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Korea: A Study of the Seokguram Grotto and the Buddha Project

Purpose: Students will study and analyze various Buddha's from around the world.

Essential Questions:

1. How is the Buddha portrayed across Asia?
2. What comparisons can be made among Buddhist sites and sculptures?
3. How has Buddhism traveled from India?

Rationale: Buddhism should be recognized by students as a major world religion.

Materials:

Map of the Silk Road
Copies of a blank map of Asia and a projected map (perhaps using a Smart Board if available)
Handouts of the Sokkuram Grotto and explanations of the Buddha Project
Student produced handouts

Activities

My students will have prior knowledge of the Indian origins of Buddhism because this will act as an extension to our unit on India and Eastern Religions. This knowledge will be needed prior to beginning this lesson.

1. Hand out map of the Silk Road. Discuss how this contributed to the spread of Buddhism into China which in turn led to Buddhism becoming a part of the culture throughout Southeast Asia.
2. Teacher does Model Presentation using Seokguram Grotto in South Korea (see attached information)
3. Pass out Buddha Presentation Assignment (see attached sample assignment)
4. There are many sites a teacher could assign to students. Some are listed below. Also, depending upon class size, this could be an individual or small group project.
 - Hoodo of the Byodo-in Temple at Uji, Japan
 - Miroku of the Chugu-ji nunnery near Nara (Japan)
 - Longmen Caves in Luoyang (China)
 - Buddha from Gal Vikara near Polonnaruwa (Sri Lanka)
 - Gilded Bronze Buddhas of the Silla (Korea)
 - Buddhas of Borobudur, Chandi Mendut, Chandi Pawon (Java)
 - Colossal Buddha at Banriyan, Afghanistan
 - Leshan Buddha near Chengdu, Sichuan Province (China)
 - There are many other sites in India, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam that you could add to the list as needed. (The oriental architecture website provides an excellent list of all types of art in Asia.)

5. After presentations, teachers could use the Smart Board to make an interactive map with the students of all the locations that they researched. If technology is lacking, a map transparency could work just as well.

Assesment: The presentation on each Buddhist site is the main assessment. However, I would also recommend assigning an essay as a culminating activity. Perhaps, the students could write an essay in which students must explain and evaluate the most important Buddhist sites presented.

Grade Adaptation: Target Audience: Grades 9-12 Humanities Class

A teacher could eliminate or increase the sophistication of the writing assignment based on the ability level of their class.

Younger students could write about just their site in a research-based essay.

State Standards: For English: Research, Communication, Writing Applications
For History: Geography, People in Societies, History

Works Consulted

Amster, Martin, ed. From Silk to Oil: Cross-Cultural Connections along the Silk Road. China Institute, 2005.

Miller, Jeffrey. "Sokkuram Buddha: An Unforgettable Likeness of Being." 1 October 2003. The Korean Times. 6 March 2006.

<http://times.hankooki.com/lpage/culture/200310/kt2003100118535811000.htm>

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http://www.ocp.go.kr/english/treasure/dom_sgr.html#4

"Seokguram Grotto." 2005. Asian Historical Architecture. 6 March 2006.

<http://www.orientalarchitecture.com/kyongju/seokguramindex.htm>

Tansey, Richard G. and Fred S. Kleiner. Gardner's Art through the Ages. 10th ed. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1996.

"World Heritage Seokguram." 1996. Haein Stone Company. 8 March 2006.

<http://seokjae.com/eng/seokguram/main.htm>

Seokguram Grotto



Location: Kyongju, South Korea

Near the summit of Mt. Tohamsan overlooking the East Sea

Historical Context: Buddhism was first introduced in Korea by China in 372 CE.

- The grotto constructed during Korea's Golden Age of Silla.
- Construction began in 742 and remains the only wholly intact building from the Silla era
- Served a religious function but also looked upon as a protective force against the external threat of Japan (looks over the underwater tomb of King Munmu, which is known to have been built to resist Japanese invasion)

Mythical Origins: **see Legend of a Filial son on World Heritage website**

Dae-seong—

- originally born into poverty but dies shortly after giving his rice field to the local monastery
- due to this action, he is reborn into a wealthy family but is looked after by his previous mother and maintains his same name because the name is marked in his palm after birth
- Later in life, he builds the beautiful temple Bulguksa in memory of his parents of the present life and the wonderful cave temple of Seokguram for his parents of the previous life.
- “After the great stone Buddha for Seokguram was finished, Dae-seong was working on a large piece of stone for the ceiling of the main hall when it suddenly broke into three pieces (to signify the Three Kingdoms). He wept bitterly over this and fell into sleep. During the night, gods descended from heaven and restored the stone to its original condition. Dae-seong awoke with joy and climbed the southern peak of Mt. Tohamsan, where he burned incense and worshiped the deities. People called the place Hyangnyong,

or Incense peak, thereafter.” It is said you can still see the marks of where the stone was mended today.

Construction:

- Grotto is completely man-made
 - consists of a square front room, a short, narrow hallway, and a back round room that holds the Buddha
- hundreds of pieces of granite of various shapes and sizes were assembled to form the cave—no mortar was used but stones are held together with stone rivets.
- Buddha—Sakyamuni Buddha (at the point of enlightenment)
 - a single block of granite 3.5 meters high
 - he sits on a lotus-petaled pedestal that is 1.34 meters high
- The Buddha is surrounded by other deities and bodhisattvas carved in relief as well as three-dimensional sculptures placed in niches around the room.

