

## **Feng Shui for the Budding Interior Decorator**

NCTA East Asian Seminar

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### **Purpose:**

Home design and interior decorating vary by culture and often reflect deep-rooted beliefs.

### **Essential Questions:**

1. What is Feng Shui?
2. How has the art of Feng Shui changed over the years and how has it been perceived in East Asia and beyond?
3. How can using the principles of Feng Shui, according to modern interior decorators, improve your living environment and influence your life according to the ancient Chinese art?

### **Rationale:**

Upon entering high school, teens often wish to demonstrate that they are growing out of childhood and developing an independent sense of self. One manifestation of this is redecorating their rooms. Capitalizing on this desire enables teachers to introduce some of the uses and underlying beliefs associated with the ancient Chinese art of Feng Shui.

### **Materials:**

1. For the history of Feng Shui, use Wikipedia online encyclopedia at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feng\\_Shui](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feng_Shui)
2. Bruun, Ole (2002). "The Fengshui Resurgence in China." In T. Buoye, K. Denton, B. Dickson, B. Naughton, & M. Whyte (Eds.). *China: Adapting the past, confronting the future*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan.
3. *Feng shui for dummies* (Kennedy, 2001) or any of the books written on the subject.
4. Do a search on "Feng Shui" and a search on "Feng Shui images" to yield a variety of Web sites on interior decorating, such as <http://www.webterrace.com/fengshui/>.
5. Handouts on yin and yang, the five elements, the meaning of colors, the Bagua or Nine Life Areas.
6. Scoring Guide for the assessment.

### **Activities:**

Ask students to think about a place (indoors or out) where they feel comfortable, at peace, or focused. In pairs or small groups, have them describe their spaces to each other and tell why the space is good for them.

Introduce the concept of Feng Shui (pronounced fung shway, meaning wind and water). [What follows is a very brief summary. Please consult resources before continuing with students.] It is the ancient Chinese art of improving every aspect of one's life by enhancing one's environment according to the principles of harmony and energy flow. Traditional Feng Shui is rooted in beliefs about where to bury the dead, the position of imperial palaces, and agriculture (the south slope is most favorable to growth) based on

China's geography and the position of the stars at various times. Geomancers from 6000 BCE on have relied on a variety of tools to give such counsel. Beliefs from the Daoist view of creation (there was chaos; through a force (dao), yin and yang came to be; the five elements, through an organic fashion of evolution, created myriad things) and from eastern philosophies surrounding the relationship between the three Realms of Influence (Heaven, Human, and Earth) also find their way into the principles of Feng Shui. Thus, decorating according to Feng Shui has many variations! [CAUTION: Throughout this lesson, ensure that you relate modern iterations back to the traditional underpinnings so that students do not come away with a trivialized understanding of the art.]

In the computer lab, or with materials that you have downloaded, have students research the history of Feng Shui, including its roots in astronomy, how Feng Shui came to the U.S., and how it is viewed in China and elsewhere in East Asia these days. Have all students research all aspects of the above or assign subtopics to small groups of students. Have students jot down notes during their research.

Have students read the chapter entitled "The Fengshui Resurgence in China." (Do a search on the author if you do not have access to the book. He has written widely on the topic.) Again, you may want all students to read the entire chapter or assign subsections to groups of students.

Lead a class discussion on the traditional uses of Feng Shui and how it has been viewed through the ages based on students' research and the chapter, above.

Have students quickly sketch out their bedrooms, including the location of the door, bed, furniture, mirrors, and windows. Next, ask several students if they have objects, such as candles, plants, a fish tank or a mini fountain. Ask a few students what color their bedrooms are. Finally, have students jot down two things they like about their bedrooms and two things they'd like to change.

Have students research modern interior decorating based on Feng Shui through books, such as *Feng Shui for dummies* or Web sites. There are various handouts provided in this lesson plan on yin and yang, the five elements, the Bagua or Octagon of Nine Life Areas, and the meaning of colors to show how the environment may be manipulated to increase harmony and energy flow should you choose to use them. In conjunction with each concept, have students evaluate how aligned or misaligned their current room arrangements are. Have them note changes they'd like to make to achieve greater harmony and energy flow. Have them discuss minor changes in pairs (e.g., colors) and major changes in groups of three or four (e.g., five elements, Bagua). [NOTE: Focus on such terms as feng, shui, yin and yang, qi, the five elements, the Bagua, and colors during class time and have them do further research at home or in the library based on their personal interests.]

Lead a discussion comparing the traditional uses of and beliefs about Feng Shui with what students have found out about decorating with Feng Shui today.

After their research and discussions, have students reorganize their rooms based on Feng Shui principles and tell why they are doing so in an accompanying descriptive narrative. See assessment, below.

**Assessment:**

You want to give your room a makeover, but need to convince your parents why you'd like to do so using Feng Shui principles.

