

Everyday Calligraphy in China

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Chicago, Illinois

Grade Levels: 2nd and 3rd Grades

Summary: The purpose of this project is to introduce Chinese calligraphy writing to second and third graders. It will focus on the recognition of calligraphy as written language. Students will have opportunities to see many different examples of calligraphy styles and experience the formation of letters using both a brush and a pencil. Although references will be made to the artistry of character or stroke formation this project is not intended to provide instruction in the study of calligraphy as an art form.

Written background information on the history of Chinese calligraphy is supplied for teachers, but the prepared PowerPoint presentations have been written at the students' level of understanding as a tool to be used in the classroom. The three PowerPoint presentations visually address three topics: The first presentation focuses on the recognition of the prevalence of calligraphy in everyday China and simply the recognition and identification of Chinese calligraphy itself. The second presentation presents the vocabulary of calligraphy with visual representations of materials, brush holds and strokes, eventually leading the students into an on-line Chinese character activity, forming numbers. The third PowerPoint presentation contains calligraphy flashcards, each with a picture of China with its corresponding word in both Mandarin Chinese transliteration (Pinyin) and English, and the corresponding Chinese character. They can be used for study by individual students or as a whole class activity. They are meant to be the beginning of a class project that encourages each child or small group of learners to assemble their own flashcards for word study.

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Overview: This project is designed to teach 2nd and 3rd graders, both native English speakers and those who speak English as a second language, about Chinese calligraphy. Even young students are aware that their school supplies and clothes are for the most part made in and come from China. They wonder about this and there isn't any established curriculum that addresses the changes that are taking place in the relationship between China and the United States. I designed this project on Chinese calligraphy to give my students background knowledge about China that will help demystify their feelings about this country and increase their knowledge of China and its culture and traditions.

Background on Chinese Calligraphy Characters for the teacher: The characters that make up the written language of China have evolved from ancient times to the present. The meanings that underlie the formation of ancient pictographs that formed the earliest writing in China gives us a glimpse into early writing and its connection to community, social order and everyday life at that time.

Following are descriptions of types of Chinese calligraphy that were used from 1200 B.C. to the present. Information found here was taken from Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. Refer to the chart of Chinese calligraphy that follows these descriptions, also from Wikipedia, for examples of calligraphy styles and refer to the sources section to access these resources - and more - yourself.

The earliest writing of any kind has been found in China. Early writing was in the form of pictographs, writing that used pictures to represent a word. The first writing that we have artifacts for is called Oracle Bone Script. It is so named because it was found incised on turtle shells or animal bones. The majority of oracle bones bearing writing date to the late Shang Dynasty. Most date from 1200-1050 B.C.

Seal script, the next identified ancient style of Chinese calligraphy, became standardized and adopted as the formal script for all of China in the Qin dynasty. Even after it fell out of favor, it continued to be used for decorative engraving and seals, like name chops.

Clerical script is a classical style of calligraphy that is still used for artistic expression as headlines, on signboards and in advertisements in China. It is angular and Chinese scripts used for the last 2000 years, to the present, are often similar in some respects to it.

Semi-cursive script is a partially cursive style of calligraphy. It was derived from clerical script and was developed in the first centuries A.D.

Cursive script, literally translated as “grass” script, is faster to write than other styles, but is also harder to read. The Chinese character for grass also means “loose and sketchy.” That is one way to describe this form of calligraphy. It was used in China during the Han Dynasty, through the Jin Dynasty.

Regular script began to be used in the 7th century. It didn’t take on its current form until the 5th century during the Southern and Northern Dynasties.

Pinyin is a transliteration of standard Mandarin Chinese into the letters of our alphabet. Many other dialects besides Mandarin are also spoken in China.

Examples of each of the Calligraphy styles, showing the evolution of character formation from the pictograph to the present.

<u>Oracle Bone Script</u>	<u>Seal Script</u>	<u>Clerical Script</u>	<u>Semi-Cursive Script</u>	<u>Cursive Script</u>	<u>Regular Script (Traditional)</u>	<u>Regular Script (Simplified)</u>	<u>English and Pinyin</u>
						—	Sun rì
						—	Moon yuè
						—	Mountain shān
						—	Water shuǐ
						—	Rain yǔ

Essential Questions:

- What is calligraphy?
- What do the characters mean?
- How do you read the characters?
- Why is a brush used sometimes and a pencil or pen used at other times?
- How is calligraphy writing different from our writing?

