



"The Visual Art of Writing" Exploring Chinese Culture through Film and Illustration

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Introduction

Standing in my third grade art class, I observe the bewildered and terrified looks on the faces of my students as I eagerly await their response to the simple question: "What do you think about this artwork?" I am introducing my third graders to the concept of critiquing art for the first time. It is a method which I use to start every class in grades 3 through 5. It is an exercise that involves analyzing images and discussing our questions and opinions as a group. It is a new concept for these students because in the previous school years they didn't engage in art critiques. It is not a strategy used in the lower grade art classes, so imagine their horror when they are faced with the perplexing task of expressing their individual thoughts on the subject of art. The discomfort of the moment is intensified by my reassurance that there are not any right or wrong answers. Can you hear the booming of the cannons? No. That's something else. Their minds are blown!

It often saddens me that such a simple request is met with such resistance. What is the problem? Students have an opinion on everything; what they think of their friends, their clothes, the food they eat, the music they like. Surely they can conjure up one utterance that expresses an opinion about a painting filled with colorful dots. So the struggle continues as I encounter similar issues when introducing poems, stories, and cultural history related to art. How do I get students to analyze anything if they don't engage in or understand the process of developing an opinion? How do I get them to express the thoughts that articulate all that they are curious or concerned about, if they only subscribe to the theory that everything is either right or wrong? The thought is to teach them to interpret and express an idea through art and to tell a story seasoned with their preferences and opinions in an un-intimidating way that has positive outcomes for them in other areas of instruction.

I was struck by the idea of using film to teach the content of ancient cultures in the class, to utilize film as a platform for discussion and examination, to encourage reflection and critical thinking amongst my students. The following unit is my attempt to craft a plan for learning, discussing, interpreting and retelling the history and narratives related to the art curriculum.

This unit is intended to provide students with a dynamic experience and method of interpreting content by using film in the art class. I believe that film enhances the understanding of content through visual

representation. “Art” tells a story and seeks to be understood by the viewer. Each film audience and reader of a book may have a different interpretation of a story based on their experience with the work. These experiences may be related to the images created in the mind of the reader, as they imagine the details described by the author. The visual experience of a film is influenced by the director and the cinematic elements utilized in a film. The process and techniques of analyzing film adaptations will help my students develop the skill of better interpreting art in the classroom. The ability to interpret art serves my students in multiple ways; it also builds their verbal and writing skills. As an art teacher, I teach a cross curriculum approach that connects the visual arts curriculum to core subjects such as language arts and history. Using these skills to critique and engage in discussion related to film will also help the students to better express an idea through writing. In my course, the “*Visual Art of Writing: Exploring Chinese Culture Through Film and Storyboard Illustration*,” students will use imagery found in film, photographs, animation and storyboard renderings to engage in interpreting content through visual means. By creating their own illustrations, the students will use those images to help create a written narrative that is the retelling of a story. This may be the story of a culture, an artist, a piece of art or events in history.

Rationale

The goal of this unit is to study ancient Chinese culture and investigate how that culture is depicted in the Disney animated film *Mulan*, by using the film as well as the ancient Chinese text, *The Ballad of Mulan*. The objective is to reflect on how images provided in the film define the culture of China in comparison to what the students read and learn about ancient China by way of our introductory activities. The curriculum is an integration of visual arts, history and writing. As we explore how Chinese culture is depicted in this film, the students will also critique the film based on what they learn about ancient China. Students will analyze the film in relation to how it portrays the visual characteristics, traditions, beliefs and inventions of the people of ancient China.

