**Decorative Arts across the Indian Ocean**

Communities across the Indian Ocean have a rich history of designing and producing decorative arts. Aesthetically pleasing renditions of everyday items including clothing, furniture, and cookware have captured the imaginations of people around the world. From carpets in Persia to porcelain in China, these goods have a lasting legacy to this day for their unique combination of aesthetics and utility. Decorative arts have played a significant role in the expansive history of Indian Ocean trade and continue to play an important role in modern global trade. This lesson plan discusses decorative arts from three regions: (1) China, (2) The Middle East, and (3) Southeast Asia. Many regions could potentially be covered such as East Africa, India, and Western Europe as they have also played an important role in global trade historically. However, these three regions discussed in this lesson plan have distinctive decorative art traditions that display clear influences as a result of Indian Ocean trade.

Through the fascinating medium of decorative arts, students are able to learn more about the geography, history, and cultures of Indian Ocean communities as expressed through these artistic forms. In terms of geography, students have the ability to learn more about different regions of the world and how physical landscapes impacted the production of particular decorative art forms and techniques. Regarding history, students will learn more about how decorative arts played an important role in trade across the Silk Road and the Indian Ocean. For world cultures, students are able to learn about different cultures as expressed through the designs and functionalities of the decorative arts they produced.

In Part I of this lesson, students will learn more about decorative arts that come from China. China is home to many goods used in decorative art production such as silk and porcelain, as well as unique techniques such as cloisonné. In Part II, students explore popular decorative arts from the Middle East such as Persian carpets and incense burners. Additionally, students will learn more about the role of Islamic geometric designs in decorative art designs. In Part III, students will finish by learning more about the decorative arts of Southeast Asia. Many Southeast Asian decorative art methods and forms have gained popularity in the West such as batik and rattan furniture respectively. Additionally, Southeast Asian art provides visual evidence of its role as the nexus of Indian Ocean trade given its central location. Through these different regions, students will gain a fuller image of the important and extensive role of decorative arts across the Indian Ocean.

**Learning Objectives:**

1. Identify designs, materials, techniques, and finished pieces of decorative arts

2. Get acquainted with different regions of the world and evaluate how their physical landscapes influenced their local decorative art traditions

3. Connect the role of history along the Silk Road and Indian Ocean trade routes with the distribution of decorative arts

4. Become more familiar with world cultures as expressed through the designs and functionalities of the decorative arts they produced

**Intended Grade Level:**

High School (9th-12th grades), AP World History, AP Human Geography

**Time:**

Three class periods with a duration of 50 minutes

**Materials:**

* At least 3 personal laptops/computers accessible to the Internet
* One computer for the teacher that is accessible to the Internet
* One projector

**Relevant IOWH Icons:**

China:

Silk – Classical Era

Blue and White Porcelain – Medieval Era

Kaolin Clay – Medieval Era

Porcelain on Bagamoyo Pillar Tomb – Medieval Era

Middle East:

Incense Burner of Arabia – Medieval Era

Persian Carpets – First Global Era, Industrial and Imperial Era

Yemeni Ikat Shawl – Medieval Era

Southeast Asia:

Rattan Furniture – Industrial and Imperial Era

Batik – Medieval Era

**Activities Descriptions:**

Activity I: Online Museum Tour

Through the Google Arts and Culture website (<https://artsandculture.google.com/>), have students briefly tour three museums and look at pieces from each one (approx. 3). Students should then fill out Handout 1 (found on Page 6) to learn about important facets of individual decorative art pieces. These include raw materials used, the process of production, notable designs and techniques, and cultural influences (both to and from a piece’s culture).

Museums Featuring Decorative Arts Discussed:

British Museum (All)

Galeri Batik YBI (SE Asia)

Hubei Provincial Museum (China)

Metropolitan Museum (All)

Museum of Ethnic Cultures, Minzu University of China (China)

Museum of Islamic Art, Qatar (Middle East)

Museum Nasional Indonesia (SE Asia)

National Palace Museum (China)

Pergamon Museum (Middle East)

Shangri La Museum of Islamic Art, Culture, and Design (Middle East)

Unit Pengelola Museum Seni (SE Asia)

Activity II: Analyze History Activity

Begin by separating students into three groups. Assign one of the icons listed below to each student. Have them read through the passage and then answer the discussion questions below. Discussion questions examine how decorative arts became produced traveled thousands of miles away from their provenance across trade routes and why this occurred.

Icons Used:

Porcelain on Bagamoyo Pillar Tomb (Medieval Era)

Yemeni Ikat Shawl (Medieval)

Persian Carpets (First Global Era)

Discussion Questions:

1. How did each of these decorative arts get to their respective locations?

2. Why were these decorative arts traded?

3. Could these objects have been made in the locations they ended up in? If no, is it because of materials used, particular skill sets needed, etc.?

4. What can be learned through discussing this topic?

Activity III: Commercial Activity

Separate students into groups of four, choose a finished decorative art piece (e.g. lacquerware vase, incense burner, etc.), and create a commercial to try to sell the piece to their class. They should briefly explain the production process as well as use evidence from class materials to prove that their art piece is valuable. Some considerations include artistic skill, natural resources, size, etc. Adapted from: <https://education.asianart.org/explore-resources/lesson-or-activity/gathering-goods-for-marketplace-lesson>

**Suggested Procedure:**

Class 1:

1. (30 Minutes) Begin the PowerPoint and get students situated with background on decorative arts and the regions to be discussed. There are two Crash Course history videos and helpful information on geography + culture attached below on Page 7.
2. (20 Minutes) Continue the PowerPoint slides on China and briefly discuss its history of decorative arts.
3. Homework
   1. Assign students to watch any two of the four attached videos and write out the production processes of each decorative art form. Brief descriptions of production processes should be 100-250 words.
   2. Have students read the following IOWH icon passages for further context on information presented in the slides:
      1. Silk (Classical Era)
      2. Blue and White Porcelain (Medieval Era)
      3. Kaolin Clay (Medieval Era)

Class 2:

1. (50 Minutes) Finish the PowerPoint slides on the Middle East and Southeast Asia including 2 videos from each region attached below on Page 7. Teachers are recommended to assign students the remaining videos as homework for better reference as to the processes related to specific decorative art forms.
2. Homework
   1. **Activity I:** Using Google Arts and Culture (<https://artsandculture.google.com/>), students should find three examples of decorative art pieces in museums (one from each region) and fill in Handout 1 accordingly. Students should also print out a picture of their favorite decorative art piece to bring for Class 3’s Commercial activity.
   2. Have students read the following IOWH icon passages for further context on information presented in the slides:
      1. Incense Burner of Arabia (Medieval Era)
      2. Batik (Medieval Era)
      3. Persian Carpets (Industrial and Imperial Era)
      4. Rattan Furniture (Industrial and Imperial Era)

Class 3:

1. (25 Minutes) **Activity II:** Separate students into three groups to participate in the Analyze History activity. Assign each group one of the following icons: “Porcelain on Bagamoyo Pillar Tomb (Medieval Era),” “Yemeni Ikat Shawl (Medieval Era),” and “Persian Carpets (First Global Era).” Have students discuss the history of each decorative art, how they arrived outside of their origin of production, and why they traveled so far.

2. (25 Minutes) **Activity III:** In these groups, students should use the decorative art piece they brought with them to use in the Commercial activity. Students will attempt to sell their decorative art piece to the other students by explaining the production process, special designs and techniques used, and other evidence that might be relevant.

Handout 1:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Art Piece #1 | Art Piece #2 | Art Piece #3 |
| Decorative Art Type |  |  |  |
| Raw Materials  Used |  |  |  |
| Process of Production |  |  |  |
| Notable Techniques Used (if applicable) |  |  |  |
| Notable Patterns/Designs (if applicable) |  |  |  |
| Decorative Art Type Typically Found In |  |  |  |
| Influenced By  (if applicable) |  |  |  |

**Video Links:**

Instructions: Video links are provided both below. Specific instructions as to when to show each video are listed with the suggested procedure and below.

Historical Background: Play after "What can we learn from decorative arts?"

Silk Road: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfe-eNq-Qyg&t=563s>

Indian Ocean Trade: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6XtBLDmPA0>

China: Play two videos from below during class and assign the remaining videos as homework.

Silk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqFm_7KyfHI>

Porcelain: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AU0asyapT_o>

Lacquerware: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKTdeok2Wcw>

Cloisonné: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FK90Pnl1OI>

Middle East: Play two videos from below during class and assign the remaining videos as homework.

Persian Carpets: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JkWWjpULpjU>

Lusterware: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gohjdC-DVE8>

Doors: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CeSj1vp-fX0>

Metalworking: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yNURCG3Aoo>

Southeast Asia: Play two videos from below during class and assign the remaining videos as homework.

Batik: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLTmu5m5bFU&t=2s>

Rattan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_V10kWLh71U&t=2s>

Wood Carving: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6owtkC63nc>

Gamelan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9I_Jny9-JXw>