Perspectives on Chinese Art: The Song Dynasty through Today:

A Mini Unit

**Rationale:** In an age where artistic expression is ever more accessible through the internet and social media, this series of six lessons examine the role art has played in conveying messages both from and to the Chinese government during the Song dynasty and in recent decades. Students will begin by examining the role of government-commissioned works under the Song Dynasty and try recreating their own version of this order. In later lessons, students will examine the Chinese government’s use of artistic expression to control their citizens through censorship and rule enforcement. The unit plan culminates in an extended essay analyzing the role art has played in Chinese government policy in the two periods examined in these lessons.

**Background Knowledge:** This unit is intended to come at the end of a larger unit on Chinese history. Students will benefit most from these lessons if they have a clear understanding of the dynastic cycle in China as well as a solid understanding of the development and implementation of the Communist party in China from 1950 through today.

*Lesson 1*

**Targeted Grade Level**: 10-12th

**Subject Area**: East Asian History/Art History/World History

**Essential Question**: How has Chinese art been used in the past?

**Objectives:** Students will be able to identify the purpose of creating ‘scrolls’ and will be able to identify key features of a Song Dynasty scroll through a virtual exhibition. Students will design their own scrolls based on their assigned dynasty.

**Background Knowledge:** This lesson and mini-unit are best presented AFTER students have had some content instruction on the dynastic system in China as well as the transition to the Communist Party still in power today. If necessary, use the attached PowerPoint to review the Song Dynasty before beginning.

**Procedures:**

1. Activator: Ask students to respond to the following question:

Without a camera or computer, what is the best way to convey a detailed image of a large city? If you were an artist, how might you complete this task?

Possible Answers: *creating a mural, writing down a detailed description, creating a scroll, painting, block printing, etc.*

1. Explain that students will be examining one way people in the past tried to preserve the details of their own cities. With a project or electronic whiteboard technology, give students a preview of the scroll by showing them the images available on this link:

<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/song/>

Clicking on the “Beijing Qingming Scroll” square on the righthand column is a good place to start looking at an overview of the scroll, then click on the link in the bottom righthand corner of the original link labeled “Urban Life Depicted in the Beijing Qingming Scroll” to view more detailed images from the scroll.

As you peruse the scroll with students, engage in a class discussion of what cultural, economic, and environmental features are present in the scroll images.

Explain to students that the scroll was created by a government official hired to capture images from the southern part of the dynasty for the emperor’s review.

1. Divide students into groups of 4. Provide each member of the group one narrative and primary source to review. Students should be given ample time to read and take notes on the facts presented in the narrative and primary source for their given category.
2. When all students have had time to complete their research, provide each group with large size paper (bulletin board paper works best, but if all else fails, a series of printer paper taped together will do). Tell students to create a pictorial depiction of their section of readings; the drawings should link to one another to create one cohesive ‘scroll.’
3. Display completed scrolls throughout the classroom.

Please see attached pdf file with a sample scroll for reference.

*Lesson 2*

**Targeted Grade Level**: 10-12th

**Subject Area**: East Asian History/Art History/World History

**Essential Question**: How has Chinese art been used in the past to convey an image or message from the government?

**Objectives:** Students will identify and analyze the completed Qingming scroll from 1125AD with their own creations in lesson 1.

**Procedures:**

1. Activator: Give students a few minutes to walk around the room viewing both their own and other groups’ completed scrolls. As a class, discuss common themes/images that they saw. What do these repeating images demonstrate about the Song dynasty?

Possible Answers: *images of markets/shops, waterways, schooling/examination halls, etc.*

1. Provide students with access to a computer with internet. Ask them to examine the series of images and explanations of the Beijing Qingming scroll found here: <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/song/econ/pop.htm>

While exploring the site, students identify one fact from each section of the scroll they feel is indicative of Song dynasty culture and politics (the sections are across the top of the site: Economics, Technology, Cities, Confucianism, Outside World). Students should also compare what similarities and differences exist between their own scrolls and the actual scroll. How might they account for these similarities and differences?

