

## Chinese Art/ Botanical Motifs

**Purpose:** This lesson is intended to introduce students to Chinese Art and how artists used botanical motifs.

**Essential questions:**

How did Chinese artist use plant life to create work with deeper meaning?

What is the difference between plant images that are realistic and those that are stylized?

Do flowers and plants have the same or different meaning for western and eastern people?

How do flowers get there meanings?

**Rationale:** To increase a student's understanding and appreciation of Chinese art and design, while Expose them to non western reasons for object production and decoration.

**Materials:** Slides of Chinese Art that have botanical decoration for opening lecture and projector.

Supplies for projects:

white drawing paper or watercolor paper, 12x18, one sheet per student

pencils for sketching and layout

watercolors, brushes and dishes for water

30-60 plant life images for resource material, real plants and flowers would be very good, also.

colored paper and glue sticks for mounting finished works

box templates for alternative project

**Activities:** Introductory lesson with slides of botanical motifs in Chinese Art. Slide lecture would present a historical over view and examination of botany found in Chinese art and an explanation of plants and their meanings.

Second lesson, a watercolor demonstration could include basic skills for using watercolors successfully, as well as some Chinese brush techniques.

Lesson three, have students choose a functional object from their own lives and reinterpret it as a 2 dimensional image with the surface decorated with plants and or flowers. Students could choose to use flowers with special meanings that they like or that enhances the objects meaning of use. Finished works would be cut out and mount on color paper for display.

An alternative project would be for students to cover the outside of a box with botanical patterning. then have students cut out box and assemble. Though any box pattern could work the traditional Chinese take-out box would be interesting.

Lesson five students explain their choices of botanical imagery and its meanings to the class along with a general class critic of works on issues of technique, craftsmanship and general art principal such as balance repetition and composition.

**Assessment:** Lesson five would serve as the students' main source of assessment. student projects would have to meet established criteria for a passing grade. Possible criteria would include:  
Technique, craftsmanship and general use of watercolor.

composition  
Displaying good use of the principal of design, such as balance, repetition and

Personal statement (explanation) about their imagery work.

**Grade Adaptation:** This project can be done with children as young as second grade, but I would recommend starting with just practicing painting images of plants and flowers with watercolors.

Slide information taken from an accompanying script of pre-tour slides of work from an exhibition called "The Hundred Flowers: Botanical Motifs in Chinese Art," at the Columbus Museum of art Oct-Nov/1987

\_\_\_\_\_Plants and flowers play a very important role in the decoration of both art objects and daily utensils in China. While these plants and flowers are sometimes just decoration, more often they are representing hidden meanings and symbolize a wish for all good things in life.

Slide 1 Famille Rose Vase of the "Hundred Flowers" Qing dynasty (early 17th cent.)

The spectacular design on the vase is known as "hundred flower." In China having many flowers in bloom is a good omen. This design was first used about 250 years ago and continues to symbolize a wish for good luck on Chinese porcelain today. This vase was painted in one color and then decorated all over using enamels, a kind of paint in which color or pigments are mixed with powdered glass and then fired in a kiln

Slide 2 Carved Cinnabar Lacquer Incense Box by Zhang Cheng Yuan dynasty (mid 14th cent.)

\_\_\_\_\_A gardenia in relief on a background of stylized clouds decorate this box. The border around the sides is know as lei-wen or the thunder pattern since it resembles the ancient character for thunder. Lacquer is the sap from the sumac tree and has been used for over 3000 years for decorative purposes in China. The red color is achieved by adding cinnabar, which is a form of mercury, to the colorless lacquer. The process is one of building many layers on a core of wood or cloth.

Slide 3 Porcelain Plate with Gardinia Ming dynasty (1408-1505)

This porcelain plate is also decorated with a gardenia which is associated with summer. This fragrant flower is often wore by women in their hair. The other plant life seen here are stylized images of grapes, pomegranates and the lotus. This yellow glaze is known as imperial yellow for it was this particular yellow glaze used on items that were produced for the Emperor's household.

Slide 4 Famille Rose Plate with Tree Peony and Magnolia Qing dynasty (1723-1735)

\_\_\_\_\_The peony is the most popular botanical motif in China and is known as the "king of the flowers." It became a symbol of royalty, because a number of early Chinese rulers grew great numbers of peonies within their palace grounds. This delicate type of ceramic plate is known as porcelain, which was first developed by potters in China.