Standards addressed within the lessons of this project: Using a multi-disciplinary approach, this project will touch upon the social science topics of history and community and the language arts topics of vocabulary and word recognition. It will also touch upon how the fine arts shape and reflect everyday life.

Social Science Standards:

Compare characteristics of culture as reflected in language, literature, the arts, traditions and institutions.

Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation. Describe how people in different times and places viewed the world in different ways.

Language Arts Standards:

Apply word analysis and vocabulary skills to comprehend.

Fine Arts Standards:

Fine arts technology-Use appropriate instruments, electronic equipment, computers and networks to access information, process ideas and communicate results.

Understand how the arts shape and reflect history, society and everyday life.

Analyze how the arts function in history, society and everyday life.

Understand the sensory elements, organizational principles and expressive qualities of the arts.

Lesson #1 – View the first PowerPoint presentation to see examples of Chinese calligraphy in pictographs and in modern writing. Then view and discuss pictures of calligraphy on signs and objects in China.

Materials needed:

- 1.) PowerPoint presentation - “Calligraphy in Everyday China”
- 2.) LCD projection system.

Activity: View the PowerPoint presentation “Calligraphy in Everyday China” using a projection system in a whole class setting. Use the manual slide control as there are questions built into the presentation with opportunities for discussion.

View slides 1 to 8. Discuss the evolution of the pictograph to the modern Chinese character. This might be a good time to address the first three essential questions:

What is calligraphy? What do the characters mean? How do you read the characters?

After discussing the differences and likenesses of pictographs and modern writing, take your time as you view each of the pictures in slides 9 to 16 to answer the question:

Can you find the Chinese Calligraphy in these pictures? If you can’t read the characters, can you make a good guess of what they may say or be about?

The students will have a good chance to use their inferential thinking as I don’t think any will actually be able to read the characters that they see.

The last slide shows the covers of two good children’s books that use calligraphy as an important part of the story. Some children might be interested enough to seek out one of the books at their library or bookstore. One or both books will make an excellent activity for your next class lesson.

Follow-up activity: Ask the children to invent their own pictographs. Remind them that it isn’t a complicated picture with a lot of detail. Ask them to think up a few and then take turns showing them to a small group of 3 or 4 students. Then have a time to report back to the class. Could they read the pictograph? Why or why not?

Homework: Look for Chinese characters at home. Look on clothes tags, shoe boxes or kitchen items. Can you make a good guess of what the characters might say? Share with the class tomorrow or bring an item that has characters on it to school to share.

Evaluation: If appropriate to class size, call on each student to respond to the Chinese calligraphy in the PowerPoint pictures and evaluate their response. The pictographs generated by the students can also be evaluated as can the oral response given during the homework sharing activity.

Lesson #2

Read two books that use Chinese calligraphy as part of their story to reinforce the recognition of calligraphy as a form of writing.

Materials needed:

Book: Liu and the Bird: A Journey in Chinese Calligraphy by Catherine Louis.

Book: Voices of the Heart by Ed Young.

Activity: Read Liu and the Bird: A Journey in Chinese Calligraphy by Catherine Louis and/or Voices of the Heart by Ed Young to your students.

Liu and the Bird is the story of a little girl who travels to see her grandfather. All along the way her experiences are told not only in the English writing in the book, but also in selected pictographs and modern characters.

Voices of the Heart is a book of feelings or emotions. Each feeling or emotion is named and then the meaning of the parts that go together to make the Chinese character are listed. This book is interesting, but some of the feelings named may be beyond the understanding of younger students.

Discuss the use of pictographs in these stories.

Discuss to answer the question, “How is calligraphy writing different from our writing?”

Follow-up Activity: There are suggested activities in the back of Liu and the Bird: A Journey in Chinese Calligraphy that I recommend. The Bilingual Picture Alphabet Memory game and Flashlight Picture Magic are fun and reinforce the pictograph concept.

Homework: Write five sentences that use pictographs for some of the words. You will share them with a partner during class tomorrow.

Evaluation: Student oral participation in discussion of the trade books may be assessed. Collect the homework pictograph sentences to provide a second assessment.

Lesson #3

View a PowerPoint presentation that illustrates the materials needed for calligraphy and brushstrokes that are used in calligraphy. Then move to desks or tables to try the brushstrokes with ink and brushes.

Materials needed:

PowerPoint Presentation “Getting Started with Chinese Calligraphy” and LCD projection system.

One calligraphy brush (or paintbrush) per student and either Chinese or Japanese ink (available at craft stores – quite expensive) or tempera watered down to ink consistency.

