

The Secret Language of Dolls

How do dolls reflect the cultures that produce them? What can students learn about their own culture and others by examining culturally authentic dolls?

Objective: Students learn about the cultures represented by international dolls and develop language arts skills in writing descriptively about them.

Background

Dolls are an ancient and respected art form. They have been used by different cultures throughout history as religious icons, as symbols of good and evil, for practical purposes, as examples of fine art, to communicate or carry messages, and most of all, as beloved friends for children acting out early compulsions to nurture. Dolls can be an important element in a child's development, providing a safe avenue for the exploration of a broad range of emotions.

Miss Columbia herself was actually part of a much larger collection of dolls, including many from other countries. In taking on her role as an icon for peace and communication among different peoples, she joined a proud tradition of dolls and doll-making that truly does extend across merely political borders.

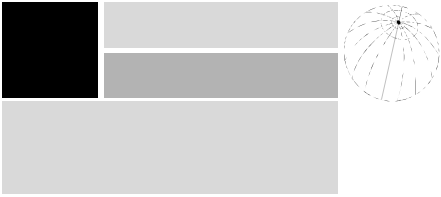
Materials



- ◆ Dolls children bring in from home, or that you can collect from other sources, that represent as many different cultures as possible.
- ◆ Paper, construction paper, markers, paints, other art materials to produce your own dolls.
- ◆ Several copies of the "What's Special About This Doll?" student handout sheet for each student (see page 101).

Getting Started

Ask children to think about famous dolls they've encountered (most likely in literature) and dolls they have at home. What are the things that make a doll unique? (Refer stories included on the next page, and to the "What's Special About This Doll?" student handout sheet for ideas.)



**THE SECRET LANGUAGE
OF DOLLS****Making a Paper Doll for Miss Columbia**

As part of your participation in the *Around the World with Miss Columbia* project, the Wenham Museum is asking that each host school create a representative paper doll and send it back to the Museum to become part of the Museum's permanent Miss Columbia collection.

After you and your students have completed the "Secret Language of Dolls" activity, ask students what kind of paper doll would represent in some unique way your school or community. There are no rules (intentionally) governing paper doll creation for this project. You can use any kind of paper and any kind of decorative technique you want. Imagine the doll becoming part of a permanent museum exhibition — your school's representative among many others, all gathered around Miss Columbia when she returns from her second around-the-world tour.

Your doll should be sent to: Miss Columbia Paper Dolls, c/o The Wenham Museum, 132 Main Street, Wenham, MA 01984, U.S.A. Please try to send it within a few days of your school's hosting of Miss Columbia. Participating schools who are not hosting an actual visit are welcome to contribute a paper doll as well.

