

Asian Odyssey

A National K-12 Interdisciplinary Curriculum Model

The
Cleveland
Museum
of Art
A world of great
art for everyone

THE THREE PERFECTIONS CALLIGRAPHY, POETRY, AND PAINTING

Introduction

Legend has it that Chinese writing was invented over 4,000 years ago by a scholar who devised written characters from the tracks of birds and animals. Certainly we know that the last emperor of the Northern Song dynasty, Huizong (r. 1100-1126), transformed writing to an art form, in part because of his own interests and talents as a calligrapher, poet, and painter. Since that time it is common to have a Chinese scroll with a combination of art and calligraphy. Chinese painters were often also scholars, and they would write their own inscriptions to add to the artistic expression of their work. (Sometimes the painting and the calligraphy would be done by different people.)

Objective

The style of calligraphy varied with the times and with the artist. Students in this activity will develop their appreciation of the different styles, and of the form, beauty, and grace of the Chinese written language.

Grade Level

This lesson was created for grades 6-8.

Concepts

- Students will discuss the impact of artist-scholars on the artistic traditions that have been preserved over time. In particular students will describe the characteristics of early civilizations as interpreted through representative artwork of the era and will evaluate the impact of these artistic traditions on later civilizations.
- Students will place the samples of art used in this lesson in rough chronological order according to the dynasties of China and place the art in the framework of contemporaneous events in other parts of the world.
- Students will compare cultural practices, products, and perspectives of past civilizations in order to understand commonality and diversity of cultures.
- Student will collect, organize, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple sources to draw logical conclusions.
- Students will also communicate their ideas using appropriate social studies terminology in oral, written, or multimedia form.

Key Ideas

- Calligraphy is a word derived from the Greek that means “beautiful writing.” We usually associate the word with good penmanship in English, analogous to handwriting that is neat, legible, and attractive.
- In China, calligraphy is recognized as an art form in and of itself, and can be as important a part of a painting as the painting itself. In some instances calligraphy is used to decorate articles of everyday use, such as fans and dishes. The style of the calligraphy will vary from one individual to another, but training and practice in early grade years make characters that are uniform and consistently accepted.
- The most precise calligraphy style was used by the civil servants and is referred to as the “Regular Style” or “Standard Script.” It is the first style learned by students of written Chinese and by aspiring students of calligraphy.

Materials

Shakyamuni Descending from the Mountains, 1244, CMA 1970.2

Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi on a Reed, 14th century, 1964.44

Fish and Rocks, mid-1600s, CMA 1953.247

Bamboo, Rock, and Tall Tree, 1300s CMA 1978.65

Old Pine Tree, late 1530s, CMA 1964.43

Scholar Reclining and Watching Rising Clouds, mid-13th century, CMA 1961.421.1

Poem by Wang Wei, 1256, CMA 1961.421.2

A collection of student handwriting, copied onto transparencies

Procedure

Engage

1. Without making a fuss, collect a sample of student handwriting (with a variety of styles, but make sure that at least some are very distinctive and recognizable). The topic should be very benign, and should not in any way be embarrassing to the author when you place the samples on the overhead and share them with the class. Copy these onto transparencies, with space between them to allow for a card to be placed over the entire page, and withdrawn sample by sample to keep the students’ attention focused on the new work being analyzed.
2. Show these to the students, and ask the students to identify the style of handwriting used in each sample. Is it handwriting, or printing? If handwriting, is it Denelian (letters are slanted and appear as a "mix" between standard and cursive), or Old English, or some other style? How hard did the writer press down on the surface of the paper, and what does that tell us about this individual? How are these handwriting samples alike? How are they different? What if I reverse the transparency and you are trying to read it backwards, how do the samples compare?

Explore

1. Collect into one folder (or onto the desktop) the digital images from the Cleveland Art Museum pieces listed above:
Note: These images should not be placed into PowerPoint slides so the power of the computer and the zooming in capabilities of the imaging software can be used to enlarge that section of each piece of art containing the calligraphy. Allow students to view and discuss each image as a whole first, then zoom in on the characters.
2. Ask students the same series of questions about the Chinese characters, which of course the students will not be able to read. If possible, invite to your classroom someone who speaks and reads Chinese, especially classical Chinese, this would be a wonderful addition to the class. If not, the students should still be able to identify the style of calligraphy that was used, and evaluate the effectiveness of the calligraphy as art to balance the artistic elements in the painting.
3. Have students create a timeline of the pieces of art, with a description of the style of writing that was used on each piece. Does a pattern emerge? If so, how can that pattern best be described?

