamza-nama," (The book of Hamza). It was a Persian story, which told the adventures of a historical personality, Hamza (Hamza was an uncle of Muhammad).
--The Book of Hamza contained 300 stories—about Hamza and his relatives, which were illustrated with 1,400 pictures and bound in 12 large volumes. Each page was 2 ½ ft high.

For Example:

**Elijah Rescuing Hamza's Nephew From the Sea, 1570**
--Ask them what they think is happening
--Pictures illustrate a moment in the story
--Who is important in the picture?
--How do we know?
--What is going on?
--What do you think will happen next?
--These paintings were meant to entertain also—shows heroes outwitting demons and monsters
**Materials:** Paint was gouache (ground mineral and vegetable pigments mixed with water)—like watercolor
--Extremely expensive pigments used—Lapis Lazuli (to create brilliant blue color), Malachite (to create green)
--24 karat gold leaf was applied on top, to make the paintings more dazzling
--artists used very thin brushes made from hair taken from squirrel tales.

**Collaborative work**—Leading artists responsible for conceiving and executing the composition in outline. Then specialists added color, others did portraits or animals, others did landscapes, architecture, borders.
--Vertical format
--lots of detail, very decorative
--bright colors (no shadows—so looks flat)
--lots of gold (valuable and to look special)
--text is often included (these were done by calligrapher)

Akbar’s other interest was in producing historical works. *The Book of Akbar* (Akbarnama), is a biography of the emperor, which depicts the events of the time and highlights the Akbar’s achievements.

For Example: **Akbar on his Elephant, 1590**
--Exciting Event
--What moment do the artists choose to depict
--How does color work (emphasis and makes the painting dynamic—your eye jumps from place to place).
--How do they show drama? What does the artist want to show about Akbar?
Akbar is dressed in white and has an orange turban. He rides his favorite elephant)(named Hawa’i) as it pursues another elephant over a bridge of boats across a river outside the red sandstone walls of Agra Fort.

--What do you think will happen next?

**Akbar Receives a Robe of Honor**
--patterned border is larger
--patterns throughout—decorative—uses patterns on carpet, clothing, tents
--What is the effect of color?
--How does the artist show that Akbar is important (look at how many people have come to see him)
--What do you think will happen next?
Images:
Hamzamnana, 1570, “Elijah rescuing Hamza’s nephew from Drowning” (British Museum)
Akbar Receiving a Robe of Honor
Akbar Riding on an Elephant
Mughal Miniature Paintings Projects

**Materials:**
- Pencils, colored pencils, markers
- Ruler
- 8 ½ x 11” paper—heavy stock is best
- Materials for stamping (corrugated cardboard) or making patterns
  (stencils made from cutting shapes out of paper)
- Aesop’s fables

Project 1—Focus on Narrative painting. Depicting a scene from a story.
- Suggestions:
  1. Aesop Fable (common one, tortoise & hare or sour grapes).
  2. Book they have recently read
  3. Movie

Students will need to: Decide on an episode within a fable, what to include to show a scene. Keep it simple (one moment in time).
- Aspects of Mughal painting to include: Decorative Borders, patterns, bright colors
- Have the students draw a border (about 1”) on their paper with pencil
- They should decide if they wish to include a portion of the text in the picture. If so, have them cut out the text they wish to use (or they can draw a box and write it themselves) and place that in the picture.
- Draw the scene with colored pencils, color them in with markers and colored pencils
- For the border have them make decorative patterns (either drawing free-hand, coloring the corrugated cardboard with lots of marker and stamping it, and or making cut-out stencils and coloring them in.)
Project 2: Work in cooperative groups to emphasize the idea of a workshop and specialization:

--Divide the class into groups. Let them decide in their groups what each of them would like to draw e.g. trees, sky, animals, human figure and birds, etc.

--Each group should decide together which Aesop fable to make

--Have each person choose a moment in the story to depict.

--At the same time, the students should draw their borders. Each student works on the pre-selected aspect of their scene (the animal person makes animals, building person does buildings, border person does the border). After 3-5 minutes, have the students pass their picture to the person to the left. That person does his/her designated specialty on the next picture.

