

# Asian Odyssey

A National K-12 Interdisciplinary Curriculum Model

The  
Cleveland  
Museum  
of Art  
A world of great  
art for everyone

## Buddhist Art

### Grade Level

Grades 6-12

### Purpose

To explore new objectives for art and examine how Chinese painting reflects Buddhist principles and to consider the meaning and significance of Buddhist mudras through the examination of images from the Cleveland Museum of Art.

### Concepts

- Bodhisattva—one who possesses the wisdom and power necessary to enter Nirvana, but has vowed not to take the final step until he has helped all sentient beings to salvation
- Buddha—the Enlightened One
- Buddhism—an Asian religion based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who became the Buddha
- Four Noble Truths: The starting point of Buddhist teachings, pronounced by the Buddha . These are:
  - 1 Life entails suffering.
  - 2 Suffering is due to earthly attachments.
  - 3 Suffering can be stopped if the earthly attachments are severed.
  - 4 To sever attachments, one must lead a disciplined and moral life and engage in meditation.
- The Middle Way—the path to truth as preached by the Buddha
- “Away from the dusty world”: term for Buddhist sentiment of escaping the mundane, daily experience to a higher plane of awareness.
- Chan Buddhism—a sect of Buddhism that features meditation as a means to enlightenment by direct intuition (known as Zen in Japan)
- Meditation—clearing the mind of distraction (*zazen* in Japanese)
- Mudra—a gesture or sign made with the hands
- Vertical landscapes—a picture composed in an up-and-down format rather than with a horizontal arrangement of the scene.
- Hanging scroll—a strip of material (silk or paper) painted and mounted on paper, that is designed to be hung on a wall or rolled up for storage.

## Key Ideas

- The purposes of meditation for the Buddhist
- The spirituality that a painting can embody
- The Chinese tradition of monks who developed the arts of painting, calligraphy, and poetry
- Hands of Buddha and Bodhisattvas are shown in different positions
- Each hand position is significant and represents a specific concept in the Buddhist teachings
- Mudras are techniques for using the hands to deliver a specific message to the viewer

## Materials

- *Buddhist Retreat by Stream and Mountain*, 960-985, CMA 1959.348
- *Twilight in the Wilderness*, 1860, CMA 1965.233
- *Jizo*, 13<sup>th</sup> century, CMA 1983.75
- *The Buddha of the Western Paradise, Amida Byorai*, 1269, CMA 1960.197
- *Descent of the Amida Buddha: Raigo*, 14<sup>th</sup> century, CMA 1953.123
- *Taima Mandala*, 14<sup>th</sup> century, CMA 1990.82
- *Further Discourses on the Supreme Truth (Abidharmakosha-Bhashya)*, 1100s, CMA 1916.1060
- *Niga Byakudo: The White Path to the Western Paradise across Two Rivers*, 13<sup>th</sup> century, CMA 1955.44
- *Nikko, the Sun Bodhisattva*, c.800, CMA 1961.48
- *Miroku Bosatsu, the Future Buddha*, 14<sup>th</sup> century, CMA 1999.195
  
- Handout: Buddhism
- Handout: Mudra

## Procedure

1. To introduce students to the concept of using art for inspiration as Buddhist monks did, consider how art inspires our own students. Discuss the following questions to prepare for the lesson:
  - a. Do you have any art (e.g. photos, posters) in your home that inspires you? A poster of an athlete, a hero, an inspiring landscape that you “enter” by looking?
  - b. Why do you display the image? What does it do for you? How does it feel for you to be able to look at it when you want to?

- c. Do you have any other tokens of inspiration—objects that you treasure for the way they make you feel? that give you hope in times of trouble?
2. As an example of art students will be more familiar with, and...
  - a. To continue the idea of art as inspiration,
  - b. And to prompt students to notice the typically Western use of color and composition for comparison to the Chinese monochromatic painting and composition.
3. View *Twilight in the Wilderness* CMA 1965.233 by American artist Frederic Edwin Church and discuss:
  - a. How would you describe the mood of this painting—that is, the feelings it conveys?
  - b. How does it make you feel or what do you think the artist wanted you to feel?
  - c. How do you think Americans of the 19<sup>th</sup> century “felt” when they saw this painting?
  - d. Does it matter that this painting was done in 1860, during the Civil War?
  - e. Do you think city-dwellers would appreciate this landscape more than those who lived in the wilderness?
  - f. Examine it closely: Where is your eye drawn? How is color used? How is the picture composed? Is it more horizontal or vertical in composition?
4. Provide some background with this information provided on the handout. Much more about Buddhism and meditation can be easily found, but a simple explanation of the Four Truths can be found at the web site listed.
5. To examine how painting was used as inspiration, view *Buddhist Retreat by Stream and Mountain* CMA 1959.348 and discuss these questions:
  - a. How is this landscape different from Church’s?
  - b. How does it make you feel (Compare this to Church’s)?
  - c. Where is your eye drawn?
  - d. Why upward? What details in the composition inspire us to look up?
  - e. Can you find examples of the “crab-claw” style, of the “alum-head” style?
  - f. Do you see any manmade structures or humans in the painting? Why do you think nature is predominant?
  - g. How do you think a monk who desires release from the “dusty world” and to “be in nature” could find inspiration here—as you might by looking at a poster in your room?
6. View art images that display deities and mudras.

