The Hall of Asian Peoples

Elementary School Teacher’s Guide

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There is no one “Asian” country. Forty-six countries make up Asia. These nations are placed together as a cultural entity because of historical contact and shared cultural traits. From earliest times to the present, large-scale processes of cross-cultural interaction have linked the various sub-regions of Asia and also connected Asia as a whole to the larger world. Routes of trade like the famed Silk Road have witnessed the exchange of goods, religions, inventions, and people. Through sea and land migrations, these large, influential civilizations have had a profound effect on the politics, religion, and arts of neighboring regions and, in turn, have been influenced by them. Each country featured in the Hall of Asian Peoples represents a unique culture yet one composed of layers of contact between cultures.

Asia, the largest landmass in the world covering some 30 percent of the earth, is home to more than 59 percent of the world’s population, or 3.5 billion people. Asia boasts not just the highest peak on earth, but the ten highest all in the Himalayas. On Asia’s Arabian Peninsula, in the southwest, lies the lowest place on the earth’s surface—the Dead Sea, too salty to support life. The world’s largest expanse of tundra stretches across northern Asia. In eastern Asia, rainwater and snowmelt have created one of the largest rivers in the world—the Yangtze.

Two of the most populous countries of the world—China and India—are in Asia. Because so much of Asia is uninhabitable—too high, too dry, or too cold—a majority of the population lives in densely settled coastal areas and river valleys. Although most Asians make their living by farming or fishing, a growing number are finding work in factories and service industries.

Biggest, highest, most populous—Asia also has the oldest state civilizations. In the fertile plains between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers the first city-based civilizations probably arose. Here, people learned how to control water for irrigation and to plant grain. Cities grew up. Over the centuries, across Asia other civilizations arose in other river valleys in China and India. These ancient cultures gave us writing, the wheel, and astronomy, as well as some of the world’s major religions. Today, people in the rural areas still live in traditional ways, as farmers and craft workers. In the cities, though, the lifestyle of people is that of a crowded, fast-paced, urban, industrialized society much like our own, but still distinctly Asian.
Standards

The following New York State Learning Standards are applicable to the Museum visit and classroom activities outlined in this guide:


Vocabulary

FAMILIARIZE STUDENTS WITH THE VOCABULARY

You may decide to review these before your class visits the Museum, or use them for your own reference.

**Ancestor Veneration (ancestor worship)**
The custom of honoring deceased ancestors, who are still considered a part of the family and whose spirits are believed to have the power to intervene in the affairs of the living.

**Buddhism**
A religion based on the teachings of Buddha (approx. 560–480 BC). The basis of Buddhist teachings are “the four noble truths”—that life is full of suffering (such as not being satisfied, old age, disease, and death), that the cause of suffering is desire and wanting things only for oneself, that there is a cure for this suffering, and that this cure is the Eightfold Path.

**Dowry**
Wealth a bride’s family contributes to the marriage, usually consisting of clothing, household furnishings, and utensils.

**Dynasty**
A Chinese dynasty took its name from a sequence of rulers from the same patrilineal (through the male line) family. For more than 2,000 years China was ruled by a series of dynasties.

**Extended Family**
A residential group consisting of two or more families of at least two generations.

**Hinduism**
A complex Indian religion (nearly 4,000 years old) with elaborate mythology, 3,000 gods, ceremonies for purification, and steps one goes through in the life cycle.

**Islam**
A religion based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (approx. 570–632 CE) as found in the sacred book, the Koran. The followers of Islam are called Muslims.

**Matchmaker**
A person whom families consult to find proper marriage partners for their children. The marriage is called an arranged marriage.

**Monsoon**
A periodic wind in South Asia generally laden with rain.

**Nomad**
A wandering pastoral (herding) people.

**Shamanism**
A belief system in which certain individuals are believed to be in direct contact with the spirit world through trance and to be able to command spirits to do their bidding.

**Shinto**
A native religion of Japan, dating to the sixth century AD, originally centered on belief in “kami,” or spiritual forces thought to live in all natural objects. Later it included worship of ancestors, heroes, and the emperor. Shinto stresses harmony among divine, natural, and human elements.

**Taoism**
A philosophy formulated by Lao Tzu (either third or sixth century BC) in which the aim of life is to conform to nature’s way. Yin (female, wet, dark, cool) and Yang (male, dry, bright, hot) and the five elements (fire, water, earth, wood, metal) interact to bring harmony.

**Terracing**
A raised embankment leveled on top with a ridge to hold water (commonly used in wet-rice farming).

**Wet-Rice Cultivation**
Common method of growing rice in Asia by flooding fields with water. Later, when the crops mature, the fields are drained. Usually involves animal plow cultivation and the use of fertilizers.

