



# FAMILY GUIDE

## American Weathervanes: The Art of the Winds

Welcome to the American Folk Art Museum! The current exhibition is called *American Weathervanes: The Art of the Winds*. Weathervanes—also known as wind vanes—are instruments that are used for telling the direction of the wind. They are often intricate and ornamental and sit on top of buildings. While most of these vanes are from the past two centuries and are made in America, they are an ancient sculptural tradition that have been seen in places like China and Greece. These objects are a unique art form that can tell us much about history.



BEAR WEATHERVANE: J.W. Fiske Ironworks; New York; late nineteenth/early twentieth century; copper; 18 x 28 1/2 in.; gift of Robert G. and Mary B. Matthews, 1992.61.

## Look and Discuss

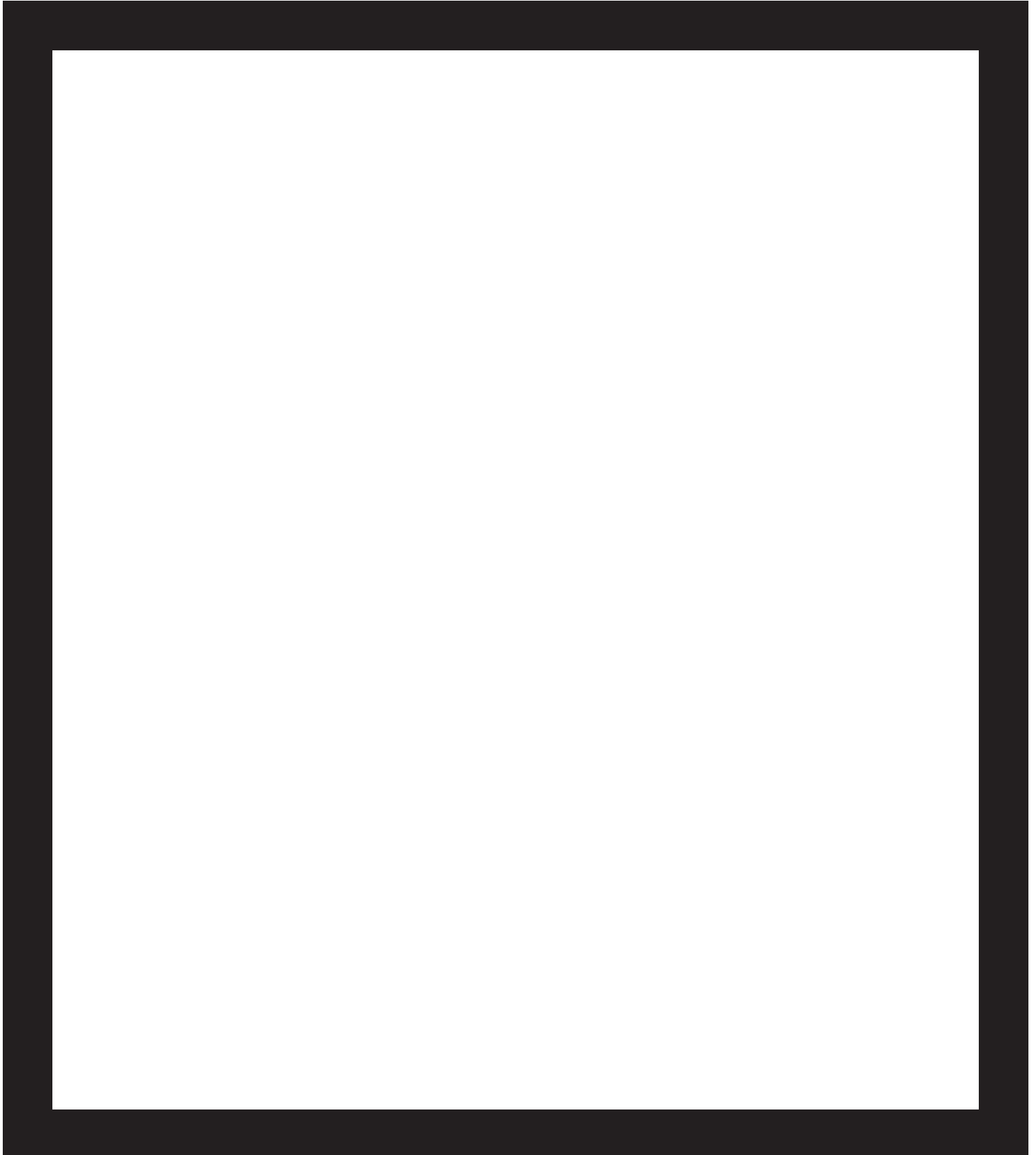
*Dove of Peace* was commissioned by George Washington, the first president, in 1787, to adorn his home. He wanted it to symbolize the hopes he had for this new country he would be leading. *Sea Dragon Weathervane* was made by William Crane for his brother Seth, who put it atop his barn in Maine. While *Dove of Peace* has a meaning behind it, both weathervanes represent something important to the maker and the person who owns it. For Seth Crane, looking at his weathervane may have been a way to remember his brother. If you were to make something for your sibling, what would it be?