7. Discuss the meaning of the mudras in each of the images.
8. Ask students how we use hand gestures for everyday speech (stop, come here); exhibit ASL to share some gestures.
9. After discussing and viewing Buddhist mudras, ask students to practice the gestures.
10. Have students form into groups of three. Pass out strips of paper with single words for example compassion, faith, or fearlessness. Have students come up with “new mudras that convey these abstract concepts and present them to the class. The class has to guess what the mudras mean based upon what they have learned so far.

### **Enrichment**

- A. Write a story of your experience of “entering” this landscape; narrate the story of the path you would take, describing what you see and experience along the way.
- B. Contemplate a landscape in your home, at a local museum, or in a library book; “meditate” on the landscape, entering it to experience what a Buddhist monk might. Then describe the experience: What did you see? Hear? Smell? Touch? How did you feel?
- C. Students can research additional mudras through an Internet search.
- D. Work in groups of three or four and have students practice the hand gestures of the Buddhas in the art images. Ask students to work together to develop hand gestures for the following concepts: Peace, Comfort/Caring, Relaxation, Abundance/Wealth, and Tranquility.

### **Evaluation**

- A. Describe your own images of inspiration; compare and contrast them with the painting.

### **Ohio State Standards**

1. Analyze how issues may be viewed differently by various cultural groups.
2. Identify the perspectives of diverse cultures when analyzing issues.
3. Explain how the character and meaning of a place reflect a society’s economics, politics, social values, and culture.
4. Compare the perspectives, practices, and cultural products of past and contemporary civilizations in order to understand commonality and diversity of cultures.

**This lesson plan is based on lesson plans developed by Dana Noble (Shaker Heights School System, Shaker Heights, Ohio) and Jackie Crandall (Beachwood School District, Beachwood, Ohio).**



## Handout

Buddhism is based in part on the Four Noble Truths set down by Siddhartha Gautama (about 560-480 BCE), the founder of Buddhism. As presented in the source listed below, they are:

1. Life means suffering.
2. The origin of suffering is attachment.
3. The cessation of suffering is attainable.
4. The path to the cessation of suffering... is a gradual path of self-improvement, or sudden enlightenment (Chan) through meditation.

[www.thebigview.com/Buddhism/fourtruths.html](http://www.thebigview.com/Buddhism/fourtruths.html)

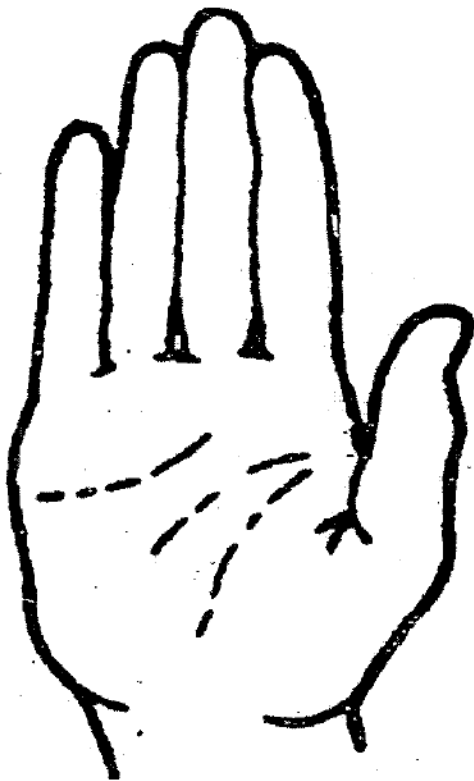
Chan Buddhists use meditation, the process of clearing of the mind of everyday concerns, to find self-realization. (Chan is called Zen in Japan.) Chan Buddhists believe that by dedicating their lives to spiritual understanding, including through meditation, they can come to self-realization. The Buddhist priests who teach monks often give them a koan, or riddle, to contemplate as they meditate; a famous one is “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” As they meditate, sitting motionless for hours, the monks seek spiritual enlightenment.