The unit plan will analyze film as art and explore the questions of “How a story is told”. It will also question if the film tells the same story as the literary text, (outlined by Brigitte Peucker, in the YNI Seminar description). These questions are intended to guide the students to develop an understanding of how stories are constructed and why stories are important. The student will discover why is it important for the writer to tell a story, in comparison to why artists paint pictures. These ideas are relevant to my students because they not only enable them to produce artwork in class, but they allow them to critique and write about art as well. This unit will focus on many aspects of telling stories through visual arts as related to the content, including visual sequencing, color usage, scenery, and expression. Film will also be compared to verbal storytelling, written text, music, poetry, and narration. The study of ancient cultures is a social studies standard of learning (S.O.L.) in my district. Students are to learn about the past and present of many ancient civilizations. Chinese culture is part of the social studies curriculum covered in my 3rd and 4th grade classes. The film *Mulan* is a based on the Chinese folktale *The Ballad of Mulan*. This film takes place in ancient China during the Han Dynasty. It is a story that encompasses many cultural elements that students are introduced to as they cover the subject of China. The film *Mulan* gives students visual reference point and background knowledge about a time and place with which many students may not be familiar. It provides a clear and defined image of what things looked like in ancient China. It is not left to the to the students’ imagination to try to envision the places and people of that era. This film is important because it is the retelling of a popular folktale known throughout

China, and it is still a part of their present day culture. The elements of this historical tale help to create cultural understanding for this unit. The secondary focus of this unit is the retelling of stories using illustrations. The objective of the film is to promote comprehension of the subject matter as well as to provide a medium for analytical discussion.

This unit is intended for elementary students. These students are emerging writers and are beginning to participate in writing assignments that have rigor and technical aspects that go beyond punctuation, capitalization and five sentence paragraphs. They are engaging in creative writing and most of them struggle. This unit is intended to guide students through the mental process of summarizing and comprehending content. The *storyboard* activity as defined later on in this unit is intended to aid students in building pictures in their minds and on paper, pictures that assist with writing. These images are visual cues that the students will enlist to drive a process that will hopefully lead to detailed and descriptive writing.

The storyboard is a series of three illustrated pictures in rectangular boxes called panels, much like a comic strip format. Using storyboards allow students to illustrate the content as a part of a culminating activity. After illustrating the elements of the story that are of interest to them, students will write about the story using the three illustrated panels to guide their written work. The storyboard illustrations accomplish the goal of the unit by providing the visual content of the students' own design. This approach challenges student to create a written narrative that mirrors what is evident in the illustrated art work. It also addresses the skill of writing in a descriptive manner about every aspect of the storyboard drawings. This unit will span a six week time period, allowing students to become completely immersed in Chinese culture.

An animation component exists to engage the student in stories both factual and fictional through a medium that is appealing and appropriate for young learners. The idea of using the Disney film *Mulan* is to incorporate a film that highlights ancient China. It will lead to the process of comprehending a story, creating a visual summary of that story, creating an art composition, and a written narrative connected to the imagery represented in the student's illustrated art. The journey of retelling the story of *Mulan* through art is one that students will share with many great artists as they try to capture an image that defines a moment in history or a span of time. The purpose of this unit is not solely to focus on the artistry of the students' storyboard drawings. It is also to allow students to develop a creative method for analyzing film and text for the purpose of retelling a story in a written form that is clear, concise, and accurate. All of these elements are related to the visual arts curriculum that my students currently explore.

I feel that it is important for students to understand the mental process as well as the technical process of creating work, both written and visual. It is important that my students develop individual opinions and a personal perspective when interpreting art, film, or text. For me, the specific appeal of the film *Mulan* is the relationship between literature, film and history we find there. History is an important component of art. Most artifacts and artworks are records of the past and tell a story themselves. I am interested in analyzing the many genres of film and discovering what may be best for my students. I believe this animated film works well for an elementary class setting. The information presented in the film *Mulan* is relevant to my students, since they study ancient civilizations in the art class. *Mulan* was selected because the film is based on a woman named Fa Mulan, a legendary female warrior of Chinese descent. She was first introduced to the world in a poem entitled *Ballad of Mulan*. The students will read the folktale of Fa Mulan, comparing the animated film to the written story. The students will also examine the visual narratives of setting, costume, color, camera angle, focus and other visual elements found in the film. The students will then summarize the story from a purely visual perspective. They will later use the illustrations that they have created to write their renditions of the story of *Mulan*.

This unit will expose my students to information about ancient Chinese culture, as well as giving them a creative process for writing. There is a need for students to understand and master the process of writing clearly, concisely and in a descriptive manner. The students need to develop the skill of creating mental pictures to drive and influence their writing. The students will be introduced to this method by drawing literal images to assist with the writing process, but first, the students' needs to be able to analyze content, the film, text or art that is the subject of their narrative. The student cannot retell a story in written, oral, or visual form without first comprehending and understanding the content, which in the case, is the film *Mulan*.