Newspaper or plastic tablecloths to cover desks or tables.

Newsprint or construction paper is needed – one sheet per student.

Water for clean-up

A painter’s shirt is a good idea, too.

Suggestion: Have examples of brush strokes to put up in the room for students to look at when they are trying to do the brushstrokes themselves.

Activity: View the PowerPoint presentation “Getting Started with Chinese Calligraphy.” Forward the slides manually so that you can discuss each slide as necessary and answer questions.

Stop the presentation for today after reading Slide 14. Slide 14 directs the students to stop and practice their own brushstrokes now. I suggest you have some examples tacked up in the room for the children to work from or leave the projector on so they can see one slide at a time.

Spread out newspaper or plastic table cover. Arranging to have some older students in the room to help (maybe one older student between two younger students) is a great idea.

Give each child a brush, ink and paper. Encourage each child to try: Horizontal brushstroke, Vertical brushstroke, Dot, Hook, Press and lift upward, Press and lift downward, Diagonal brushstroke (sweep) to the left, and Diagonal brushstroke (sweep) to the right.

Follow-up Activity: Take a few minutes to talk about how the students feel they did with their calligraphy. What did they have success with? What do they think they need to do to improve?

Homework: Ask students to look through old magazines or newspapers for examples of calligraphy to bring to school. Post these in the classroom for an interactive bulletin board. Supply strips of paper near the bulletin board so students may write captions for the calligraphy posted there.

Evaluation: Assess each student’s brushwork and look for improvement over time.

Lesson #4 and Lesson #5 **Review the brushstrokes used in calligraphy and practice to improve each child's calligraphy characters.**

Materials Needed:

Brushes

Ink or Paint

Water for clean-up

Newsprint to write on

Newspaper to cover desks or tables

Painting shirts

Activity: Your students will need more practice time before their strokes are good enough to continue on to making characters. Repeat the brushstrokes done during the last class calligraphy session. Post some of the better examples of strokes that students have done in the room. Focus on improving each kind of stroke.

Follow-up Activity: Discuss the qualities of the better examples of calligraphy that are posted in the classroom.

Evaluation: Look for improvement in brushstrokes. Evaluate discussion participation.

Lesson #6

Students will review what they have learned about calligraphy strokes. They will learn the Five Golden Rules of writing a character. They will access a computer site that will show them the brushstroke order of the characters for the numbers 1 to 10. After they practice writing each character “in the air” with their hand, they will use a calligraphy practice sheet to write each character with a pencil.

Materials needed:

PowerPoint Presentation “Getting Started with Chinese Calligraphy” and LCD projection system.

Access to at least one computer per each 2 students. If all can’t access computers at the same time, then rotate students to a computer throughout the day so all have a turn.

One copy of the Calligraphy Practice Sheet (on the next page of this lesson plan) for each student.

Pencil

Activity: Begin with slide 15, a review of what was taught on slides 1-14. Discuss. Go on to discuss slide 16, the Five Golden Rules of calligraphy. Slides 17 and 18 give directions on how to access an animated calligraphy site where they can see the Chinese character for each of the numbers from 1 to 10. The animation for each number appears in the upper left hand corner of the computer screen. It shows the order of the strokes needed to complete the number character.

Here are the instructions as shown on slides 17 and 18:

Now we will try to follow the rules for writing Chinese characters and practice the brushstrokes we have learned.

We will write the number characters from 1 to 10.

We will read all of the directions, then we will start to write.

First – Log on to this website: <http://lost-theory.org/ocrat/chargif/numbers.html>

2. Then, Click on the Chinese character for 1.

3. Watch the red flashing animated line that shows you what stroke comes first to write this character.

4. Trace the character in the air with your finger.

5. When you think you can remember how to write 1, click the arrow to go “Back” to the web page and select the Chinese character for 2 and click on it.

6. Watch each animation from 1 to 10.

7. When you have completed all 10 numbers, you are ready to write!

If you have a computer hook-up to an LCD projector, this would be the best way to access this site for the first time. You will be able to demonstrate what to do with everyone at the same time. Otherwise, you'll have to make your way around the room to any computers you have, explaining what to do with one set of students at a time.

Follow-up to the computer activity: Give each child a calligraphy practice sheet. The lines on the sheet are meant to help the students center their character writing. Each box will hold one character. There is enough room on one sheet for each child to write the characters 1 to 10 two times.

