

# Classroom Connections

SCHOOL TOUR | *Chinese Collection*

Grade Levels: 6th—12th

The  
Nelson-Atkins  
Museum  
of Art



*Guanyin of the Southern Sea*, China, Liao (907—1125) or Jin Dynasty (1115—1234). Wood with multiple layers of paint, 95 x 66 x 43 1/2 inches. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 34-10.

## CURRICULUM AREAS ADDRESSED IN THIS TOUR:

### *Visual Arts Standards (KS)*

- Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 8: Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

### *Visual Art Standards (MO)*

- Analyze and evaluate art using art vocabulary.
- Explain the connections between Visual Art and Social Studies.

### *History, Government, and Social Studies Standards (KS)*

- The student will recognize and evaluate significant beliefs, contributions, and ideas of many diverse peoples and groups and their impact on individuals, communities, states, and nations.

### *Social Studies Standards (MO)*

- Using a world history lens, describe how peoples' perspectives shaped the sources/artifacts they created.
- Analyze scientific, technological, intellectual, and artistic advancement to determine the legacy of the ancient civilizations.
- Describe how a people's culture is expressed through their art, architecture, and literature.

## TOUR DESCRIPTION:

During this tour, students will explore the rich and enduring visual culture of China. Through active looking and inquiry-driven discussions, students will discover how Chinese art from a variety of time periods reflects political, religious, and technological developments that have shaped Chinese civilization.

## TOUR OBJECTIVES:

- Students will recognize that visual art and material culture can teach us about the civilization that produced them.
- Students will make connections between art objects and aspects of Chinese history.
- Students will appreciate the achievements of Chinese civilization.

---

4525 Oak Street  
Kansas City, Missouri 64111  
[nelson-atkins.org](http://nelson-atkins.org)

To schedule a tour:  
[nelson-atkins.org/educators/school-tours](http://nelson-atkins.org/educators/school-tours)

## BEFORE YOUR VISIT

### *Consider Art as a Primary Source*

During their tour, students will consider what we can learn about Chinese civilization by studying the art objects it has produced. Have students practice this mode of thinking with an art object of their own time and place. Invite each student to choose something found in their home or school. If historians living 1,000 years from now were to discover that object, what might it tell them about American culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

### *Explore an Ancient Chinese Tomb*

Many of the works students will view in the museum's Chinese collection were used in burial rituals or placed in tombs. Discover what ancient Chinese tombs looked like on the inside by exploring a 3-D digital recreation of a Han Dynasty mausoleum, viewable at [tombtreasures.asianart.org](http://tombtreasures.asianart.org).

### *Distinguish Dynasties*

Students may encounter works from the Shang, Zhou, Han, Tang, Ming, and Qing dynasties during their visit to the Nelson-Atkins. Encourage them to learn more about what makes each of these periods of Chinese history unique. Divide students into pairs or small groups, and assign each of them a different dynasty to research. Consider: What was life like in China under that dynasty? How did it differ from those that came before or after it? What notable innovations, events, or individuals are associated with that dynasty? After gathering information from web or library sources, students can present what they have learned to their classmates.

### *Connect with a Kit*

Our Art Connection Kits provide a hands-on introduction to different parts of the museum's collections. The China kit contains books, posters, and a variety of multisensory materials, including music, fragrances, and traditional art-making tools. Check out a kit from the ERC before your visit, and invite students to explore its contents as they consider what each component might tell us about life in ancient China.

## AFTER YOUR VISIT

### *Reflect & Apply Knowledge*

If students became familiar with dynasties through classwork or through the *Distinguish Dynasties* pre-visit activity, invite them to apply what they have learned. Divide students into pairs or small groups and assign each group a different dynasty. Instruct them to reflect on the works they saw on the tour and to choose one work that they think best exemplifies the dynasty in which it was made. Groups can then share their selections and their reasoning with the class.

### *Compare Across Cultures*

After seeing *Guanyin of the Southern Sea* during their tour, students can compare this Chinese sculpture of a bodhisattva with a similar one made in a different place and time. Display an image of *The Bodhisattva Maitreya* (viewable online at [bit.ly/2xBV5zR](http://bit.ly/2xBV5zR)) and an image of *Guanyin of the Southern Sea* (viewable online at [bit.ly/3805o0j](http://bit.ly/3805o0j)). Explain that Buddhism spread to China about 500 years after its development in India. These sculptures—one made in Pakistan or Afghanistan in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. and one made in China around the 11<sup>th</sup> century C.E.—show that Buddhism flourished in both cultures, even though each had its own style and imagery. How are the two sculptures similar? How are they different?