**Aesop’s Fables For Project**

**The Tortoise and The Hare**

There once was a speedy hare, who bragged about how fast he could run. Tired of hearing him boast, Slow and Steady, the tortoise, challenged him to a race. All the animals in the forest gathered to watch.

Hare ran down the road for a while and then paused to rest. He looked back at Slow and Steady and cried out, "How do you expect to win this race when you are walking along at your slow, slow pace?"

Hare stretched himself out alongside the road and fell asleep, thinking, "There is plenty of time to relax."

Slow and Steady walked and walked. He never, ever stopped until he came to the finish line.

The animals, who were watching, cheered so loudly for Tortoise, they woke up Hare.

Hare stretched and yawned and began to run again, but it was too late. Tortoise was over the line.

After that, Hare always reminded himself, "Don't brag about your lightning pace, for Slow and Steady won the race!"
The Boy Who Cried Wolf

There once was a shepherd boy who was bored as he sat on the hillside watching the village sheep. To amuse himself he took a great breath and sang out, "Wolf! Wolf! The Wolf is chasing the sheep!"
The villagers came running up the hill to help the boy drive the wolf away. But when they arrived at the top of the hill, they found no wolf. The boy laughed at the sight of their angry faces. "Don't cry 'wolf', shepherd boy," said the villagers, "when there's no wolf!" They went grumbling back down the hill.

Later, the boy sang out again, "Wolf! Wolf! The wolf is chasing the sheep!" To his naughty delight, he watched the villagers run up the hill to help him drive the wolf away.

When the villagers saw no wolf they sternly said, "Save your frightened song for when there is really something wrong! Don't cry 'wolf' when there is NO wolf!"
But the boy just grinned and watched them go grumbling down the hill once more.

Later, he saw a REAL wolf prowling about his flock. Alarmed, he leaped to his feet and sang out as loudly as he could, "Wolf! Wolf!"
But the villagers thought he was trying to fool them again, and so they didn't come.

At sunset, everyone wondered why the shepherd boy hadn't returned to the village with their sheep. They went up the hill to find the boy. They found him weeping. "There really was a wolf here! The flock has scattered! I cried out, "Wolf!" Why didn't you come?"

An old man tried to comfort the boy as they walked back to the village. "We'll help you look for the lost sheep in the morning," he said, putting his arm around the youth, "Nobody believes a liar...even when he is telling the truth!"

Sour Grapes

A hungry fox noticed a juicy bunch of grapes growing high on a grapevine. He leaped. He snapped. Drooling, he jumped to reach them, but try as he might, he could not obtain the tasty prize.
Disappointed by the fruitless efforts he'd made to get the grapes that day, he
said, with a shrug, to comfort himself, "Oh, they were probably sour anyway!"

**The Lion and the Mouse**

A small mouse crept up to a sleeping lion. The mouse admired the lion's ears, his long whiskers and his great mane. "Since he's sleeping," thought the mouse, "he'll never suspect I'm here!"

With that, the little mouse climbed up onto the lion's tail, ran across its back, slid down its leg and jumped off of its paw. The lion awoke and quickly caught the mouse between its claws.

"Please," said the mouse, "let me go and I'll come back and help you someday." The lion laughed, "You are so small! How could ever help me?"

The lion laughed so hard he had to hold his belly! The mouse jumped to freedom and ran until she was far, far away.

The next day, two hunters came to the jungle. They went to the lion's lair. They set a huge rope snare. When the lion came home that night, he stepped into the trap.

He roared! He wept! But he couldn't pull himself free.

The mouse heard the lion's pitiful roar and came back to help him.

The mouse eyed the trap and noticed the one thick rope that held it together. She began nibbling and nibbling until the rope broke. The lion was able to shake off the other ropes that held him tight. He stood up free again!

The lion turned to the mouse and said, "Dear friend, I was foolish to ridicule you for being small. You helped me by saving my life after all!"