Storytelling Through Asian Art

Elementary Lesson
Eastern Asia: China, Korea, Japan

## Geography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CHINA</th>
<th>KOREA</th>
<th>JAPAN</th>
<th>MICHIGAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SQUARE MILES</td>
<td>3.705 million</td>
<td>38,691 (combined)</td>
<td>145,91</td>
<td>96,71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| POPULATION       | 1.4 billion    | North Korea: 25 million  
                              | South Korea: 51 million | 127 million | 10 million |
| MILES OF COASTLINE | 9,010         | North Korea: 1,550  
                              | South Korea: 1,499 | 18,486   | 3,288    |
| CLIMATE          | Extremely diverse; tropical in south to subarctic in north | Temperate, with rainfall heavier in summer than winter; cold winters, especially in the North | Varies from tropical in south to cool temperate in north | Distinctive summers and winters with a fairly even distribution of precipitation throughout the year |

Sources: CIA World Factbook, Michigan DNR, Michigan NRI. Numbers based on 2019 figures.
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<td><strong>TERRAIN</strong></td>
<td>Most mountains, high plateaus, deserts in west; plains, deltas, and hills in east</td>
<td>North: mostly hills and mountains with deep narrow valleys; wide coastal plains in west; South: mostly hills and mountains; wide coastal plains in west and south</td>
<td>Mostly rugged and mountainous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NATURAL RESOURCES</strong></td>
<td>Iron ore, tin, aluminum, lead, world’s largest hydropower potential, arable land</td>
<td>North: iron ore, limestone, graphite, copper, lead, precious metals, hydropower potential South: graphite, lead, hydropower potential</td>
<td>Fish, timber, and very few mineral resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LAND USE</strong></td>
<td>Agricultural land: 55% Forest: 22% Other: 23%</td>
<td>North Korea/South Korea Agricultural: 22%/18% Forest: 46%/64% Other: 32%/18%</td>
<td>Agricultural land: 13% Forest: 69% Other: 19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: CIA World Factbook, Michigan DNR, Michigan NRI. Numbers based on 2019 figures.
What is a symbol?

A symbol is something that represents or stands for something else. What are used as symbols in your culture? What ideas do they represent?

We can see a variety of symbols being used in East Asian art. An example of a popular Asian symbol is the phoenix which symbolizes virtue and grace.

*Box with Design of Phoenixes and Lotus Blossoms*

no. 1983.5
All images from the DIA collection, accessible by searching words at www.dia.org/art/collection.
Stories such as *The Tale of Genji* use flowers as symbols.

Illustrations inspired by such stories often use these symbols as a way for viewers to identify the specific chapters or scenes featured in the artwork.
Comparing Sculptures

• How might these sculptures symbolize safety and/or luck?
• In what ways are these works similar? How do they differ?
• Does the size and medium of the artwork have any impact on its message or story--how so?
• For whom do you think these sculptures might have been made and where might they have originally been found?

What titles could you suggest that might reflect the stories that the piece would tell?
What’s Missing?

- What stories do they think these lions could be sharing?
- What secrets might they tell us?
Noh Theater Mask And Drum

Noh masks express the feelings and personalities of the characters they represent, and they are only worn by the main character.

Since actors often chant or sing their lines, music is an important part of Noh theater—so much so that the musicians appear on stage throughout the performance playing instruments such as this kotsuzumi, or small hand drum.

- What sort of character do you think this mask represents and why?
- How might the copper surrounding the eyes on this mask help to create a dramatic effect on a 17th century stage lit with candles?
- How might this drum help to tell the actor’s story?
Textiles

Japanese Noh Theater Robe

- What are some of the images you can recognize on these robes? What might those images symbolize?
- How do the silk and metallic threads of these robes impact their appearance?

Chinese Dragon Robe
Korean Chaekkori Screen

What images and symbols do you see being used by the artist? What is the story being told? Does the order of the panels make a difference in interpreting this story, why or why not?
How does a collection of 2D painted images differ from a collage of 3D images in telling a story?
Set of Miniature Painting Albums
ca. 18-19th century, Japanese.
Albums: ink and watercolor on paper.
Box: wood and ink
Happy World-
Scattered Crumbs
In what ways are these two storytelling formats similar, and in what ways are they different?
Set of Miniature Painting Albums

Once, a wealthy collector's home went up in flames. He was able to salvage just one item—a small album, like the one you see here—which fit into his pocket. Japanese collectors held great affection for small-sized works.

The person who commissioned this set asked 20 leading artists and scholars to contribute miniature paintings and calligraphy. It took more than 10 years to complete the project.

Happy World-Scattered Crumbs

Artist Ik-Joong Kang moved to New York City from Korea in 1984.

While traveling on long subway rides, he carried small canvases to create a record of these new experiences, eventually making thousands of paintings and mixed-media works inspired by his collection.
Making it to the Moon

An image or shape that we see repeated in Ik-Joong Kang’s work is the moon jar, a traditional Korean ceramic form that takes two wheel-thrown bowls and connects them by scoring and slipping the seams together and then cutting an opening at the top.

Subtle impurities in the white porcelain along with the slight asymmetry of the sphere adds to the unique character of each work. As a national symbol of Korea, this form was used for the Olympic cauldron at the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, South Korea.

According to Kang, moon jars represent connections; they are pieces that shape us and travel through endless cycles.

Think about the processes involved in making ceramics—taking the raw clay and transforming it into a form and then firing and painting or glazing the work in order to make it a finished piece.

Think about how people can interact with the works that you have made—is the purpose of your artwork more functional or aesthetic? What messages or stories do you share in your artwork?
Record a day in your life

For this project, you have been given a cardboard square that you will use to record a day in your life. Like Kang’s work, we will assemble all of these squares together for an art installation at school.