Though most Buddhist monasteries were built in the mountains where the quiet and peace promotes reflection, Chinese Buddhist monks of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries sometimes lived in monasteries that were located in cities. The artist Juran moves to the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty, Kaifeng, in CE 975 to enter a monastery.

Juran and his fellow monks lived in the hustle and bustle of a city capital, but longed to be in a peaceful environment. A common expression for this wish was to be “away from the dusty world,” a desire they reflected in their art. Juran spent much of his time meditating but also made paintings with Buddhist themes. He painted *Buddhist Retreat by Stream and Mountain* to be hung in the monastery so that monks could “enter” the mountains and be inspired to meditate. Notice that Juran used only black ink in creating this painting, so that its beauty comes from the way he uses his brush. The artist depicted trees in a traditional manner, using a type of brushstroke called “crab-claw.” The mountains were painted in an unusual way; termed as “alum-head” stones, they were a hallmark of Juran’s personal style.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Mudras** are symbolic gestures made with the fingers and hands. Each gesture has a specific meaning and represents an important event in the life and teachings of the Buddha. Sculptures and images of the Buddha show him with different mudras, telling us more about the function of the deity.



**Abhaya**

**Protection**

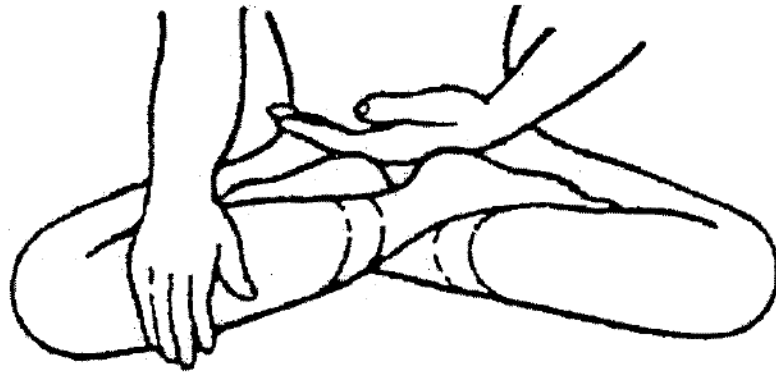
The right hand is lifted to shoulder-level. The palm, with fingers extended upward, faces outward.



**Varada**

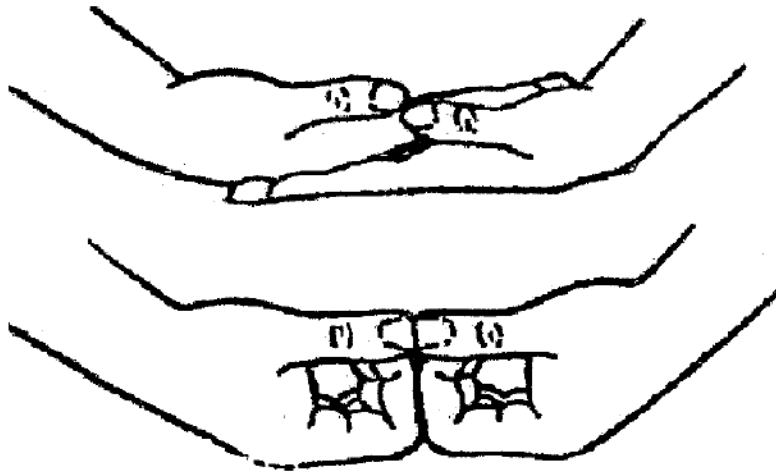
**Power to Grant a Wish**

The arm is extended all the way down, with palm facing outward, fingers extended downward



