



Unknown (South India, probably Tanjore)  
*Two Noblemen on Horseback with Dogs*, 19th century  
opaque watercolor on varnished leather, heightened with gold  
10 9/16 in. diam.  
Bequest of Mrs. Horace W. Frost  
91.15.66

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Unknown (South India, probably Tanjore)  
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19th century

Meant to amuse, this circular playing card is from the card game *ganjifa* that originated in Persia and became popular in India under Mughal rule during the 16th century. The game was first popular at court, and this card is probably from a royal collection. It is leather with gold highlights, whereas cards from cheaper sets would be made of wood or palm leaf. Suits of *ganjifa* cards were comprised of twelve subjects, including two face cards, a minister and a king. The versos are black or another dark color, but the faces have backgrounds of various colors: black for the Lion and Sun, white for the King, red for the Lady, gold for the Soldier. The lowest value card, the *Lakat*, is green. The pictures on the cards demonstrate much variety and are often obscene, particularly those on the *Lakat*. This card shows two noblemen on horseback with dogs. The fine detail and modeling on this low value card suggest that higher ranked cards might display an even greater degree of technical skill.



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## DISCUSS

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Roll your cursor over the image of these two figures to magnify. What can we tell about these figures from the illustration? What kinds of adventures do you think these two might have?

This watercolor is painted on a circular leather playing card for a game called ganjifa, which originated in Persia and became popular in India during the 16th century. A full set included 12 subjects. The card sets typically featured religious, historical, or courtly figures.

Here are some other examples of ganjifa illustrations:



Unknown (South Indian, 19th century)  
*Playing card (ganjifa): Krishna Riding a "Composite" Horse (Fashioned from a Mosaic of Individual Ladies)*, 19th century  
opaque watercolor on leather with varnish  
8 7/8 in. (22.5 cm)  
Gift of Mrs. Horace W. Frost  
83.26.4



Unknown (South Indian, 19th century)  
*Playing card (ganjifa): Krishna Riding a "Composite" Elephant*, 19th century  
opaque watercolor on varnished leather, heightened with gold  
9 1/16 in.  
Bequest of Mrs. Horace W. Frost  
91.15.65

While they are often meant to amuse, ganjifa illustrations also reflect Indian culture and history. Brainstorm a list of games common in your culture. What types of images or characters play a role in those games? What do you think those games reflect about your culture, its history, or values? How do more older games (Old Maid, Monopoly, Pac Man) compare with newer games (Xbox or Wii games)?



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## CREATE

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This card was made by an artist who paid great attention to detail and patterning. Roll your cursor over the photograph to magnify. What details do you notice?

To create your own deck of cards to play a game of Memory, you'll need 30 index cards, colored pencils or markers, crayons, and a set of watercolors and a paintbrush.

Think of a theme for your deck of cards. For example, your cards could follow a theme such as animals, sports, or your favorite foods. Brainstorm a list of 15 different illustrations for the face side of your cards. Then draw each of your illustrations on two separate cards, so that there are two of each type. For an animal-themed deck, you might have two turtle cards, two dog cards, two bird cards, and so on.

To decorate the back side of your cards, think about a simple pattern that connects with the theme of your cards. The pattern should look the same on the back of every card. Lay the cards out on a sheet of old newspaper, face down. Use crayons to draw your pattern on every card, pressing firmly. Then use the watercolor paints to brush a background color over the pattern (the crayon will resist the paint, so you will still be able to see your pattern). Give them time to dry. If your cards buckle (become wavy), press them flat under a heavy book.

To play, lay out all of the cards, face down. Each player takes a turn flipping two cards to face up. If the two match, that player takes the cards and flips two more. If they don't match, the player flips the cards back face down, and then next player takes a turn. When all of the cards have been collected, the player with the most cards wins.