

LESSON PLAN

Batik: Textile Connections from China to Today



Subjects: Social Studies

Grade Level: Middle School/Junior High, High School

Duration: One to three 45-minute class periods

Dynasty: Modern period (1912–present)

Object Type: Costume and Textile

Themes: Technology and Production; Daily Life and Folkways

Contributed by: Anjali Wells, Montgomery County Public Schools, MD

Objective

Students will be able to analyze how traditional crafts reflect changing times, traditions, and cultural uses.

Essential Questions

- What is a textile and how is it created/used?
- How have tools/technology changed over time, and what impact does that have on traditional crafts?
- How do crafts and their creation process change across cultures and time?

Background Information

The history of batik or “wax dye” (*la ran*) in China extends back more than two thousand years. It began with agrarian societies around the central Yangzi River region. Later, for several historical reasons, some ethnic groups, such as the Miao, Yao, and Buyi, started migrating to the southwestern regions of China, like Guizhou, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces, bringing the batik technique with them.

The first step of batik production is the selection of cloth since its quality affects the colors. The patterns of intended ornaments are drawn with melted wax on a homespun cloth. After the batik artists finish drawing patterns, they wet the cloth with water and put it into indigo dye. They leave the cloth for twenty minutes in the dye, and then take it out for ten minutes to oxidize. These steps should be repeated more than twenty times before the batik is done. After soaking the cloth, the artists remove it and put it into hot water. The wax that was used to draw the patterns floats up to the surface of the water. Artists then collect the wax so it can be reused. Finally, they wash the cloth with clean water and hang it to dry. After the cloth is dry, it can be used for different purposes, including making dresses for special occasions such as weddings.

Vocabulary

batik: a textile created using a resist process.

indigo: a deep reddish blue; a pigment traditionally obtained from plants.

oxidize: to combine chemically with oxygen.

resist: using a material, such as wax, to create a barrier and prevent dye from altering another material, such as cloth. The barrier is usually removed after the pigmentation process to reveal a design. In Chinese, this method of resist dyeing is called *la ran*, literally “wax-dye.”

textile: any type of cloth or fabric.

Procedure

Day 1

1. Activate prior knowledge by asking students what they know about traditions, and if there are any traditions or objects that have been passed down through their family.
2. Guide students to think about textiles, and ask if they have any textiles in their homes that have specific meaning. These could be clothes for special occasions (team jerseys, camp shirts, traditional clothing from their heritage).
3. Discuss as a class: What designs do these special items have on them, and how does that design communicate their significance?
4. Inform students that they will investigate through a video an ancient technique used to create special fabrics.
5. Show the video: [Batik and Botanic Dyes](#). Use the Discussion Questions below in a class discussion after viewing the video.
6. Provide the Object Description during the discussion as needed.

Days 2–3

Choose an extension from below.

Discussion Questions

Describe

- What tools did you see being used?
- What types of patterns/shapes did you see in the batiks?
- What colors did you see?

Analyze

- Do you think the tools you saw are the same ones used two thousand years ago? Why?
- What do you think has changed about the process over time? What has stayed the same?
- Why do you think they used the specific patterns/shapes/colors that you saw in the video?

Interpret

- Who do you think were batik artists historically?
- Who do you think passes down the tradition of batik making?
- How do you think batik fabrics are used?

Inquire

- What connections can you make to other textiles from what you just learned about batik?
- What are other processes for adding color/design to textiles?
- What processes do you think were used to create the textiles in your home?

Extensions

Visual Arts

- Drawing (crayon resist): Draw and design your own batik pattern on paper using white crayon. Then, paint over the image with watercolor to reveal your image. Compare the tools you used for this resist process with those observed in the video.
- Batik: Draw a batik design. Use melted wax (or crayon for color) to draw your planned design on a piece of fabric. Then, dip the fabric in a dye bath. Iron the fabric between newspaper to melt and release the wax. Compare the tools you used for this resist process with those used in the video.

English Language Arts

- Research and write an essay about how resist dyeing processes have changed over time by relating the history of Chinese batik from the video with the development of tie-dye.

Social Studies

- Compare Chinese batik textile designs with textile designs, processes, and tools from another country.
- Research other ways of producing decoration on textiles in order to create a slide presentation about how textiles are manipulated.

Resources

Chinese Batik: Wax Printing. <https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/culture/batik.htm>

The History of Batik. <https://www.batikguild.org.uk/batik/history-of-batik>

View the video "Batik and Botanic Dyes" online.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JT023F_mS6Q&list=PL6RoU6Y7k_2dR5vWYCYSJvCZ5EcfRWDiT&index=2

Learn more at <https://asia.si.edu/teachingchina>