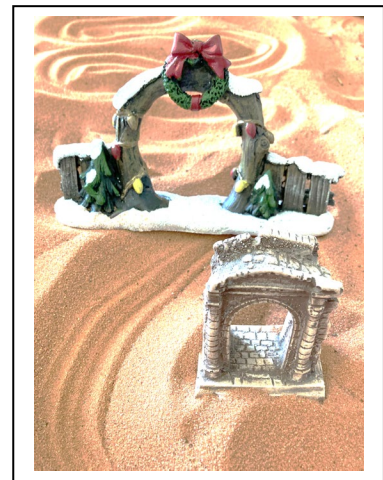




## **Focus on Miniatures: Gates & Arches**

Theresa Fraser, Associate Editor  
Canada

For this issue of *Focus on Miniatures*, we invited reflection about gates and arches. Sometimes bridges, gates, and arches are combined in some way. For example, elaborate bridges built by the ancient Romans used arches to support the bridge. Also, the traditional architectural Chinese ceremonial gates have been replicated in many areas in North America. In *The Book of Symbols* (Ronnberg & Martin, 2010) notes that homes often have gates – to separate strangers from those who belong within. Cities may also have gates to identify boundaries. The book reports that gates are places of transition from one state to another. Sacred sites have gates, such as Saint Peter at the Gates of Heaven and "the great dog Cerberus over the gates to the Greek underworld" (p. 556).



The therapists who contributed to this article identified that they come from various theoretical orientations, including Sand Story, psychodynamic, psychodramatic, sociometric, and humanistic. They shared that they journey in the sand with groups, families, and individuals under ten to sixty-five. Their words have weaved this article in its entirety.

One participant shared that, like bridges, "gates and arches speak of passages, transitions, and initiations" and "there are symbolic differences as well. With bridges, we go "over," with gates we go "through," and with arches, we go "under." With bridges, we wonder what is the "over" underneath the bridge. With gates, we wonder what we are "passing through," opening and entering protected space, perhaps, or perhaps leaving our protected space and going into the larger world. With arches, we again pass through, but especially we pass "under," and we can wonder what is "above." Typically, these highly stylized gated arches are decorated with many more symbols, such as lions, fish, dragons, and balls. Also, the triumphal arch is built as an important monument, such as the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

One therapist shared that "for me, the bridge and gate seem to be more personal, and the arch seems more transpersonal, more spiritual. Some builders, however, may also see the gate as spiritual (heaven's pearly gates?). Another therapist stated that as a psychodrama practitioner and trainer, they were most interested in what the architectural symbol has to say, not so much what is thought about it. Another stated that they often asked the person to role reverse with a particular miniature, perhaps by lightly placing a finger on the miniature and giving it voice. Themes of bridges may include transitions, and graduations, such as marriage, divorce,



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new parenthood, aging, and the like. Themes of arches can include life-cycle change, transitions, anxiety, chaos/irritability, safety/security, relationships, anxiety, depression, change, hope, future-oriented, safety/security, or protection/safety, exploration, passage, journey

"When I have seen a client put an archway in the sand, I am reminded of the sense of strength and support that these structures often provide and their position that allows movement through; this could be time or space." It then depends on how the client describes the symbol. Do they call it an arch or use it to move forward in time or space?

Gates can symbolize an entryway into the known or the unknown, it can be a place of significance and is usually indicative of a threshold of some kind. Gates can often be guarded for additional security if there is something special within, and this could be an animal. Again, does the client use the term *gate*, and do they indicate what is on either side of the gate? Overall, when put into a sand tray, both symbols could be seen on an unconscious level as positive and transitional, indicating movement forward, strength, and support, heading towards a new phase in life. However, none of this is conveyed to the client in these words. Instead, the client may process these things within the tray and verbalise what they see, think, and feel in whatever way they wish. If they make these connections, we witness; if they don't, we still witness.

Reference:

Ronnberg, A., & Martin, K. (2010). *The book of symbols: Reflections on archetypal images*. Taschen.

**Thank you to the writers of this Focus on Miniatures article.**

Diane O'Donoghue, Co. Cavan Ireland

Sarah Moran, USA

Amanda Jones, USA

Karen Carnabucci, USA