

Activity 5.1 Expressing the Self Through Word and Image

Performance Objectives Students will read and analyze poems, paying special attention to the use of imagery, and then create their own poems and corresponding images in handscroll format.

Grade Level 6–12

Variation Grade Level 3–5

Essential Questions What are some themes of Tang poetry?
How is imagery used in Chinese poetry?
What is the relationship between word and image in Chinese poetry and painting?
How can poetic and artistic imagery be characterized as universal, culturally specific, or personal?

Standards **Social Studies**

World History

- Knowing the social and economic characteristics, such as customs, traditions, child-rearing practices, ways of making a living, education and socialization practices, gender roles, roots, and religious and spiritual beliefs, that distinguish cultures and civilizations
- Viewing history through the eyes of those who witnessed key events and developments by analyzing their literature, diary accounts, letters, artifacts, art, music, architectural drawings, and other documents

Language Arts

Language for Literary Response and Expression

- Selecting texts and performances from a wide range of authors, subjects, and genres, including poetry
- Reading literary works set in different periods and places and using appropriate written forms, such as essays or reviews, to explore the connections between them and aspects of human experience, including those that are common and those that are culturally distinct

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Language for Critical Analysis and Evaluation

- Assessing the content and presentation of written and oral texts using criteria drawn from elements specific to a genre, from knowledge of the subject matter and purpose, and from personal perspectives
- Comparing and contrasting different literary styles

Time Required One class period to analyze and write poems; two additional classes to complete handscrolls and present final products

Materials Copies of the **Use of Imagery in Tang Poems** handout
Copies of the **Sources of Chinese Art** handout
Wooden dowels (5/16 x 10 in.), two for each handscroll
Strips of white paper; cutting 11 x 14 in. sheets of watercolor sheets in half, horizontally, works well
Wallpaper remnants or sturdy wrapping paper, cut into approximately 9 x 21 in. pieces for border
Glue
Watercolor
Paintbrushes
Water in containers
Paper towels
Embroidery floss cut into 6 in. lengths and knotted at one end

Assessment Piece Poem; handscrolls

Procedure

1. Read the poems in the **Use of Imagery in Tang Poems** handout with students and discuss the following:
These poems were all written in the Tang dynasty (618–907 C.E.). What are the themes of each poem? (Wang Wei reflects upon solitude and the celebration of nature; Li Bo’s work is a fantasy piece that focuses on people; and Du Fu is making a social comment.)
Consider what might be lost through translation of the poems (rhythm, rhyme, consonance, depth of meaning of particular words).
Consider what might be translated but still not fully understood for someone unfamiliar with Chinese culture (e.g., imagery that may allude to Chinese myths, stories, historical figures, and places).
2. Have students choose one of the excerpts to use as a model for writing their own short poems, considering theme but creating or using imagery that is relevant to their own time and culture.
3. Have students make a horizontal handscroll that incorporates their poem

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with their writing style and art. Remind them that in traditional Chinese art, poetry, painting, and calligraphy complemented one another in a handscroll—the figures, form, and words acted as a whole in creating a sense of harmony. Have them study examples of Chinese handscroll paintings as found in museum Web sites or books and ask them the following:

Note the sense of balance—the use of empty space as well as form in the paintings.

Consider the way individuals are depicted—size in relation to surroundings is especially important.

Are the natural landscapes depicted to scale? A literal representation is not as important as the impression it creates.

Where do you find calligraphy on the handscroll? Have other people added to the writing on the painting, recording impressions, comments, or reflections about the painting?

What subjects are shown in the handscrolls? Do you find certain images and themes frequently represented? What images and themes might students use to enable their classmates to understand the painting that they will create?

4. Set up art materials for students, including paper, watercolor, paintbrushes, water, and paper towels. To set the proper mood, consider taking a few minutes for students to practice sitting upright, breathing deeply with eyes closed to clear the mind and prepare for work. This fosters the meditative state that artists strive to incorporate in their undertakings and has the effect of calming and focusing students.

5. Have students begin by copying their poem on the right side of the handscroll. This will provide a constant reminder of the poem's themes and images, as well as guarantee room for the placement and balance of images.

6. Have students complete their watercolor paintings. Allow paintings to dry, weighting the ends of the paper to lie flat.

7. Use wallpaper remnants, or wrapping paper, to create frames for the pictures. Adding a 2 in. border around the painting is effective, leaving additional length for dowels. (This translates to a 9 1/2 x 20 in. sheet.) Center the painting on the border and mark corners with pencil for placement. Remove painting, apply glue along the border, and reset painting, aligning to the corner marks.