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS RELATED TO CHINESE ART

**Ancestor worship:** The ritualistic expression of family continuity that formed the basis of the ancient Chinese worldview. Familial relationships and identities continue to underpin Chinese society today.

**Bodhisattva:** In Buddhism, a compassionate being who has achieved or is progressing toward enlightenment but has chosen to refrain from entering nirvana in order to offer aid to all other beings seeking that goal.

**Buddhism:** A religion based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, also called Shakyamuni; it centers on following a path that will lead to the cessation of rebirth, suffering, and attachment. Buddhism developed in India around the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. and spread to China starting in the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E.

**Calligraphy:** The art of handwritten lettering. In China, it has traditionally been accorded even higher status than other visual art forms.

**Cast bronze:** A metal alloy (mostly copper) that is heated, poured into a mold, and then cooled to its final state. The Shang Dynasty is particularly known for its achievements in bronze casting.

**Ceramic:** An object made from clay that has been hardened through baking. China's ceramics tradition dates back millennia and has been influential both within Asia and beyond.

**Confucianism:** A system of beliefs and practices based on the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius, who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. and emphasized the importance of morality and respect for social order to maintain harmony in the world. It became the official state ideology of China during the Han Dynasty.

**Daoism:** A religious and philosophical movement that developed in China alongside Confucianism and taught that discipline and control only distort or repress one's natural instinct to flow with the natural stream of existence.

**Dynasty:** A series of rulers who are members of the same family or clan.

**Enlightenment:** In Buddhism, an awakening to a complete and perfect awareness of the true nature of the universe.

**Guanyin:** The Chinese bodhisattva who embodies compassion.

**Jade:** A hard stone (actually two distinct minerals, jadeite and nephrite) that has long been prized in China for its beauty and other physical and spiritual properties.

**Joinery:** Wooden components made to fit together to form a building, piece of furniture, or other object.

**Ming qi:** Figures, often made of earthenware or metal, that represent people, animals, and furnishings a person might have enjoyed in life and which were placed in ancient Chinese tombs for the dead to have in the afterlife.

**Scholar-official:** A Chinese government worker who had to pass a difficult qualification exam and who administered the emperor's commands and laws throughout the empire.

**Social order:** The division of society by rank or class.

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES

### ***Masterworks of Chinese Art: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*** Colin Mackenzie, Ph.D.

This book includes images and detailed descriptions of some of the highlights of the Chinese collection at the Nelson-Atkins. Available in the ERC.

### ***Chinese Art: A Guide to Motifs and Visual Imagery*** By Patricia Bjaaland Welch

This guide serves as a handy reference for determining the significance of designs, symbols, and rebuses used in Chinese art. Available in the ERC.

### ***Chinese Dynasties, Parts One and Two: The Shang Dynasty through the Qing Dynasty*** By Waka Takahashi Brown and Selena Lai

An extensive two-part curriculum guide, this resource was created by the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education and provides images, background information, and lesson plans related to Chinese art and history. It is most appropriate for grades 5—12. Available in the ERC.

### ***The Story of China*** Maya Vision International for PBS, written and presented by Michael Wood

A 6-episode PBS documentary, this DVD set gives a good overview of the history and culture of China from its earliest written records to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Available in the ERC.

### ***Asia for Educators*** The Weatherhead East Asian Institute at Columbia University [afe.easia.columbia.edu](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu)

This website offers detailed essays, timelines, videos, and other multimedia content aimed at supporting educators of all levels who teach about Asia.

### ***Asian Art Museum: Education*** [education.asianart.org](http://education.asianart.org)

The Asian Art Museum in San Francisco offers lesson plans, hi-res images, and extensive multimedia content related to a variety of Asian cultures and their artistic traditions.



## EDUCATOR RESOURCE CENTER

The ERC can help you expand your pre- and post-visit activities to connect students' museum experience with your classroom curriculum. The ERC offers:

- Curriculum consultations
- Circulating resources, including hands-on Art Connection Kits
- Professional development workshops

Visit [nelson-atkins.org/educators/resources](http://nelson-atkins.org/educators/resources) for info.