

USC PAM Distance Learning Program
Theme: Exploring the Silk Road

Pre-visit lesson: Ceramics Trade and Cultural Exchange

Grades: 6-8

Time: 1 class period

Essential Questions:

- How did trade of materials with other cultures influence art and design in China?
- How has Silk Road trade influenced cultures over centuries?
- How are ceramics primary examples of the significance of Silk Road trade?

Key Concepts/Vocabulary/Art Elements:

Ceramics, porcelain, kendi, cobalt blue, motif, symbol, trade, Silk Road, functional, decorative

Materials:

Paper and pencil or a computer/tablet to write on; Optional: colored pencils/washable markers/crayons

Artworks in Focus

- *Drinking Vessel (kendi)*, China, Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644) 15th c. (1991.47.11)
- *Double gourd-shaped vase*, China, Ming dynasty (1368-1644), 16th-17th c. (1994.46.1)

Notes and Tips for Teachers:

- Show a map of the Silk Road and point out the travel routes from China to Persia
- Use an annotation tool to point out things on the object that students notice
- Assign partners prior to starting the lesson. The pair sharing can be done via written chat or in a pre-assigned video break out groups.

Looking and Talking About Art

Part I:

Think Pair Share:

Take a close look at the *Drinking Vessel (kendi)* from China. With a partner, answer the following questions:

- Do you think it is functional or decorative? If functional, what do you think it was used for?
- What do you notice about this object's shape?
- How would you describe the designs on it?
- What material do you think this is made of?

Now, share your thoughts with the group.

Learn More:

This object is called a **kendi**. It is a type of pouring vessel originating in India, used to pour liquids during ritual ceremonies. Unlike other pouring vessels, such as tea pots, it does not have a handle or lid. Its unique shape, pattern, and material shows the significance of trade along the Silk Road.

This kendi was made in China in the 15th century. It is made out of **porcelain**, a material used for making **ceramics**, or pottery. It is composed of kaolin clay which is native to China. Porcelain is unique because it is white, semi-translucent (meaning you can see through it when holding it up to the light), and hard when fired at a high temperature. It was so valuable that China kept the technology for making porcelain a secret from the rest of the world for centuries.

China traded extensively with Middle Eastern empires, such as Persia (present day Iran). The blue color used to create the designs on the kendi was a pigment made of **cobalt**, a chemical element used to make blue which was found in Persia. The floral design on the kendi is most likely inspired by Islamic art. This vessel is an example of trade because it combines both Chinese and Persian materials and styles. The shape was popular among Muslim communities and was most likely made by Chinese craftsmen as an export to the Middle East.

Part II:

Now, take a close look at the *Double gourd-shaped vase* and consider the following questions:

- What do you notice about its shape?
- What **motifs** (designs that make the pattern) do you see?
- What similarities does it have with the kendi?
- What do you think could be the significance of this vase?

Learn More:

Just like the kendi, it is made of porcelain with the signature blue and white design that has become synonymous with Chinese art. This popular shape in Chinese ceramics gets its name from the gourd vegetable, which comes in a variety of round shapes. The double gourd is a symbol of fertility and was considered to be good luck in Chinese culture. Vases like this were often given as gifts on occasions such as birthdays in order to wish someone a long and happy life.

The motifs on this vase include flowers, Chinese characters (letters), and an image of a wise man. Chinese artists and craftsmen were influenced by Persian floral designs that were shared by merchants along the Silk Road. They then combined them with more traditional Chinese symbols to create a style that became known as distinctly Chinese, especially at the height of the Ming Dynasty. Thus this vase is a perfect example of the influence of Silk Road trade on Chinese art and culture.

Think Pair Share:

Think of other examples of exchanges that occurred along the Silk Road. Share these examples with your partner and then the entire group.

Now, individually, write a short 1-2 paragraph essay answering the questions below:

- How has the trade of materials along the Silk Road influenced both China and other cultures?
- What do ceramics teach us about cultural exchange and the importance of trade along the Silk Road?
- Why do you think ceramics are important/valuable and continue to exist today?

Activity: Ceramic Design

Think of a place you visited, either recently or long ago. It could be a different neighborhood, city, state, country, or even just someone else's house.

Now, imagine being able to create a ceramic object, such as a vase, whose design relates to your visit to this place. Use the place as inspiration to design this object and make a drawing of it on a sheet of paper. Consider the following questions when making your design:

- What did you like about the place you visited? What made it special?
- What images come to mind when you remember being there?
- What shapes, colors, or textures do you remember?

You can add color to your drawing if you have it. When you are done, share your drawing with the rest of the class.

Reflection

- What did you discover while making your drawing?
- What connection can you make between this activity and how cultures influenced one another along the Silk Road?
- How do you think objects teach us about exchanges of materials and ideas?

Tips, Modifications, and Extensions

- Students can compare and contrast the two vessels, either in a short essay or Venn diagram.
- Students can research other ways Asia and the Middle East have influenced one another and write a short essay with their findings.
- Assign the resource text below to students for research and have them cite the source in their writing.
- The ceramics design activity can be done in a digital or written format if drawing materials are not available.

Curriculum Connections

History-Social Science Content Standards

6.6.7. Cite the significance of the trans-Eurasian "silk roads" in the period of the Han Dynasty and Roman Empire and their locations.

CCSS for ELA - Writing Standards for 6-8

6-8.2 - Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

6-8.6 - Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

6-8.7 - Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

6-8.8 - Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS for ELA - Speaking and Listening for 6-8

6-8.1 - Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 6, grade 7, and grade 8 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

6-8.2 - Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation.

CCSS for ELA - Language for 6-8

6-8.6 - Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

CCSS for ELA - Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–8

6-8.1 - Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

6-8.7 - Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS for ELA - Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6–8

6-8.2 - Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.

6-8.7 - Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

National Core Arts Standards

Creating

VA:Cr1.2.6a - Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.

VA:Cr1.2.7a - Develop criteria to guide making a work of art or design to meet an identified goal.

Responding

VA:Re.7.1.6a - Identify and interpret works of art or design that reveal how people live around the world and what they value.

VA:Re.7.2.7a - Analyze multiple ways that images influence specific audiences.

VA:Re.7.1.8a - Explain how a person's aesthetic choices are influenced by culture and environment and impact the visual image that one conveys to others.

VA:Re.7.2.6a - Analyze ways that visual components and cultural associations suggested by images influence ideas, emotions, and actions.

Resources

- Tracing the Development of Ceramics Along the Silk Road:
<https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/ruminations/2016/ceramics-along-the-silk-road>
- Porcelain: <https://www.britannica.com/art/porcelain>
- How the Quest for the Perfect Blue Changed Art Forever:
<https://www.cnn.com/style/article/how-the-color-blue-changed-art-forever/index.html>
- Ming Dynasty art in USC PAM collection:
http://pamcollections.usc.edu/mwebcgi/mweb?request=advanced; tkeyword=ming*%20dynasty*;dtype=d



Drinking vessel (kendi)
China, 15th C.
Porcelain; glaze
5.25" H x 5.25" DIA
Gift of the Hon. and Mrs. Jack Lydman
1991.47.11



Double gourd-shaped vase

China, Ming dynasty (1368-1644 AD); 16th-17th c.

Porcelain; glaze

26.378" H x 13.5" DIA

Museum Purchase (formerly in the Collection of Ambassador Alexander Otto)

1994.46.1