

# Belz Museum of Asian and Judaic Art

## Pre-Visit Terms and Vocabulary

The following is a list of vocabulary terms that are frequently used during museum tours. It may be helpful to introduce them to your students before their visit, and as a follow-up to the tour to reinforce the terms they have learned,

### Historical Terms:

**Artifacts** are material things that past civilizations left behind. From these objects, archeologists can study the way people lived.

**Archeology** is the study of past human life and culture via material things.

**Archaic** is in reference to a time period long ago.

**Dynasty** is a succession of rulers from the same family or line.

**Pagodas** are seven or nine storied towers that mark where sacred Buddhist relics are interred. They began to appear around 300 A.D.

**The Forbidden City** is located in Beijing and is the home of the Emperor.

**Mongols** are a nomadic and war-like people from Mongolia who conquered China and ruled over the country from 1271-1368.

**Manchus** are a nomadic people from Manchuria who conquered China and established the Qing dynasty.

**Buddhism** was first introduced to China via the Silk Road in AD 159. It is centered on the belief that freeing one's self from desire will end suffering and put one's self closer to Nirvana.

**Daoism** is a Chinese philosophy based on contemplation of the natural world.

**Confucianism** centers on ethics, morals, and politics. Its purpose was to maintain public order and provide, honesty and effective government

**Ancient religions** - varied by region, and because China is an agricultural society, Gods were often associated with natural phenomenon.

### Rocks and Minerals:

*\*You will recognize many of the semi-precious stones found in the collection, as they are often used nowadays to create jewelry.*

**Jade** comes in two forms, Jadeite and Nephrite. Jade is a very difficult to carve, as it measures “7” on the Moh’s Hardness Scale and craftsmen use diamond-tipped tools to carve it.

**Agate** is a reddish-brown stone with swirling patterns.

**Lapis** is a deep blue-colored stone.

**Rhodonite** is a pink/light red colored stone.

**Amethyst** is a purple colored stone.

**Malachite** is a vibrant green stone with striped patterning.

**Tiger’s Eye** is a golden-brown stone with striped patterning.

**Scholar’s Rocks** are naturally formed rocks that can either be categorized as abstract or representational.

They are appreciated for their similarity to particular objects such as people, mountains, various landscapes etc.

## **High Art:**

**Calligraphy** is a script produced chiefly by brush. The Chinese regarded calligraphy as their ultimate artistic achievement.

**Paintings** are often influenced by Taoism in that people are represented as small parts in the midst of a bigger landscape to illustrate how small people are in the scheme of things.

**Poetry** frequently accompanied scroll paintings.

## **Crafts:**

**Cloisonné** is a technique where colored enamel in the form of paste is inlaid between thin strips of metal to create complicated designs on bronze molds. Cloisonné comes from the French word, Cloison, meaning ‘cell’

**Cinnabar** is a red lacquer that is used to paint, waterproof and protect many different types of objects.

**Sculptures** are used to tell stories of famous Gods and Goddesses, symbols are present to add meaning to the work as well as to help identify who the heroes are.

**Screens** are a type of craft, and functions as walls within a house.

## **Other Materials:**

**Ivory** is a material that comes from an elephants tusk, mammoth tusk, walrus tusk, or narwhale horn. It is generally obtained through trade. It is a soft material as is fairly easy to carve.

**Silk** comes from the cocoon of silk worms. It was developed in China around 2600 B.C. It is a very durable cloth with surprising strength.

**Mongolian Silver** is light- weight silver used by the nomadic Mongols because it was relatively easy to carry.

**Bronze** is a type of metal from which artwork is made.

### **Chinese Mythology:**

**The Eight Immortals** are a special class of human souls that achieved more than any other in their understanding of nature's secrets.

**The 18 Lohan** are the disciples of Buddha. They have followed the 'Eight fold Path' and are no longer subject to rebirth. Their name means "deserving and worthy."

**The Long Dragon/ 5-clawed dragon** is the king of the dragons and is the symbol of the Emperor.

**General Kuan** is the Chinese God of War. He was known for being the conqueror of demons and the helper of those in need.

**Temple Lions** are found in pairs; male and female, which can be distinguished by a ball under the male's paw and a cub under the female's. In China, pairs of lions guard palaces, secular buildings, and temples.