In the past, methods for creating summaries of stories have not improved the comprehension skills of my students. The critique and discussion of film will not only unfold the story in small digestible parts for students, but it will also channel opinionated discussions and analytical thought about what they see and how they relate to it. The process of analyzing the film will also help students examine the visual aspects of how the culture of ancient China is portrayed and depicted through a succession of images in the film. The hope is that this method will enhance the students' cultural knowledge. At the conclusion of this unit, students should be familiar enough with the many cultural elements related to China to discern if the film accurately portrays what life was like during ancient times. The film provides an animated view of the landscape, architecture and people of ancient China, as well as touching on aspects of belief systems related to honor, symbolism, ancestry and customs.

Content

The content of this unit will be explored through the introduction of the character Mulan. Students will dive into a series of topics that will create a connection with China through the experience of learning about Fa Mulan, connecting students with the past through pathways other than just reading a book and collecting facts. Students will pose the following questions: Who is Mulan? Where is she from? What is that place like? Why is her story important? How is her story told?

Students will be introduced to Mulan as a young woman who doesn't fit into the conventional models of how women are expected to behave in ancient China. She is expected to bring honor to her family by fulfilling her role as an obedient and dutiful daughter by getting married and becoming a good wife. She has difficulty with the ideals and principles that go along with being matched and wedded. Her story is set during a time of war in her country. Soldiers are being drafted from each family in her village. Every household must send one male to serve in the Emperor's army. Her father is ailing and old, but he will not dishonor his family by refusing to serve. When she finds out that her aging father is going to enter the army and go off to war, Mulan cuts her hair, dresses in her father's old uniform, and takes his place in the army. She disguises herself as a male cousin who will represent their family's household.

First students are asked to listen to the reading of *The Ballad of Mulan*. They are asked to discuss in groups what kind of person they believe Mulan to be. By participating in this discussion they are building a connection with the character long before they see the film. They are then asked to come up with one question each that they would ask Mulan if they had the opportunity to meet her. This process can also be modified for students by giving each student a prepared question on an index card. These inquiries can address a multitude of concerns, for example: Why doesn't Fa Mulan want to get married? Was she was afraid to be a soldier? Students may come up with their own theories that answer these questions. Because these

things are not defined in the story students are free to imagine the answers. This approach to question and answer discussion is the first breath of life for the creative writer as well as the analytical thinker. This Socratic Method is a form of inquiry and discussion between individuals, based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and to illuminate ideas. It is a no pressure approach to thinking about the character and content based solely on what is omitted from the text and what they are curious about as learners. This is not done to test comprehension or understanding: it is an exercise in imagination that builds confidence and extends permission to voice a thought without fear of humiliation or condemnation. It builds trust between the students and their peers as well as the teacher, creating a learning environment that values all opinions and encouraged participation by every student.

The question of where Mulan is from is understandable to students, as their introduction to her as a character pays mention to her Asian origins. This topic allows me as a teacher to provide students with a deeper understanding of the place in which Mulan lives. They are connected to this character and seek to know more about her as a person and they are instinctively intrigued to see if any of the theories assumed in the introductory lesson will prove to be true. This is the time that I am able to give students background knowledge related to the culture of China. I am required by my state learning standards to instruct on the subject of inventions and contributions of ancient China. Students will learn of the many discoveries of these ancient people, as they are responsible for the invention of gunpowder and fireworks that are still used today by people all over the world. Students are expected to know about the invention of the compass that was made from *loadstone* found in China. Loadstone was a naturally magnetic mineral, prized by the Chinese and used as wedding rings. It was believed to bring good fortune. Its magnetic properties when combined with a brass plate automatically point south and so were used as the first compass. The contributions of ancient China also include the invention of paper: it was the first country to develop a papermaking industry and process. Along with the kite, noodles and silk, China takes the credit for many other important discoveries. Helping students understand and identify the valuable accomplishments of this culture is central to students' achieving the goals of this unit. We will be using *Mulan* as a vehicle for identifying this ancient civilization (China) and for analyzing how that civilization is portrayed in film.