**Closure**: Students should conclude their web visit of the scroll by writing an analysis of how the scroll reflects daily life in the Song dynasty. How accurate is the portrayal produced in the Qingming scroll? What might the government have chosen to include/leave out when approving the finished painting? Use the following rubric to score their responses:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **4 points** | **3 points** | **2 points** | **1 point** |
| **Main Idea** | Correctly identifies the main idea in a clear and accurate manner. | Correctly identifies most of main idea in a complete sentence. | Identifies an important idea but not the main idea in a complete sentence. | Identifies a detail but not the main idea. |
| **Supporting Details** | Clearly states 2 or more important details using own words or statements. | States at least 2 important details with some paraphrasing of information. | States at least 1 important detail. Demonstrates little if any paraphrasing. | Includes unnecessary details. Does not demonstrate any paraphrasing. |
| **Conclusion** | Writes a clear and specific concluding statement. | Writes an adequate concluding statement. | Writes a weak concluding statement. | Does not include a concluding statement. |

*Lesson 3*

**Targeted Grade Level**: 10-12th

**Subject Area**: East Asian History/Art History/World History

**Essential Question**: How does the current Chinese government employ art to send a message?

**Objectives:** Students will identify and examine propaganda posters from the Hangzhou local government.

**Procedures:**

1. Activator: What kind of messages does the US government send using art? Think about posters, billboards, video messages, etc.

*Possible answers: TV ads to encourage use of new dollar coins, posters in public transit stations encouraging passengers to report suspicious behaviors, posters reminding passengers in airports of permitted and prohibited items for travel, etc.*

1. Have the Hangzhou posters displayed throughout the room. Ask students to walk around and view the posters will recording what behaviors they should assume while visiting Hangzhou, China.

Possible Answers: *be friendly, harmonious, obey rules, be patriotic, honest, kind, frugal, don’t spit, don’t curse, etc.*

1. Explain to students that a certain cultural character common to many Chinese is used to portray the government’s message in the posters. Discuss the relevance of using the Monkey King to teach the Chinese about appropriate behaviors in Hangzhou. Does his presence on the posters make it more or less likely for people to abide by the rules?

Note: More information about the “monkey king” tale can be found here: <http://www.wku.edu/~haiwang.yuan/China/tales/monkey.html>

1. Ask students to discuss whether or not these posters should be considered ‘art.’ If an artistic image is demonstrating the message of the government, is it still art?
2. Engage the class in a discussion of the behaviors present on the posters. Explain that the city of Hangzhou was also the capital under the Song Dynasty, when the Qingming scroll used in lesson one was created. Do these modern propaganda signs reflect the mood/values/ethics one might infer from the original scroll? Would these messages be likely to be found on posters/billboards in the US? Why or why not? Discuss the cultural implications of both Confucianism and Communism in examining these images.

**Closure:** Ask students to create a propaganda poster of their own that might be used in the United States. Ask them to think of both a relevant slogan that might realistically come from the local, state, or national government as well as a relevant cultural character that might be encouraging people to follow the new rules. Use the following rubric:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Poor/Fair (1-2 points)** | **Good (3 points)** | **Excellent (4 points)** |
| **Slogan**  A catchy title for the poster | Slogan shows little creativity or relevance to topic | Slogan is appropriate and relevant to topic | Slogan is catchy and relevant to topic |
| **Organization and Layout**  Information and images presented on the poster are presented in a logical manner. | unorganized | somewhat organized | Information about topic is presented in a clear and easy to follow manner |
| **Pictures or images**  Images are relevant to the theme of the poster | Missing or not related to topic | Images are somewhat related to the topic | The image chosen is related and appropriate |
| **Creativity**  Care and concern for the physical display of information and images on the poster. | No attempt to present information in a creative manner. | Some attempt to present information in a creative manner. | Teacher noted an effort to present information on the poster with care and concern for the topic. |

*Lesson 4*

**Targeted Grade Level**: 10-12th

**Subject Area**: East Asian History/Art History/World History

**Essential Question**: How much artistic freedom is permitted in China today?

**Objectives:** Students will identify and examine methods of suppression employed by the Chinese government in reference to expression on the internet.

