



Porcelain Exchange during the Age of European Exploration

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Grade level 9-10
World History

SECTION A

In Your Classroom

Description

A conventional interpretation of the impetus behind the European Age of Exploration is to emphasize the idea of the European innate superiority. Recently, however, historians have challenged this idea, pointing out that compared to civilizations in many other parts of the world in the late 15th century, particularly in Asia and Africa, Europe was a cultural and technological backwater. This lesson explores the strength, power, and wealth of these non-European civilizations by examining the medium of Chinese porcelain, which the Europeans went to great lengths to obtain.

I. Concept Goals

- To understand how in the 15th century Europeans were in many ways backward compared to other societies. The lesson will focus on the following:
 - Importance of Arab/Muslim learning during the 8th-15th centuries
 - Chinese voyages of exploration under Zheng He (1405-1433)
 - The problems that the Europeans encountered as traders when they entered the Indian Ocean
- To understand the development of European exploration:
 - Why exploration began in the 15th century (with a focus on the rediscovery of classical maps)
 - Essential motives (God, gold, and glory)
 - Important explorers (see vocabulary below)
 - Columbian Exchange (the transfer of European disease and livestock to the Americas while many New World crops, such as potatoes, maize, tomatoes, and tobacco, became staples in the Old World)
- To discuss the development of Chinese porcelain
 - Characteristics of porcelain: hard, white, translucent, rings when struck
 - Kaolin: a fine white clay necessary to make porcelain
 - Developments in Tang dynasty (618-907)
 - Perfected in Ming dynasty (1368-1644)

II. Skill Goals

- To understand map perspectives and the way that explorers used maps
- To learn the essentials of using a digital camera

III. Ohio State Standards

Not applicable – Ohio private school

IV. Vocabulary

See Handout # 1 - Essential Terms – European Exploration

V. Materials

- World History textbook (e.g., Jerry Bentley and Herbert Ziegler, *Traditions and Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past*, McGraw Hill, 2003).
- Following are web sites that teachers can use to outline the essential aspects of both European exploration and the development of Chinese porcelain:
 - Travel guide to China that includes brief history of the development of Chinese porcelain:http://www.warriortours.com/intro/crafts_porcelain.htm
 - Travel guide to China that includes a comparative chart of European and Chinese history:
http://www.imperialtours.net/comparative_history.htm
 - The history of porcelain: <http://star-cs.com/peterstar/porcelain-history.html>
 - ChineseArts:http://www.cnarts.net/eweb/KnowArts/cq/GDzhishi/cqNP/ciqiNP_han.htm#CiQiDeQiYuan

VI. Methodologies and Procedures

1. No longer are Christopher Columbus and the Spanish seen as inevitable conquerors of the world because of the supposed superiority of the Europeans. The prevailing view is that the Europeans were able to achieve as much as they did because they carried with them a secret weapon--disease--that led to the death of about 85% of the population of the Americas the mid-16th century.
2. This lesson seeks to reconsider the conventional interpretation and show how in one important area, the production of luxury items such as porcelain, the Europeans were unable to create their own versions. They craved Asian trade goods and went to great lengths to obtain them; but the Europeans had little to offer the Chinese in return. Ultimately, a thousand years later than in China, the Europeans created their own porcelain industry, using Chinese materials and production methods as a model.
3. After studying the essential aspects of European exploration, students will learn more about the various aspects of Chinese porcelain through research on the internet.
4. After exploring these themes through readings and a PowerPoint presentation on the essential aspects of Chinese porcelain. The teacher will introduce the

Exhibit Design Activity. The Exhibit Design Activity has the students creating an exhibit, either virtual or a 3-d/model with objects from the CMA. The students should be introduced to the following basic elements of designing a museum exhibit:

- Walls – what color, size, shape will they be?
 - Display cases - what color, size, shape, material will be used?
 - Frames – what shape and material will be used?
 - Labels – discuss the difference between object labels and collection labels – what font size will they use? how much information should they include?
 - Content relationships between objects – what is the story of the exhibit and how are the objects arranged in order to tell that story –this process will help lead to the development of sub-themes
 - Flow – how large is the room? how much space is allowed for a visitor to view objects?
5. The main theme for the student exhibit is Porcelain Exchange – The Mixing of Two Cultures. Since they have already been introduced to Chinese Porcelain as a class, it is now time to break them into three different groups: Dutch Baroque; Italian Renaissance; and 19th Century French. Assign each group one object from the corresponding galleries. As a group, they will research this object to understand how it would support the main exhibit theme and begin exploring sub-themes – such as – uses and trade; peoples and places; and materials and techniques. At the museum, they will visit their assigned galleries and “collect” objects that complete their exhibit story.

VII. Evaluation

Teachers may use a multiple-choice or essay test to evaluate students’ command of this information. The test bank available with the *Traditions and Encounter* text provides examples.