Besides the square, you can use a variety of other materials to create a mixed-media assemblage: tissue paper, construction paper, magazine photos, paint, markers, additional cardboard, glue, etc.

What objects, items, and symbols would help to describe a day in your life?

Make sure to use objects that will stick to your cardboard—nothing too heavy or anything that will decompose.
How can an object such as this have a story even though there are no recognizable images?

Is there anything in your own home or in school that is similar to this object?
What is the function of these patchworked pieces of cloth?
If you had to design a box, what materials might you use?

• What would determine the designs you use to decorate the box?
• How might the materials and symbols you choose be representative of your own culture?
• For what might your box be used?
Compare the materials and symbols from two East Asian boxes.

Be ready to present what you discover in this analysis: introduce your two artworks, use facts and definitions to develop your key points, and provide a concluding statement.
What did you learn?

- Trade your writing with a classmate.
- Describe how the author used specific examples from their boxes to present important points.

*Cosmetic Box with Designs of Silk Incense Wrappers*
No. 1984.19
STOP, LOOK, and LISTEN

In the Asian Arts Galleries, find one example of each of the following:
- A box, an object with a face, and an object made from fabric.

For each item, sketch the object in the octagon and respond to the questions in the rectangle below.

**BOX**
Title of Work: 
Country of Origin: 
What might be found inside this box?

**FACE**
Title of Work: 
Country of Origin: 
How would you describe the expression on this face?

**FABRIC**
Title of Work: 
Country of Origin: 
What might the colors and shapes on the fabric mean?
Please Listen

Examine the following three works and imagine the stories that could be told by these objects.

What do you think this lion may be thinking? Why?

What might happen in a story that involves this character?

What type of gift might this fabric be used to wrap?
Return to the boxes you analyzed.

Imagine the stories that the owners of these boxes might tell. What details in the object could help you develop a story?
Select one museum object to use for this creative writing activity.
Use the “Movie Maker” graphic organizer to create a storyline.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CREATIVE WRITING RUBRIC</th>
<th>ADVANCED</th>
<th>PROFICIENT</th>
<th>BASIC</th>
<th>LIMITED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student selected one specific museum object for his/her fictional story.</td>
<td>Student incorporated more than one specific museum object for their fictional story.</td>
<td>Student selected one specific museum object for their fictional story.</td>
<td>With directed help, student selected a specific museum object for their fictional story.</td>
<td>Student did not select a museum object for their fictional story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students used specific visual evidence from the object as inspiration and details in his/her story.</td>
<td>Student used specific visual evidence from the object as inspiration for creative and original details.</td>
<td>Student used specific visual evidence from the object as inspiration and details in their story.</td>
<td>Student used little visual evidence from the museum object in their story.</td>
<td>Student did not use any specific visual evidence from the museum object as inspiration and details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students completed the “Movie Maker” graphic organizer to organize a timeline of events for their story.</td>
<td>Graphic organizer completed with multiple accurate details for each frame.</td>
<td>Graphic organizer completed with details for each frame.</td>
<td>Graphic organizer completed with few or inaccurate details in some frames.</td>
<td>Incomplete graphic organizer and/or information is inaccurate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presented their stories and/or displayed their completed work.</td>
<td>Student delivered a polished presented with attention to detail.</td>
<td>Student presented a piece with some details.</td>
<td>Student completed a presentation that lacked detail.</td>
<td>Student did not complete a presentation.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
DESIGN CHALLENGE!

Develop a simple sketch, drawing, or model diagram for an accompanying work of art.

Based on the object you have chosen for your story, what might a similar piece look like and how could you incorporate that piece into your story?
DESIGN CHALLENGE!

Develop a sketch, drawing, or model diagram for an accompanying work of art.

Name of the Museum Piece: ___________________________

Medium: ____________________________________________

Size: _______________________________________________

Description: _______________________________________

Sketch of Object:

Name for Your New Piece: ___________________________

Medium: ____________________________________________

Size: _______________________________________________

Description:

Sketch of Object:
Page 6


Page 8


Page 9


Page 10


Page 11


Page 12


2. Chinese. Dragon Robe, late 19th Century. Woven and embroidered silk, gilded paper (wrapped silk thread), and brass; 55 × 81 inches. Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of the Estate of Berthe McFadden Evans. 69.165

Page 13


Page 16


Page 17


Page 19


Page 20

Korean. Moon Jar, 18th century. Porcelain with glaze, 14 1/2 × 14 1/2 inches. Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, G. Albert Lyon Fund and L. A. Young Fund, with additional funds from Mrs. George Endicott and Mr. and Mrs. Charles M. Endicott. 1984.2

Page 21


Page 22

Korean. Bojagi, mid–late 20th century. Silk, cloth, 29 1/4 × 27 1/4 inches. Detroit Institute of Arts, Museum Purchase, Friends of Asian Arts and Cultures Acquisition Fund. 2015.71

Page 23


2. Japanese. Cosmetic Box with Designs of Silk Incense Wrappers, 16th century. Black and gold lacquer on leather and wood with silk cords and metal fittings, 4 3/4 × 11 × 8 5/8 inches. Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford II Fund and General Membership Fund; gifts from Mr. and Mrs. William A. Fisher, and Mr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Whitcomb by exchange. 1984.19


4. Ogata Korin (Japanese, 1658-1716). Box for Writing Implements, 17th–early 18th century. Lacquer, gold, mother-of-pearl, and lead on wood. 2 × 8 1/4 × 11 5/8 inches. Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Charles M. Endicott, Mr. and Mrs. George M. Endicott, Miss Elizabeth Ann Stoddard, Mr. Simeon H. Stoddard, and Mr. Stanford D. Stoddard. 80.29


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