Before Coming to the Museum

**HAVE A CLASS DISCUSSION**
Write on a chalkboard the facts that come to mind when the students think about China, Japan, Korea, or India. Ask the students what they know about these cultures and what they would like to know. After your trip, ask the students to do their own research about new things they learned from the discussion and want to learn more about.

**STUDY MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPhS**
The enclosed map (insert) is provided to give students a sense of Asia as both a physical and cultural place. Point out the natural geographic boundaries that separate each nation and the possible areas of contact. China and India are the two largest rice-producing countries in the world; they produce paddy (irrigated) rice. Paddy rice needs lots of water either from heavy rains, or flooding. Using the information you have about rice, have the students mark the areas on the map of Asia that would be best suited for rice production.

Have students study copies of the photographs (insert) of rural Japan 100 years ago and two teenagers in Japan today. Have them make up stories or a journalist’s interview with the people in the photographs. Discuss the differences in rural and urban living.

**Panel 3**

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THE SILK ROAD
No name evokes the mystery of the ancient Silk Road more than Samarkand, a city rich with history and unmistakable magic. Samarkand was already a great walled city when it was conquered in 329 BC by Alexander the Great. The Registan pictured in the diorama is a majestic commercial center flanked by blue-tiled madrasses or free schools and mosques. In the madrasses famous Islamic scholars, mathematicians, and astronomers lectured. The central mosque has graceful minarets where muezzin (religious leaders) called the religious to prayer. The marketplace drew merchants from Europe and other parts of Asia. They came on foot, by horse, by camel caravan, or accompanying troops of soldiers. In the bazaars they would meet, share stories of their desert travails, eat, enjoy music, and trade.

INDIA

INDIA: THEATER AND FESTIVAL
Many of the world’s greatest stories and fairytales derived from traditional Indian theater performed in religious and seasonal festivals. Elaborate masks and puppets are used in the telling of these well-loved stories. The three large papier-mâché figures in this case depict characters from the Ramayana, an epic poem. The Ramayana and its characters—Rama, loyal to his father’s memory, and Rama’s wife Sita, the paragon of wifely virtues—are widely known to children in every town in India. Other characters from the Ramayana are Ravana, the demon king (bearded 10-headed gold mask), and Hanuman, the monkey king (red mask in Crafts case on left). These performances were held outdoors with limited scenery. Each Indian village had its own unique way of celebrating religious and popular mythic stories. Although theater today in India has to compete with movies and television, old religious and mythic themes are still popular.

Student activity—standards: SS2.A4, ELA4

INDIA: THE WEDDING
This diorama dramatically depicts a wedding in a rural Hindu village in central India. The wedding was an important family celebration in both urban and rural settings. Rarely were two families joined together from the same village; this was not socially desirable. In accordance with important Hindu beliefs, the bride and groom had to be from the same caste and subcaste. The bride’s ornate clothing and jewelry visually expressed the wealth of her family to the wedding guests and spectators. Her jewelry alone was hers to keep or use as she needed. Besides her husband, the Brahman priest and the matchmaker, often the village barber, are shown.

Student activity—standards: SS2, ELA 4, SS3, M6

CHINA

CHINA: THE FRONTIER
The painting in this case depicts the Great Wall of China. This section, near Beijing, was built during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). China’s
walls protected it from nomadic invaders and foreign governments. The skeletal remains in this case belong to a nomadic warrior (Hsiung-nu) who lived in approximately AD 1000. The skeleton is seen with the warrior’s quiver and saddle. The painting symbolizes daily life and the meeting of two ecosystems—the wheat-growing population of the flat plains of north China next to the nomadic population of the hills and tundra of north China and Mongolia. On one side of the Great Wall, the right side of the painting, is a wheat farming settlement, while on the opposite side a caravan of traders approaches the gates.

### TRADITIONAL CHINA: THEATER

Theater in a variety of forms flourished throughout China’s countryside and urban centers. Opera and puppet shows enlivened village and temple festivals. In opera, the stage set was simple, while the actors’ makeup, costuming, and movements were elaborate. The characters of the shadow puppets here are from the story of the Monkey King, from the novel *Journey to the West*. Sun-Wukong, the Monkey King, is a mischievous anti-authoritarian figure renowned for his magical and martial arts skills. In the shadow puppet screen in the diorama, Sun-Wukong (far right) and his sidekicks, Friar Sands and Pigsy (left), assist the Tang Priest Xuanzang on his sacred quest to India to bring back Buddhist sutras (texts). This story is popular with children today not only in opera performances, but also in cartoons and movies.