Slide 5 Porcelain Bowl with Wisteria Qing dynasty (1875-1908)

\_\_\_\_\_The wisteria bush/ tree that decorates this yellow bowl is a favorite of the Chinese, because of its large clusters of butterfly-like blossoms and dragon-like, gnarled and twisted branches. The twining branches are appealing for they are a reminder of the calligrapher's brushstrokes. Calligraphy is the art of beautiful writing.

Slide 6 Vase with Morning Glory Ming dynasty (mid 15th century)

The morning glory decorates this vase and is a vine-like plant which clings to whatever is nearby, Perhaps it is the reason it has become a symbol for marital bliss. The designs on this vase were painted directly onto the clay with cobalt, a blue pigment found in some metals. This type of blue and white ceramics were very popular in China and was exported to other countries.

Slide 7 Familla Rose Bowl with Yangmei Qing dynasty (1723-1735)

\_\_\_\_\_The fruit of the yangmei, an evergreen shrub that grows the the Yanzi River, is round and covered with

wavy granules which range from deep red or purple to grayish white. It can be eaten as is or made into a beverage. Because the yangmei remains green through the winter is symbolizes a long life and old age.

Slide 8 Famille Rose Bowl with Peaches and Bats Qing dynasty (1723-1735)

In ancient times, the peach tree was consider sacred in China and its wood was used as a charm against evil. The peach blossom is symbol for the New Year and the peach itself symbolizes long life and is often used as a birthday greeting when paired with bats.

Slide 9 Jade Water Receptacle in the Shape of a Buddha Hand Citron Ming dynasty (15-17th cent)

This bowl carved to resemble a fruit called a citron. Its shape suggest the fingers of Buddha, an important religious figure to many Chinese. When a citron is used in combination with a peach and pomegranate, they represent "the Three Plenties": long life, happiness and many children. This Buddha Hand Citron is carved jade, a semi-precious stone treasured by the Chinese.

slide 10 Junyao Stoneware Bottle Gourd Vase Yang dynasty (1271 - 1368)

This stoneware vase has been made in the shape of a double gourd, a squash-like plant that represents abundance and good luck.

Slide 11 Jade Tray with Begonias Quig dynast (18th cent.

Legend has it that the begonia, carved into this jade tray, was created by a woman's tears. Weeping in her garden over a lost lover, her constant tears nurtured the begonia to grow and comfort her. This beautiful flower with four pink petals had been used as a surface decoration by the Chinese for centuries.

Slide 12 Jade Plaque Representing the "Three Friends" Quig dynast (18th cent.)

This jade wall decoration is decorated with three plants: the pine, prunus, and bamboo. Because pine and bamboo remain green year-round and the prunus is the first flowers to bloom in early spring, they are known as the "Three Friends of Winter"

Slide 13 Rhinoceros Horn Cup in the Shape of a Pine Tree Ming dynasty (16th- early 17th cent.)

This cup is made from a rhinoceros' horn, which are now extinct in China, but used to be found there. The horns are considered one of the Eight Treasure. a collection of objects which serve as symbols for good things. Rhinoceros horns symbolize happiness and in conjunction with the pine tree's symbol of long life, this cup is wishing the owner a long and happy life.

Slide 14 Gianyao Porcelain Palette in the Shape of a Fungus Quig dynast (136-1795)

This cracked porcelain plate is in the shape of ling-chi, a fungus that resembles mushroom and believed to be the plant of never-ending life.

Slide 15 Enameled Porcelain Dish Quig dynast (late 18th cent)

The screen on this plate is also about ling-chi, the sacred fungus. this is the fairy immortal Magu, wearing peacock feathers and carrying a hoe. Magu has just dug up ling-chi which grows on the roots of some trees. The dear is believes to be the only animal that can find this sacred fungus.

Slide 16 Porcelain Pillow in the Shape of a Child holding a Lotus Leaf Song dynasty (10th-13th cent)

Yes, a ceramic pillow, such pillows were used in the warm months as a cool resting place. A person would rest the back of their neck on the curved part of the pillow. Besides the lotus leaf notice the fern design on the edge of the child's robe and the stylized vine o the side of the bed.

Slide 17      Mynas on a Pine Tree, by Emperor Wuzong      Ming dynasty (16th sent)

The birds on this scroll painting seem to be having an interesting conversation as they perch of a pine branch, a symbol of long life.