



## **Art Masterpiece**

2nd Grade

**Core knowledge Topics:** Ancient China

### **Chinese Scroll Painting**

**Lesson:** Today we introduced traditional Chinese painting specifically through the work of artist Xiao Sun. We discussed the elements of his hanging scroll called Landscape features in the Phoenix Art Museum and painted in 1930. We also viewed an original Chinese brush painted scroll from Beijing. These classical Chinese compositions rely on lines or the indelible mark of the inked brush rather than color or texture which are minimal. Landscapes in China have inspired painters and poets for centuries. The tall, narrow scroll creates a vertical sense of space and suggests a vast distance when reading the painting or “du hua” from the river at the bottom up to the mountain peaks at the top. Xiao Sun provides several contrasting elements which we compared to our own local desert landscape.

Chinese artists are known for their ability to convey a sense of peace and serenity with limited color and simplicity of style in these natural scenes. The mountains represent the permanence of earth, pine trees symbolize survival, while water shows change. Chinese characters written along side the painting are a poem or story to complement the scene often written by a calligrapher or someone other than the artist. The red seal is a symbol of ownership. Many different seals on a Chinese painting show the number of owners it has had.

Chinese brush painting has been in existence for more than 2,000 years. During the Han Dynasty, which began in 200 B.C., the Chinese began using stiff-hair paintbrushes soaked in a mixture of pine soot and water. They used sheets of silk, bamboo and other woods as painting surfaces. In order to understand the process the children created their own scrolls using “the four treasures” of a Chinese artist’s studio: rice paper (“xhi”), sumi ink (“mo”) a bamboo brush (“bi”) and an ink stone (“yan”). Once completed each painting was stamped with Chinese characters and a red seal to authenticate the experience.

## Chinese Art

When we look at Chinese art and talk about Chinese art we usually talk about **lines**. **Vertical, horizontal, diagonal or oblique** lines are used. **Thick and thin lines with some straight or curved**. Chinese artists have thought of color as a distraction. So many famous pieces of Chinese art do not have a lot of color in the paintings. They liked to rely on lines to capture the outer appearance of a subject not the colors.

Chinese brush painting has been around for more than two thousand years. Beginning in about 200 B.C. during the Han Dynasty or kingdom the Chinese people who wanted to create art started using stiff-hair paintbrushes from wolf or boars hair soaked in a mixture of pine soot and water. (Pine soot is the burnt wood from a pine tree crushed into powder which was black and mixed with water to make paint.) They would paint on sheets of silk or on bamboo wood. What do you think they would paint? What type of a picture?

The Chinese people love to paint nature scenes, plants and animals. Their beautiful landscapes with mountains and waterfalls would inspire them to paint these scenes on scrolls. Tall narrow sheets that usually hang vertically with a string at the top and a dowel or piece of wood at the bottom to balance the painting. Sometimes the scroll is mounted on a piece of silk fabric.

Is this an ideal imagined landscape? Is it real? Is it a real place? Sometimes Chinese landscapes are a real place and sometimes they are imagined. When we look at a Chinese landscape the artist tries to make you see a great distance in this tall narrow space. How does he/she do that? You look from bottom to top in an "S" curve water to mountains. "Du hua" means "to read a painting" and many of the elements or things in the painting mean something. The mountains represent permanence of the earth.

The pine trees can mean survival since a pine tree stays green all year even through the harsh cold winter. The outstretched boughs offer protection to smaller trees so they stand like princely gentlemen. Water running over rocks like waterfalls can show how the landscape changes over time. The water carves the rocks and land. It may move and flow over different areas showing the change of the earth over time.

What else do you see on this landscape painting? People are minimal, not important that is what makes it a landscape. Do you see any Chinese calligraphy or characters? Often times the artist would have a poet inscribe the painting with a poem to go with the scene. Chinese calligraphy is also an art form. In China, people train and start practicing calligraphy as little children through adulthood. (Read an example of a poem written in Chinese calligraphy).

The red seal is a symbol of ownership. Who owned this painting? A ruler or an important person. The king or emperor was often judged by how good the art of

his time was. If the artists did not do well then he was considered a bad ruler. Some Chinese scrolls could have many red seals to show that many different people have owned that painting. These red seals show the appreciation of the owner to the artist.

Today you are going to create a scroll on special Chinese rice paper (the “zhi”) using Chinese sumi ink (the “mo”) and painting with real bamboo paint brushes (the “bi”). You can practice your brush strokes before you begin and you can lightly sketch your drawing on the paper before you paint.

**Project:** Finger painting. Create your own swirls that would be in the wind or the ocean.

**Need:**

Clean desk!

Fingerpaints

Paper

Many paper towels