**Bhumisparsa**  
**Touching the Earth**

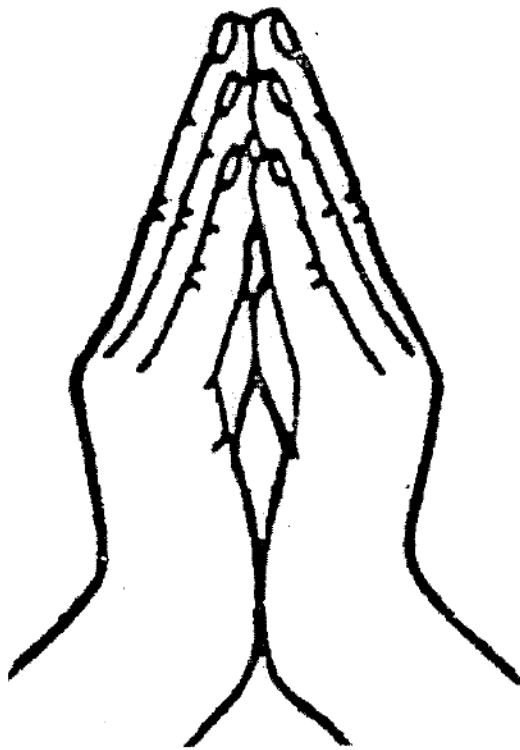
This gesture commemorates Gautama Buddha's victory over temptation by the demon Mara. In this gesture, the right hand of the sitting Buddha, supported on his right knee, touches the lotus seat below, palm inward, fingers extended.



**Dhyana**  
**Meditation**

Both hands are placed on the lap, right hand on left, with the fingers fully extended and the palms facing upward.





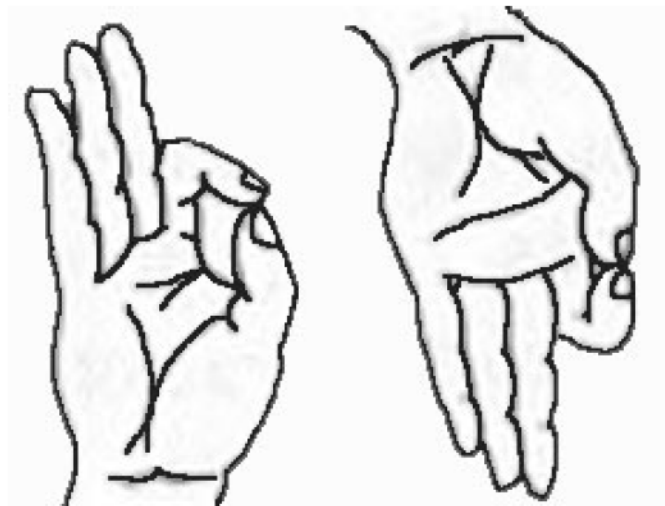
**Namaskara  
Prayer**

The two hands are kept close to the chest, touching palm to palm.



**Jnanamudra  
Teaching**

The tips of the index finger and the thumb are joined and held near the center of the chest, the palm fumed inward.



**Vitraka**

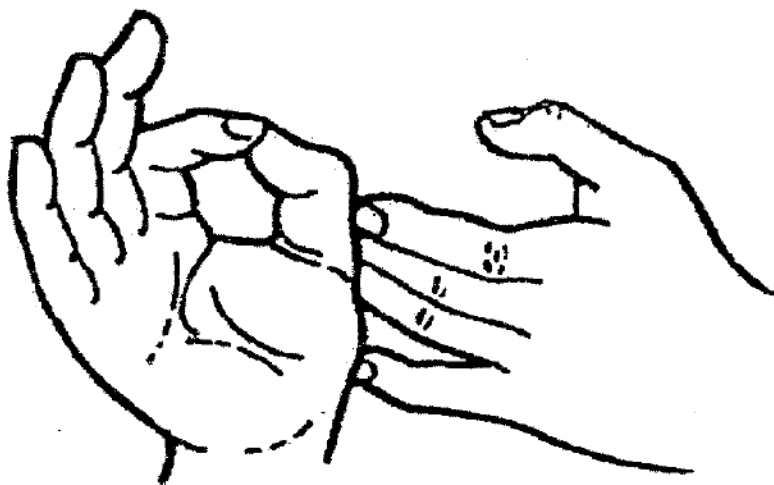
**Reasoning**

Right hand points upward, left downward. Both palms turned outward, with the thumb and index finger on each hand forming a circle. Right hand at shoulder level, left hand at hip level.



**Dharmachakra  
Teaching the Law**

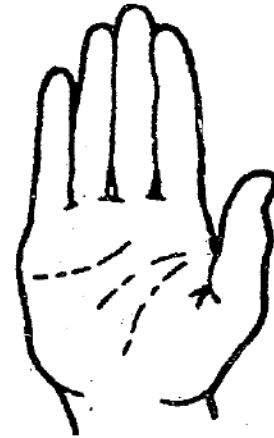
This Mudra commemorates the first sermon of Buddha in Samath. Both hands are held against the chest, the left facing inward, covering the right facing outward, the index finger and thumb of each hand making a circle.