Explain

1. One of the distinctive characteristics of Chinese painting is the use of poetry inscriptions written in calligraphy and the additional use of special seals as part of the painting itself. Confucian scholar-painters brought these innovations to Chinese art, but the ability of the calligraphy to express the theme and artistic conception of the painting more clearly and deeply ensured that calligraphy would remain an integral part of the piece. In addition, the calligraphy added great insight into the artist's individuality, emotions, and views on art and life.
2. It is true that those who are able to read the calligraphy and understand the Chinese are better able to appreciate the artistic contributions of the calligraphy than those who cannot read the Chinese. However, even those unable to read or understand Chinese may learn something from the handwriting.
3. The length and nature of the inscriptions vary. Among the simplest are those that consist of the artist's name and the date the work was completed. A slightly longer inscription would include information about the occasion for the painting and the name of the person for whom the painting was done. In some cases the inscription describes the subject and style of the painting. Often the artist is also a scholar, and might include a piece of poetry or a literary allusion. These are all followed by the artist's own seal.
4. A seal can be made of stone, with the artist's personal seal carved into the bottom so it may be used as a stamp. The seal might present a name or a design or symbol that has a connection with the artist. The seals are pressed into a small container of cinnabar paste, which has a scarlet red color. The seal is then impressed onto the painting.
5. The Chinese painter, in addition to considering the content of the piece, has always given great thought to the placement, length and dimensions of the inscription and the position of the seal on the painting. The composition and use

of space are very important, and will be used by the artist to the best advantage of the piece.

Evaluation

- A. Students will be able to describe the elements of style in a painting, and identify the style of the calligraphy in the painting. For the purposes of evaluation, use one final image: *Beggars and Street Characters*, 1516 (Ming dynasty), CMA 1964.94.
- B. Ask students to write a description of the piece, place it along the time line of the other pieces, identify the style of calligraphy used, and record four observations about the use of space and the composition of the piece.

Enrichment

- A. Help your students try calligraphy themselves. Information from the Internet can make this easy, even if you speak no Chinese. For everything you'll need except the ink, brushes, and paper, go to <http://www.greendragonarts.com/calligraphyfun.htm> and <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/>
[Follow the links for <Elementary Resources> to <Language> to the sections called <Chinese Calligraphy>, <Exercise in the Classroom>, and <Exercise: Chinese Calligraphy (Numbers 1-10)>. Print out for the students as much of these web sites as you need, but in particular the section called <Practice Pages for Writing Chinese Numbers 1-10>, and get ready for some fun. Invite a native speaker of Chinese from your neighborhood to come to school to help you with this activity. Hopefully your guest will be able to work with the students on the correct way to hold and use the brush, how to duplicate the variation in stroke width, using the ink stick and ink stones, and the correct stroke order for developing the characters.
- B. Try <http://www.voanews.com/chinese/> to listen to some spoken Chinese.
- C. The speakers use some English, but mostly Chinese. Remind students that for years Chinese would be written the same, but as the characters provide only minimal information about how the characters should be pronounced, Chinese speakers in different parts of the country developed local customs for pronouncing the characters, and eventually Chinese dialects flourished. In current day China, students across the country are all taught the “people’s language”, so it is more common for Chinese people in the south and north to converse together.

Ohio State Standards

History, p. 28, grades 6-8

Describe the political and social characteristics of early civilizations and their enduring impact on later civilizations

Chronology, p. 45, grade 6

2. Arrange dates in order on a time line using the conventions of B.C., A.D., or BCE and CE.

Chronology, p. 45, grade 7

1. Group events by broadly defined historical eras and enter onto multiple-tier time lines.

Chronology, p. 46, grade 8

1. Select events and construct a multiple-tier time line to show relationships among events.

People in Societies, p. 30, grades 6-8

Compare cultural practices, products, and perspectives of past civilizations in order to understand commonality and diversity of cultures

Social Studies Skills and Methods Benchmark, p. 95

Students collect, organize, evaluate, and synthesize information from multiple sources to draw logical conclusions. Students communicate this information using appropriate social studies terminology in oral, written, or multimedia form and apply what they have learned to societal issues in simulated or real-world settings.

This lesson plan was developed by Mary Lightbody, Westerville City School District.

第一章

道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名。無名天地之始；有名萬物之母。故常無，欲以觀其妙；常有，欲以觀其徼。此兩者，同出而異名，同謂之玄。玄之又玄，眾妙之門。

The Tao that can be followed is not the eternal Tao.

The name that can be named is not the eternal name

The nameless is the origin of heaven and earth;

While naming is the origin of the myriad things.

Therefore, always desireless, you see the mystery

Ever desiring, you see the manifestations.

These two are the same—

When they appear they are named differently.

This sameness is the mystery.

Mystery within mystery;

The door to all marvels.