

Asian Odyssey

A National K-12 Interdisciplinary Curriculum Model

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THE LIFE OF A CHINESE SCHOLAR “LISTENING TO BAMBOO”

Grade Level

This lesson has been created for Grades 6-9.

Objectives

- Students will read the works of Confucius and see the effect that Confucian teachings had on the government and culture.

Key Ideas

- Members of the scholar-artist class were educated in the classics of Confucius and held positions in the imperial bureaucracy, which was like the civil service in this country.
- These men had passed rigorous examinations. Candidates for this examination had to have beautiful calligraphy, the art of writing Chinese characters with a brush; had to memorize Confucian classical texts; and be able to write prose and poetry that contained allusions to ancient Chinese history and literature.
- These scholar-artists eventually replaced the old aristocratic families as the ruling elite in China.
- During the Song dynasty the scholar-artists brought their "amateur" style of painting, which is done with the same brush and ink as calligraphy, to its full development.
- Scholar-artist paintings often contain poems written in beautiful characters. The Chinese classify painting, calligraphy, and poetry as the "Three Perfections."
- The Chinese regard this understated style of the scholar-artist paintings as expressing the personality of the artist, who often took up painting after retiring from government service.

Materials

Listening to the Bamboo, late 1400s-1500s, CMA 1977.172

Handout: A translation of the inscription at the top of the scroll

The Chinese Scholar's Studio: The education and Lifestyle of the Chinese Literati; Freer Gallery of Art.

Lau, D.C., trans. *The Analects*. Harmondsworth; New York: Penguin Books, 1979.

Bowker, J. *World Religion*. New York, New York: DK Publishing, 1997.

Dawson, Raymond, trans. *The Analects*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Elman, Benjamin A., and Woodside, Alexander, eds. *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

Wang Yang-ming, *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings*, translated by Wing-tsit Chan, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963)

Procedure

Engage

1. Share the following Chinese Proverb with students:
If there be righteousness in the heart,
there will be beauty in the character.
If there is beauty in the character,
there will be harmony in the home.
If there is harmony in the home,
there will be order in the nation.
When there is order in each nation,
there will be peace in the world.
2. This proverb is very old and was written in a time very different from our own. It can help us evaluate the relative importance of education in the life of a citizen, and the role of a scholar-artist in China.
3. Ask students to consider this proverb and to discuss with one other person in class whether the proverb applies to modern life in the United States and the world we live in today.

Explore

1. Share the image *Listening to the Bamboo* with students. While they study the image read to them the translation of the Chinese that appears at the top of the scroll (see Handout). Again, ask students to evaluate the importance of education, and of artistic expression, in our world.
2. Engage the students with the *Chinese Scholar's Studio*, and work with the students on Lesson 1, which describes the rigorous education provided for boys in ancient China. Have students write down their daily schedule for school, homework, and outside activities; record the information in a data table. Students should then compare their daily schedule to that described in the *Chinese Scholar's Studio*, and compare both schedules to that of the officials of the town, who do not work nearly as hard.
3. Describe the learning that occurs in the "mile wide and an inch thick" curriculum in our schools today to compared to that covered by Confucian values of education. Young men in ancient China studied very hard for the entrance exams; knowing that the ability to pass the test and do well in the year ahead could put the student and his family into a higher social and economic position.
4. The parallels in our world are the achievement and diagnostic tests, and college-board tests. Have students compare the outcomes of our modern-day tests with to those from ancient China as much as possible to determine which system provides the more rigorous assessment.

Explain

1. Create a resource library in the classroom. Have the students consider which was the more rigorous, our state and national achievement tests, the state graduation test, or the Civil Service exam that was developed and used in China for hundreds of years. The Civil Service exam was completely founded on Confucian principles and ideals of filial piety, ritual, and humaneness.

Evaluation

- A. Students will write a short paragraph describing the teaching of Confucius, how the belief system was founded and continued through centuries of Chinese civil service. Students should reflect on the value of nature, music, art, and poetry in their worlds, and speculate on the changes in modern life that shifted the priorities of so many students after they graduate from high school and college and join the work force.

Enrichment

- A. The teaching of Confucius later combined with the beliefs of Buddhism. Students could research the life and philosophy that is taught by American Buddhists now, through an Internet research project.

Ohio State Standards

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

Explain how contact between different cultures impacts the diffusion of belief systems, art, science, technology, language, and forms of government

Government, p. 36, gr 6-8

Explain why people institute government, how they influence governments, and how governments interact with each other

Early Civilizations, p. 44, Grade 7:

2. Describe the enduring impact of early civilizations in China after 1000 B.C., including the development of concepts of government and citizenship, scientific and cultural advancements, the spread of religion, and slavery and systems of labor.

Cultures, p. 58, gr 6

1. Compare the cultural practices and products of the societies studied including class structure, gender roles, beliefs, customs and traditions.

2. Compare world religions and belief systems focusing on geographic origins, founding leaders, and teachings including Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam.

Diffusion, p. 59, gr 7

3. Give examples of contacts among different cultures that led to the changes in belief systems, art, science, technology, language or systems of government.

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

HANDOUT

Inscriptions on *Listening to the Bamboo* by Zhengming (Chinese, 1470-1559) hanging scroll, ink on Sung sutra paper, 94.5 x 30.5 cm

Artist's inscription, signature, and 2 seals on separate sheet above painting:

In the empty studio sitting in deep loneliness;
Like cool sound sending pure beauty,
Or pendants swinging in the wind,
Or a solitary ch'in suggesting running water.
Where is that sound from?
The green poles in the courtyard,
Clean and light like an echo,
The sound and ears are in tune,
The sound of bamboo now very beautiful;
My ears are also clear.
Who says the sound is in the bamboo?
To know it depends on oneself.
A noble person is like a tall bamboo;
A thin bamboo is like the noble man.
When the sound enters, the mind responds,
Only one thing but artificially separated.
A bystander searching for the sound,
But the sound can only be found in silence.
Otherwise I am still I,
Bamboo is still bamboo.
Even if I live with bamboo every day,
Still the music will be a thousand miles away.
Look at sound's most primeval course:
Did it enter a zither or a lute?