

# Unit Plan

## Tibet: Why it is Important to China? A Geographic Perspective

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### Introduction

The following five day unit plan focuses on the importance of the Plateau of Tibet, generally, and the Tibetan Autonomous Republic (TAR), specifically, to the People's Republic of China from a geographical perspective. While there has been much recent scholarship on Tibet at the university level, Tibet remains an area either largely ignored in K-12 curricula or, if covered, is presented in a very romantic, biased (usually, anti-Chinese) manner. The purpose of this unit is to demonstrate the importance of the TAR to China in geo-political terms in order to better understand China's stance on this often highly contentious area.

The unit will comprise five, 45 minute class periods, designed for use in grades 6 or 7. However, at the teacher's discretion, the lesson could be modified for any secondary (6-12) curriculum. Standards are based on the State of Michigan's Proposed Social Studies Content Expectations for Grade 6.

**Objective:** To use skills of geographic inquiry and analysis to answer important questions about relationships between people, their cultures, and their environment, in their community and within the larger world context.

### Day 1 Activities:

Hand out KWLQ chart (see attached) and conduct a KWLQ activity, asking students to list in column 1 as many facts as they can about what they know about the physical and human geography of Tibet and the Tibetan Plateau. Review with students, creating a master list that will be saved.

Have students list in column 2, things that they want to know about the physical and human geography of Tibet and the Tibetan Plateau. Review with students, creating a master list that will be saved.

Students should also retain their own copies of the KWLQ chart. (20 minutes)

As a means to introduce students to the issues involved with Tibet, have students watch the video:

BYkids: My Country Is Tibet BYkids, 2010. Full Video, a video produced about the last king of Tibet, a young man currently living in exile and attending college in the United States.

Discovery Education. Web. 1/11/2015. <http://www.discoveryeducation.com> (26:30 minutes) and complete the Guided Viewing worksheet as they watch. (See Attachment 1) (To view this video, it is necessary to subscribe to “Discovery Education”)

Assign as homework: Read: Stewart Gordon article, "Major Asian Rivers of the Plateau of Tibet: The Basics." Education about Asia 15.3 (2010): 15-18. Education about Asia on line. Web. 1 Nov. 2015. <<http://aas2.asian-studies.org/EAA/EAA-Archives/15/3/933.pdf>>.

### Day 2 Activities:

In class, review student answers from the Guided Reading sheet from “My Country Is Tibet”, collect and grade.

As a visual aid for the study of Tibet, view: “Summer on the Tibetan Plateau” BBC. All Rights Reserved. , 2007. Video Segment  
Discovery Education. Web. 1/11/2015. <http://www.discoveryeducation.com>. (To view this video, it is necessary to subscribe to “Discovery Education”.)

In class activity: Utilizing the map from the Gordon article a map of Asia and a blank political map showing the countries of Asia’s borders, students will trace the course of each of the 10 major rivers that originate in the Plateau of Tibet and label the countries through which each flow. If not completed in class, this will be assigned as homework.

Assign as homework: Worksheet (Attachment 2)

### Day 3 Activities:

In class, review students’ responses to the “Major Rivers” article, collect and grade.

Watch: Video: “The Top Ten Things to Know about Tibetan Civilization” (first 11:40 of 40 minutes, points 1 and 2) (To view this video, you must create an account for online Professional Development on East Asia with Asia for Educators and the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA)). [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/online\\_course/](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/online_course/)

While watching the video, students will take notes on the first two points discussed (1. Tibet is Massive and 2. Tibet is the Roof of the World)

Watch: Video: “Top Ten Things to Know about Tibet Today” (first 7:20 of 38 minutes, points 1, 2 and 3) (To view this video, you must create an account for online Professional Development on East Asia with Asia for Educators and the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA)). [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/online\\_course/](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/online_course/)

While watching the video, students will take notes on the first three misconceptions discussed (1. Tibet is Small and Remote, 2. Tibet is Unimportant, 3. Tibetans are religious and Non-Violent).

Assign as Homework: Students will review and edit their notes from the two video lectures.

