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# Art Masterpiece: "Floor Mosaic with a Personification of Ktisis"

Unknown Artist - 500-550 CE Byzantine Marble and Glass

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**Keywords:** Personification, Mosaic, Cornucopia

**Grade:** 1<sup>st</sup> Grade

**Activity:** The Heart Mosaic



**Keywords:**

**Personification** is when you assign the qualities of a person to something that isn't human or, in some cases, to something that isn't even alive.\*

**Mosaic** is the art of creating images with an assemblage of small pieces of colored glass, stone, or other materials. Small pieces, mostly roughly square, of stone or glass of different colors, are used to create a pattern or picture.\*\*

**Cornucopia** or **horn of plenty** is a symbol of abundance and nourishment, commonly a large horn-shaped container overflowing with produce, flowers, nuts, other edibles, or wealth in some form. It is particularly associated with the Thanksgiving holiday in North America.\*\*\*

### Meet the Artwork:

The **personification** of Ktisis is a part of large floor **mosaic** of a once public building of the Byzantine Empire. Byzantine Empire was an Eastern part of the Roman Empire during the Middle Ages with its capital in Byzantium (former Greek city). The richly bejeweled lady in this mosaic is Ktisis, a personification of generous donation or foundation. In her hands she holds a rod; it is a tool for measuring the Roman foot (length equal to 11.64 English inches). On her right a man extends a **cornucopia** toward her as if offering a gift; the Greek word for "good" is near his head. Originally a similar figure probably appeared to her left, and an inscription by his head would have completed the legend "Good wishes."

The classical tradition of personifying abstract ideals continued during the Christian era in many places around the Mediterranean basin. Images of Ktisis often showing her holding the same measuring tool are found on the floor mosaics of bathhouses as well as churches throughout the Byzantine Empire

The Greek Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City purchased the two figures (Ktisis and the man with cornucopia) separately. The fragment of mosaic was divided for sale, and once the museum acquired both pieces the mosaic was restored in accordance with an old photograph of the mosaic in a dealer's storeroom\*\*\*\*.

### Possible questions:

- What jewelry is the lady wearing? (diadem on her head, large pearls in her ears, a necklace of delicate stones about her throat, and two broaches—one clasping her yellow mantle and another as a clasp to her dress\*\*\*\*\*)
- What would be other examples of personification? (Movies such as "Cars"; cars are alive. In art, Mother Nature is depicted as a woman with body parts made out of natural elements i.e. hair made out of tree branches and leaves)
- What colors do you see in the mosaic? (earthy tones, warm colors, light background, browns, dark lines)
- Can you find contrasting colors? Explain contrast (earrings and hair, man's dark shoes against light background)
- Think of the texture, how would the mosaic feel if you touched it?
- Have you ever seen mosaic in a real life? If yes, where? (Mosaic garden tables, decorative pieces)

### Materials:

- White construction paper
- Square mosaic pieces (already cut, can be found in the cabinet)
- Pencils
- Glue
- Scissors

## Process:

- Sign your name on the back of your paper. Lightly draw an image on a piece of paper but do not shade it or put a lot of details in it. The objective is simply to create an outline for the image you will be creating.
- Glue pieces of mosaic squares inside the sketch you just made. Students may cut pieces in half (diagonal/horizontal) if needed. Leave a small gap between each piece for a tiled effect, or overlapping for a different look.
- Let it dry. If you'd like to keep it sturdy and able to hang on walls, glue onto a thick piece of cardboard.
- Finish, but adding mosaic pieces, preferable in a contrasting color, on the outside of your image



## Sources:

\*<http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-personification.html>

\*\* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosaic>

\*\*\* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornucopia>

\*\*\*\* <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1998.69,1999.99>

\*\*\*\*\* <http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/469960>