



Chinese Folklore & Literature
High School & Adult
(Suggested Grade Level 9 & Adult)

Tour length: 30-45 minutes

Goals:

1. Provide students with a greater understanding of Chinese art and culture.

Objectives:

1. Demonstrate how art is used to reinforce values introduced through folklore.
2. To illustrate how scenes, characters and ideas from classic Chinese texts are incorporated into works of art.

Vocabulary:

The following is a list of vocabulary terms that are frequently used during museum tours. It may be helpful to introduce them to your students before their visit and to reinforce the terms they have learned after the tour.

The Qing Dynasty (pronounced Ching) began in 1644 when the Manchu minority took China and ruled the Han majority. Ending in 1911, the Qing dynasty was it was the last imperial dynasty of China. A great deal of art in the museum was made during this time.

Ming Dynasty (1368 to 1644) was the dynasty which preceded the Qing Dynasty, notable for the expansion of the Great Wall and the prosperity of agricultural and the fine arts, particularly porcelain.

Tang Dynasty (618 to 907 A.D.) Considered to be China's Golden Age, this period was especially important for Chinese funerary art. The Tang Dynasty was during the height of the Silk Road.

The "**Mandate of Heaven**" was a term used to rationalize the "dynastic cycle." The founder of the dynasty had the "mandate," or command, of heaven to rule.

Dowager Empress is the title given to the mother of an emperor, particularly in Asia. Empress dowagers held regency during the reign of an underage emperor. China's most prominent empress dowager, Cixi, managed to extend her control for a long period after the emperor was old enough to govern. This was a source of political turmoil according to the traditional view of Chinese history.

Civil Service Exam was one of the first exam systems in the world allowing any male who could pass the test to become a government official, regardless of social class. Students were tested on their ability to memorize classic texts, poetry, arithmetic, and the like.

Guan Yu was a war general during the Three Kingdoms period of China. His character became fictionalized in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (some even call him a god), and he usually represented with his guandao weapon named Green Dragon Crescent Blade, a red face, and a long beard.

Guan Yin is the Buddhist goddess of mercy and compassion. She is a major subject of Chinese art, often represented by a moon.

Daoism comes from the teachings of the fundamental *Dao De Jing* classic text written by Laozi. Daoist principles focus on nature, harmony, and moderation.

Confucianism was established by the teachings of Confucius and concerns social responsibility. Confucianism is more community-oriented than Buddhism or Daoism. A dominant principle in Confucianism is that self-fulfillment can be found through helping others. Confucius based his teaching on five important relationships; ruler-subject, father-son, elder brother-younger brother, husband-wife, friend-friend.

Buddhism is a religion that originated in India. It is based on the Four Noble Truths and spread through China along the Silk Road. Buddhism represents the search for Enlightenment and the way out of the cycle of reincarnation.

The Silk Road was a massive trade route extending over 4,000 miles spanning from southern Europe all the way to China. The Silk Road was important not only in the trading of goods, but also in cultural exchange between European, Indian, African, and Middle Eastern cultures.

The Monkey King was a character created by a Buddhist monk named Xuan Zang (602-664). Monkey King traveled west to India to attain the Sutras, or Buddhist holy book. His adventures became the subject of many stories that were later rewritten into the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*.

Jade is a popular material in Chinese art. Jade measures 7 out of 10 on the Mohs scale of hardness. It must be carved with materials which rank 7 or higher. Diamond-tipped tools are often used for the abrading process. It comes in two forms: jadeite and nephrite.

Scholars were male Chinese officials who had passed the civil service exam and proved themselves to be knowledgeable in the Chinese literary classics and practiced the high arts. Scholars held great respect and power in traditional China and were an educated and elite group.

High Art Forms

Calligraphy is considered the highest art form in Chinese culture. Chinese calligraphy characters are based on pictures. Calligraphy uses brushes and black ink to write Chinese characters in an artistic manner, similar to the idea of cursive-writing in English.

Painting was traditionally done by scholars with black or colored inks. Popular scenes included landscapes, nature scenes, traditional folk tales, and royal life.

Poetry is one of the most respected art forms in Chinese culture and was a necessary study for taking the civil service exam.

The Four Great Classical Novels

These novels are commonly considered by scholars to be the pinnacle of Chinese achievement in classical literature.

Journey to the West was inspired by a Buddhist monk named Xuan Zang (602-664), who traveled west to India to attain the Sutras, or Buddhist holy books. The story is fictionalized with colorful characters such as the Monkey King, who experiences great adventures and difficulties along the way.

Dream of the Red Chamber is a novel that contains an extraordinarily large number of characters and details the life of the aristocratic Jia family. The novel is significant for its depiction of life during the Qing Dynasty.

Romance of the Three Kingdoms is also famous for its numerous characters and complex story. Written during the Ming Dynasty, much of the novel focuses on military conquests and historical generals and rulers of the end of the Han dynasty and beginning of the Three Kingdoms period.

Outlaws of the Marsh (also called Water Margin) is the least widely-known among the four classics. The novel details the lives of 108 bandits during the Song Dynasty. There is a theory that *Water Margin* became popular during the Yuan Dynasty due to resentment toward the Mongol rulers. The rebellion was safe to promote because it criticized the Song Dynasty on the surface, but it was also a call to oppose corrupt governments.

Research Topics:
