Art In History

Basic Lesson Plan

EDU026
Qin Dynasty China
Terra Cotta Warrior
221 BC - 202 BC
China is one of the world’s most historically and culturally rich countries. For thousands of years, China was ruled by leaders under the dynastic system of government. China’s dynastic period lasted from the Shang Dynasty (which dates to the 18th century B.C.) to the Qing Dynasty (which ended in 1912). Recently, however, archaeologists found evidence of an earlier dynasty, the Xia Dynasty, which dates to 2200 B.C. They were farmers who lived in the Huang He region of China, along the Huang He River.

The Qin Dynasty came to power in 221 B.C. when Qin Shi Huangdi united many warring kingdoms. Qin Shi Huangdi means “First Emperor of China.” The name China comes from the name Qin (pronounced “chin”).

Qin Shi Huangdi’s name in Chinese

Geography

Qin China was one of the largest, strongest, and most important empires in the world. The Qin Dynasty was located in what is today eastern and central China. The dynasty was bordered by the Yellow Sea and East China Sea on the east, the Great Wall and Gobi Desert to the north, and extended beyond the Chang Jiang River to the south. Parts of the empire reached the South China Sea to the south. The capital was the city of Xianyang, near the modern-day city of Xian.
The Warring States Period

The years before the Qin Dynasty are known as the Warring States Period (476 B.C – 221 B.C.). During this time, seven states continuously fought each other for control. These included the Qin, Han, Zhao, Wei, Yan, Chu, and Qi. In 246 B.C., Ying Zheng became the king of the Qin after his father died. He was 13 years old. It was at this time that the young king decided to have warriors created that would be placed in his tomb at the time of his death. Over time, Yin Zheng conquered the other states. Finally, in 221 B.C., Ying Zheng unified all the Warring States under one central government. He declared himself Qin Shi Huangdi – the First Emperor of China.

Qin Shi Huangdi

Qin Shi Huangdi was a tyrant who ruled his empire with an iron fist. Many people lost their lives building the Great Wall and fighting enemies. However, it was Qin Shi Huangdi who unified China, formed a centralized government, and created a far reaching empire. To make the empire work smoothly, he established standards for many things including axle widths, coins, and script.

One great accomplishment was the centralization of government. Prior to the formation of the Qin Dynasty, each Warring State had its own government. Qin Shi Huangdi centralized the government in the capital of Xianyang. He created laws that applied to all parts of the empire. The emperor had bureaucrats run the government, and censors monitor the bureaucrats. The system of government created by Qin Shi Huangdi remained in place until the early 1900s.

The emperor ordered the building of more than 4,000 miles (6438 km) of roads. These roads ensured constant communication between the emperor and the far reaches of the empire. Bridges were also built to help move goods and armies around the empire. The width of axles used on carts was standardized. This allowed every cart in the empire to be able to travel in the ruts that were created in the roads. Irrigation systems, defensive walls, and palaces were also built.

Money was also standardized during the Qin Dynasty. Until this time, various forms of money were used by each of the different Warring States. Qin Shi Huangdi made all coins round with a square in the middle. Now, the empire had a standard coin for use in trading. The round shape with the square center can still be seen today as a symbol of the Bank of China.
Until the Qin Dynasty, there was no standard script. People in different regions wrote in different ways. During the Qin Dynasty script was standardized. Now, although people spoke in different dialects, everyone read the same written language.

Before the Qin Dynasty, many people in China believed in Confucianism. Confucius was a philosopher who believed in peace, justice, harmony, and the importance of the family. Qin Shi Huangdi did not agree with the teachings of Confucius. Instead, he believed in the ideas of Legalists. Legalists followed the writings of Han Feizi. He believed that people were selfish and needed to be controlled. To control the people of the Qin Dynasty, Qin Shi Huangdi ordered his prime minister, Li Su, to kill the Confucian scholars. He also ordered the burning of books he thought were useless, such as literature, and philosophy. Only books about agriculture and medicine were saved.

