



OCTOBER 2020

FINDING COMMON GROUND

Lion and Humped Ox | Syria (present-day Turkey)



Lion and Humped Ox. Syria (present-day Turkey). 5th century. Stone and lime mortar. 89 x 100 in. (226.1 x 254.1 cm). The Baltimore Museum of Art: Antioch Subscription Fund, BMA 1937.119

A lion and an ox face each other on either side of a fruit tree's trunk. Inscribed on it is a word in Greek: *philia*. To the left of the lion is a lone flower and a border featuring a decorative ribbon, interspersed with golden leaves. To the right of the ox is what appears to be the knotty trunk of another tree.

What would you expect to happen if a lion and an ox were to meet face-to-face? The stance of the animals in this mosaic does not indicate what is likely to happen next, but we do know that in the natural world, a lion is a predator, and an ox would be prey. However, the word on the trunk of the fruit tree—a pomegranate tree—between the two gives us some information about their relationship. The Greek word *philia* means "friendship" in English, and its inclusion reflects the realities and values of the ancient city of Antioch and its surrounding area (now in present-day Turkey). Antioch was a port city with a diverse population, including people of different races, ethnicities, and religious traditions. This mosaic, made in the 5th century, was one in a series of four that depict predators and prey, such as a tiger and a boar.

Made from stone of various colors and concrete, this mosaic was found in what was once Daphne, a suburb of Antioch used by wealthy citizens as a summer escape from the heat. Unlike how it is mounted on the walls at the BMA, the mosaic would have been situated on the floor, and perhaps—during hot days—would have been flooded with water, which would evaporate to cool the air.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

You can use ceramic tiles or glass "gems" from an art supply store to approximate the kind of mosaic featured in this resource. Using a support such as a pre-made ceramic base, you can apply the tiles or gems using craft glue to create a decorative image. However, there are a number of alternatives that do not require these materials. For example, you can use foam pieces, paper, or even beans or dyed eggshells as mosaic "tiles" on a paper or cardboard support. For instructions on how to make a paper mosaic, visit: artbma.org/friendshipmosaic



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