

## China through the Arts Supplementary Lesson

### Han Bedtime Stories

In the course of this lesson, students will learn about one method of acculturation, passing along cultural ideas through the use of storytelling. The students will also make motivational connections between their lives and the curriculum while practicing artistic and writing process skills through writing their own stories for teaching lessons.

This week long lesson, designed for sixth grade students studying ancient China, could also be useful in high school when reviewing Chinese philosophy or to contrast with how cultural standards are maintained in the twentieth century. It may be used in its entirety or in part.

**Materials:** Student copies of “Mommy, tell me a story”  
A copy of the fairy tale chart on overhead (optional)  
Sample illustration of an allegorical artwork  
Art materials for creating allegorical artwork

**Vocabulary:** Han dynasty, Confucian, commission, allegorical, chun-tzu, mandate of heaven, usurp

#### Day 1

##### (1) Distribute “Mommy, tell me a story...”

- Read about the use of bedtime stories in Han China as a means of passing along the values of the Confucian culture, and the story of the Duke of Zhou.
- With higher level students, you may wish to pause and discuss “allegorical” stories and artwork in which the characters and events symbolize truths about human life. Students may enjoy comparing and contrasting or giving examples from other cultures (i.e. parables).
- Answer the questions, discussing the lessons that the story would teach to children in ancient China. Further, discuss why stories are used to pass along the rules of society instead of lectures.

##### (2) Storytelling teaches lessons in all cultures

- Next, discuss how stories are used in many cultures to teach lessons. Even though they may not realize it, they have been learning the same types of lessons as they grew up! Some stories they may have forgotten or may not realize the message they told.

- Recall the story of Cinderella asking a volunteer to summarize its basic form. What is the “moral” of the story? Ask students from other cultures to share their versions of the story. Compare and contrast the similarities. Finally, have students fill in the “moral” of Cinderella on their charts.
- In their groups they will finish the chart, deciding what the other fairy tales listed mean, and filling in other stories they know and their corresponding meanings.
- Groups share and discuss their results. Students may add stories to their charts as other groups share.
- If time permits or if you wish, students may act out stories in Tableaux format: a student narrator tells the story before the class, pausing at each key story event to tap a group member on the shoulder. The group member then acts out the portion of the story that the narrator just told, stops, and waits for the narrator to speak and tap another actor.

**(3) Preview the assignment: Write Your Own Bedtime Story**

- Start looking at the next section of the student worksheet packet. Explain that the students should be thinking about values which are important for successful living today. The kinds of values they should be thinking of are the type that they, as older siblings, may pass on to a younger brother or sister. For example, “do your homework,” or “don’t lie.”

**Homework:** Finish brainstorming VALUES important for successful living today (on chart.)

**Day 2**

**(3) Students write their “...Own Bedtime Story”**

Go over the instructions on the “Now Write Your Own Bedtime Story” sheet.

- Their mission is to teach a younger brother or sister a lesson that is important to successful living in American society. First, they will brainstorm what values they feel are important today (they may have completed this for homework.)
- Next, they will use the graphic organizer to expand their ideas, filling in the values in the bubbles, and suggesting story ideas on the lines connected to the bubbles.
- After discussing their ideas as a whole class, in groups or with a peer writing partner, they will choose one of the ideas and write a story, completing the writing process mostly in class.
- You may wish to provide some time to go over the elements of a story.
- Finally, they will illustrate their stories, creating one allegorical artwork which symbolically tells the story.

NOTE: When you explain allegorical artwork, make sure to provide an illustration to further reinforce how the Chinese emperors would remind the citizens of the correct lifestyle values. Explain that in Han China when you walked into a public building, a temple at the side of the road for example, you might see an allegorical artwork of the prosperous Duke of Zhou serving the young emperor and it would remind you of the story.