Rediscovered:

- Left abandoned for many centuries until rediscovered in 1909 by a traveling postman who happened upon it by chance. He was seeking shelter during a thunderstorm in what he thought was a cave. Upon lighting a candle, he discovered the Buddha.

Preservation:

- Several failed preservation attempts by the Japanese who were ruling Korea at the time.
 - 1913-15—adding concrete to the structure causing water leaks and erosion
 - 1917—drainage pipes but leaks continue
 - 1920-23—waterproof asphalt attempted to no avail
 - 1927—sprayed hot steam on the granite to reduce moss
 - 1961-64—UNESCO completed major renovations and installed air conditioning and heating to maintain temperature and prevent damage.
 - 1995—UNESCO names it a World Heritage Site making it one of Korea’s most important historical sites.

The Buddha Project

Just as we have been investigating images of the Buddha throughout India and most recently, South Korea, you will now research a Buddhist site of your own.

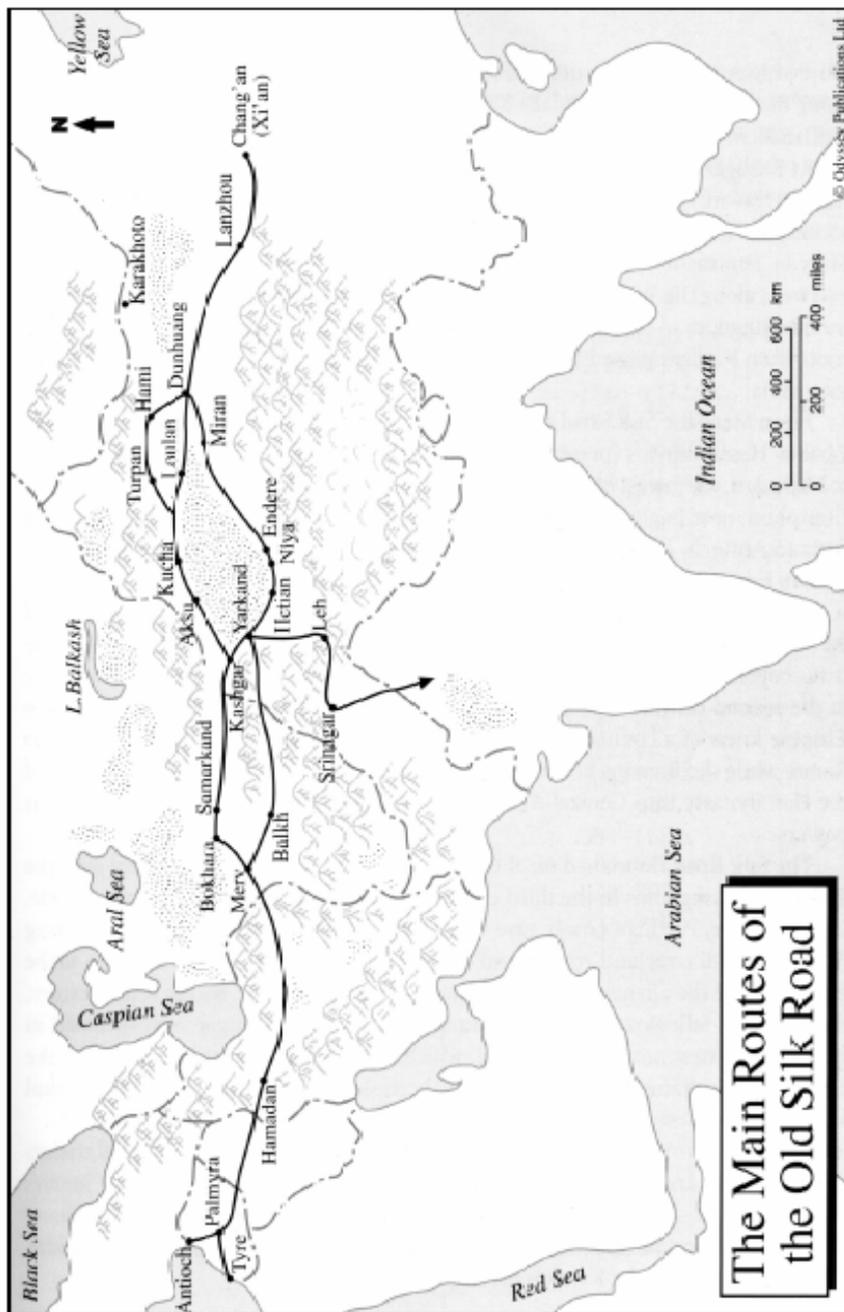
Procedure and Requirements:

1. Research your assigned Buddhist site with your group members. (Remember not to rely just on the Internet; take a look in Art History books as well as reference books.)
2. Prepare a presentation for the class in which you share the following information about your image of the Buddha.
 - Historical context of its creation—where is it located, who made it, when was it created
 - Other major elements of the site—basic environment, how it was constructed, media used
 - When was the piece rediscovered or has it remained continually important since its creation?
 - Preservation techniques—attempted successfully or unsuccessfully
 - How does this statue compare to other Buddhist art we have been studying in class?
3. Create a handout for your classmates with the image on it and room so that students can take notes from your presentation

Remember that you will be evaluated on your presentation skills, your information provided, and the handout created.

Map D
From Chang'an (Modern Xi'an In China) to the Middle East—Places Along the Silk Roads

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From Chang'an (Modern Xi'an In China) to the Middle East—Places Along the Silk Roads



Source: From Judy Bonavia, 1988. *The Silk Road—From Xi'an to Kashgar*. Odyssey Publications Ltd.