

CHEUNG Yee

Suggested class activities for Senior Primary

Artist: CHEUNG Yee

Level: Senior Primary

Theme: Tortoise Shell Relief

Suggested length: 4 hours

Teaching concept:

Sculpture plays both a functional and practical role in the development of Chinese art. Examples include statues of deities, figurines, and ornaments for gardens, monasteries and palaces. One of the pioneers of Hong Kong modern sculpture, CHEUNG Yee has brought together both Chinese and Western elements in his sculpture, using the modern sculpture methods of segmentation and reassembly since the 1960s, along with traditional Chinese elements, such as oracle bone script, tortoise shell and Yijing hexagram symbols, to create sculptures that are highly individualistic in style. He has also created cast paper murals with similar themes.

This course aims to help students learn about and appreciate CHEUNG's sculptures, which are inspired by tortoise shell and oracle bone script. The course introduces features of Chinese culture and shows the students how to add new visual effects to traditional objects using modern art approaches.

Required background knowledge:

1. The students should have experience in creating three-dimensional works with modelling clay.
2. They should already have seen pictograms.
3. They should have experience in using acrylic paint.

Teaching goals:

1. Learn about and appreciate CHEUNG's sculpture through his video.
2. Use the techniques of segmentation and reassembly to design a tortoise shell relief.
3. Learn how to create low relief using light-weight modelling clay.
4. Use your imagination to transform natural phenomena into symbols and to create stories.
5. Learn how to use acrylic paint to imitate the effect of oxidized bronze surfaces.

Suggested class activities:

1. Introduce the oracle bone script (Suggested length: 10 mins)

Show the “Supplementary Teaching Materials ppt” pp2-3

- Group activity: Find a picture of a tortoise shell with oracle bone script and cut it into several pieces. Divide students into groups and distribute one piece to each group. Ask them to guess and imagine the completed picture.
- Students should be able to identify a tortoise shell and the pictograms carved on it.
- Students should complete the puzzle to form the entire picture.
- Introduce the historical background of the oracle bone script and ancient Chinese characters. In ancient times, people would carve the results of fortune-telling on animal bones or tortoise shells. These types of carved words are called oracle bone script.



2. Introduce CHEUNG Yee and his artistic style (Suggested length: 5 mins)

Show the “Artist Introduction ppt” pp1-3

CHEUNG Yee (1936-2019) was born in Guangzhou, China. He graduated from the Fine Arts Department of Taiwan Normal University in 1958. In 1963, he founded the Circle Art Group in Hong Kong with other local artists to promote modern art in Hong Kong. In 1965, he received a grant from the Institute of International Education to study in the United States and Europe. He taught in the Extramural Studies Department of the University of Hong Kong and The Chinese University of Hong Kong. He was a Senior Lecturer in the Swire School of Design of Hong Kong Polytechnic and later Chairman of the Department of Fine Arts of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. He was awarded the Member Order of the British Empire (Honorary) in 1979 and Sculptor of the Year Award by the Hong Kong Artists’ Guild in 1988.

CHEUNG's style merged the simplicity and naivety of traditional Chinese folk art and the plasticity of modern Western art. He was always able to strike a delicate balance in the abstract geometrical construction of his works. He is particularly fond of pure red and black. Basing his choices largely on the textures of the materials, he endowed single colours with a rich variety of content under light from different sources.

3. **Video viewing guide (Suggested length: 5 mins)**

- Play attention to the interests of the artist and art-making media.

4. **Play the “Artist Video mp4” (Suggested length: 20 mins)**

Select parts of the video depending on your chosen area of focus, pausing as needed to explain the content or ask questions.

Suggested Q&A:

- What is CHEUNG's favourite creative theme?
(Tortoise shells, crabs, ancient Chinese writing, philosophical themes)
- What media does he use for his artworks?
(Print, sculpture and relief.)

