



CERAMICS and China Trade Porcelain

Recommended for
Middle School

This section is designed to support and augment the study of early American trade with China using PEM's outstanding collection of Chinese export porcelain.

Philip Freneau (1752–1832) was an important early American poet, often called the “poet of the Revolution.” A graduate of Princeton University, he was known for witty prose and poetic satire about British rule in the American colonies and writings in fervent praise of American nationalism. He served as a ship captain in the American militia in 1778 and spent six weeks on a British prison ship. Much of his poetry from the 1780s reflects the bitterness of that experience. In the 1790s, Freneau was asked by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison (formerly a classmate at Princeton) to publish a newspaper, the National Gazette, to give voice to Jeffersonian (Republican) values. This was to counteract the Hamiltonian (Federalist) views espoused by the Gazette of the United States.

INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL PRIMARY SOURCE MATERIAL

On the First American Ship That Explored the Route to CHINA and the EAST-INDIES, After the Revolution

Philip Freneau (1784)

With clearance from **BELLONA** won ■
She spreads her wings to meet the Sun,
Those golden regions to explore
Where George forbade to sail before. ■

Thus, grown to strength, the bird of Jove, ■
Impatient, quits his native grove,
With eyes of fire, and lightning's force
Through the blue aether holds his course.

No foreign tars are here allow'd ●
To mingle with her chosen crowd,
Who, when return'd, might, boasting say
They show'd our native oak the way.

To that old track no more confin'd,
By Britain's jealous court assign'd,
She round the **STORMY CAPE** shall sail ■
And eastward, catch the odorous gale.

To countries plac'd in burning climes ●
And islands of remotest times
She now her eager course explores,
And soon shall greet **Chinesian** shores.

From thence their fragrant **TEAS** to bring
Without the leave of Britain's king;
And **PORCELAIN WARE**, enchas'd in gold,
The product of that finer mould. ●

Thus commerce to our world conveys
All that the varying taste can please;
For us, the Indian looms are free, ■
And **JAVA** strips her spicy **TREE**. ■

Great pile proceed! – and o'er the brine
May every prosperous gale be thine,
'Till, freighted deep with eastern gems,
You reach again your native streams.

From *The Empress of China* by Philip Chadwick Foster Smith
(Philadelphia Maritime Museum, 1984), p.xiii.

GLOSSARY

Bellona – the Roman goddess of war

George – King George III of England

Bird of Jove – American eagle

Aether – air in the upper atmosphere

Tar – a sailor

Cape – Cape of Good Hope

Clime – climate

Chinesian – Chinese

Enchas'd (enchased) – decorated, ornamented, or inlaid

Leave – permission

Gale – a breeze or wind

Analyzing Text

Working either individually or in groups, students should select a stanza from the poem “On the First American Ship That Explored the Route to CHINA and the EAST-INDIES, After the Revolution.” The task is to determine the meaning of the stanza. Lines in format A (marked with a yellow ●) should be analyzed for language syntax and symbolism. Lines in format B (marked with a blue ■) should be analyzed with reference to early American history and the China trade. Students should share their findings with the entire class in order to understand the poem.

Uncovering Assumptions

Why was this subject important to Americans in the late 18th century? Why does the poet capitalize the words “teas” and “porcelain ware”?

Porcelain for Emperors (DVD)

SADA/USC/Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 1993

Running Time: 12 minutes

Learn about the process of Chinese porcelain production and decoration, and discover the vast numbers of people involved in providing high-quality porcelain for the imperial court. An excellent resource for art and social studies teachers. Open captioned.

Metropolitan Museum of Art Timeline of Art History Web Site

www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ewpor/hd_ewpor.htm

The *Timeline of Art History* is a chronological, geographical, and thematic exploration of the history of art from around the world, illustrated in particular by the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection. The Met's curatorial, conservation, and education staff—the largest team of art experts anywhere in the world—research and write the *Timeline*, which is an invaluable reference and research tool for students, educators, scholars, and anyone else who is interested in the study of art history and related subjects. First launched in 2000, the *Timeline* now extends from prehistory to the present day. The *Timeline* will continue to expand in scope and depth and will also reflect the most up-to-date scholarship.

MEDIA COMPONENTS

◆ [Porcelain for Emperors DVD](#)

◆ [MMA Timeline of Art History Web Site](#)

◆ [Iraq and China Web Site](#)

Iraq and China: Ceramics, Trade, and Innovation Web Site
www.asia.si.edu/exhibitions/online.htm

Originally designed to accompany an art exhibition, this online resource explores the ways China and Iraq influenced each other's ceramic decoration from the 8th to 10th centuries and how these techniques in turn spread to other countries and regions. It focuses particularly on decoration using blue-and-white and metallic luster and on the role Iraqi potters played in developing and transmitting these techniques. The resource is delivered using the Flash format, but a PDF version is also available for printing. There are also links to other Web resources, including online image collections.

ART DISCUSSION with PEM ART CARDS



Dish
1522–1566, China
Art Card C9

Object-to-Self Questions

What shapes are your dishes at home? How does the shape of a dish tell you about how it is used? Can you think of examples of cultural differences related to dishes for eating or serving food? Have you tried eating in a new or different way? Have you ever eaten with chopsticks? With your hands? Describe the circumstance and the people you were with.

Object-to-World Questions

These objects were made in China for use in India, the Middle East, Europe, and America. How do you think they differ from the objects made for use in China? Do you own anything that was made in China? Clothes? Electronics? Toys? Do you think they are different than the products used in China by Chinese people? How so?