DOVE OF PEACE; Joseph Rakestraw; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; 1787; copper, iron, lead, gilt, and paint; 34 3/4 x 42 1/2 in.; Mount Vernon Ladies' Association through the generosity of John Augustine Washington III, 1860, w-2492. SEA DRAGON; William Crane, Sr.; China, Maine; c. 1830-40; painted pine and iron; 30 x 79 x 16 1/2 in.; The Newark Museum, purchase 1982 Membership Endowment Fund, 82.149.

## Create

Create an **emblem**—or a symbol—for your family or your community using the box below. Use whatever writing or drawing materials you brought with you. Are there types of food, places, objects, feelings that you associate with your family? Try to represent these things in your drawing.



## Look and Discuss:

Each of these vanes was meant to represent the business whose building they presided on top of. *Hand and Heart* was most likely on top of a hotel in Massachusetts. Greyhound dogs were often used in hunting, and this dog may have watched over a country club of some sort. *Fame Weathervane* represents the Greek goddess of renown, rumor and gossip. She was placed on top of a weathervane craftsman shop. What are businesses or places in your neighborhood that are important to you? Discuss the ways they advertise themselves.

## Did You Know:

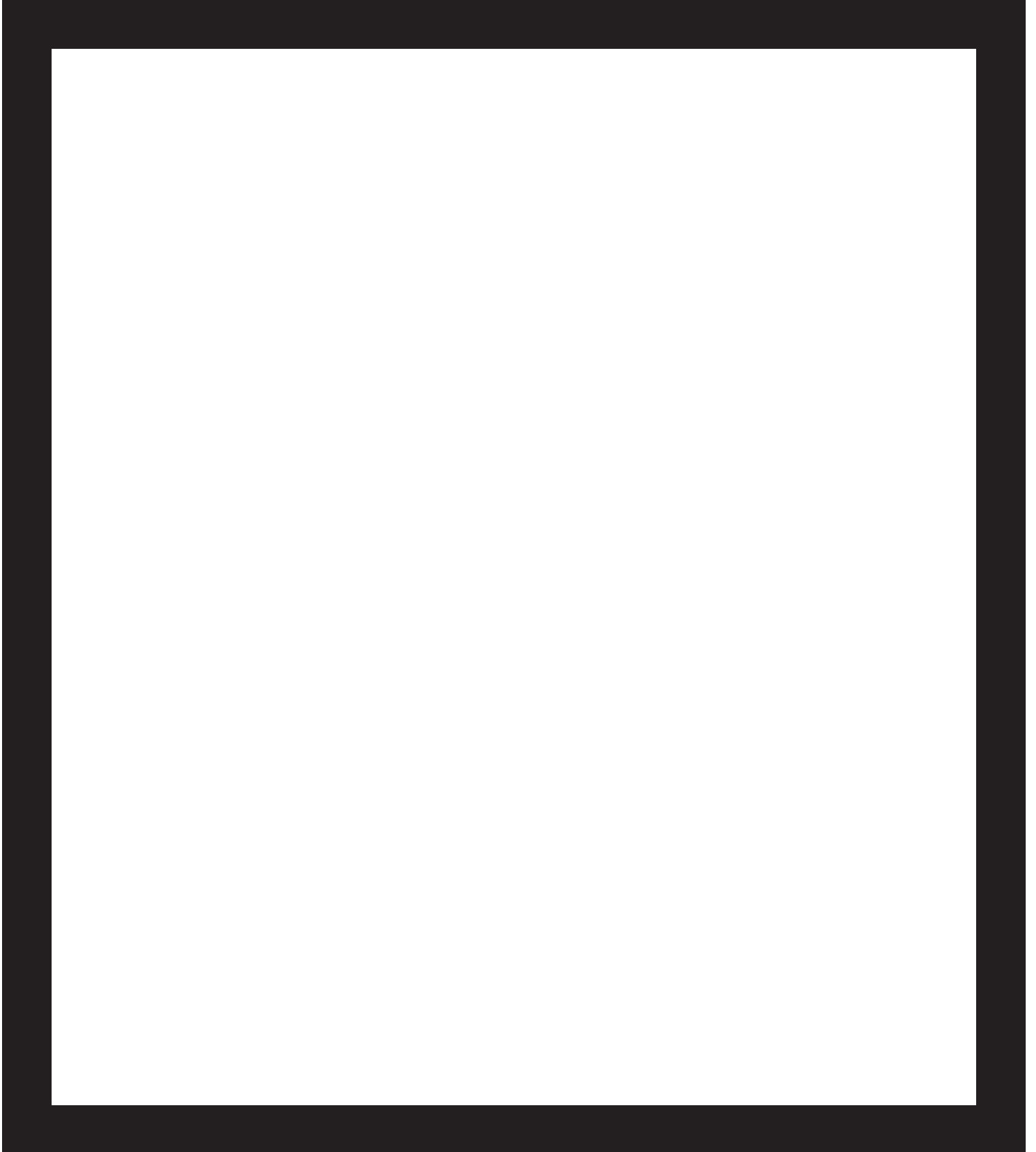
Landmarks are important buildings or structures. Sometimes, a city makes a building a landmark, which means it can't be torn down and it has historical meaning. But other times a landmark can be a place that has significance to you or your community. It can be your favorite restaurant or even a playground you like to go to.



HEART AND HAND: Ezra Ames and Bela Dexter, Chelsea, Massachusetts; 1839; carved white pine with original paint; 21 x 39 in.; private collection. Photograph courtesy David A. Schorsch and Eileen M. Smiles. GREY HOUND: C. & J. Howard or J. Howard & Co.; West Bridgewater, Massachusetts; c. 1850-67; molded copper and cast zinc with gold leaf; 16 1/4 x 40 1/2 in.; collection of Kendra and Allan Daniel. Photograph courtesy of Sotheby's, Inc. © 2020. FAME OR PHEME; attributed to E. G. Washburne & Co.; New York; c. 1890; molded copper and cast zinc with traces of gold leaf; 39 x 35 3/4 x 23 1/2 in.; American Folk Art Museum, gift of Ralph Esmerian, 2005.8.62. Photograph by Gavin Ashworth.

## Create:

Think of a landmark in your community. In the box below, design a weathervane for it!