- For example, either show a picture from a book or draw a quick sketch on the board of three pigs standing beside a houses of straw, sticks and bricks. Tell the students to imagine that they walked into the public library and saw a painting such as this painted on the wall. What would it make them think of? What is the lesson of this story?
- They need to accomplish this in their allegorical artwork. If someone looks at their picture, they should recall the story and its lesson.

**Suggested time line:**

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|-------|--|
| Day 2 | Finish prewriting and start rough draft (steps 1 – 3)          |
| Day 3 | Finish rough draft and self edit (steps 3 – 4)                 |
| Day 4 | Finish self and peer editing and final draft (step 4)          |
| Day 5 | Create allegorical artwork and turn in completed work (step 5) |

## **“Mommy, tell me a story...”**

### **The Duke of Zhou and Other Bedtime Favorites**

In Han China, elders told children bedtime stories to teach the values of the Confucian culture. Instead of nagging the children to “respect your elders” or “obey your parents,” they would tell stories in which characters who acted rightly lived happily or were rewarded. Characters who broke the rules of society suffered the consequences of their evil, antisocial deeds.

To reinforce these lessons throughout a Chinese citizen’s lifetime, the rulers commissioned paintings that illustrated these stories to decorate public buildings. Each allegorical artwork, (a painting which tells a story about the human experience,) represented a story. The paintings reminded people of the stories they learned as children. When they went to a temple, for example, they would see a painting of the Duke of Zhou and remember his story and the lessons it taught...

The Duke of Zhou was the King’s brother and trusted servant—the King’s right hand man. One day the king unexpectedly died leaving his only son heir to the throne. Yet his son was too young to take over as ruler.

Now the Duke could have pushed the young boy aside and taken the position of king for himself. But the Duke was a chun-tzu, a superior human being or gentleman, who respected and lived by Confucian values.

Instead he respected the “mandate of heaven,” the ancient Chinese belief that the heavens selected the appropriate ruler. Greedy, selfish, or unjust people did not qualify. Because the boy’s family was chosen by the heavens to rule, the Duke of Zhou could not question their authority. He knew that if he usurped the throne, he would not have the mandate of heaven. The heavens would destroy him.

Therefore, the Duke raised his nephew as if he were his own son. When the boy became a man, he was given the throne. The Duke lived to be an elderly man who assisted and was well-taken care of by the king. He held the respect, admiration and trust of all.

Questions:

1. What lesson(s) or value(s) did the Duke of Zhou teach?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why didn’t parents simply tell the children, “Now if you’re a good boy, you will grow up to be a respected person”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Why is the use of stories an effective means for passing on the values of a culture?

But the Han Chinese weren't the only people in history who used stories to teach their children the values or rules of society...

The following chart contains some familiar fairy tales. Each of the stories listed was created to teach a valuable lesson to children. In your groups discuss and fill in the chart as you share ideas. What lessons did these stories teach? In the blank spaces provided, list other stories from around the world and describe the values or ideas they taught.

<b>Story</b>	<b>Lesson/Moral of the Story</b>
Cinderella	
The Ugly Little Duckling	
Little Red Riding Hood	

## Now Write Your Own Bedtime Story...

Imagine you are going to teach your younger brother or sister a lesson that they won't forget. What better way than through a story!

**Step 1:** Brainstorm values that you feel are important to successful living in America today.



VALUES

**Step 2:** Select the values you feel are most important. On the chart on the back of this sheet, write the values in the bubbles. At the ends of the lines, suggest ideas for how you could get that point across in a story.

**Step 3:** Pick one story idea which you feel conveys an important lesson or value for living well in America. Write a rough draft of your story.

Step 4: Complete the writing process:

- Self edit
- Peer edit
- Revise
- Create final draft

Step 5: Illustrate your story using allegorical artwork—create one picture which tells your story so that if a viewer were to see it, they would remember your story.

Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_

On the due date, turn in

- 1) This page with your brainstorming on front and back
- 2) Your rough draft with self and peer editing
- 3) Your final draft
- 4) Your allegorical illustration.