- Briefly explain the history, purpose and terms used in Feng Shui, including feng, shui, yin and yang, and qi.
- Draw your room the way you would like to reorganize it and put the Octagon of Nine Life Areas in correctly. Explain at least two of the life areas to your parents. (Hint: Choose ones they'd like to see you improve!)
- List the five elements and describe why each might be important to include in your room. Then, suggest some items you'd like to put in your room that might fit with each of the elements.
- Choose three colors you'd like to use in your room and explain why. (Remember, you'll need to re-evaluate your Feng Shui every so often so choose your items of color carefully to avoid costly make-overs!)
- Explain why two items or life areas are already in alignment with your current room arrangement and why two need to be changed.
- Finally, give a personal reaction to your new room arrangement.

Use the scoring guide to award points.

**Grade Adaptation:**

This lesson targets Grade 9.

For seniors, change the assessment context so that they are designing a home or decorating their future dorm rooms or apartments. Include the interaction of elements, life areas, and colors in the lesson and assessment and add cures to increase the cognitive demands.

For lower grades, treat the elements, colors, and life areas as separate lessons and reduce the amount of explanation in the assessment.

**State Standards:**

**Visual Arts**

**Standard:** Historical, Cultural and Social Contexts

**Benchmark:** Explain ways in which selected, contemporary works of art relate to the themes, issues and events of their contexts.

**Indicator 3:** Research and describe the cultural values in various traditions that influence contemporary art media.

**Standard:** Connections: Relationships and Applications

**Benchmark B.** Formulate and solve a visual art problem using strategies and perspectives from other disciplines.

**Indicator 3:** Research and provide examples that show the relationship of visual art to other subjects in the curriculum (e.g., English language arts, mathematics, social studies and science).

**Social Studies**

**Standard:** Peoples in Societies

**Benchmark C:** Analyze the ways that contacts between people of different cultures result in exchanges of cultural practices.

**Indicator 3:** Explain how advances in communication and transportation have impacted:

- a. Globalization;
- b. Cooperation and conflict;
- c. The environment;
- d. Collective security;
- e. Popular culture;
- f. Political systems;
- g. Religion.

## Yin and Yang

The ancient Chinese believed that the universe was composed of two complementary, opposing qualities, yin and yang. These two essences are found in the three categories of Heaven, Earth, and Human. Feng Shui derived from intense study of how these interconnected categories could be manipulated and influenced. Too much yang, for example, could be disturbing, causing a loss of peace and harmony. Too much yin could make one overly subdued and lethargic. Notice how these qualities are not neatly divided, but flow fluidly.



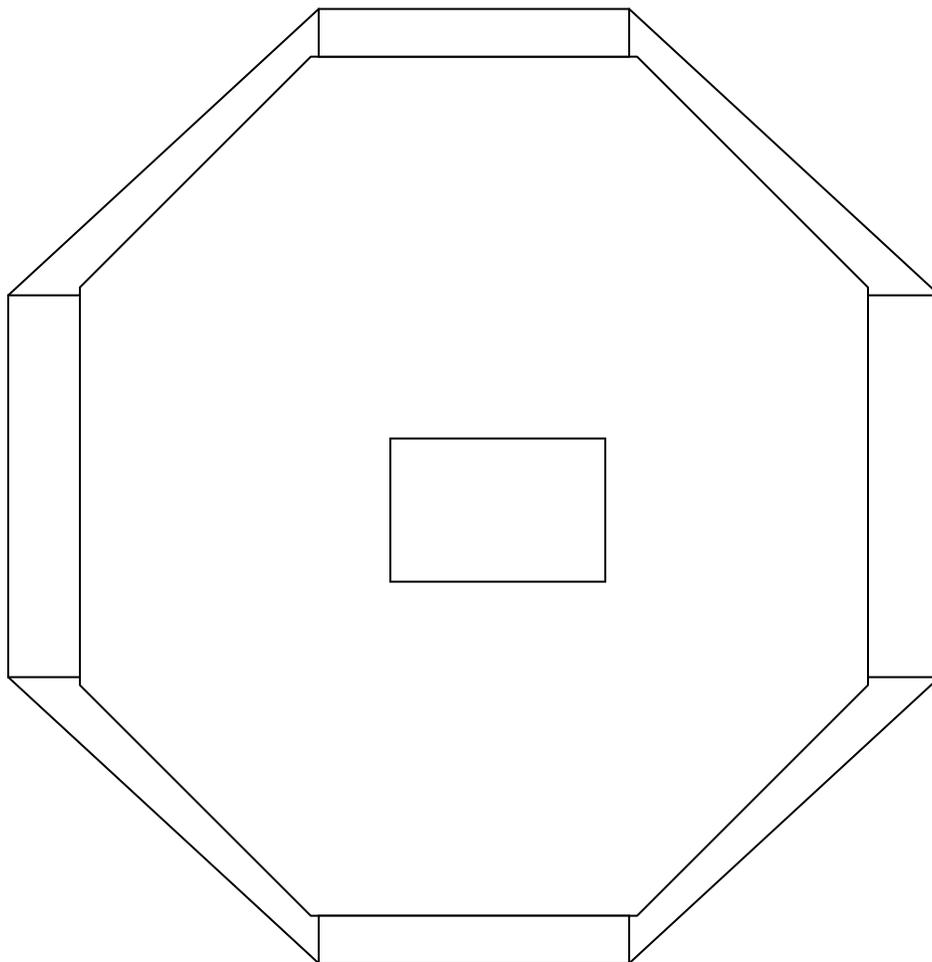
<b>Yin Characteristics</b>	<b>Yang</b>
Black fish with white eye. More passive side of nature. The more “feminine side.” Connect with family. More serene, quiet, receptive, passive, private. Silence, rest, darkness, inwardness. Associated with the back part of the house.	White fish with black eye. More active side of nature. The more “masculine side.” Connect with world. More active, loud, hard, projecting. Brightness. Associated with the front part of the house.