**Procedures:**

1. Activator: Ask students to identify ways in which artistic expression in schools is limited.

Possible Answers: *no expression relating to drugs or alcohol is permitted, nothing that disrupts student learning during the school day*

1. Divide students into groups of 4.
2. Distribute a different article from the list below to each group member. Ask students to identify how artistic expression is being suppressed on the internet based on the information in the articles.
   1. <http://www.voatibetanenglish.com/content/chinas-sina-weibo-unveils-new-censorship-system-155335335/1267399.html>[[1]](#endnote-1)
   2. <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/how-weibo-changing-china>[[2]](#endnote-2)
   3. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/karstenstrauss/2012/05/18/facebook-and-the-china-problem/> [[3]](#endnote-3)
   4. <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/politics/2012/10/china%E2%80%99s-paid-trolls-meet-50-cent-party> [[4]](#endnote-4)
3. In their small groups, ask students to come up with a list of ways in which China is suppressing and/or controlling citizens’ expression on social media sites as well as China’s reasons for doing so. Have students record this on poster paper or newsprint large enough to be seen from a distance. At the bottom of the poster, have students record their own opinions in response to the question, “Is the current government in China suppressing artistic expression? Explain. Should they change their policies? Why or why not?”
4. Display the student posters/newsprint around the room. Engage the class in a discussion of their findings and their opinions on whether or not the types of censorship policies employed in China should continue.
5. Finally, show students the Green Dam girl image (show below) and discuss the relevance of her image.



The Green Dam girl is a meme used on the Chinese internet. She is meant to represent the commonly called “Green Dam” that is the required internet firewall installed on all computers bought in China. She holds a seemingly adorable rabbit meant to represent the thoughts and ideas of internet users censored by her firewall and she holds a bucket of crabs and has one on her head that represent the river crabs which have come to represent the ‘pinch’ of Chinese censorship on its citizens. Lastly, the grass mud horse (llama) represents more citizens vying for freedom of speech on the internet but have been chained and restricted by the Green Dam firewall. More information on this symbolism can be found here: <http://chineseculture.about.com/b/2009/03/23/river-crab-and-grass-mud-horse-battle-continues.htm>

*Lesson 5*

**Targeted Grade Level**: 10-12th

**Subject Area**: East Asian History/Art History/World History

**Essential Question**: How do Chinese citizens resist suppression of artistic expression in their nation?

**Objectives:** Students will identify and examine methods of resistance to censorship by examining the artwork of Ai Weiwei.

**Procedures:**

1. Ask students how art can be used as a form of protest.

Possible Answers: *subtle resistance to rules, i.e. Green Dam girl, images, messages that go against the norm, posters used during picketing/protesting, symbols of someone’s beliefs such as the use of peace signs, etc.*

1. Explain to students that on prominent artist, Ai Weiwei, has been trying to find ways to use both art and social media to protest actions taken by the Chinese government that he disagrees with. As a class, read aloud the interview by Time magazine with artist Ai Weiwei found here: <http://world.time.com/2012/10/07/the-artist-who-cant-leave-china-an-interview-with-ai-weiwei/>

As you read, ask students to make a T-chart that lists what actions Ai Weiwei has taken to protest the Chinese government as well as what particular topics he has found issue with in the government.

1. Using the attached PowerPoint, take students on a virtual tour of Ai Weiwei’s exhibit at the Hirshhorn Museum of Modern Art in Washington, DC.

**Closure:** Ask students to complete an exit card answering the following question:

Should artists such as Ai Weiwei attempt to make a difference in the policies of the Chinese government through art? Why or why not? Would Ai Weiwei’s statements be differently received if he were not creating visual arts? Explain.

