East Asia in the Upper Midwest: US-China Relations

A Museum Exploration of US/China Trade Relations in Early America

ABOUT THIS LESSON

In this lesson, students will take a tour of an online exhibit The Dragon and The Eagle: American Traders in China in preparation for a visit to the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, MA (or another local exhibit/online exhibit). As they explore, they will complete a series of activities associated with their exploration to help them understand the relationship between the two nations between 1776 and the mid-1800s and compare it to the US and China relationship now and debunk the ideas that the current error of globalization was the first global era.

GRADE LEVEL

High School (9th - 12th)

CLASSROOM TIME

- This lesson is written as a two-day assignment.
    - The first day consists of exploring an online exhibit on the US/China trade from the Hong Kong Maritime Musume: The Dragon and The Eagle: American Traders in China.
    - The second day is a visit to the Peabody Essex Museum: Asian Export Art Collection in Salem, MA. If you are unable to visit the museum, you can visit a museum local to you that contains early American art, or Asian export art from the 1700s-1800s. There are a few online experiences from the Peabody Essex Museum that you can use if traveling to a museum is not an option.

RESOURCES

- Background Information for the Teacher:
    - Global Trade in the Nineteenth Century: The House of Houqua and the Canton System by John D. Wong (Cambridge, 2017).
    - Understanding US-China Relations: Session with Historian John Wong https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IplD1w4wnnQ&t=5s
    - The Burning of Opium at Humen: https://artsandculture.google.com/story/wgVBx6zughcA8A
    - Canton Trade: https://artsandculture.google.com/story/5gWBhKKXSKUpJg

    - Ties that Bind: Peabody Essex Museum Asian Export Gallery (7/24/20) https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/1328370983527228172
        - Presenter: Karina H. Corrigan, H. A. Crosby Forbes Curator of Asian Export Art, Peabody Essex Museum
- For the Lesson:
    - *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom*, by John Pomfret (Picador, 2017).
    - The Dragon and The Eagle: American Traders in China (Hong Kong Maritime Museum) https://artsandculture.google.com/story/7QWBMR0KAZPSLg
    - Description of the Peabody Essex Museum Asian Export Art collection and its link to the opium trade. The end of the article has a 5-minute video Every eleven minutes that makes this link even more concrete. https://www.pem.org/blog/every-eleven-minutes

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Examine artifacts associated with the United States and Chinese trade relationships at the inception of the US in 1776.
- Find evidence of the influence of western tastes and desires on Chinese art.
- Learn how the opium trade impacted the trade relationship between the US and China.
- Identify the differences between how the US/China trade relationship is remembered by a museum in the East and a museum in the West.
- Discuss how our past trade relationship with China informs/impact our current trade practices.

STANDARDS

Wisconsin Standards for Social Studies - Grades 9-12

- Inquiry Practices and Processes
    - SS.Inq1.a.h Frame researchable, complex, and open-ended questions, integrating multiple social studies strands that call for investigation.
    - SS.Inq2.b.h Analyze and weigh relevance of a source through a disciplinary lens to determine how the author, context, audience, and purpose affect the reliability, limitations, and usefulness of a source.
- Behavioral Sciences (which include Anthropology, Psychology, and Sociology)
    - SS.BH3.a.h Analyze the means by and extent to which groups and institutions can influence people, events, and cultures in both historical and contemporary settings. Become critically aware of ethnocentrism, its manifestations, and consequences in a world that is increasingly interconnected.
- Economics
    - S.Econ1.a.h Perform a cost–benefit analysis on a real-world situation, using economic thinking to describe the marginal costs and benefits of a particular decision.

- Geography
    - Geog3.b: Networks Analyze the evolution of the global economy to its present state and the role it plays in the economic development of world regions. Analyze the role of supranational organizations (e.g., NAFTA, NATO, UN).
- History
    - SS.Hist3.a.h Analyze significant historical periods and their relationship to prese
    - SS.Hist3.b.h Evaluate historical perspectives to create arguments with evidence concerning current events.
    - SS.Hist3.c.h Evaluate and justify predictions of potential outcomes of current events based on the past.

LESSON

Warm-Up:

1. **5 - 10 minutes** Brainstorm in small groups: What does the phrase “made in China” mean to you? What objects do you associate with the phrase “made in China?” What emotions? What issues (social, economic, ethically, environmental, etc) are associated with the phrase “made in China?”
2. **5 minutes** Ask students to share out their brainstorming. What are some common themes that all of the groups pointed out?
3. **5 minutes** Tell students that they are going to examine the origins of the phrase “made in China” from a historical point of view and consider the origins of US/China relations and how they have developed and changed into the modern era. The US and China have been trading partners since the inception of the new nation at the conclusion of the American Revolution. Ask students:
    a. What do you think were some of the challenges of foreign trade during this time? How are these challenges similar to the ones that you brainstormed earlier? How are they different?