**Guan Yin** is the Goddess of mercy and compassion. Her name means, "Hears the cries of the World."

**The Monkey King** was a character created by a Buddhist Monk named Xuan Zang (602-664). He traveled west to India to attain the *Sutras*, or Buddhist holy book. His adventures became the subject of many stories that were later rewritten into the Chinese classic, "Journey to the West".

## Pre- Visit Prep for Teachers

### Chinese Cultural Terms and Vocabulary

The following is a list of vocabulary terms and phrases that are frequently used during museum tours. It may be helpful to introduce them to your students before their visit and to reinforce the terms they have learned after the tour.

#### Elementary Terms

The **emperor** is the male sovereign or supreme ruler of an empire (often compared to a King).

A **dynasty** is a succession of emperors from the same family or line.

The **Qing Dynasty** (pronounced Ching) began in 1644 and ended in 1911. It was the last imperial dynasty of China, and a great deal of art in the museum was made during this time.

**Jade** is a popular material in Chinese art. It is often used for carvings and jewelry. Jade is a very hard substance and must be carved with diamond-tipped tools. It comes in two forms: jadeite and nephrite.

**Silk** is a durable and luxurious material which was developed in China around 2600 BCE. The thread comes from the cocoon of silk worms. Silk is still used today to produce fine garments. The Chinese were attributed with the creation of silk and traded it via the silk road.

**Ivory** is a white material that comes from elephants' tusks or other mammals' bones. It was generally obtained through trade.

**Pagodas** are tiered towers often built near Buddhist temples and have religious significance. A pagoda must have an odd-number of floors.

**Chinese dragons** are powerful, legendary creatures that were once used to symbolize the emperor. Dragons are mostly associated with agriculture. One myth is that the sound of thunder comes from dragons playing in the clouds with a ball.

**Temple lions** are found in pairs; male and female. The male has a ball under his paw; the female has a cub under hers. In imperial China, temple lions guarded palaces, bridges, and important buildings from evil spirits.

**Cloisonné** is a French word to describe the Chinese art form that combines metal and enamel (glass) to create jewelry, statues, fish pots, and other decorative items. It is usually very colorful with interesting patterns.

**Screens** are made from several panels of wood hinged together to function like walls within a house. Screens often have calligraphy or landscape sceneries engraved onto them.

**Cinnabar** is a popular bright red color of lacquer in China, consisting of multiple layers which is used to paint, waterproof, and protect furniture and other objects.

**The Monkey King** was a character created by a Buddhist Monk named Xuan Zang (602-664). He traveled west to India to attain the Sutras, or Buddhist holy books. His adventures became the subject of many stories that were later rewritten into the Chinese classic, "Journey to the West".

A **symbol** is something that represents something else by association or resemblance. For example, a heart is usually a symbol of love.

**Peaches** are ancient Chinese symbols and often represented in art; they represent long-life and immortality.

**Fish**, especially carp, symbolize wealth and prosperity. According to legend, the carp is noted for its strength and bravery when it swims against the current. Some say when it makes its final leap over the rapid, it turns into a celestial dragon.

**Lotus blossoms** symbolize creative power and purity amid diverse surroundings. They sprout from the mud under ponds yet retain their purity and beauty. Generally associated with Buddhism.

## Middle School Terms

The **Qing Dynasty** (pronounced Ching) began in 1644 when the Manchu minority took China and ruled the Han majority. Ending in 1911, the Qing dynasty was it was the last imperial dynasty of China. A great deal of art in the museum was made during this time.

**The Manchus** come from an area known as Manchuria, found in the northeast of modern China. They are a separate ethnicity from the majority Han Chinese, with their own dress, culture, and writing system. The Manchus took over Beijing in 1644 and began the Qing Dynasty, which lasted until 1911.

**The Mongols** are an ethnic group that comes from the area now known as Mongolia. Famous Mongol rulers such as Ghengis Khan lead conquests all over Asia, Russia and Eastern Europe. Mongols controlled China during the Song Dynasty.

**The Eight Immortals** are a group of Taoist immortals who symbolize longevity and prosperity. Each is represented with a different attribute.

**The Eighteen Luohan** are a group of famous Buddhist figures who have reached the Buddhist state of nirvana, or enlightenment. Sometimes they are referred to as the eighteen disciples of Buddha.

