

# Chinese Knotting

## Standards/Benchmarks:

- Compare and contrast visual forms of expression found throughout different regions and cultures of the world.
- Discuss the role and function of art objects (e.g., furniture, tableware, jewelry and pottery) within cultures.
- Analyze and demonstrate the stylistic characteristics of culturally representative artworks.
- Connect a variety of contemporary art forms, media and styles to their cultural, historical and social origins.
- Describe ways in which language, stories, folktales, music and artistic creations serve as expressions of culture and influence the behavior of people living in a particular culture.

**Rationale:** I teach a small group self-contained Emotionally Disturbed class. This class has 9-12 grade students. This lesson could easily be used with a larger group or with lower grade levels. I would teach this lesson to expose my students to a part of Chinese culture. I want my students to learn about art forms they may have never learned about before. Also, I want them to have an appreciation for the work that goes into making objects and to realize that art can become something functional and sellable.

## Teacher Materials Needed:

- Pictures and/or examples of objects that contain Chinese knots.
- Copies of Origin and History of knotting for each student.
- Instructions for each student on how to do each knot.
- Cord ( ½ centimeter thick, not too rigid or pliable, cotton or hemp) in varying colors.
- Beads, pendants and other trinkets to decorate knots.
- Tweezers to help pull cord through cramped knots.
- Cardboard or corkboard piece for each student to help lay out knot patterns.
- Scissors
- Push pins to anchor cord onto the cardboard/corkboard.
- Needle and thread to finish knot – keeps it from slipping out.

## Student Materials Needed:

- Instructions on how to tie each knot.
- Origin and History of knotting reading passage.
- Piece of cardboard/corkboard
- Push pins

**Length of Time Needed for Lesson:** 2-3 class periods of 45 minutes

## Instructional Procedures:

- Show students pictures and/or examples of objects that contain Chinese knots.
- Ask students to guess which country makes objects with knots of this type. Have a discussion about them being Chinese knots and how much work the students feel it would take to make objects such as these.

- As a class, read the about the origin and history of Chinese knotting.
- Show and explain how to do each knot, then have students practice that knot before moving on to the next knot.
  - Basic knots: double coin knot, double connection knot, sauvastika knot, cross knot, cloverleaf knot, good luck knot, button knot, pan chang knot, round brocade knot, plafond knot, and flat knot.
- After students feel confident in the basic knots, have each student choose a compound knot to try to do on their own. (Students will need to add any beads or decoration at the appropriate time in the knotting).
  - Compound knots: ju i knot, brocade ball knot, dragonfly knot, long pan chang knot, fish knot, ten-accord knot and dragon knot.
- Have students write a paragraph about how Chinese knotting is an expression of Chinese culture, as well as the role and function of objects that contain Chinese knotting.

**Differentiated Instruction:** Visual – students will learn how to tie knots by looking at instructions, pictures and teacher demonstration. Auditory – students will hear the steps to complete each knot. Kinesthetic – students will tie knots.

**Assessment:**

- Students will be assessed on following directions when knotting.
- Students will be assessed on their paragraph.

**Resources:**

Chen, Lydia. (2003). *Chinese Knotting: Creative designs that are easy and fun!*. Boston, MA: Tuttle Publishing.

Hibbert, Clare. (2005). *Chinese Art & Culture*. Chicago, IL: Raintree.

<http://www.chineseknotting.org/>

<http://webpages.charter.net/yvonnechang/knots/12-basicknots.htm>

<http://www.ezlearnchinese.com/knotting.html>

<http://chineseknots.net/>

## Origin and History of Chinese Knotting

The first hint of the earliest Chinese knots dates back to the late Paleolithic age, about seventy to a hundred thousand years ago. Archaeologists have found artifacts in caves, including instruments with holes in the end. Archaeologists found that they were used for sewing, implying that thread and some form of knotting must have existed at that time.

Evidence has been found that leads to the conclusion that knots were cherished as symbols and were also an essential part of everyday life. Chinese gentlemen of the Chou Dynasty (1112-256 B.C.) carried a tool called a *hsi*. The *hsi* was a device used to untie intricate knots on attire. The fact that the *hsi* was common to all adult wardrobes tells us that knots were abundant in the Chou Dynasty, as commonplace as watches are today.

People wore long robes with flowing sleeves (both men and women), which had to be fastened at the waist with knotted sashes. Household objects in ancient China also made use of knots. Bronze mirrors had rings on the back so that they could be tied to the walls by knotted cords. Unfortunately, cord fibers often rot away quickly, often leaving no evidence for later generations to study.

Knots have even been referenced in literary works. The first ruler of the early sixth century state of Liang, Wu Ti, mentions the true lover's knot in a poem. The poem states: "I dreamed the silk cords at our waists / were bound together in a true lover's knot". This knot is tied in an endlessly repeating pattern and symbolizes romance and affection. Some men have even been known to seal several true lover's knots in a box and send them to a woman to display their affection. Two popular songs even were made that mentioned this knot.

Decorative knotting played an important role in the lives of early Chinese. Not only did the knots embellish personal attire, but were also used as symbols of love and affection or for religious concepts. Long ago, the tying of these knots, was considered to be a necessary skills for all unmarried women to master. The techniques were passed down orally from grandmother to mother to daughter, right along with spinning, weaving, and sewing. Knotting was a mundane part of life, and was a skill common to most women.

Today, knotting is again becoming a widespread hobby. People are rediscovering the artistic satisfaction, relaxation and beautiful personalized ornamentation knotting can offer. Some practitioners have not only learned and shared knots of the old, they have also invented new knots. Some people have even started experimenting with new materials, such as cotton, hemp, synthetic fibers, leather and fishing line. This promises to add a new and exciting dimension to this ancient craft.

