

An Inquiry into Ancient China: The Historian's Notebook

Grade Level: 6

Prepared by: Julia Larkin

Length of Unit: 3-4 weeks

How do historians begin to investigate the past? What types of questions do they ask? How do they form a hypothesis? How do they test to see whether their hypothesis is correct? Where do they look to find resources? What different types of information can they gather from different resources? How can they determine whether their sources are correct? How do they determine how the creators of certain sources influenced the way history was told? Can historians always find the answers that they are looking for?

These are the questions that our students will face, and seek to answer, as they become "Historians" and assume an active role in investigating China. Too frequently our students are presented with historical "facts" and taught to accept them unquestioningly. History is often seen as "cut and dry," a matter of factual information rather than interpretation. The purpose of this unit is to place each student in the role of historian for him or herself, to use resources available at the present in an effort to better understand the past. Among the sources available for their pursuits are art, artifacts, biographies, CD-roms, dramatization, folktales, historical narratives, interviews, legends, literature, maps, myths, newspapers, photographs, poems, primary documents, and videos.

At the center of each of our historian's learning will be a "Historian's notebook," a small notebook used solely for investigating China. In this notebook, students will develop questions and wonderings, pursue lines of critical thinking, collect observations, classify and categorize information about China, create hypotheses, gather information to confirm and predict their hypotheses, compare and contrast different ideas, and make personal connections to ancient China.