**The Silk Road** was a massive trade route extending over 4,000 miles spanning from southern Europe all the way to China. The Silk Road was important not only in the trading of goods, but also in cultural exchange between European, Indian, African, and Middle Eastern cultures.

**The Monkey King** was a character created by a Buddhist monk named Xuan Zang (602-664). Monkey King traveled west to India to attain the Sutras, or Buddhist holy book. His adventures became the subject of many stories that were later rewritten into the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*.

**Jade** is a popular material in Chinese art. Jade measures 7 out of 10 on the Mohs scale of hardness. It must be carved with materials which rank 7 or higher. Diamond-tipped tools are often used for the abrading process. It comes in two forms: jadeite and nephrite.

**Guan Yu** was a war general during the Three Kingdoms period of China. His character became fictionalized in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (some even call him a god), and he usually represented with his guandao weapon named Green Dragon Crescent Blade, a red face, and a long beard.

**Guan Yin** is the Buddhist goddess of mercy and compassion. She is a major subject of Chinese art, often represented by a moon.

**Scholars** were male Chinese officials who had passed the civil service exam and proved themselves to be knowledgeable in the Chinese literary classics and practiced the high arts. Scholars held great respect and power in traditional China and were educated and elite group.

## Jr. And Sr. High School Terms

**The Qing Dynasty** (pronounced Ching) began in 1644 when the Manchu minority took China and ruled the Han majority. Ending in 1911, the Qing dynasty was it was the last imperial dynasty of China. A great deal of art in the museum was made during this time.

**Dowager Empress** is the title given to the mother of an emperor, particularly in Asia. Empress dowagers held regency during the reign of an underage emperor. China's most prominent empress dowager, Cixi, managed to extend her control for a long period after the emperor was old enough to govern. This was a source of political turmoil according to the traditional view of Chinese history.

**Civil Service Exam** was one of the first exam systems in the world allowing any male who could pass the test to become a government official, regardless of social class. Students were tested on their ability to memorize classic texts, poetry, arithmetic, and the like.

**Daoism** comes from the teachings of the fundamental *Dao De Jing* classic text written by Laozi. Daoist principles focus on nature, harmony, and moderation.

**Confucianism** was established by the teachings of Confucius and concerns social responsibility.

Confucianism is more community-oriented than Buddhism or Daoism. A dominant principle in Confucianism is that self-fulfillment can be found through helping others. Confucius based his teaching on five important relationships; ruler-subject, father-son, elder brother-younger brother, husband-wife, friend-friend.

**Buddhism** is a religion that originated in India. It is based on the Four Noble Truths and spread through China along the Silk Road. Buddhism represents the search for Enlightenment and the way out of the cycle of reincarnation.

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## High Art Forms

**Calligraphy** is considered the highest art form in Chinese culture. Chinese calligraphy characters are based on pictures. Calligraphy uses brushes and black ink to write Chinese characters in an artistic manner, similar to the idea of cursive-writing in English.

**Painting** was traditionally done by scholars with black or colored inks. Popular scenes included landscapes, nature scenes, traditional folk tales, and royal life.

**Poetry** is one of the most respected art forms in Chinese culture and was a necessary study for taking the civil service exam.

**The Four Great Classical Novels** - These novels are commonly considered by scholars to be the pinnacle of Chinese achievement in classical literature.

***Journey to the West*** was inspired by a Buddhist monk named Xuan Zang (602-664), who traveled west to India to attain the Sutras, or Buddhist holy books. The story is fictionalized with colorful characters such as the Monkey King, who experiences great adventures and difficulties along the way.

***Dream of the Red Chamber*** is a novel that contains an extraordinarily large number of characters and details the life of the aristocratic Jia family; Important for its depiction of life during the Qing Dynasty.

***Romance of the Three Kingdoms*** is also famous for its numerous characters and complex story. Written during the Ming Dynasty, much of the novel focuses on military conquests and historical generals and rulers of the end of the Han dynasty and beginning of the Three Kingdoms period.

***Outlaws of the Marsh (also called Water Margin)*** is the least widely-known among the four classics. The novel details the lives of 108 bandits during the Song Dynasty. There is a theory that *Water Margin* became popular during the Yuan Dynasty due to resentment toward the Mongol rulers. The rebellion was safe to promote because it criticized the Song Dynasty on the surface, but it was also a call to oppose corrupt governments.