Students will also view photo images related to the aesthetic characteristics of China. Allowing students to see the architecture, landscape, clothing and people of China will increase the visual impact of the film on students, as it will be observed through the knowing eyes of students that have now been exposed to the many aspects of this Asian culture. This prerequisite prepares students to engage in film analysis that is significant. Students will review and respond to the touchstones that are typical of the landscape. Most areas are represented as gardens with small architectural buildings or walls. The land is often represented in art as including rushing water, trees, flowers, and mountains. The people of China are depicted wearing heavily ornamented clothing and having the physical appearance of fair skin and straight black hair. Their clothing is described as a cross collar shirt that is fastened to the right. This unique style was accompanied by pants and a long robe for men, and a skirt and long robe for women.

The traditions of this culture manifest themselves through a belief system that is steeped in symbolism. Many of these symbols --from the yin-yang, half black half white circular image, to the large and gilded images of dragons--have traditional representations that are revered and shared by this entire culture. The theme of good fortune is one that is closely tied to many of these symbols. It is believed that it provides protection as well as good luck. The symbol of the dragon is held in high esteem, as it is believed to be powerful and good. The dragon is a cherished symbol of the people. The same is true of the color red that is a favorite hue among the Chinese people. The idea of good luck is also represented in this color.

The traditions and social structures of Chinese culture are also built on the ideals and principles of honor. Respect for one's parents and elders have been the foundational element of Chinese culture for thousands of years. The respect for family and ancestry is also an important aspect of their behavior and beliefs, due to the widely held belief that ancestors possess supernatural powers that enable them the ability to protect the living. Asking and addressing the question of where Mulan is from develops a connection with her culture. Although this method of learning about China is directly related to the individual Fa Mulan, students feel as though they are learning more about her as person. Providing students with details about her homeland in this manner is a less rigid presentation of the inventions, aesthetics and traditions of China, one that reaches below surface learning. As the unit progresses, the students will continue to explore and question what they need to know about Mulan and why her story is important.

Just as children from America are familiar with the stories of the "Three Little Pigs" and "Little Red Riding Hood," children of China are familiar with the tale of Fa Mulan. This story has been shared for hundreds of years and is still shared to this day. The legend of Mulan is an important story to boys and girls who are inspired by her bravery. Mulan, the name that means flower, empowered herself to do things that girls were not permitted to do during ancient times. Students need to understand the significance of this narrative as well as how her story is told.

It is essential that students are aware of the many ways that a story can be told. Students will become acquainted with the array of mediums that can be used to communicate this tale. To look at just one form of conveying this story, in my opinion, would be insufficient. It is only fair to share the original folktale as it is told in China before introducing the more Americanized film version produced by Disney. This text is the standard by which students will compare and contrast the film *Mulan*. It is important to point out that film requires more than a passive attitude towards the content. There is more that is involved in understanding and analyzing the pieces of a film. Students should think of viewing a film in the way that a movie critique would do, paying close attention to elements such as setting, aesthetics, and sound. These factors make a major impact on the feeling and style of the film.

The legend that is *The Ballad of Mulan* is retold in cinematic form, as a Disney animated film simply titled *Mulan*. Teaching students how to dissect a film develops depth of understanding of people, places, events and time periods. Furthermore, fostering the understanding of how individual elements of a story impact each person's interpretation of that story. This is evident when modeling how students participate in being active viewers of film. The function of this activity is to help organize the viewing process by targeting the students' areas of focus in the film. Teachers must be careful to provide structured objectives for viewing the film. Even if this framework is provided, students will still interpret the film in different ways. The film addresses several aspects of life in ancient China: aesthetics, customs, and honor. The integration of film into this unit permits the observation of the many aspects of Chinese culture collectively. They will be able to glimpse at life in China through the eyes and experiences of the lead characters of *Mulan*. The film serves the specific purpose of reinforcing the understanding of custom, characteristics, and their visual aspects that students need to be able to identify. The question of how accurately the film represents China is at the core for assessing the student's mastery of understanding.

