

# GEOGRAPHY AND CHINESE LANDSCAPE PAINTING

This lesson will introduce students to the different geographic regions of China. Students will view various paintings and then try to determine what part of China the artist may have been depicting.

## Grade Level

This lesson is intended as one 45-minute lesson for a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class.

## Objective

The students will label the physical features of China on a map and become familiar with the content of traditional Chinese landscape paintings.

## Concepts

- Basin: the entire tract of country drained by a river and its tributaries
- Gorge: a narrow steep-walled canyon or part of a canyon
- Physical features: landforms of a specific area
- Plateau: a usually extensive land area having a relatively level surface raised sharply above adjacent land on at least one side
- Steppes: vast usually level and treeless tracts in southeastern Europe or Asia
- Album leaf: an illustrated or painted page from an album, usually small and rectangular in format
- Hand scroll: a horizontal painting format that is unrolled and viewed or read from right to left, a small section at a time; suitable for the narration of stories or a broad panoramic landscape scene.
- Hanging scroll: a long, narrow, vertical format for a painting that is designed to be hung on a wall; suitable for depicting lofty mountain scenes.

## Key Ideas

### Geography

- China is the third largest country in the world and has a very wide range of geographical and climatic conditions.
- The lower Yellow River (*Huanghai*) valley is considered the birthplace of Chinese civilization. Archaeologists have uncovered thousands of sites that show settled agricultural settlement began in this area around 12,000 BCE.
- There are many famous mountains in China. Among these are the Five Sacred Mountains of Daoism, where Chinese emperors formerly performed sacrificial rituals for Heaven and Earth, and the four mountains sacred to Buddhists. Both religions revere a mountain in each of the four corners of the universe, with the Daoists adding one in the center.
- The Yangzi River in southern China is the country's longest and most important river. It is the third-longest river in the world. The 3,494-mile Yangzi flows from west to east through some of China's major economic centers and provides a major transportation route across central China, one of the world's most densely populated areas.

- The gorges of the Yangzi provide some of the most famous landscapes in China. This landscape is being dramatically altered by the Three Gorges Dam, which will create the world's largest water storage reservoir and hydroelectric plant.
- China can be divided into a number of major land regions.
  - Tibet is a barren plateau well high sea level surrounded by mountain ranges.
  - The Mongolian uplands can be used only marginally for farming.
  - Manchuria is a fertile basin located in the northeast.
  - The Gobi Desert is one of the world's driest deserts.
  - The North China plain includes some of the best farmland in China and is considered the heart of China.
  - South China – this region includes lush rain forests (tropical woodland with an annual rainfall of at least 100 inches [254 centimeters]), bamboo grooves, and rice paddies. There are also rugged terrain and as well as plains areas along rivers and lakes.

### **Landscape Painting**

- Landscape painting is one of the main types of traditional Chinese painting; the Chinese word for it is literally a combination of the characters for "mountains" and "water," the two most frequently depicted subjects.
- Landscape painting was influenced by the Daoist tradition of man's harmony with nature. However, when human figures are included in a landscape painting, they are usually very small.
- Several of the standard elements included in Chinese landscape paintings are rugged mountains, partly covered by misty clouds; waterfalls; groups of trees; or perhaps a valley with a body of water and fishermen in a boat, people crossing a bridge, or small buildings scattered throughout the landscape.
- Chinese landscape paintings have no fixed perspective of the kind found in Western landscape paintings.
- Some traditional Chinese painters visited the sites they painted, while others based their landscapes on other artists' paintings and their own imaginings. We can sometimes guess what part of China is being depicted, but we should never assume that what we see is a documentary view.

### **Materials**

*Buddhist Retreat by Stream and Mountain*, 960-985, CMA 1959.348

*Cloudy Mountains*, 1130, CMA 1933.220

*Bamboo and Ducks by a Rushing Stream*, 1127-1279, CMA 1967.145

*Mountains of the Immortals*, 1279-1368, CMA 1997.95

*The Peach-Blossom Spring*, 1650, CMA 1971.227

*Album of Landscape Paintings Illustrating Old Poems: A Man Lies in a Bamboo Grove*, 1700s, CMA 1982.68.5

Milliken, Linda. *China Activity Book*. Dana Point, CA: Edupress, Inc. 1995.

p.7 (classroom use only)

Maps of China (one for each student)

## Procedure

1. Identify specific geographic locations of China on classroom wall map.
2. Distribute individual maps of China for each student to label the following:
  - a. Manchuria
  - b. Gobi Desert
  - c. Yellow River
  - d. Yangzi River
  - e. Mount Hua
  - f. Tibet
  - g. North China Plain
  - h. Beijing
3. Use a transparency as a model for students to make correct identifications.
4. Students will color their maps distinguishing elevations using the wall map as a model.
5. Display images of the CMA paintings. In spite of China's highly varied regions, artists traditionally preferred to paint only certain types of landscapes. Ask students to determine which types of scenes were popular, and which were not.
6. The Chinese word for landscape is *shanshui*, or "mountain-water." Can the students find mountains and water in all of these paintings?

## Evaluation

- A. Students will correctly identify seven geographic locations on an individual China map.
- B. Students will compare and contrast physical regions of China using a graphic organizer.
- C. Students will explain the possible sources for a Chinese landscape painting (direct observation, earlier artworks, and imagination.)

## Enrichment

- A. Students will work in cooperative learning groups to define and report on four cultural groups:
  - a. Sedentary people
  - b. Nomadic livestock raisers
  - c. Mountain people
  - d. Mixed cultures of South China and Southeast Asia
- B. Students will paint a picture using watercolors depicting one of the above cultures.

## Ohio State Standards Social Studies

*Geography* - Students use knowledge of geographic locations, patterns and processes to show the interrelationship between the physical environment and human activity, and to explain the interactions that occur.

**This lesson plan was developed by Laurie Mental, 4th grade teacher, Beachwood City Schools, Beachwood, Ohio**