Discuss to answer the question, "Why is a brush used sometimes and a pencil used other times"? (Brushes are used for art and for special occasions or purposes. Pencils are used for daily writing and in situations where using a brush and ink isn't practical.)

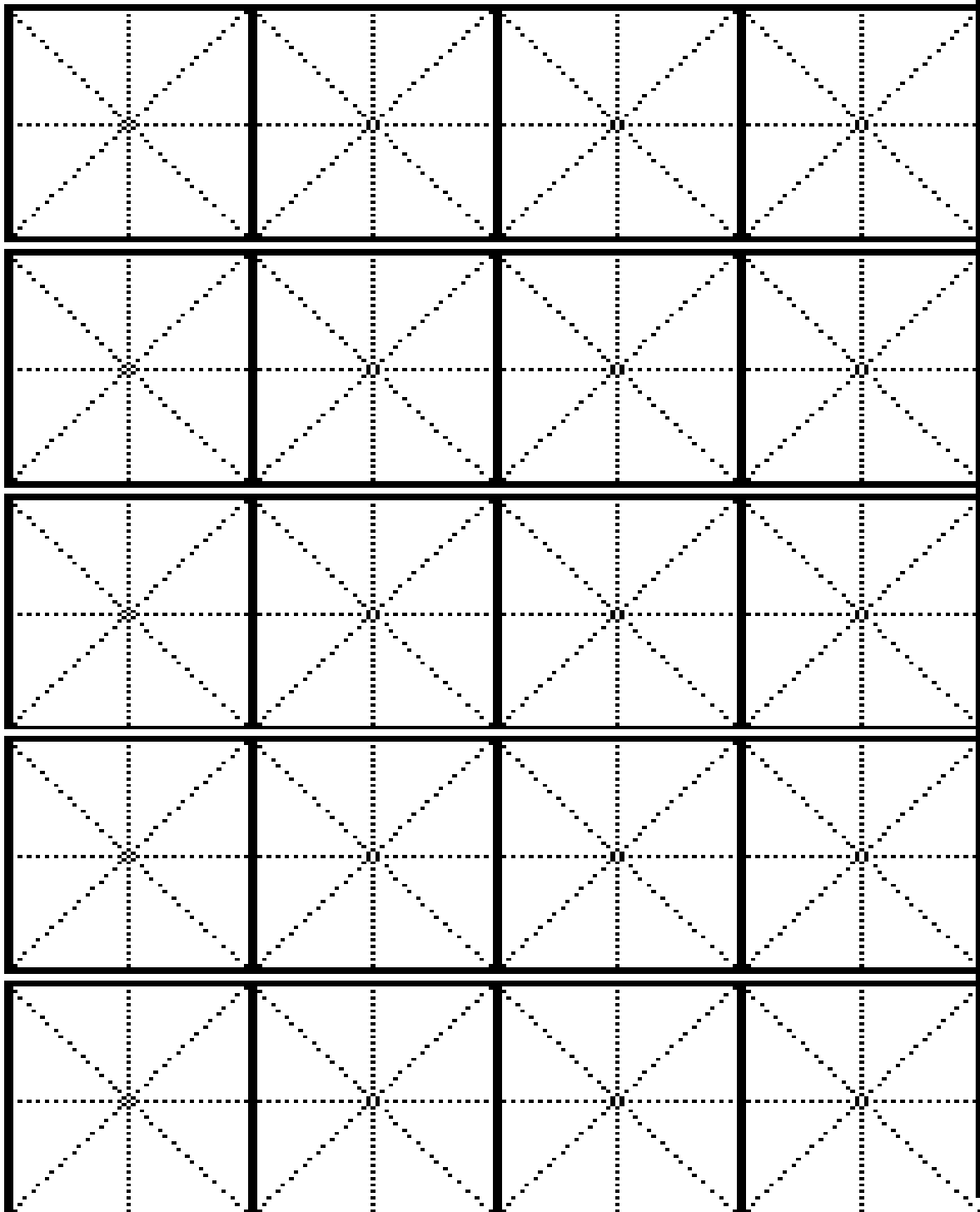
Homework: Students may practice the formation of the characters at home using a blank piece of copy paper folded into 16 squares. They may write one character in each square with a pencil or marker.

Evaluation: Assess the work completed on the Calligraphy Practice Sheet and the homework practice sheet. Look for improvement.

Calligraphy Practice Sheet

Name _____

Date _____



Lesson #7

Students will return to the animated calligraphy website to review the characters for the numbers 1-10 and learn new characters as selected by the teacher. They will practice character formation using the Calligraphy Practice Sheet.