Historians from the first century wrote of book burning, along with the burying alive of scholars. However, some modern-day experts believe this is only a myth. Jane Portal, the Curator of the Department of Asia at the British Museum, is one of these experts. She believes these stories are myths, and are not supported by evidence.

In 210 B.C. Qin Shi Huandi died. He was succeeded as emperor by Hu Hai. Just one year after assuming power, the people of the empire began to revolt. They were angry about the high taxes and brutal treatment. Many government officials were killed by the rebels. In 202 B.C. the Qin Dynasty collapsed and was replaced by the Han Dynasty, which lasted for more than 400 years.

The Great Wall

One of the greatest accomplishments of the Qin Dynasty was the construction of the Great Wall. The Great Wall was built to protect the Qin Dynasty from the attacks. The Qin did not build the entire wall, however. Instead, they connected smaller walls that were built by previous rulers. The final wall protected the Qin from the Hun, located to the north.

The Great Wall extends from the Gobi Desert in the west to the Yellow Sea in the east. A watch tower was built every 200 to 300 yards. The wall is constructed of large slabs of stone on the outside and filled with pebbles and dirt. Each section of the wall is approximately 30 feet tall. The Great Wall was an expensive project, both in terms of money and life. Laborers were forced to work on the wall, and a great many people died during the construction. Tax money was used
to pay for the wall. The taxes were a burden to the subjects of Shi Huangdi, and were part of the reason people rebelled in 206 B.C.

Work on the Great Wall that we see today was completed by the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644). The Great Wall is really several sections of wall. Depending on how it is measured, it is anywhere from 1,500 – 4,000 miles in length (2415 – 6440 km). It is still the largest man-made structure in the world. Many people believe that the Great Wall can be seen from space. However, in 2005, pictures taken from the International Space Station proved this theory wrong. The Great Wall can only be seen in low Earth orbit when a powerful lens is used, or when radar images are taken. In 1987, the Wall became a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The Tomb Complex and the Terra Cotta Warriors

The terra cotta warriors were discovered on March 29, 1974, when local farmers were digging a well. This was one of the most remarkable archaeological discoveries in the world. The entire tomb complex covers 21.6 square miles (56 sq. km.), and contains nearly 600 pits. Each pit contains artifacts that Qin Shi Huangdi planned to take with him after his death. In total, experts estimate that more than 7,000 warriors are buried in the pits which surround the tomb. It took approximately 700,000 workers to construct the entire tomb complex.

The most famous sections of the tomb complex are the pits. Pit 1 contains the main terra cotta army, but only one-third of the pit has been excavated. Scientists are waiting to uncover the remaining sections and other pits until they can be certain that the paints and lacquer used on the warriors will remain intact. Scientists from China, Germany, and other countries are working to develop a way to preserve the warriors once they are unearthed. Pit 2 includes cavalry units, infantry units, and war chariots. Art In History’s replica is from Pit 2. Pit 3 includes a command post with high ranking officers, the command chariot, and horses. In all, it is estimated that these three pits contain 7,000 sculptures of warriors, 130 chariots, and 670 horses. Other pits contain stone armor, acrobats, stables, bronze chariots, and every other item needed by the emperor after he died. There is also evidence that slaves were sacrificed and buried in the tomb complex.

The tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi has not been excavated, but there are some ideas about what it contains. The tomb itself is said to be lined in bronze, and have crossbows that are rigged to fire if anyone tries to enter. The ceiling of the underground palace is painted to look like the
stars, and the floor is a model of the empire, complete with rivers of mercury. In a sense, Qin Shi Huangdi recreated his empire underground. The government of China believes the tomb should remain intact and undisturbed.
Map 1: The Qin Dynasty, 221 B.C. – 202 B.C.
Art In History’s replica is an example of a terra cotta warrior from the Qin Dynasty (pronounced “chin”). The Qin Dynasty is an important era in Chinese history even though it only lasted from 221 B.C. – 202 B.C. During this time the Qin became the greatest power in Asia by unifying many groups of people.