#### Day 4 Activities:

Discuss with students notes from the video lectures on Tibet specifically addressing the issues of

1. Tibet's size (roughly equal to Western Europe or the American Southwest.)
2. Tibet comprises approximately 26% of China's territory (and if coupled with the other two disputed areas of China, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, comprises 55-56% of China's territory)
3. Approximately one third of China's water comes from Tibet and one seventh of the world's potential hydroelectric power is located in Tibet.
4. Tibet's glaciers are warming at three times the rate of warming at sea level, creating concern for water supplies in the future.
5. Tibet shares a border with India which is disputed by India and China with both sides heavily militarizing the area.
6. This area is the world's only tri-junctional nuclear area with Pakistan, India and China possessing nuclear arms.
7. China has minority ethnic groups such as the Tibetans within its borders that it doesn't know how to deal with.
8. China is surrounded by nations that have cultural and religious connections to minority groups within China.
9. China is surrounded by major powers that have interests in this region.

Have students complete columns 3 and 4 of the original KWLQ sheet (What I Learned and Questions I Still Have). Students must list a minimum of ten things that they have learned and five things that they still have questions about relative to the relationship between China, the TAR and the Tibetan community in exile.

Assignment as Homework: Complete KWLQ sheets if not finished in class.

#### Day 5 Activities:

Sheets will be collected and graded based on quality and sophistication of answers.

Culminating Activity: Discussion of predictions as to what the future will be between China and Tibet. Stated differently, will China or can China afford to allow an independent Tibet?

## Standards

### Michigan K-12 Social Studies Standards Draft (8/15)

6—G1.1.1 Use maps, globes, and web based geography technology to investigate the world at global, interregional, regional, and local scales.

6—G1.2.1 Apply the skills of geographic inquiry (asking geographic questions, acquiring geographic information, organizing geographic information, analyzing geographic information, and answering geographic questions) to analyze a geographic problem or issue.

6—G1.3.3 Explain the different ways in which places are connected and how those connections demonstrate interdependence and accessibility.

6—G2.1.1 Locate and describe the landforms, ecosystems, and the climate of the region under study.

6—G2.2.3 Explain how culture and experience influence people's perception of places and regions.

6—G4.4.1 Identify factors that contribute to conflict and cooperation between and among cultural groups (*e.g. control/use of natural resources, power, wealth, and cultural diversity*).

6—4.4.2 Evaluate from different perspectives, examples of cooperation and conflict within the region under study.

6—G6.1.1 Contemporary Investigations-Investigate a contemporary global issue by applying the skills of geographic inquiry (asking questions, acquiring geographic information, organizing geographic information, analyzing geographic information, and answering geographic questions) and, when practical, develop a plan for action.

6—C4.3.1 Explain how governments address national and international issues and form policies and how the policies may not be consistent with those of other countries.

6---C4.3.2 Explain the challenges to governments and the cooperation needed to address international issues (*e.g. migration and human rights*)

6—C4.3.3 Analyze the impact of treaties, agreements, and international organizations on global issues.

## **Guided Viewing: My Country Is Tibet**

1. What does Trichen hope Western people get from the movie?
2. Who was Trichen's father?
3. Even though he is the descendant of Tibetan kings, what does Trichen still do for himself?
4. When did the People's Liberation army take over parts of the Tibetan area?
5. In what country does Trichen live?
6. What is the main purpose of the Rajpur Tibetan Refugee Factory?
7. How do you think it does this?
8. Why does Trichen attend a Tibetan school rather than an Indian school?

9. Of the three great historical religious kings of Tibet, who sent many scholars to India to learn Buddhism?
10. What did the other two kings accomplish?
11. As the son, what was Trichen's responsibility to perform at his father's funeral?
12. What happened to Trichen one year after his father's death?
13. What is Trichen's relationship with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama?
14. Trichen's friend says that as Tibetans, they have the right to live in their own land. Do people have such a right? Why or why not?
15. What do Trichen and his friend believe Trichen must do to help Tibet regain its independence? Do you think that this will be successful? Explain your answer.

## **Worksheet: Major Asian Rivers of the Plateau of Tibet: The Basics**

- 1. Explain the importance of monsoonal rains to the rivers of the Tibetan Plateau.**
- 2. Why are the waters of these rivers becoming increasingly important?**
- 3. In addition to fresh water, what other important natural resource do these rivers supply?**
- 4. Using a political map that shows the countries of Asia, what countries border the Tibetan Autonomous Republic (TAR)?**
- 5. Why do you think that it would be important for countries such as China to maintain favorable relations and/or control territories in which the rivers of the Himalayas originate?**