Online Exhibit: The Dragon and The Eagle: American Traders in China

1. **30 - 40 minutes** Direct students to the online exhibit. As they review the exhibit have them answer the following questions. If an answer to their question cannot fully be found on the website, they should do some additional research to answer their question:
    a. Why was the US/China trade so crucial to the fledgling nation?
    b. What were some of the preserved artifacts in the exhibit that show evidence of globalization, a blending between European/American and Chinese cultures?
    c. What are the Opium Wars and why did they occur? How did they shift trade between the US and China?
    d. What impact did opium have on China and its people? How did Chinese administrators respond to the increased, and illegal, availability of opium in their country?
    e. Choose 3 artifacts from the exhibit and sketch them. Briefly describe the artifact in your own words (item, material, artist, date, etc) and explain what the artifact tells us about United States/China trade relations.

f. What was one new thing that you learned from this online exhibit or one thing that surprised you to learn, and why?
g. What is one question that you hope to answer tomorrow during our field trip based on your experience today?

Field Trip to the Peabody Essex Museum:

- Asian Export Art: “How far would you go to get what you want? Beginning in the late 16th century, European merchants raced to the thriving port cities of Guangzhou, China; Calcutta (Kolkata), India; and Nagasaki, Japan, to seek their fortunes in tea, textiles, and other commodities. Asian artists, catering to diverse markets around the globe, adapted and combined design motifs, materials, and techniques to create unique expressions of artistic creativity that were among the finest produced in the world. Now known as Asian export art, these transcultural objects — from translucent porcelains and glittering lacquers to sumptuous fabrics — defy easy categorization. PEM holds the largest and most comprehensive collection in the world of these fascinating works of hybridity. The historic collections of the East India Marine Society and the Essex Institute include important works from China, Japan, and South Asia, a vestige of Salem’s intensive trade with Asian ports in the early 19th century.” (From the PEM website, https://www.pem.org/explore-art/asian-export-art)
- As students travel through the Asian Export Art Gallery have them consider:
    - What is Asian Export Art? What was the purpose of Export Art for Asian traders? Is Export Art a good representation of the people and culture that produced it? Why or why not?
    - How do you feel about the art in the gallery? Do your feelings change knowing that many of these pieces were bought with profits from the opium trade?
    - What is your favorite piece in the gallery? Why?
    - What is one piece of artwork that you wished that you knew more about?

Online Peabody Essex Museum Collection:

- **Asian Export Art Gallery** https://www.pem.org/exhibitions/asian-export-art-gallery
- **Tea Production in China**, about 1800: Artists in Guangzhou, China. Oil on canvas, 47 1/8 × 71 3/4 in. (119.7 × 182.3 cm). https://www.pem.org/explore-art/asian-export-art/tea-production-in-china-about-1800/tea-production-in-china-large
- **Tea packer and tea porter**, about 1803: Artists in Guangzhou, China. Unfired clay, paint, wood, and human hair, h. (tea porter) 15 in. (38.1 cm). https://www.pem.org/explore-art/asian-export-art/tea-packer-and-tea-porter-about-1803/tea-packer-and-tea-porter-about-1803-large
- **Studio of Tingqua Active mid-19th century**, Guangzhou, China. Shop of Tingqua, The Painter, about 1830. Gouache on paper. 7 1/16 x 10 1/4 inches (18 x 26 cm). https://www.pem.org/explore-art/asian-export-art/studio-of-tingqua/studio-of-tingqua-large-1
- **Complete set of wallpaper originally installed in Strathallan Castle, Perthshire, Scotland**, about 1800 Artists in Guangzhou, China. Opaque watercolor on mulberry

paper, 10 ft. 11 3/4 in. × 73 ft. 11 1/4 in. (3.4 × 22.5 m) overall. https://www.pem.org/explore-art/asian-export-art/complete-set-of-wallpaper-originally-installed-in-strathallan-castle-about-1800/complete-set-of-wallpaper-originally-installed-in-strathallan-castle-large

- **Every Eleven Minutes:** https://www.pem.org/blog/every-eleven-minutes
- **Search the PEM collection:** https://collection.pem.org/portals/collection/#category/1099

ASSESSMENT

Follow-Up Discussion Questions:

1. Did you notice any difference in the way that information was presented between the two museums? What do you think accounted for those differences?
2. "One thing that defines all of [the works in this gallery], each and everyone is a hybrid, a manifestation of cross-cultural connections." (Karina H. Corrigan, Curator of Asian Export Art) What can you take away from your experience with the two museums that you can apply to your own experience as a global consumer?
3. What parallels do you see between US/China trade relations depicted in the museum and the modern era?

EXTENSIONS

1. If you would like students to have a more complete understanding of US/Chinese trade during this time period, have students read Chapter One of *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom.*
2. Create a series of diary entries to reflect both sides of the global trade:
    a. What do you think it was like for an American to make port in Canton? What site, smells, and experiences do you think that they would have? Use the artifacts from the exhibits to help support your diary entries.
    b. What do you think it was like for a Chinese person who just moved to the port of Canton during the height of the Canton System? How different do you think their experience was compared to other parts of China? What new things do you think that they saw in Canton because of the international trade? Use the artifacts from the exhibits to help support your diary entries.