

Asian Odyssey

A National K-12 Interdisciplinary Curriculum Model

The
Cleveland
Museum
of Art

A world of great
art for everyone

CHINESE AND JAPANESE TOMB CULTURES

Grade Level

This lesson was developed for a 6th-grade class; it can be adjusted for grades 5-8.

Purpose

To examine burial customs in ancient China and Japan.

Concepts

- Feng shui: an ancient Chinese system of divination used to determine the correct positioning of public buildings, houses, tombs and other structures to ensure good fortune and avert bad luck.
- Qin Shi Huang: the first emperor of China (reigned BCE221-210)
- Terra-cotta: a hard, waterproof fired clay used in pottery, often reddish-brown
- Jade: a hard gemstone that can be highly polished; jade is found in green and other colors
- Kofun "Old Tomb" Era: 300–710CE in Japan
- Haniwa: clay cylinders that in ancient Japan were placed on graves

Key Ideas

- Tombs and the objects buried in them are a reflection of the cultures that created them. Wealthy and politically important people were buried in underground tombs surrounded by objects they were thought to need in their afterlife. Tombs also provided a place for later generations to perform the necessary ongoing rituals for their ancestors.
- Tomb placement was very important and was chosen according to the principles of feng shui in order to protect the deceased from evil spirits and to bring good fortune to future generations.
- One of the best-known tombs in China is that of the country's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, who died in BCE 210. The tomb includes a burial chamber and an underground complex in which was buried a terra-cotta (pottery) army with thousands of individually modeled life-size soldiers, horses, and chariots. The tomb, which may have been looted shortly after its completion, remains unexcavated. It lies within an inner wall and beneath a four-sided pyramid mound that was originally landscaped to appear as a low, wooded mountain. The interior is reputedly a vast underground palace that took the forced labor of about 700,000

workmen more than 36 years to complete. The historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien (c.BCE 145–c.85) wrote:

The laborers dug through three subterranean streams, which they sealed off with bronze to construct the burial chamber. They built models of palaces, pavilions, and offices and filled the tomb with fine vessels, precious stones, and rarities. Artisans were ordered to install mechanically triggered crossbows set to shoot any intruder. With quicksilver [mercury] the various waterways of the empire, the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers, and even the great ocean itself were created and made to flow and circulate mechanically. With shining pearls the heavenly constellations were depicted above, and with figures of birds in gold and silver and of pine trees carved of jade the earth was laid out below. Lamps were fueled with whale oil so that they might burn for the longest possible time.

- In Japan, the Kofun era (300-710 CE) takes its name from man-made earthen mounds, some of which are gigantic, covering the stone burial chambers of important people.
- Kofun tomb mounds were round or keyhole shaped (the combination of a circular mound with a triangular one suggesting the shape of an old-fashioned keyhole). The burial chamber was usually located near the top of this mound and once the wooden coffin and accompanying grave goods were in place, the earth was then mounded over.
- Objects placed in these tombs were usually iron weapons, bronze mirrors, and jade ornaments. Clay cylinders called haniwa were placed around the surface of the mound, with a house-shaped haniwa placed directly over the deceased.
- The earliest haniwa were created out of slabs or coils of clay by local potters, but over time haniwa became more and more elaborate.
- The purpose or function of the haniwa remains unclear. The most widely accepted theory is that the haniwa was to separate the world of the living from the world of the dead and to protect the dead by ensuring them a comfortable resting place.
- Mirrors, an important item in Japanese mythology, were often found in tombs of the Kofun era. These mirrors were made of bronze, with a raised design on one side and a polished surface (for reflection) on the other.
- By 710, Buddhism had become widespread in Japan, and the Buddhist practice of cremation replaced tomb burials.