The field of focus for my students will be provided in a framework that defines the terms setting, aesthetics, and sound. Prior to viewing the film, students will participate in group discussion related to these aspects of the film. Each class period we will target one of these cinematic elements to be discussed, allowing for thirty to forty minutes of viewing, followed by ten to fifteen minutes of discussion.

The depiction of China as the setting starts with the credit sequence. The opening of the film is set in motion by black ink that bleeds into a background, becoming a line drawing of the landscape of China. This image appears on the screen as if being painted by an artist, exhibiting the silhouettes of trees, mountains, and clouds in a fluid movement that is slow and peaceful. The final image is of the Great Wall of China, which is superimposed by the fully animated representation of the Great Wall. The image of this structure is held on the screen, shadowed by the covering of night. This scene creates the setting in which the story takes place, along the Great Wall. The cry of a hawk and the organ-like tone we hear once the bird swoops into the scene add to the anticipation that something frightful is about to happen. The sound builds with the sound of tubas and drums that beat slowly and then increase in speed, adding to the drama, action, and suspense of this scene.

It is suggested that Mulan lives in a large family home and the farm animals and gates suggest that they reside in the country. The gardens outside their home display clusters of green trees that frame a red architectural structure with the visual characteristics of a temple. The film follows Mulan through her village, where we notice that the streets are dirt roads lined with markets and shops. The sounds and music that permeate this scene introduce Mulan with energetic and upbeat music, peppered with the sounds of the animals and a dog. The sounds evoke the thought that Mulan lives a happy life with her family.

The setting of this film is the complete landscape of China. The landscape includes all outdoor areas in the film, from the snowy mountains to the streets of town to the emperor's palace. These aestheticized scenes provide a beautifully illustrated backdrop for the story. The flowers and fauna illustrated in the film depict the beauty of nature found in this region. The pink flowers in Mulan's yard fill the frame of the scene, as a close-up focuses on the blossoms on the tree. During the staging of this scene Mulan's father tries to comfort her after an unsuccessful appointment with the matchmaker. When the father uses the flower imagery to compare the bud that has not yet blossomed to Mulan, he is reassuring her that he cares for and supports her. He is also reassuring her that with time and patients she will also bloom.

The music and especially the songs in the film act as part of the narrative of the story. Usually it is the voice in a character's head as it expresses thoughts and beliefs that are not verbalized in the film script. The songs are important because the lyrics explain in detail how characters feel and think. The songs are sung by groups of characters as well as by individuals, thus adding another dimension to the scenes. Disney animated films are usually musicals. It is important that students are encouraged to interpret the lyrics found in the songs. These poetic verses are another method of storytelling and should not be overlooked.

Strategies

Students will participate in peer lead discussions. This strategy incorporates critiques as well as question and answer sessions. Students will also engage in team dialogue that encourages students to develop an opinionated approach to discussing information in a large group setting. Students will learn visualization techniques by creating thumbnail sketches. Students will also make venn diagrams that compare and contrast the film *Mulan* with the original folk tale.

My plan for navigating the six weeks of material and activities that students will engage in begins with the simple strategy of building a profile for Mulan. Students are introduced to her as a name and imogie

displayed on a screen, whiteboard or LCD projector. The same way in which Facebook and email users have a picture and a name listed; students will only see the image or icon of a flower next to the name, Fa Mulan, and her name defined as flower. Her profile headings will include basic facts about her: that she is a young Asian female from China. Her age will be listed as unknown, and her most notable characteristics will be listed as heroism and bravery. Below her profile will be the heading: "Let's friend Fa Mulan" followed by the Facebook icon. Several questions will be bulleted below. Who is Fa Mulan? Where is she from? What is her homeland like? What is her story? Why is her story important? How has her story been told? This is my introductory strategy. Each of these bulleted questions will lead students on a path that will reveal answers about the character Fa Mulan, the content of her fable, the history of her culture and how stories can be communicated.

