



When Civilizations End

The focus of this lesson plan is symbolism in the Forbidden City of ancient China.

Subject

World History

Grade level

6-8

Duration

Three class periods

Objectives

Students will

- discuss China's history and its dynasties;
- review facts about the Forbidden City; and
- research and highlight the symbols of five sites inside the Forbidden City.

Materials

- Computer with Internet access
- Print and online resources about the Forbidden City
- Paper, pen or pencil
- *When Civilizations End* video and VCR (or DVD and DVD player)

Procedures:

1. Begin the class with a brief discussion of 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 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 this was the Qing dynasty, which would be China's last, ending 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 the locations below, 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 below and look for supporting information and images at the other Web sites:

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 ten 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 and highlight its symbolism.

7. Have students exchange their descriptions with another student. After students have read their accounts, ask them to share one symbol used in the Forbidden City, including what it stood for and where it was found.

8. End with a class discussion about the Forbidden City. If students lived in China during the 19th century, would they want to live in the Forbidden City? Why or why not? What would be the advantages? What would be the disadvantages? What are the sacrifices they would make to live there?

Evaluation

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; showed thorough research about at least five locations in the Forbidden City; wrote comprehensive descriptions, clearly highlighting the symbolism at all five; shared more than one symbol from another student's descriptions.

2 points: Students recalled some key details about the Forbidden City; participated somewhat in class discussions; showed satisfactory research about five locations in the Forbidden City; wrote satisfactory descriptions, highlighting the symbolism at four or five; shared one symbol from another student's descriptions.

1 point: Students recalled few or no key details about the Forbidden City; did not participate in class discussions; showed little research about fewer than five locations at the Forbidden City; wrote incomplete descriptions, which do not highlight symbolism; did not share any symbols from another student's descriptions.

Extensions

For "The Mummies of Peru" segment: Review facts about the Chiribaya with your class. Where did they live? (*Peru, South America*) What was their environment like? (*high desert*) When was their civilization at its height? (*A.D. 900–1350*) What have archaeologists found that give clues about how the Chiribaya lived? (*mummies*) How were they so well preserved? (*by the desert salt*)

Next, ask students to recall the objects that have been found with the mummies: wool clothing, jewelry, ceramic pots, food, (corn, potatoes, and grain), a small pot inside a mummy's chest, and coca leaves inside and with the mummy. Ask students to describe what each item reveals about the Chiribaya civilization.

For the segments "Zimbabwe: Lost City of Africa" and "Scramble for African Colonies": Have students use what they learned in the programs to write an essay about European imperialism. Their essays should discuss how Europeans historically viewed African nations and the impact they had on African colonies. For example, why didn't the Europeans believe that Africans had built Great Zimbabwe? (*They believed that Africans were too inferior, primitive, uncivilized to build such a sophisticated city.*) What did early Europeans do to the site? (*They destroyed much of it, stripping it of its artifacts.*) What effect did Europeans have on the African colonies they established in the late 19th century? (*They exploited the people and their resources, creating wealth and power for their own countries.*) What was the purpose of the European missionaries in Africa? (*They wanted to convert "primitive" Africans to Christianity.*) Did they make any positive contributions? (*They built schools and hospitals.*) Describe the influence of Belgium's King Leopold in Congo. (*He exploited the land and brutally forced people to harvest ivory and rubber.*)

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: In China, 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 by which Chinese emperors ruled, that they divinely selected.

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

opium

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

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of the 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

Credit

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