Materials Needed:

Computers

Website: <http://lost-theory.org/ocrat/chargif/numbers.html>

Calligraphy Practice Sheet – One per student.

Pencil

Activity: Allow students to return to the animated calligraphy website to review the characters for the numbers 1 – 10. The site offers additional sets of characters for study, like the characters for pronouns. You may select additional character sets for your students to learn, if you wish.

Give each student a copy of the blank Calligraphy Practice Sheet to practice their calligraphy after their work on the computer is completed.

Follow-up Activity: Provide individual feedback for your students. Suggest improvement for those who need it. Pairing students who need help with those who are more able is one way to provide a model for your students who need more help with their calligraphy writing.

Homework: Students may practice the formation of the characters at home using a blank piece of copy paper folded into 16 squares. They may write one character in each square with a pencil or marker.

Evaluation: Assess improvement in formation of characters on the Calligraphy Practice Sheet. Give a quick oral test to individual students to determine if they can recognize the characters for the numbers 1 – 10.

Lesson #8

Students will View a PowerPoint presentation that contains Calligraphy Cards. They will make their own cards to reinforce identification of the calligraphy characters they are learning.

Materials Needed:

PowerPoint Presentation, “Chinese Calligraphy Cards”

Magazine pictures, photos from home, or hand-drawn pictures

Ink, Newsprint, Brushes or pencils

Construction paper or Index paper cut into 3 ½”x 8” rectangular flashcards. Each child will need 10 cards to start. (Or select a size appropriate for your students.)

Newspaper

Water for clean-up

Activity: Watch the PowerPoint presentation, “Chinese Calligraphy Cards.” It shows a series of “cards” that have a picture, a character, and an English word and Pinyin transliteration that describes the picture. Discuss the cards and encourage the students to “discover” the parts that make up each card.

Tell the students that they will have the opportunity to make their own calligraphy cards for the Chinese characters that they are learning.

They will find or make a picture that represents each character they are learning. They will make the calligraphy character on the card and write the English translation on the front (or on the back, if you wish) of the card.

The Pinyin word shown on each card is for additional information only at this point. There are computer sites available that provide sound to hear the pronunciation of Chinese words and the Pinyin notation for each word. This goes beyond the lessons contained in this project.

Follow-up Activity: Students can use their calligraphy cards to practice identifying the Chinese characters with a friend or alone to review the characters they have learned.

Evaluation: Give students time to make and then learn to identify the characters on their calligraphy cards. Give individual oral tests to students to assess how many characters the students can identify correctly.

Sources

Works Cited: Teacher Background Information and Project Activities

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Wake Forest University. 20 Nov. 2007 <<http://www.wfu.edu/~moran/callig.html>>. I changed this original version of the blank calligraphy sheet to accommodate younger students. It's use is described within Lesson 6.

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Full descriptions of calligraphy scripts can be found here as well as the complete chart of calligraphy scripts from ancient times to the present as seen (in part and revised) within the teacher background information section.

Young, Ed. Voices of the Heart. New York: Scholastic P, 1997. This is an elementary level book that explains how some Chinese characters are formed. Recommended for use in lesson 2 of this project.

Works Cited: PowerPoint presentation, “Calligraphy in Everyday China.”

Louis, Catherine. Liu and the Bird: a Journey in Chinese Calligraphy. New York: North-South Books, 2006. A children's story based on calligraphy from oracle bone script to modern characters. Recommended for use by elementary students.

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Descriptions of calligraphy scripts can be found here as well as the complete chart of calligraphy scripts from ancient times to the present as seen (in part) in slides 4, 6, 7, and 8.

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Works cited: PowerPoint presentation, “Chinese Calligraphy Cards: A Visual Visit to China: Word-by-Word.”

Leo, Andres. "Chinese Symbols Database Collection." Chinese-Word.Com. 20 Nov. 2007

<<http://www.chinese-word.com/>>. The Chinese characters used in this presentation (as well as many others) can be accessed here.

eStroke Animated Chinese Characters. 1999. EON Media Limited. 20 Nov. 2007

<<http://www.eon.com.hk/estroke/>>. Produces an animated GIF to show brush stroke order. I recommend this program (in addition to enabling your computer with Chinese language capabilities) to type Chinese characters for the vocabulary cards as seen in the PowerPoint presentation, “Chinese Calligraphy Cards: A Visual Visit to China: Word-by-Word.”