Students will work in small groups and discuss what they believe they know about this person based on the information or lack thereof. Students will work to come up with their own answers to the above mentioned questions. I suggest that teachers be careful not to show students images of Mulan too early in the introduction of this unit. I like to focus on the informative process before I incorporate visual elements into a lesson. Some of your students may be familiar with the film *Mulan* and the visual images created by Disney should not be used before viewing the film. I recommend that all visual images used prior to the film viewing come from the illustrated text *The Ballad of Mulan*. By framing the questions in this manner and viewing the film at the end of the unit (the third and fourth week), students are not allowed to be passive learners. We do not want to spoil the process of thinking and discussing that is inspired by the speculation about who Fa Mulan is. It is also important to refer to the character by first and last name. Even those students that are familiar with the movie will not recognize that this Disney character is the axis point of all that they are intended to learn. By revealing the film resource too soon you run the risk of losing the participation of students that feel that they already know everything about this topic, after all "they already saw the movie". For our purposes the film is a tool of learning, not merely an entertainment. It is used to help the students to more clearly understand and identify aspects of Asian culture that they will explore over a six week period.

During week one, students will focus on the question "What is Mulan's story"? While in small groups they will brainstorm and hypothesize about the questions that will help them learn about Mulan (allow 10 minutes). Students will record their answers on index cards or on a worksheet. Then they will participate in whole group or class discussions where each child has to share their thoughts or answers to the profile questions. Students will then listen to a read-aloud story, *The Ballad of Mulan*, retold and illustrated by Nan Zhang. Students will have their first true introduction to the story of Mulan. After the reading we will engage in question and answer session as a class and revisit the profile questions and discuss what we discovered in the text.

In week two, students will focus on where Mulan is from and what her home land is like. Students will engage in an instructional session that focuses on facts about China. Students will learn about the landscape, as well as the culture and the inventions that come from this region. Students will view slides, watch video clips and *Brain pop* segments on the subject of the cultural contributions of ancient China. Students will also view Chinese drawings in black and white that document military and governmental accomplishments. Students will see how these drawings were used to preserve important moments in history as well as stories.

During weeks three and four, students will focus on how her story is told and why it is important. They will view the film *Mulan* in 30 minute blocks, allowing 15 minutes of class discussion. Students will complete a Venn diagram during film that allows them to document comparisons and contrast between the book, *The Ballad of Mulan* and the film *Mulan*. Students will target their responses to the subjects of the content of the story, the visual aspects in the film animation versus the book illustrations, and the cultural depictions. In

weeks five and six, Students will engage in creating thumbnail sketches to help retell the story in sequence. Sketches will be the focus of class critique and discussion. These sketches will aid students in completing final project and activity of illustrating the story of Mulan.

Both teachers and students must answer for themselves why this character is important. Because the character connects the student to the content, the entire cultural unit can be taught in relation to how it relates to her life as the main character of this folk tale. The basic strategies are as follows: Use Mulan as a catalyst to identify an ancient civilization (China) and analyze how that civilization is portrayed in film. Allow students the opportunity to examine the visual aspects of how that culture is portrayed through film animation.

Activity 1

Objective: Summarize film using storyboard technique to retell a story and translate those images into descriptive writing projects. Materials: projector, images of Chinese ink drawings, 9x12inch drawing paper, black construction paper, pencil, black sharpie markers, color pencils.

Students will create three story board panels. The panels will be drawn in pencil and traced in black ink. Students may incorporate color but it is not a requirement. Students will also write a narrative in summary form that incorporates the visual elements of each panel, in an organized and detailed written format. Each panel should illustrate an aspect of the story or film.

Activity 2

Objective: Read and act out the script found in the book of *Mulan: Five Versions of the Classic Chinese Legend*.

Students can engage in acting out Act I of this story found on page 21 of this text. There are six character parts and soldiers. Students will participate in acting out half of the script and then turning over the character to another student. This in-class drama will help students compare and contrast the differences between the text and film.

Activity 3

Objective: Use of film as the theme and subject source for this unit, along with related poetry and stories.

