

LESSON PLAN

## Tea Culture in China



**Subjects:** Social Studies, Visual Arts, Language Arts  
**Grade Levels:** Elementary, Middle School/Junior High  
**Duration:** 60 minutes  
**Dynasty:** Qing (1644–1911)  
**Object Type:** Painting  
**Theme:** Daily Life and Folkways  
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**Landscape: Tea sipping under willows**

China, Qing dynasty, 1644–1911

Ink and color on silk

10 1/4 x 10 3/4 in

Gift of Charles Lang Freer. Freer Gallery of Art, F1909.247e

## Objectives

Students will watch a video about Chinese tea and tea wares to learn about their impact on art and traditions. They will also think about how tea influences their community.

## Essential Questions

- How do traditions continue over time?
- How has tea shaped art and culture?
- What is the role of tea drinking culture in the modern world?



**Smithsonian**  
Freer Gallery of Art  
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

## Background Information

Tea culture gained popularity in China during the cosmopolitan Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), although tea leaves had been grown in southern China long before that. By the Tang dynasty, drinking tea had become embedded in the daily lives of all levels of the social strata; it was a means of hospitality, medicine, divination, and food culture. Tea houses were essential to social life. The process of tea preparation and the act of tea drinking saw new customs in China, and of course, new forms of art in ceramics. In a tea ceremony, the size, shape, material, and color of the tea ware are all carefully selected in order to enhance the tea. Tea was the subject of paintings and poetry. The trading of tea ware and rituals and arts about tea became increasingly favored.

## Vocabulary

**cosmopolitan:** communities with representation of peoples from many different countries.

**custom:** an action or way of behaving that is widely practiced by a society.

**divination:** fortune-telling.

**hospitality:** welcoming and entertaining visitors.

**social strata:** the way a society classifies groups of people.

**tea ware:** equipment used for making and drinking tea.

## Procedure

1. Distribute the **Student Notes Worksheet** to each student.
2. Have students silently observe “Landscape: Tea sipping under willows” (F1909.247e) for a minute, then have them write down how the painting appeals to their five senses, encouraging them to use descriptive language.
3. To learn more about traditions surrounding tea and tea ware, watch the video “Exploring Chinese Teas and Tea Wares” from the “Teaching China with the Smithsonian” website: <https://asia.si.edu/learn/for-educators/teaching-china-with-the-smithsonian/videos/exploring-chinese-teas-and-tea-wares/>.
4. Use the **Discussion Questions** to guide the class through a whole class discussion about the video. Rewatch the video if necessary.
5. Ask students to silently write what experiences they have had with tea. Have students share a few experiences aloud.
6. Have students read the **Background Information** or the adjusted reading level **Student Background Information**.
7. Choose an extension activity to extend learning or to assess students' understanding.

# Discussion Questions

## Describe

- What material(s) is involved in the Gongfu tea ceremony?
- Look at the tea ware that Hollie Wong (the person in the video who is performing the tea ceremony) uses. How might you describe the tea ware used? How is it similar to or different from other bowls/cups you have used?
- How might you describe the environment in the video? Pay attention to the background, the tables, the way the people are seated, etc.

## Analyze

- How would you describe the mood of the Gongfu tea ceremony?
- Have you ever seen someone drinking tea at home or at a restaurant? How is this tea ceremony different from how you have seen someone drinking tea?

## Interpret

- What does this tea ceremony tell you about Chinese culture and values?
- How does the environment in the video add to your understanding of Chinese tea culture?

## Inquire

- How can traditions continue over time?
- How has tea shaped art and culture?
- What is the role of tea drinking culture in the modern world?
- Where else in the world is tea drinking culture prevalent?

# Extensions

## Visual Arts

- Have students decorate their own Chazhong tea ware on the **Decorate Your Chazhong Tea Ware** worksheet. Students can refer to "A Selected Illustrated Guide to Common Chinese Symbols" for design inspiration: <https://asia.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/LP23WS1-Symbolism-in-Cloisonne-FA3.pdf>.
- For middle school art teachers, consider having students work with clay, glaze, and a kiln to create works of ceramics.

## Social Studies

- Have students conduct interviews with older family members and community members about their relationships with tea. Students might even work in groups to create a podcast. An example of interviews that share personal stories involving tea can be found at the "Teaching China with the Smithsonian" website: "Personal Stories about Tea in Chinese Culture" (<https://asia.si.edu/learn/for-educators/teaching-china-with-the-smithsonian/videos/personal-stories-about-tea-in-chinese-culture/>).

# Resources

Hinsch, Bret. *The Rise of Tea Culture in China: The Invention of the Individual*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.

Kieschnick, John. *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.

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



