

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to China! In a country which contains about one-fifth of the world's population, it is no surprise that there is an enormous variety of topics which could be covered within this unit. Given realistic time limits, however, we have had to select just a few topics out of that crowded pool to concentrate on. We have focused these lessons on belief systems, because we feel it is crucial that our students understand there are many different ways of viewing the world, all of which are equally valid. We chose to spend some time looking at these beliefs, rather than rushing over them in favor of additional material. Perhaps you would have chosen different topics, or covered the same topics in a different way. This, of course, is still your option. Out of an endless number of lessons which could be created on China, We have developed twenty.

These twenty lessons stem from the presumptions that we place our students in the role of "Historian" for the duration of our studies on China. To paraphrase a saying we once heard, "Education is what is left when you have forgotten all of the facts." Our students need to develop skills which will allow them to access a whole world of information beyond the "content" that we are able to teach. Each day, we have focused on a different skill that the students, as budding historians, should learn. We have called these skills "Historian Tips."

To briefly outline the format of the lesson plan: "Today's investigation" is the topic which will be explored on a given day. The "Outcome of the investigation" is a list of

objectives for the lesson. "Vocabulary" consists of words students should learn the meaning of, to maximize understanding of the topic. We usually focus on transmitting meaning through context, rather than giving definition sheets. "Materials" are items you should have handy for the lesson. Most of the materials are available in the accompanying Resource Packet. Read-alouds will need to be borrowed from the library or purchased. We were able to check-out all the read-alouds on my first trip to a library, and we hope you are equally as lucky! The "Read-alouds" add to a literacy-rich environment in the classroom. We prefer to have the students pull their chairs around us as we share the book together.

"Mini-lessons" are the brief content or skill lessons your students will need before conducting their investigations. We have written the mini-lessons as we might actually say them. Of course, you may add supplemental materials or readings if you feel they are necessary. Overall, the mini-lessons should be kept to under 8 minutes of your class time. Students may jot notes, or you may prefer to hand-out sheets containing the main ideas of the mini-lessons. Again, the idea is that our students need practice being historians more than they need tons of facts! This practice comes into play during the "Activities," for which the majority of class time should be allotted. The "Group-share" is a time for the class to briefly reflect on the investigation. This should take just a few minutes at the end of class.

In the "Connecting past to present" sections, we try to highlight links between the lives of the ancient Chinese and students today. We believe this is a crucial part of each

lesson. Students may view ancient Chinese usage of Oracle bones as “weird” or “strange,” until they realize their neighbor gets his or her palm read for the same reasons. This section helps make the unfamiliar just a little more familiar, and enables students to make personal connections to the material.

We have chosen to make an “ABC Book of China” (or another type of factual information book) to be the cumulative project. We have done this with the idea that the book could be shared with younger students, and therefore serves an authentic purpose. We suggest that you collaborate with your literacy teacher in order to accomplish this project. If this is not possible, the bulk of work on this project will need to be done in a few days tacked onto the end of the unit, or completed on your students’ own time.

We truly hope you find the following unit helpful. Enjoy your journey through China!

Julia Larkin and Seamus

Dowling