## Look and Discuss:

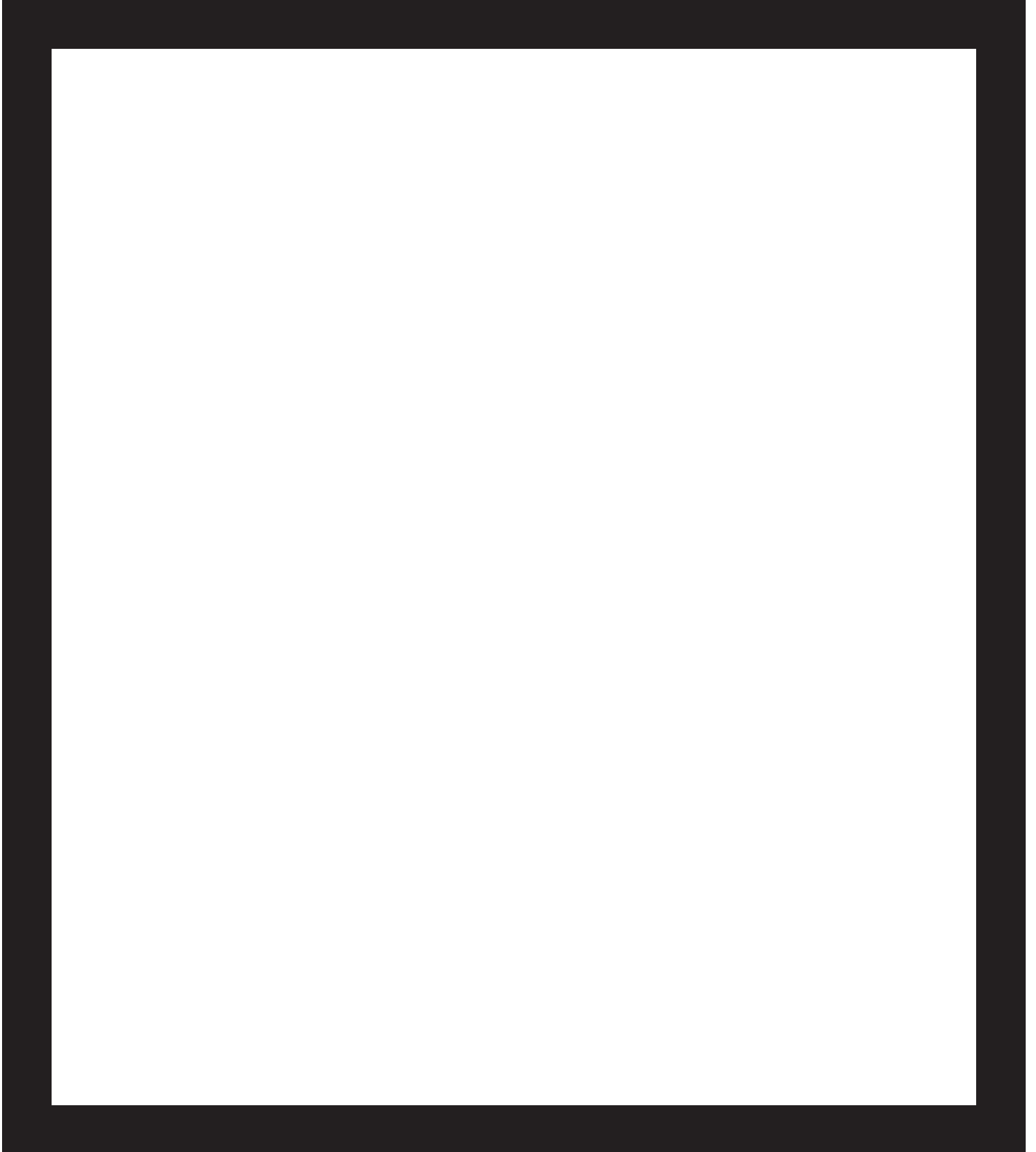
What do you notice about these weathervanes? What do you like about them? Can you recognize who they are? Both centaurs and dragons are mythological creatures. At the time these were made, mythological creatures were gaining in popularity as subjects for weathervanes.



THE WARREN DRAGON: artist unidentified; Warren, Pennsylvania; c. 1891; molded copper with glass eyes; overall h. 6 ft., 10 in.; dragon 57 x 40 x 6 in.; collection of Jane and Gerald Katcher. Photograph by Gavin Ashworth; courtesy Allan Katz Americana, Madison, CT. ARCHER/SAGITTARIUS: artist unidentified, formerly attributed to A.L. Jewell & Co.; found in Hollis, New Hampshire; c. 1860-80; molded and sheet copper with gold leaf and cast iron directional; 50 1/2 x 43 x 29 in.; American Folk Art Museum, gift of Ralph Esmerian, 2005.8.54. Photograph by John Bigelow Taylor.

## Create:

Draw your own mythological figure, using the space below!