Materials

Chinese

Mirror with Phoenixes and Floral Sprays, c.700-750, CMA 1973.74

Tomb Guardians, late 7th or early 8th century, 2000.118.1-.2

Horse, late 7th or early 8th century, CMA 1955.295

Camel, 8th century, CMA 1967.147

Chariot Fitting, late-11th century BCE, CMA 1990.30

Funerary Relief with Chariot Procession, 2nd century, CMA 1985.73
Fangyou (Covered Jar), c. BCE1200-1050, CMA1963.103
Ding, BCE 200-1000, CMA 2003.2
Master Lai's Bell, BCE 900-800, CMA 1989.3
Bian: A Shallow Basin Supported by Bird, BCE early 400s, CMA 1991.8
Mat Weight in the Form of a Bear, BCE 206 -24 CE, CMA 1994.203
Jue (Wine Cup), c. BCE 1600-1400, CMA1982.148
Jia (Wine Vessel), c. BCE 2000-1600, CMA 1989.150
Ge (Dagger-Axe), c. BCE 1600-1050, CMA 1937.25
Xian (Steamer), c. BCE 1100, CMA 1975.96
Jade Plaque, BCE 475-221, CMA 1991.78.1-.2
Daigou (Garment Hook), 475-221 BC, 1950.249
Jade Bi Disk, c. BCE 3200-2000, CMA 1917.974
Funerary Object (Mingqi): Dog, 25-220, CMA 1983.1
Japanese (Kofun period)
Male Haniwa Head, c500-600, CMA 1977.206
Haniwa Figure of a Female, c.500, CMA 1962.39
Haniwa in the Form of an Archer, c.500, CMA 1999.170
Caparisoned Haniwa Horse, 400-500, CMA 1957.27

O'Connor, Jane. *The Emperor's Silent Army*. New York: Viking, 2002.
 12 x 18-inch construction paper
 Colored pencils

Procedure

1. Discuss modern-day burial customs. Ask students to describe their culture's rituals and practices, and share, if they wish, share any personal experiences they may have had.
2. Have the students take out a blank notebook page and draw two vertical lines separating the sheet into three equal parts. They should label one column China and one Japan. Review the Concepts and Key Ideas. Have students take notes about the discussion in the appropriate columns.
3. Share CMA images of Asian tomb artifacts.
4. Look for burial traditions that were similar in each culture and those that were different. Have a student make a list of similarities on one part of the board, and a second student list the differences on another part of the board while the rest of the students copy them on their notebook pages under the appropriate headings.
5. Begin to compare customs of China and Japan to another culture studied during the year (such as Native American or Egyptian). Ask the students to work as a class to describe this culture's tomb rituals. These should be noted in the third column of the sheet.
6. Ask each student to think of a person who has had an important role in history, then list on paper the accomplishments of this famous person.
7. Divide the class into two groups; half will be designated as Chinese Tomb Builders and the other half as Japanese Tomb Builders.

8. Distribute 12 x 18 construction paper to each student. Have them fold paper the paper in half to create two sections measuring 9 x 12.
9. The Chinese group will work together to discuss how a Chinese person in an equivalent position as the chosen famous person would be interred. The Japanese group should do a similar thing.
10. Having worked as a group on the brainstorming, each student should work separately to draw the tomb on one side and on the other side the types of objects involved in the tomb.
11. Have each student present their design to the class explaining the construction and contents of the tomb.

Enrichment

- A. Students will write an obituary for their famous person that will explain the artifacts they chose to represent contributions and achievements made during their lifetime.
- B. Students will research and report orally or in written format on one other ancient civilization burial custom.

Ohio State Standards

History Standard

1. Students use materials drawn from the diversity of human experience to analyze and interpret significant events, patterns and themes in the history of Ohio, the United States and the world.

People in Societies Standard

1. Students use knowledge of perspectives, practices and products of cultural, ethnic and social groups to analyze the impact of their commonality and diversity within local, national, regional and global settings

Social Studies Skills and Methods

1. Students collect, organize, evaluate and synthesize information from multiple sources to draw logical conclusions.
2. Students communicate this information using appropriate social studies terminology in oral, written or multimedia form and apply what they have learned to societal issues in simulated or real-world settings.

This lesson plan developed by Jackie Crandall, Beachwood School System, Beachwood, Ohio.