The storyboard illustration is a strategy and an activity that ties in how students will demonstrate their understanding of the content. The act of retelling the story through illustration is influenced by the individual interpretations of the story. Different aspects of Chinese culture will appeal to different students and should

be reflected in the culminating activity that is artwork. The focus of the storyboard illustrations is to provide a platform or expression of student's opinions and realizations related to the film. Those drawings exhibit the cultural elements that speak best to the students. The teacher can deduce what areas of knowledge the student has mastered with regard to the unit. The pictures provide a blueprint for the written activities related to this unit. The visual elements of the illustrations mark details that should be present in the writing. The subject of the students' writing is how the film relates to the true condition of life in ancient China. The writing should discuss elements of the aesthetics of that geographical region. These activities should also help the student address the following overreaching concept questions. They should develop and understanding of why history is important and how storytelling is an intricate part of preserving the past. The activities should also help students determine if the film represents China's culture accurately.

Student Reading List

Zhang, Song Nan. *Mulan: The Ballad of Mulan*. Union City, CA: Pan Asian Publications, 1998.

Kwa, Shiamin. *Mulan: Five Versions of a Classic Chinese Legend with Related Texts*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub., 2010.

Souci, Robert D., and Jean Tseng. *Fa Mulan: The Story of a Woman Warrior*. New York: Hyperion Paperbacks for Children, 2000.

Resources for Classroom Use

Brain pop Jr: <https://jr.brainpop.com> -Provides educational movies for K-3 students. Homework Help, leveled quizzes, games and activities for kids. This is an exceptional resource for teachers and students.

United streaming: <https://discoveryeducation.com> - Provides students and teacher with video segments that can be streamed in the classroom. This is a great resource for showing student video images of geographical landscapes, cultural events, and faraway places.

Williams, Suzanne, and Andrea Fong. *Made in China: Ideas and Inventions from Ancient China*. Berkeley, Calif.: Pacific View Press, 1996.

Fox, Dana L. *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children's Literature*. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003.

Appendix

The lesson objectives stated in these activities are aligned with the Commonwealth of Virginia standard of learning for second through fourth grade visual arts curriculum. The second grade visual arts standard (VA2.8) and (VA2.9) require that students use observational drawing in preparation for creation works of art and develop works of art from observation. The primary focus of this unit is the Art History and Cultural component of the visual arts standards of learning required for instruction within the Richmond Public School district. According to these requirements, students must be able to identify symbols of various cultures, cultural works of art, elements of architecture, and artifacts of other cultures. The plan for classroom discussions and peer-lead critiques align with the analysis and evaluation strands of the Virginia visual arts standards (VA 2.15) through (VA2.17). Students will express opinions with supporting statements regarding works of art, interpret ideas and feelings expressed in personal art and work of others. Students will identify works of art by subject matter, including genres of landscape or portrait. This unit has the primary focus of learning about the culture of China. Students will explain ways that the art of a culture reflects its people's attitudes and beliefs (VA2.19).

The standards for grade three visual arts curriculum emphasize learning through inquiry. Students examine aspects of the artistic process: idea generation, problem solving, and self-assessment. Students investigate the integral role of art and architecture within various cultures, and they combine knowledge of art and architecture, effective artistic processes and skills, and a variety of ideas to produce works of art. The standards of learning for third and second graders have some similarities, but the cultural context is a bit more specific, as China is the defined culture of focus for this grade level. Third grade social studies standards (SS3.2) require that students explain how the contributions of ancient China have influenced the present world in terms of architecture, inventions, and written language. The art history standards (VA3.11 - VA 3.16) challenge students to be able to identify how art reflects a time, place, and culture; how history, culture and the visual arts influence each other; common attributes of works of art created by artist within a culture; relationships between form and function in artifacts of a culture; and comparisons and contrast of art and architecture form other cultures. Students will express informed judgements about works of art and describe reasons for valuing those works of art (VA3.20- 3.22).

The visual arts standards for fourth grade engage the student in the analysis and evaluation of aesthetics. Students will compare and contrast characteristics of diverse cultures depicted in works of art (VA4.14) Students will interpret works of art for multiple meanings. (VA4.19) Student will formulate questions about aesthetic aspect of works of art. (VA4.21) These visual arts concepts develop analytical thought processes amongst students and open pathways of thought that create critical thinking skills that go beyond this curriculum unit.

Virginia Standards of Learning can be found at <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/>.

Bibliography

- Brode, Douglas. *Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005.
- Zhang, Song Nan. *Mulan: The Ballad of Mulan*. Union City, CA: Pan Asian Publications, 1998.
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