The Qin potters were very skilled and imaginative. Their terra cotta sculptures are known for elegant shapes and beautiful colors. In fact, each terra cotta warrior is unique. Out of the 7,000 warriors, no two have the same face! In addition to warriors, potters made horses, archers, strongmen, bureaucrats, acrobats, swans, geese, and cranes. Warriors are life-size replicas of the Qin army. Preservation of the sculptures is extremely important.

The terra cotta warriors were created from yellow clay. Sometimes, molds were used to form the main parts of each warrior, such as the torso, legs, arms, and head. Then, sculptors added the details to each warrior. These included the hair, eyes, nose, lips, and other features that give each warrior a unique appearance. The figures were then fired in a kiln at temperatures estimated between 1700°F – 1900°F (950°C – 1050°C).

Once the warriors were fired, Qin potters covered their pieces with lacquer. Lacquer is the sap from the lacquer tree. It takes a lacquer tree 6 years before the lacquer is ready, and can only be tapped during the summer months. Approximately 25 trees were needed for each warrior. It is estimated that in order to produce enough lacquer to cover the Terra Cotta Army more than 150,000 trees would need to be grown and tapped. Once the lacquer dried, which can take several weeks, colors were painted onto the warriors. Using an egg base, colors were applied to all the figures. The colors used include red, white, green, black, brown, blue, and purple. Red was a particularly difficult color to make. It was produced by hand-grinding crystals of cinnabar, a mineral that produces the dangerous element mercury when processed. When exposed to air, the colors and the lacquer disintegrate. Scientists are still working to develop a method of preserving these during excavation.

Today, the terra cotta warriors are world famous and often tour museums around the world. Perhaps Qin Shi Huangdi achieved his goal of never dying, as he is probably more famous today than during the time when he lived. More information about the terra cotta warriors from this time period can be found in libraries and online.
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SAMPLE MOTIF

Finished Example
Chest Plate Designs
**STEP-BY-STEP PAINTING DIRECTIONS**  
*(students can work in small groups)*

**I. APPLY THE BASE COLOR**  
Lightly apply a **LIGHT BROWN** stain onto the replica.

1. Each student should have a plate to use as a paint palette to organize the colored stains (one for each color), a brush; and some water.

2. Using a damp sponge, dip it into a small amount of **LIGHT BROWN** stain. Lightly apply the stain to all parts of the warrior.

3. When the warrior is dry, students may write their name on the bottom in pencil.

**II. PAINT THE WARRIOR**  
Remember: Use cups of water to clean paintbrushes when changing paint colors. Use newspapers and paper towels during the painting process for easy clean up.

1. Begin with **MIXING** 2 parts **COCHINEAL RED** to 1 part **CARBON BLACK** to create **MAROON**. Use the **MAROON** stain and paint the chest plate, shoulders, shoulder plate, middle collar, and hat.

2. Use **GRASS GREEN** to paint the lower pants, lower coat, and tassels.

3. Use **COBALT BLUE** to paint the upper pants.

4. Use **COCHINEAL RED** to paint the collar, around the shoulders, coat, and belt. Use **COCHINEAL RED** to paint the trim around the shoulders, upper collar, belt, lips, cuffs, and upper shoes. Apply **LIGHT BROWN** lightly to lips if the color is too bright.

5. Use **CARBON BLACK** to paint the hair, eyebrows, mustache, eyes, and shoes.

6. **MIX** 1 part **COCHINEAL RED** to 1 part **COBALT BLUE** to create **PURPLE**. Use **PURPLE** to paint the coat, and ribbon that ties the hat.

7. Use **LIGHT BROWN**, **GRASS GREEN**, and **COCHINEAL RED** to paint the details on the chest plate.

**III. ALLOW THE WARRIOR TO DRY**