

SPICE Lesson Plan: Women in Ancient and Modern China
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Organizing Questions:

- How do women negotiate the tension between societal expectations, obligation, and personal desires?
- To what extent does gender and cultural context affect one's ability to achieve his/her goals?

Introduction:

This lesson aims to engage students in a critical analysis of the role that society plays in creating and promoting expectations of women in Ancient and Modern China. Each segment of the lesson allows students to learn more about expectations placed on Chinese women during different historical periods, and it also encourages them to make connections to their own lives in the present day. Students will engage with narrative excerpts and primary sources with the goal of collaborating to turn the entire classroom into a Mogao cave that details the stories of women in Ancient and Modern China.

Objectives:

- In this lesson, students will be able to critically analyze narratives, using a gender analysis protocol.
- In this lesson, students will compare expectations placed on women in Ancient and Modern China to the expectations existing in their present-day communities.
- In this lesson, students will relate their own identities and experiences with those of women in China.
- In this lesson, students will synthesize sources in order to design and create a Mogao Cave that conveys the values, histories, and dreams of women in Ancient and Modern China.

Materials:

- Images of Mogao Cave 45
- Excerpts from *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*
- Chapter 12 of *The Lotus Sutra*
- Mogao women Powerpoint
- Poster paper, markers
- Cave-building supplies: paint, butcher paper, tape, glue, scissors, stapler.

Equipment

- Computer
- Projector

Teacher Preparation:

- Make copies of *The Lotus Sutra* for each student
- Prepare poster paper and markers

Time:

One week, with 50% of the time devoted to the lesson, and the other 50% of the time given to students to work on creating their cave.

Procedures: Follow the Powerpoint created, to bring students on an inquiry-based journey throughout Ancient and Modern China.

Slides 2-8: These are terms students will be exposed to along the unit. Let students know that they will know what all of these words mean by the end of the week.

Slides 9-10: As an engaging introduction, ask students to think about their own goals and dreams. Then have them share with partners how these dreams are made more easy or difficult because of their gender and upbringing.

Slide 11: Present the objective and essential question of the lesson (listed in previous page).

Slide 12-13: Have students look at the picture and guess the three contemporary ideal characteristics of a Chinese woman (“Bai Fu Mei” means “White, Rich, and Beautiful”). Then ask them to discuss with partners and as a whole class how these standards are similar or different within their own cultural contexts.

Slide 14: Going back to the goals they stated in Slide 9, have them discuss with partners and with the class how these goals would be accomplished if their feet were smaller than an iPhone 6.

Introduce students to the concept of foot binding, and inform them that this was considered beautiful for 1,000 years in China.

Slide 15: Relate foot binding to modern day times, and ask students to brainstorm how women suffer for beauty and limit their physical mobility for fashion. Have them discuss in pairs and as a group.

Slide 16-19: In groups of 4, ask students to engage in the Question Formulation Technique. This is a strategy for encouraging students to actively engage in critical thinking, and it structures the process for creating questions around a specific topic. (See Question Formulation Technique One-Pager)
By the end of the process, students will have a list of their three most important questions.

Slide 20: In partner groups, assign each student to be either Person A or Person B. Have them read their assigned excerpt and explain it to their partner. Then, ask them to discuss how these excerpts answer some of their three important questions. Encourage them to write down more questions they have after reading these excerpts.

Slide 21-24: Introduction to the Mogao caves. Explain that these caves were built over time, and contain sculptures and artwork that demonstrate the values, belief systems, and daily lives of people at the time.

Slide 25: To further help students understand that concept of the cave walls as community stories and histories, show images of local murals. Explain that these murals tell the stories of their communities, detailing the beliefs and values of the people. Similarly, the Mogao caves did this too.

Slide 26-27: Show students images of the Mogao caves, and have them focus on the female images. Have them discuss the following questions:

- Who might these women be?
- What are they doing?
- How are they dressed?

Slide 28: Explain that many of the caves have artwork depicting Buddhist teachings. Pass our Chapter 12 of *The Lotus Sutra*, and ask students to read and annotate it through a gender analysis lens.

- Read the five gender analysis questions beforehand, so that students know what they are looking for in their reading.
- Ask them to share their thoughts with a partner, and then with the class.
- Depending on the maturity level of the students, and the teacher's comfort level, a small class debate could be structured around the question, "Is Tara a model for women to follow, even though she had to change who she was in order to achieve her goal?"

Slide 29: This is a quote describing some of the practical benefits for women who devoted their lives to Buddhism. This could be an exit pass prompt, in which students read the quote and then answer a question synthesizing Chapter 12 of *The Lotus Sutra* and this quote. "What opportunities and restrictions did Buddhism present to women?"

Slide 30: Students are now free to brainstorm, research, plan, and build their own Mogao cave. Develop small due dates to check on student progress. Remind them that they will write a reflection and evaluation once they are done.

Assessment:

Convert our classroom into Mogao Cave OXX, a super secret cave created 1,000 years ago by a group of women. It is still maintained and updated by contemporary women. Mogao Cave OXX chronicles the belief systems, values, histories, daily struggles, hopes, and dreams of women throughout ancient and modern China.

Students will be placed in groups, and will be assigned a particular wall/area of the classroom as their section of the Mogao cave to design and build. As a small group, they will be responsible for:

- Brainstorming ideas
- Assigning roles and deadlines
- Conducting further research
- Sketching the design of their section of the cave
- Building their cave and accompanying artwork, text, 3D artifacts
- Ensuring text-based connections are present in their work

Each student will individually be responsible for a reflection and evaluation. The evaluation asks:

- What did you contribute to the group?
- What did each individual member contribute?

The reflection will ask each student to specifically explain how their section of the Mogao Cave tells the story of women in Ancient and Modern China. They must demonstrate their knowledge by selecting at least three artifacts from their caves and, describing, in detail, the meaning and significance with regard to the lives of women in Ancient and Modern China.