

# PEARLS: OBSERVATION SHEET

In this exhibition you will explore the following questions:

What are the features of mollusks?

What are the pearl-forming mollusks?

How are pearls formed?

What role do pearls play in human culture?

What factors endanger pearl oyster and pearl mussel populations?

## What Are Pearls?

1. What is a mollusk?
2. How do mollusks produce pearls?
3. What internal organs do we share with mollusks?
4. What organs are unique to mollusks?
5. Compare the surface, size, shape and color of the pearls on display. What is the range of color among these pearls?
6. What produces pearl luster?

## The Central Gallery

1. Chose a specimen from this gallery. Describe it in writing or draw a picture of it. What is it about the piece that makes it so unusual? What is the historical significance of the piece?
2. The Evolutionary Tree—Did some groups continue to produce nacre while their relatives lost the ability?

## Marine Pearls

1. While all mollusks are capable of producing pearls, most pearls come from bivalves, the two-shelled mollusks. Why?
2. Compare and contrast the anatomy and way of life of a single-shelled gastropod with a two-shelled mollusk. How are they alike? How are they different? Draw a sketch of one of them and add labels.
3. What role did Christopher Columbus play in bringing the Atlantic Pearl Oyster close to extinction?

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## Freshwater Pearls

1. How do freshwater mollusks differ from marine mollusks?
2. In a paragraph, describe the life cycle of a pearl mussel or draw and label a diagram. Contrast the pearl mussel life cycle with that of saltwater pearl oyster.
3. Why are pearl mussels in peril? What conservation efforts are being undertaken to protect pearl mussels?

## Gathering and Culturing Pearls

1. Write a paragraph describing the different methods for culturing pearls.
2. Trace the steps and processes that pearls undergo from their salt or freshwater harvesting to their display in a jewelry store.

## Pearls in Human History

Pearls were highly valued in some cultures, while other cultures preferred the more easily obtainable mother-of-pearl, or pearl shell. Throughout history, pearls have symbolized wealth, power, religion, and influence.

1. Choose an object from this section. Describe the piece or draw a sketch of it. Write a paragraph in which you explain the historical significance of the piece.

## Conclusion

1. What did you learn today about pearls that surprised you the most?
2. What questions do you still have about pearls?
3. With all the information you have gathered, create your own question about pearls for use in a follow-up class discussion.