MUSEUM VISIT LESSON

Arrange for your class to take the PEM tour entitled “The China Trade: Venturing to Asia.” Have students pay special attention to the designs painted on the blue-and-white porcelain wares.

Ask students to:

- ◆ Imagine how different artists would have contributed to the production of one object.
- ◆ See which design motifs and patterns appear on more than one object.
- ◆ Examine the quality of the glazes, especially the way color blue is used.
- ◆ Consider the similarities and differences between looking at Art Cards versus original works of art.

Porcelain Factories in Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) China

The artists employed by porcelain factories in Qing dynasty China had very specialized roles. A plate, for example, would pass through many artists' hands before it was finished. The steps involved included:

1. mining the clay, preparing the clay, organizing it into usable slabs;
2. shaping the plate on the pottery wheel;
3. allowing it to dry;
4. reshaping it and scraping it down;
5. decorating it with underglaze;
6. dipping it in glaze, painting it;
7. loading the kiln, firing it, and unloading the kiln; and
8. examining quality to determine appropriate client.

Each step was handled by different people. For example, the artists who decorated the porcelain pieces with underglaze would have divided up the painting into segments. Each type of design or picture would have been painted by someone who specialized in that image.

This activity will explore issues surrounding the production and trade of porcelain. Groups of students will form porcelain “factories.” Each group will be commissioned to produce a set of 12 identical cups based on a model.

Materials

- ◆ White paper cups
- ◆ Markers
- ◆ Scissors

Objectives

Students will:

- ◆ Learn about the production of porcelain for the China trade.
- ◆ Think about the cross-cultural exchanges brought about by trade.
- ◆ Think about the nature of mass production versus production by an individual artist.
- ◆ Think about the roles of artists in society.

Instructions

1. Rearrange the classroom.
2. Divide students up into teams of six.
3. Place the materials in the center of the room.
4. Give each group a model cup that has been cut in some way and decorated with a design featuring five major elements.
5. Tell the students that their goal is to create a set of 12 cups that look *exactly* like this model.
6. Have half of the teams divide up the work so that each person is doing one thing (cutting the cup to the right shape, drawing the border, drawing one of the main images, for example).
7. Have the other half of the teams create two cups each from start to finish.

8. Have the teams spend five minutes discussing a game plan using the following questions:
 - How would you make a cup like the one they're supposed to copy?
 - In what order should things proceed?
 - What are the components of the design? Who should do what?
9. After five minutes, have one member of each team retrieve materials from the center of the room.
10. Give the groups 20 minutes to create their sets of cups and five minutes to arrange them in a display.
11. Next, tell everyone to stop, and have the class walk around to look at the work by the other groups.
12. Lead a discussion about the process:
 - Did all the groups finish? For those who didn't finish, why not?
 - Which set would make a client happy?
 - Which set looks the most uniform?
 - Can you tell the difference between the groups that divided the work and those that created the cups from start to finish?
 - Of the sets of 12 cups, do any have cups that don't match the others?
 - If so, how many per set?
13. Ask each group to write a one-page recommendation for how to make the "manufacturing" process more efficient if they were to do it again.

Clay

Clay is made from the chemical weathering of silicate-bearing rocks. The resulting substance is rich in glassy minerals like mica and feldspar and is made up of silicon, aluminum oxides, and hydroxides.

Ceramics

Ceramics (clay hardened by fire) have been developed by many cultures around the world and are used as safe, unreactive vessels for storing, serving, and eating food and drink, as well as for aesthetic and decorative purposes.

There are three basic kinds of ceramics:

EARTHENWARE

The earliest and most basic type of ceramic is earthenware which is clay fired at a relatively low temperature (1,200°–1,800° F). It is not waterproof unless the surfaces are polished or burnished or unless glaze is added and the ceramic is fired again.

STONEWARE

Stoneware is clay fired at a higher temperature (1,800°–2,300° F) than earthenware, at which point it vitrifies and becomes watertight. It is also heavier and more durable than earthenware.

PORCELAIN

Porcelain is made from a special kind of white clay that contains feldspar. It is called kaolin, a transliteration of Gaoling, a mountain near the “porcelain capital” of Jingdezhen in China’s Jianxi province. Kaolin is combined with the feldspar-rich stone called petunze, a transliteration of the Chinese word *baidunzi*, or white stone. Porcelain is then fired at a very high temperature—2,300° F or above. Porcelain can be differentiated from other types of ceramics by its white color, its resonance when struck, and its relative strength, despite its light weight.

What is China?

The term “china” or “chinaware” is generally used to refer to ceramic dishes, especially high-quality stoneware and porcelain. Starting with the development of porcelain during the Tang dynasty (618–907), China was the only country that had the technology to make porcelain for about 1,000 years. The ceramics that were exported to Europe and the United States from China became synonymous with their country of origin. When the formula was replicated in 1709 in Meissen, Germany, Europeans began to produce porcelain domestically.

MASSACHUSETTS FRAMEWORKS

English Language Arts Strands: 4, 8, 9, 14, 18

Foreign Language Curriculum Standards: 4

Social Studies Pathways:

World History II, 1800–2001

U.S. History 1, 1763–1877

Visual Arts Learning Standards: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10

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Trade, Technology, and Teapots, a Teacher's Guide to the Exhibition Porcelain Stories: From China to Europe. 2000. Seattle Art Museum. 20 August 2005. www.seattleartmuseum.org/teach/pdf/porcelainstories.pdf.