**Dharmachakra Variation  
Teaching**



*Standing Sakyamuni*  
Pakistan, Gandhara, probably Peshawar area,  
Kushan Period (1st century-320)  
2nd half of the 2nd Century  
1972.43



*Standing Buddha*  
Northern India, Kashmir, or Western Tibet, late  
10th-early 11th century  
c. 998-1026  
1966.30

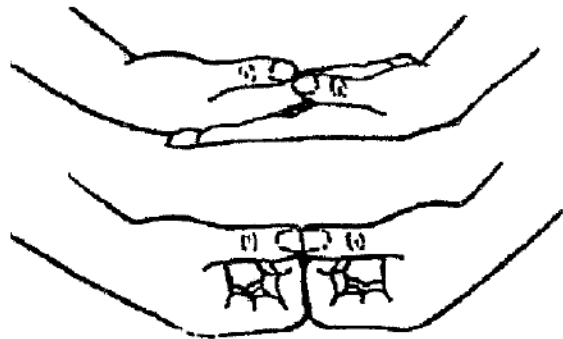




*Stele with Sakyamuni and Bodhisattvas*  
China, Six Dynasties Period (371-581), Eastern  
Wei Dynasty (534-549)  
537  
1914.567



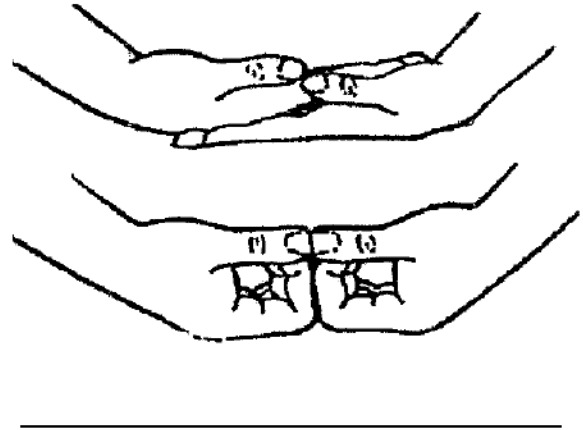
*Sakyamuni Buddha*  
Korea, Three Kingdoms period (57 BC-668 AD)  
6th-7th century  
1987.188



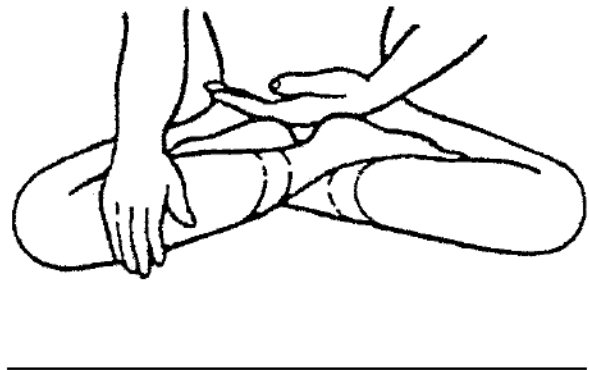




*Amitabha*  
China, Liao Dynasty (916-1125)  
10th Century  
1942.1082

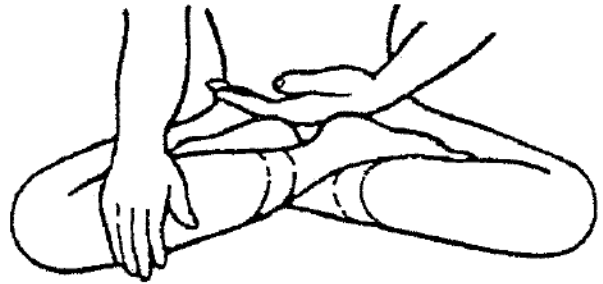


*Temptation of Buddha by the Evil Forces of Mara*  
India, Kashmir, 8th Century  
8th Century  
1971.18