VIII. Comments and Recommendations

1. Students will often bring many misconceptions to this lesson, such as the belief that Columbus and other explorers thought that the world was flat (educated Europeans had known since ancient times that the world was spherical and so did every oceangoing sailor).
2. Students are also likely never to have heard of Zheng He and his exploits. Explain to them that he was the grand admiral of the Chinese navy, who led seven maritime expeditions between 1405 and 1433 for the Ming dynasty emperor Yongle (Yung-Lo). Zheng sailed to Southeast Asia, India, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and along the east coast of Africa as far as the Cape of Good Hope. His expeditions took place prior to the great period of European maritime exploration and proved the ability of the Chinese to build big ships and navigate them over enormous distances. The Chinese were skilled in

navigating with the compass, which they invented in the 4th century BCE. Many of Zheng He's ships were over 500 feet long and 200 feet wide, the largest that had been sailed up to that time. (In comparison, Columbus's flagship, the *Santa Maria*, was 117 feet long, and the *Nina* and the *Pinta* were about half its size.)

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SECTION B

At the Cleveland Museum of Art

I. Concept Goals

- To understand the impact that the desire for Chinese porcelain had on European exploration
- To see the changes that occurred in style and use in porcelain as it moved from China to other areas of the world

II. Skill Goals

- To learn how to use a digital camera

III. Ohio State Standards

Not applicable – Ohio Private School

IV. Vocabulary

See Section A, IV.

V. Materials

- Digital camera for each group
- Handout 2: In the Galleries (one copy per student)

VI. Methodologies and Procedures

The museum activity will begin in the Asian Galleries. The students will be re-introduced to Chinese porcelain objects and the teacher will review the essential features of porcelain from Section A. Before sending students off to their assigned galleries with Handout 2 and a digital camera, the teacher should briefly run through the following activity:

Ask students to pick two different kinds of porcelain objects in the gallery, for example, a teacup and a vase. The teacher will then lead a discussion on the essential characteristics of each, including:

What were they used for?

What sort of designs are used to decorate them?
(natural or figurative)

What kinds of colors are used?

The students will now divide into their groups and go to their assigned galleries and find the object they have been researching. In this gallery they will find the

object that was assigned to them in class and begin exploring the gallery and making connections to their previously discussed sub-themes, or finding new ones. Students should take photographs or sketch at least 5 objects. The number will vary by collection. Students should be sure to write down all label copy and make notes on the design of the gallery.

1. students already in group
2. Taking with them a digital camera, students will find 2-4 images in their assigned galleries; have them complete Tasks 1 and 2 from Handout 2.
3. After they have completed these assignments, students will reassemble and the teacher should verify that students have taken clear and relevant digital images. Teachers may wish to begin some debriefing to determine how successful students have been in their tasks.

VII. Evaluation

While teachers may wish to discuss preliminary results of student findings at the museum, most of this will take place back at the school in Section C.

VIII. Comments and Recommendations

1. The large group discussion in the Chinese porcelain gallery should be relatively simple, assuming that the number of students is not an issue.
2. The small group task has the potential to be a little more complicated. The groups in the Dutch Baroque and French galleries should have little difficulty completing their assignments and making connections.
3. The task for the Italian Renaissance gallery is more problematic as students will find objects dating c.1450-1500, just before the Age of Exploration, and they will have to make the connection that the earlier Chinese influence was the result of the trade on the Silk Road.
4. The group in the American galleries can be easily confounded because they will not find any Chinese influence. This will indicate that from 1500-1800 there was no market for Chinese porcelain in America, rather it was so precious a commodity, it reserved for the European market.

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SECTION C

Back in Your Classroom

I. Concept Goals

- To analyze the impact the desire for Chinese porcelain had on European exploration; to see how deeply Europeans were influenced by Chinese ideas
- To see how the importance of Chinese porcelain changes over time in various European countries.
- To see how some functional shapes--cups, pouring utensils, bowls--are universal across cultures
- Each group will then create an interesting, well-researched exhibit of photographs based on content learned in the unit

II. Skill Goals

- To learn how to use a basic image management program, such as Adobe Photoshop
- Research skills: including finding and evaluating sources, note-taking, citing sources, documenting, writing bibliographies
- Writing process skills, including writing and revising
- Organizing visual and written information in a pleasing, easy to follow format

III. Ohio State Standards

Not applicable – Ohio private school

IV. Vocabulary

See Section A, IV.

V. Materials

- School computer with Internet access.
- Computer program, such as Adobe Photoshop, to view images that were transferred from CMA and PowerPoint to create presentation
- Materials to make a large group time line, such as poster board, butcher paper, chalkboard, or the like

VI. Methodologies and Procedures

Back in the classroom, students will write a reflective piece as a group, describing their concept for the exhibit and including a description of works recorded in the museum. Students assess what they need to research next in order to complete the assignment.

Students continue to research works on line or in books to complete their exhibition. Students will research chosen works and document context and history found as well as the location and all source information on their pieces.

Students present their exhibition to the class and answer questions about their choices. There are several ways these exhibitions can be presented: PowerPoint presentation with images of objects and their accompanying labels written by the students; Posterboard presentations with images copied from their museum visit, web site research or journals; or each group can create a 3-D exhibit. Creating the 3-D model is a little more involved, but can be very engaging, as students have to decide on the color of the walls, and placement of artwork.