**The Nine Life Areas of the Octagon  
The Bagua (Bah gwah)**

<b>Life Areas</b>	<b>What It Symbolizes</b>
<b>Career</b>	Your job, passage of life.
<b>Wisdom &amp; Knowledge</b>	Learning, knowledge, or study.
<b>Health &amp; Family</b>	Physical and emotional health; ancestors; current family, friends, coworkers.
<b>Wealth</b>	Money or anything else that makes you feel “wealthy” or blessed.
<b>Fame &amp; Reputation</b>	How the world sees you.
<b>Love &amp; Marriage</b>	Personal relationships, such as those between husband and wife, business partners, and good friends.
<b>Children and creativity</b>	Children, current projects, or anything creative.
<b>Helpful People</b>	Relationships with people other than your intimate family and friends, such as a stranger who touched your life; a mentor at work; your priest, rabbi, or other spiritual guide.
<b>Health, Center, or Chi</b>	Harmonizes all the areas together. Health and longevity. Keep uncluttered.

Adapted from Feng Shui for Dummies (2001) and [www.webterrace.com/fengshui/](http://www.webterrace.com/fengshui/)

Sample Octagon



## The Meaning of Colors

Color	What It Symbolizes
Black	Power, authority, absorbing energy, respect
Blue	Knowledge, the sky, royalty, life, hope
Gray	Neutrality, absence of color, hidden things, benefactors
Green	New life, new beginnings, growth, energy, vitality, spring, hope
Pink	Love, romance
Purple	Wealth, royalty, spiritual guidance
Red	Attraction, warmth, strength, power, protection, energy
White	Cleanliness, purity, righteousness, death
Yellow and earth tones	Energy, life, health, the earth, ground, connection

Combined from *Feng Shui for Dummies* (Kennedy, 2001) and [www.webterrace.com/fengshui/](http://www.webterrace.com/fengshui/)

## The Five Elements and What They Symbolize

Wood=growth, expansion, vitality, new beginnings. Like adding a touch of spring to feel young, energetic, and motivated. Good in the Family Area of the Octagon.
Fire=expansion, upward, burning, hot energy; maximum expansiveness and activity, the peak of energetic intensity. Good in the Fame Area of the Octagon.
Earth=stability, balance, grounded, centered, connected. Good in the Health Area of the Octagon.
Metal=contraction; cold, dense energy associated with communication; creativity; detail; symbols; signals; noise. Good in Children's Area of the Octagon.
Water=Stillness, maximum concentration, energy of things moving downward and coming to rest. Good in the Career Area of the Octagon.

Adapted from *Feng Shui for Dummies* (Kennedy, 2001).

### Scoring Guide for Room Makeover

	<b>Possible Points</b>	<b>Points Earned</b>
Thorough and accurate explanation of the history, purpose, and terms used in Feng Shui, including feng, shui, yin and yang, and qi.	<b>9</b> <b>6</b> <b>5</b>	
Neat drawing of room	<b>5</b>	
Octagon of Nine Life Areas (Bagua) placed correctly.	<b>5</b>	
Thorough and accurate explanation of two life areas.	<b>6</b>	
All five elements included.	<b>5</b>	
Explanation of why it is important to include all five is thorough and accurate.	<b>15</b>	
Items suggested for room fit with elements.	<b>5</b>	
Three colors chosen.	<b>3</b>	
Explanation of why colors were chosen is thorough and accurate.	<b>6</b>	
Explanation of why two items or life areas are already in alignment and why two need to be changed is accurate and complete.	<b>8</b>	
Personal reaction to new room arrangement.	<b>2</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>80</b>	