5. **Appreciation of CHEUNG's art works (Suggested length: 10 mins)**

Suggested Q&A:

Show the “Artist Introduction ppt” pp5-11

- Show CHEUNG's tortoise shell-themed works collected by the Hong Kong Museum of Art, which are created with different media, and ask the students to identify their similarities and differences.
(The differences lie in the creative media, including sculpture, relief and print.)
(The similarities lie in the form of tortoise shell and the philosophical themes)



Genesis / 1968

Wood sculpture

Monolith / 1970

Green granite
sculpture

Fortune / 1986

Bronze plate

Everlasting 3 / 1968

Woodblock print on
paper

Four Gods / 1977

Wood sculpture

Four Circles / 1990

Wood sculpture

Introduce the artwork *Tablet*, show the “Artist Introduction ppt” p12

Tablet is built up with sixty pieces of bronze relief. The bronze pieces were cast from originals carved in wood which carry the texture of the wood originals. Lots of transformed Chinese characters in oracle script and pictograms are identifiable from the abstracted forms, such as the words 'treasure', 'horse', etc. Interestingly many of the forms appeared to be pictograms of some unknown characters. Cheung Yee has studied traditional Chinese painting and possesses deep understanding of the Chinese culture. In this work we can find many of the elements and ideas of his sculptural works, such as the use of tortoise shell, limpets, the five-agents, female body, etc.

Guide the students to appreciate in the following steps:

- Description: Describe the images in the grids.
(There are ancient totems, images that resemble bronzeware script, designs that look partly like a word and partly like a pattern, shapes that resemble a tortoise shell, modern Chinese characters, and designs with a narrative.)
Note: Teachers may have to explain nouns like “totem”, “bronzeware script” and “modern Chinese characters”.
- Formal analysis: Describe the medium, the material and the composition of *Tablet*.
(Relief, bronze, a grid of 60 rectangles)
- Interpretation: What does CHEUNG express?
(CHEUNG expresses nostalgia through these themes.)



6. Introduction of pictograms and natural patterns and textures (Suggested length: 20 mins)

Show the **“Supplementary Teaching Materials ppt” pp4-11**

- Show a picture of a tortoise shell with carved characters and ask the students the characteristics of oracle bone script.

Characteristics of oracle bone script

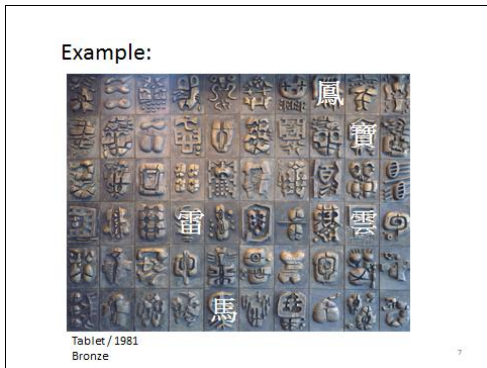
- lines
- structures
- origin of the characters

- Show how pictograms developed into modern Chinese characters.

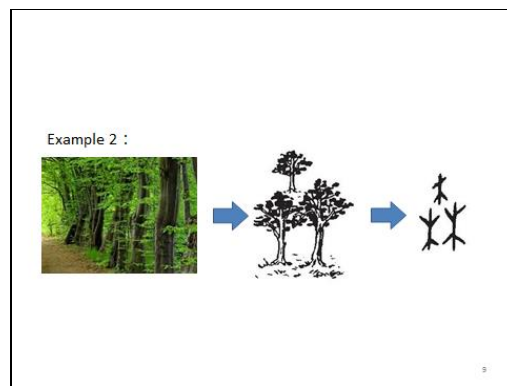
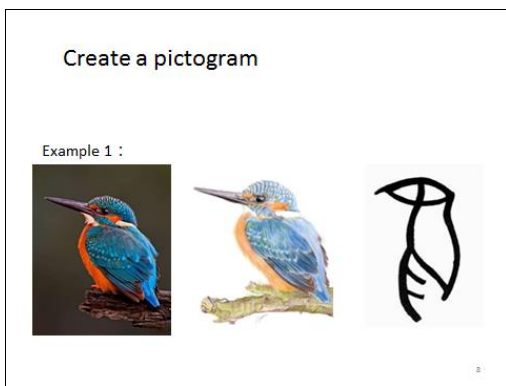
Origin and Evolution of Chinese Characters

日		→		→		→	
目		→		→		→	
木		→		→		→	
山		→		→		→	
馬		→		→		→	
刀		→		→		→	
魚		→		→		→	
門		→		→		→	