# At Home Activities

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## Did You Know:

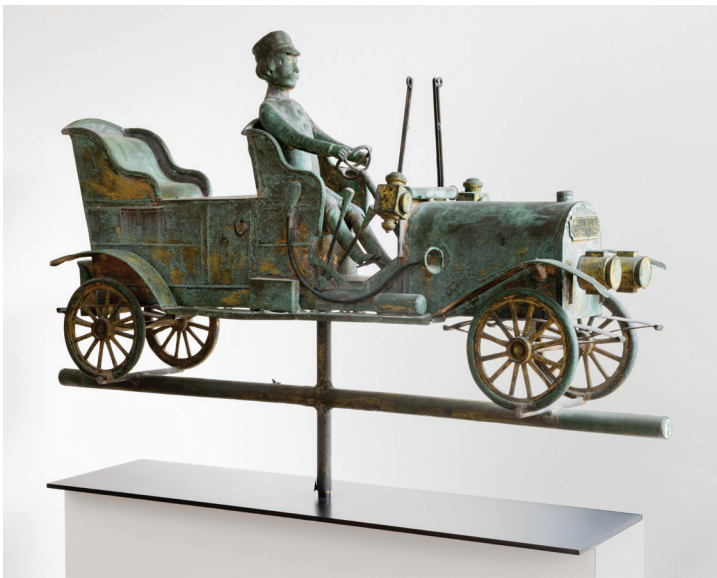
*Touring Car and Driver Weathervane* was made at a time when automobiles were gaining popularity, a symbol of the changing times and new technology. *Goddess of Liberty* depicts the Roman goddess Libertas, who was a symbol of freedom and democracy in ancient Rome. She was depicted on coins, often holding a rod. Her image has remained prevalent throughout history as a symbol of liberty. At the time this was made, America was a young country, and liberty was something many Americans cared about. Can you think of any other symbols of freedom?

## Discuss:

Both of these vanes are meant to represent a particular moment in history, each one marking important change. Right now, we are living through a time of great change, globally. Talk about this past year. What have you learned this past year about our country, our world? Are there people you think of when you reflect on this past year? How could you honor or represent them?

## Create:

How would you commemorate this past year? Are there moments that you feel were important? Create a drawing to honor someone or something that happened this past year.



TOURING CAR AND DRIVER: W. A. Snow Iron Works: Boston, Massachusetts: c. 1910; molded copper with traces of gilt; h. from bottom of wheels 18 in.; 1.33 in.; collection of Susan and Jerry Lauren. Photograph by Adam Reich. GODDESS OF LIBERTY: A. L. Jewell & Co.; Waltham, Massachusetts: 1865-67; molded and sheet copper, molded zinc; paint; 20 x 15 x 2 1/2 in.; depth at base 4 1/2 in.; collection of Bob and Becky Alexander.



# Create Your Own Weathervane

**Materials:** Cardboard or a paper plate, paper cup, plastic straw, pencil with eraser, thumbtack, markers or drawing utensils, glue (hot glue gun is best), scissors, colorful paper, block of Sculpey or another type of polymer clay (optional), rocks (optional).

**STEP 1 Make the Base:** If using cardboard, cut out a circle. If you are using a paper plate, you can skip this step. The shape should be no bigger than a paper plate.

**STEP 2 Decorate the base:** Write "N, E, S, W" (North, East, South, West) on your circle. You can use a ruler to create quadrants by drawing a line through the center of your circle and drawing another line that intersects at a 90-degree angle. Feel free to decorate this surface with anything you'd like!

**STEP 3 Make the arrow:** If using a straw with a bend, cut it down so that it is straight. Using colorful paper, cut out a triangle and a chevron and tape them to either side of the straw, making the shape of an arrow.

**STEP 4 Attach the arrow:** Using the thumbtack, attach the arrow to the eraser of the pencil by pushing the thumbtack through the center of the straw. The straw and pencil should now make a T-shape. Don't push the thumbtack all the way through, and make sure the straw is still able to move around once attached to the pencil's eraser.

**STEP 5 Attach it all!:** Turn the paper cup upside down. Push the sharp end of the pencil through the bottom of the paper cup. You can now secure your weathervane by attaching the cup and pencil to the paper plate/base using polymer clay or glue. You may want to add some rocks or something heavy inside the overturned cup so it doesn't tip over in the wind. Take your weathervane outside and see which way the wind is blowing!