8. Fold one half inch of each end of the border back (away from the painting) and insert the dowel. Insert unknotted end of floss on the right side, so that it extends horizontally away from the handscroll, and glue along length of border.

9. Gently roll the handscrolls from left to right. Wind floss around handscrolls, tucking the knotted ends through to hold them closed.

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10. Either in small groups, or as a class, have students present handscrolls and poems. Discuss the use of imagery in the poems and paintings and ask students the following questions:

How do they complement one another?

Which images in the poems and paintings are universal, readily understandable to anyone? Which are understandable only to someone versed in the same culture as the poet-artist? Which images are personal and have a certain meaning to the poet-artist and different meanings for others?

Extension Have students bring in lyrics to one of their favorite songs and analyze the use of imagery, identifying the universal, the culturally specific, and the personal.

Variation for Grades 3–5 Have students concentrate on making handscrolls. Explain that handscrolls relate a narrative. Much like a comic strip, in a handscroll the narrative is rendered in individual scenes. The reader unrolls the handscroll one scene at a time, pausing to examine each. Rather than drawing boxes around each scene, Chinese artists used vertical objects, such as a tree or screen, to distinguish scenes. Referring to the steps above, ask students to create a narrative handscroll. It can be an account of their day or a story they have read.

Handout Use of Imagery in Tang (618–907 C.E.) Poems

I sit alone in the dark bamboo grove,
Playing the zither and whistling long.
In this deep wood no one would know—
Only bright moon comes to shine.
—Wang Wei (701–761 C.E.)

Silk that was bestowed at the vermilion court
Came originally from some poor shivering women;
Their husbands were whipped and flogged
So that it could be levied as a tribute to the imperial city.

Inside the vermilion gate wine and meat are stinking;
On the roadside lie the bones of people frozen to death.
—Du Fu (712–776 C.E.)

From a swift horse prancing proudly through fallen petals,
He brushes his whip against a cloud-covered chariot.
A lovely woman, smiling, raises the pearl curtain—
“My home is there,” she says pointing off at a red tower.
—Li Bo (701–762 C.E.)

Chinese Painting and Poetry

The history of Chinese art is very dynamic, but there are consistent trends as well. In traditional Chinese art, poetry, painting, and calligraphy complemented one another in a handscroll—the figures, form, and words acted as a whole in creating a sense of harmony. Have students study examples of Chinese handscroll paintings as found in museum Web sites or books and ask them the following:

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What subjects are shown in the handscrolls? Do you find certain images and themes frequently represented? What images and themes might you use to enable your classmates to understand the painting that you will create?

Handout Sources of Chinese Art

Print Sources

China, 5000 Years: Innovation and Transformation in the Arts. Selected by Sherman Lee. New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1998. (Many images that are not available on the Web site are in this book.)

Clunas, Craig. *Art in China*. Oxford History of Art. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Rawson, Jessica, et al. *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*. Edited by Jessica Rawson. London: British Museum Press, 1992.

Silbergeld, Jerome. *Chinese Painting Style: Media, Methods, and Principles of Form*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982.

Sullivan, Michael. *The Arts of China*. Revised edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.

Selected Chinese Paintings on the Internet

Night-Shining White

Attributed to Han Gan (Chinese, active 742–56)

Tang dynasty (618–960)

Handscroll; ink on paper

<http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/view1.asp?dep=6&full=0&item=1977%2E78>

Five-Colored Parakeet on Blossoming Apricot Tree

Attributed to Emperor Huizong (reigned 1101–1125, died 1135)

Song dynasty (960–1279)

Handscroll; ink and color on silk

<http://www.boston.com/mfa/chinese/parakeet.htm>

Pure and Remote Mountains and Streams

Xia Gui (active ca. 1195–1224)

Song dynasty (960–1279)

Handscroll; ink and color on silk

<http://www.npm.gov.tw/destore/dp00045.htm>

Handout Sources of Chinese Art

Autumn Colors on the Ch'iao and Hua Mountains

Zhao Mengfu (1254–1322)

Yuan dynasty (1279–1368)

Handscroll; ink and color on paper

<http://www.npm.gov.tw/destore/dp00025.htm>

Dwelling in the Fu-ch'un Mountains

Huang Kongwang (1268–1354)

Yuan dynasty (1279–1368)

Handscroll; ink on paper

<http://www.npm.gov.tw/destore/dp00026.htm>