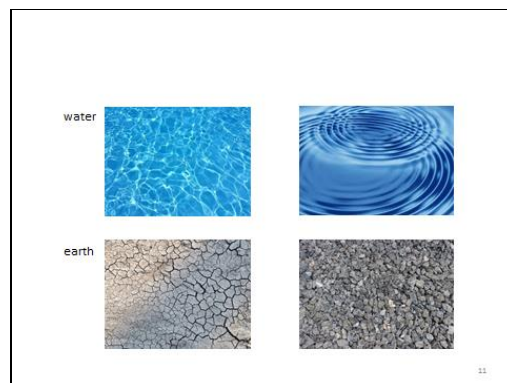
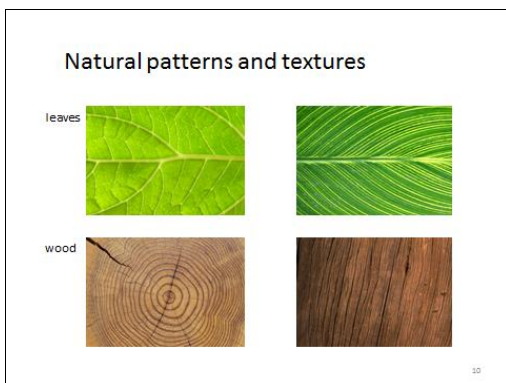
- Show pictures of CHEUNG's work, *Tablet*, and ask the students to identify some Chinese characters.



- Select and show pictures of several kinds of natural elements (such as animals, plants, or meteorological phenomena). Ask the students to simplify the natural elements into drawings to create their own pictograms on drawing paper.



- Show pictures of various natural patterns and textures. Ask the students to draw some natural patterns with water-based markers. Collect their group works and put them up on the whiteboard to share with the class.



7. **Introduce the art-making process (Suggested length: 20 mins)**

Show the **“Supplementary Teaching Materials ppt” pp11-20**

- Create a tortoise shell relief with modelling clay

Create a tortoise shell relief



1. Knead the light-weight modelling clay into an oval shape.

1



2. Press the oval shaped clay to a thickness of 5mm -- about three-quarters the thickness of cardboard.

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3. Use a plastic modelling tool to divide the formed tortoise shell into pieces.



4. Reassemble the divided pieces.

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- Create a pictogram:

Create a pictogram




5. Reassemble the divided pieces to form the body of a self-created pictogram.

6. Create small accessories with clay and stick them onto the empty space on the cardboard to enrich the design of the pictogram.


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- Create natural patterns:

Create natural patterns



7. Use the modelling tool to create patterns on the tortoise shell. (If the modelling clay has dried, apply a thin layer of new clay on top of it to create patterns.)



8. Apply the techniques of kneading, pressing and reassembling to create natural patterns with clay and stick the clay onto the body of the pictogram.

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Note:

- The students should create imaginative content on the tortoise shell relief.
- They should express the imaginative content with abstract images.
- They should pay attention to the sequence of the images.
- They should add matching natural patterns or textures on the pictogram to express the meaning.

- Create the metallic effect with acrylic paint and the techniques of colour-mixing:

Example of bronze relief



Tablet / 1981
Bronze
Collection of Hong Kong
Museum of Art



Everlasting / 1970
Bronze
Collection of Hong Kong
Museum of Art

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Create metallic effect



9. On a piece of dried paper clay, apply black acrylic paint as the background colour. Wait for it to dry.

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10. Combine metallic, burgundy, dark green and brown paint in a colour-mixing dish.



11. Use a dry brush to apply the colours.

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8. **Class activity (1): Tortoise shell relief with modelling clay (Suggested length: 60 mins)**

- Create a tortoise shell relief with modelling clay and wait for the work to dry.

9. **Class activity (2): Colouring the tortoise shell relief (Suggested length: 60 mins)**

- Have the students explore, practise and learn the techniques of mixing and creating metallic colours.
- Paint the relief with metallic colours.
- Using CHEUNG's *Tablet* as a reference, have the class combine all their works to form a large relief.

10. **Appreciating students' works (Suggested length: 20 mins)**

- Have the students explain the meaning of their self-created pictograms.

11. **Materials**

Light weight modelling clay, hard cardboard, modelling tool, acrylic paint (including metallic colours), paint brush, colour mixing dish, white glue