**Possible Extensions:**

View the documentary “Never Sorry” about Ai Weiwei’s struggle to maintain his freedom from prison after many accusations related to his Twitter and Blog statements.

*Lesson 6*

**Targeted Grade Level**: 10-12th

**Subject Area**: East Asian History/Art History/World History

**Essential Question**: What role does art play in society?

**Objectives:** Students will use information from the previous four lessons to write an extended response essay in the role of art in Chinese society.

**Procedures:**

1. Ask students to take out their notes from the past 4 lessons. How has the role of art changed? What aspects of art in Chinese society have remained the same?

Possible answers: *Art has been used by the government to send a message as well as by the citizens to protest against the government, the art examined in class has generally remained true to Chinese traditions by utilizing traditional methods (block printing, brush painting, sculpting) and themes (Monkey king, traditional Chinese pottery, etc.)*

**Closure:** Provide students with the rest of the class period to work on a well-constructed essay that discusses the role of art in China and its relationship to government policy. Use the following rubric:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **CRITERIA** | **Points**  **1 to 5** |
| **THESIS and CONTENT (Development)**  The essay has a thesis—a single, central point that is interesting, original, striking and substantial. The central idea is developed in the essay through well-chosen, appropriate, concrete details that show originality and freshness. Author shows rather than merely tells. Generalizations and assertions are defended. Arguments are logical. |  |
| **ORGANIZATION**  The essay is organized and well structured (there is a beginning, a body, and a conclusion). The essay exhibits a clear strategy for persuasion and pattern of development (chronological order, spatial order, comparison/contrast, etc.). The organization works with the thesis so that the thesis and the organization contribute to serving the purpose of the essay. Essay does not digress from central point. Transitions help the paper flow smoothly. Introductory paragraph(s) is (are) interesting and appropriate. Concluding paragraph is satisfying. |  |
| **PARAGRAPHS**  Paragraphs are organized, unified and coherent. Each supporting paragraph has a controlling idea (which may be expressed in a topic sentence). In supporting paragraphs, topic idea helps further the thesis. |  |
| **STYLE**  Sentences are mature and parallel. Writer avoids modifier problems. Sentences show variety of pattern and are rhetorically effective. The essay is written in a style and tone appropriate to the audience, topic and purpose. Words are appropriate and well chosen. Writer avoids jargon and sexist language. Writer seems to be speaking in an authentic voice. Paper is enjoyable and interesting. |  |
| **GRAMMAR, SPELLING, MECHANICS**  Subtract points for errors in grammar (comma splices, fragments, fused sentences, agreement, etc.), spelling, and mechanics (margins, format, etc.). |  |
| **TOTAL** | /25 |

1. China's Sina Weibo Unveils New Censorship System. (2012, May 28). *VOA - News on Tibet - Voice of America Tibetan News, Radio & TV*. Retrieved November 10, 2012, from http://www.voatibetanenglish.com/content/chinas-sina-weibo-unveils-new-censorship-system-155335335/1267399.html [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Magistad, M. K. (2012, August 9). How Weibo Is Changing China. *YaleGlobal Online Magazine*. Retrieved November 10, 2012, from http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/how-weibo-changing-china [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Strauss, K. (2012, May 18). Facebook And The China Problem - Forbes. *Information for the World's Business Leaders - Forbes.com*. Retrieved November 15, 2012, from http://www.forbes.com/sites/karstenstrauss/2012/05/18/facebook-and-the-china-problem/ [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Weiwei, A. (2012, October 17). Chinaâ€™s Paid Trolls: Meet the 50-Cent Party. *New Statesman - Britain's Current Affairs & Politics Magazine*. Retrieved November 10, 2012, from http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/politics/2012/10/china%E2%80%99s-paid-trolls-meet-50-cent-party [↑](#endnote-ref-4)