



China: Its History, Dynasties, and the Forbidden City

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 6-8

Curriculum Focus: World History

Lesson Duration: Three class periods

Student Objectives

- Discuss China's history and its dynasties.
- Review facts about the Forbidden City.
- Research and highlight the symbols of five sites inside the Forbidden City.

Materials

- Video on *unitedstreaming: Assignment Discovery: When Civilizations End*
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- The Forbidden City
 - The Forbidden City - Home to the Son of Heaven
 - Journeying to the Forbidden City
 - The Ming Dynasty Builds the Forbidden City
 - New Western Interests in China
 - The Boxer Rebellion
 - The Last Emperor
- Computer with Internet access
- Print and online resources about the Forbidden City
- Paper, pens or pencils

Procedures

1. After viewing *When Civilizations End*, hold a brief class discussion about China's history and rulers. Explain to students that China is the location of some of the world's earliest civilizations, which developed around the Yellow River and the Yangtze River. Have students find these rivers on a class map. Ask students why people might have settled there. (The valleys were fertile for farming.) Tell students that from 2000 B.C. to A.D. 1911, Chinese history can be

divided into periods called dynasties. As a class, define the word “dynasty.” (A succession of rulers from the same family) Ask what the rulers in China were called. (emperors) Ask students to describe the emperor’s power based on what the program featured. For example, what is the Mandate of Heaven? (The Chinese believed the emperor ruled with absolute power by divine right, or by a Mandate of Heaven.) How did this affect the interpretation of catastrophic events, such as flooding or famine? (Catastrophic events were signs the gods did not approve of the emperor.)

2. Next, ask students where China’s emperors lived and ruled from 1420 to 1911. (The Forbidden City) Show students an image of the Forbidden City from the following Web site: <http://pasture.ecn.purdue.edu/~agenhtml/agenmc/china/images/scenery/forbcity.gif>. Explain that this complex of palaces was built in the 15th century by emperors of the Ming dynasty (A.D. 1368-1644). Following it was the Qing dynasty, which would be China’s last; it ended in 1911.
3. Review facts about the Forbidden City based on the program. How would students describe it? (ornate, complex, magnificent, vast) Where is it? (in the center of Beijing) How do we know what life was like there? (from millions of manuscripts about the emperor’s life found in the imperial archives) Why was it called the “Forbidden City”? Who or what was forbidden? (Only people related to the emperor’s rule could enter; common people were forbidden entry. And some people, such as the emperor’s wives, were forbidden to leave.) What were the significant colors and symbols used throughout the Forbidden City? (Yellow stood for power, red for good luck, and dragons were to bring rains and make the land prosper.)
4. Tell students that they are going to explore magnificent locations—halls, palaces, and gates—within the Forbidden City. As they explore these locations, have them choose five that incorporate significant symbols or colors. For each one, they should answer the following questions:
 - What is the name of this location?
 - What was its primary purpose?
 - Who used it?
 - Were different people restricted in how they used it? Explain.
 - What were some motifs, icons, or symbols here? What did they represent?
5. Have students use the following Web sites in their research. NOTE: Encourage students to select their locations from the first Web site; they should then visit the other sites to gather supporting information and images.
 - The Forbidden City (background, images, and detailed descriptions)
<http://www.beijingtrip.com/attractions/forbidden/index.htm>
 - The Forbidden City: A Virtual Tour (clickable map with images)
<http://www.chinavista.com/beijing/gugong/!start.html>
 - The Forbidden City (introduction and images)
<http://pasture.ecn.purdue.edu/~agenhtml/agenmc/china/scenfc.html#sfc00>

- Forbidden City: Gate of Supreme Harmony and Hall of Supreme Harmony (click through next 10 images)
<http://www.stuebegreen.com/wonderland/photos/fc/pix0.html>
6. When students have completed their research, ask them to write a brief description of each location that highlights its symbolism.
 7. Have students exchange their descriptions with another student. After students have read the descriptions, ask them to share one symbol (from their classmate's description) used in the Forbidden City, including what it stood for and where it was found.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students recalled several key details about the Forbidden City; participated actively in class discussions; thoroughly researched at least five locations in the Forbidden City; wrote comprehensive descriptions that clearly highlighted the symbolism at all five; shared more than one symbol from another student's description.
- **2 points:** Students recalled some key details about the Forbidden City; participated somewhat in class discussions; satisfactorily researched five locations in the Forbidden City; wrote satisfactory descriptions that highlighted the symbolism at four or five; shared one symbol from another student's description.
- **1 point:** Students recalled few or no key details about the Forbidden City; did not participate in class discussions; marginally researched fewer than five locations at the Forbidden City; wrote incomplete descriptions that did not highlight symbolism; did not share any symbols from another student's description.

Vocabulary

barbarian

Definition: A person who is believed to be uncivilized and inferior

Context: Most Chinese believed that Europeans were barbarians who should be kept out of the Forbidden City.

dynasty

Definition: Succession of rulers from the same family

Context: Empress Cu Xi ruled during the Manchu Dynasty from A.D. 1644 to 1911.

kowtow

Definition: To show respect or submission by kneeling and touching one's forehead to the ground

Context: The British ambassador Lord George Macartney did not kowtow to the Chinese Emperor Qianlong.

Mandate of Heaven

Definition: The belief that Chinese emperors were divinely selected and ruled by divine right

Context: According to the Mandate of Heaven, if the gods disapproved of the emperor, Chinese citizens would suffer flooding, droughts, famine, or other misfortune.

opium

Definition: An extract containing narcotic substances from the seeds of the opium poppy; the drug made from the opium extract

Context: When the Chinese emperors refused to trade with Westerners, the British smuggled opium into China.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Geography – Human Systems: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface
- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media; Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process, Gathers and uses information for research purposes

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
- People, Places, and Environments
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>