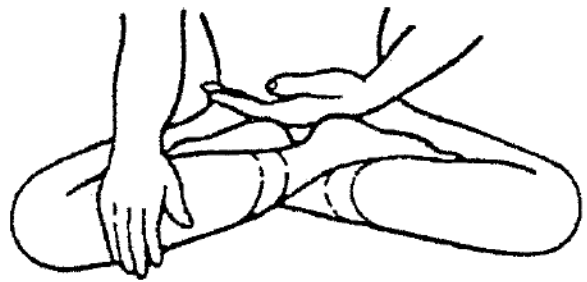




*Akshobhya: The Buddha of the East*  
India, Kurkihar, Bihar, Pala Period, 9th Century  
late 800s  
1970.10



*Buddha Calling on Earth to Witness*  
India, Bengal, Bihar, Pala Period (750-1197)  
9th century  
1935.146



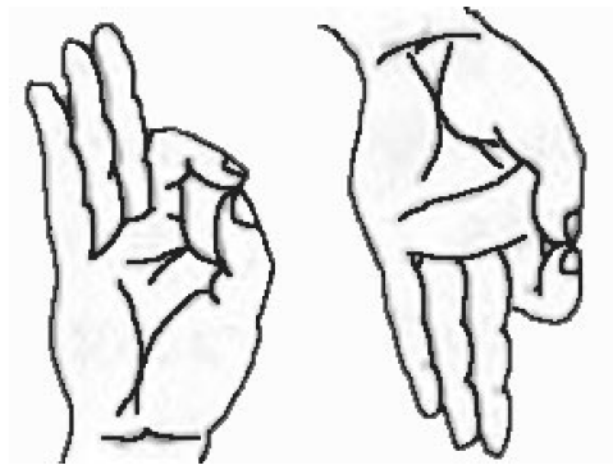




*Standing Buddha Amitabha (Amit'a)*  
Korea, Unified Silla Kingdom (668 - 935)  
800s  
1988.34

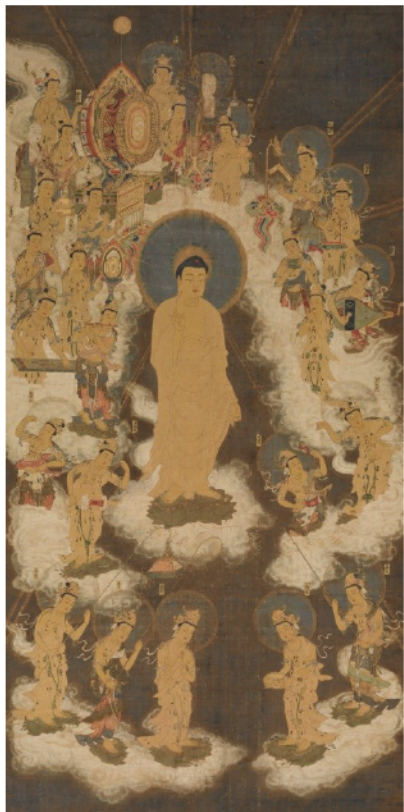
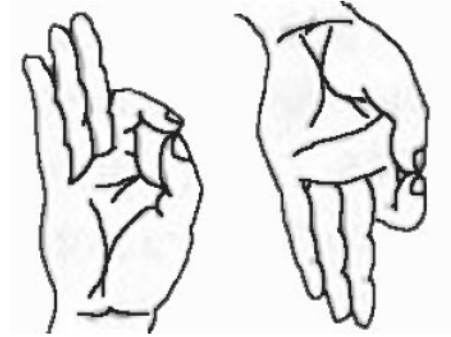


*Seated Shaka*  
Japan, Heian Period (794-1185)  
c. 900  
1986.7

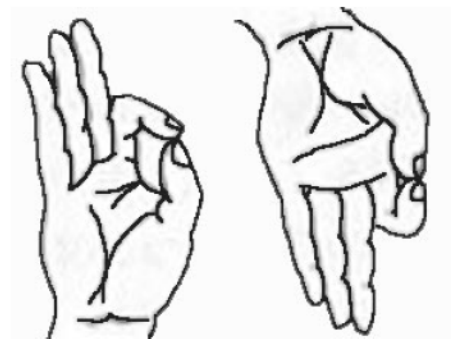




*The Buddha of the Western Paradise, Amida Nyorai*  
Koshun (Japanese), assistant Koshin (Japanese),  
assistant Joshun (Japanese)  
1269  
1960.197



*Descent of the Amida Buddha: Raigo*  
Japan, Kamakura Period (1185-1333)  
1300s  
1953.123





*Shotoku Taishi as a Child*  
Japan, Kamakura Period (1185-1333)  
early 14th century  
1989.76



*A Preaching Buddha*  
Japan, Nara period (710-794)  
8th century  
1985.87