### TRADITIONAL CHINA: THE WEDDING

Traditional Chinese society was based on the extended family as the primary economic and social unit. Weddings are important family events because they bring in new members, brides, who produce children. The elaborate decoration of the wedding chair has much symbolic meaning. The blue kingfisher feathers symbolize beauty and a happy marriage. The small dangling mirrors protect the bride and her marriage by frightening away ghosts. The wedding chair was used to transport the bride to her new home. Brides are usually carried (on bikes or in cars today) to protect them during this transitional period. The bride, who most likely would not have met her husband before the wedding, was hidden inside the chair by the front panels (at the right side of diorama), which have been left off for display purposes. The matchmaking of the couple was carefully planned according to Chinese astrology and financial strategy. The bride’s dowry would have been carried along as part of the procession, displaying the status of her family. The chair, the day, and the event mark dramatic changes in the life cycle and identity of the bride. She is no longer a member of her parents’ family, but that of her husband.

### TRADITIONAL CHINA: CITY STREET SCENE MURAL

This mural of an urban street depicts aspects of traditional life at the time of Marco Polo’s famous visit. Like any urban center, the one shown in the
painting is complex. Multiple activities, such as a Buddhist temple ceremony, fortune-telling, games and entertainment, transporting of goods, a wedding procession, and shopping, are occurring simultaneously.

Student activity—standards: SS2, SS3

KOREA

The two rooms depicted in this diorama show the home of a Korean upper-class family in the nineteenth century.

KOREA: THE CONFUCIAN TRADITION

The scholar in his studio is studying a text of Mencius, a disciple of Confucius, written in both Chinese and the Korean alphabet, hangul. Educated Koreans had to be able to read Chinese as well as their own language in order to study the classics. The scholar is seated on a floor cushion at his low desk, surrounded by the material necessary to his work, such as writing brushes and scrolls. The scholar’s attire, including the kat hat, marks his economic status, for only the elite could afford the luxury of a life of study. This room would have been heated by the ingenious ondol system of heated pipes under the floor, which made sitting and sleeping on the floor comfortable during the cold winters.

KOREA: THE UNIQUENESS

The wife of the scholar works in the inner room of the house. This woman wears the hanbok, a traditional style of dress. While her hanbok is decorated with the Chinese characters for good fortune, long life, and happiness, the bright colors are traditionally Korean. In the foreground of the diorama is a set of metal tongs heating over coals, which this woman would use for ironing. Hanging on the wall is a painting of a type traditionally found in the woman’s sanctum. Unlike the painting in the scholar’s studio, this one is brightly colored, with a folk motif of Mandarin ducks, a symbol of marital happiness.

JAPAN

MODEL OF TRADITIONAL HOUSE

This model of a traditional Japanese house is typical of a farmer’s home in the nineteenth century. The architecture demonstrates many uses of rice and other natural materials in building construction. The windowpanes, made from rice paper, are well suited to an earthquake region, as they do not shatter. Rice was also used in roof thatching. The wooden frame of the house, which allows the structure to bend, is well suited to a region of tsunamis (tidal waves), typhoons, and earthquakes. The daily life of the residents of this traditional house contrasts sharply with that of the small families of urban Japan today.

CLOTHING IN THE CENTRAL CASE

Children in rural Japan might have seen their fathers going to work in the fields wearing the mino. The mino, made from rice stalks, is a raincoat. It
has been replaced today by modern rain clothing.

Both women and men in traditional Japan wore the kimono. Today it is still worn on special occasions, such as festivals and weddings. Kimonos in traditional Japan reflected the age of the wearer. Bright colors were worn by girls, while elderly women wore more subdued colors. Except for priests and officials, men usually wore dark kimonos.

The Shinto priest sitting on the pedestal at the rear of the case is wearing the traditional clothing and hairstyle of his station. Shinto priests still wear these beautiful garments today.

**FESTIVALS (MATSURI) THROUGHOUT THE YEAR**

Families today, as in the past, gather together at annual festivals to celebrate religious and life-cycle traditions. Three of these festivals are Hinamatsuri (the Doll Festival), Shogatsu (New Year), and Obon. The following information is designed to assist educators’ discussions with their students on the objects in the Shintoism: The Indigenous Religion, Buddhist Altar, and Life-Cycle cases.

**SHINTOISM: THE INDIGENOUS RELIGION**

For the New Year, parents take their children to a Shinto shrine for blessings of good health and happiness from the kami (spirits) and the Shinto priest. Displayed in this case are objects necessary for the Shinto priest’s blessing, such as the purification wand at the top right side of the center section of the shrine. To call the kami, parents and children ring a bell, bow twice, clap twice, and bow a final time.

**BUDDHIST ALTAR AND THE AMIDA (AMITABHA) BUDDHA**

A summer festival, Obon is a time when families honor and remember their ancestors. It is believed that during Obon the spirits of ancestors return. Families welcome the spirits, visit family altars and graves, celebrate the knowledge they gained from their ancestors, and then assist the spirits in returning to the land of the dead.

The celebrations of Obon center around the Buddhist temple. Families would go to the temple where they might see a large image of Buddha like the Amida Buddha on top of the central case. The altar shown here belonged to a wealthy family. It was kept closed except during times of ancestor remembrance. The figure seated on a lotus flower at the top of the shrine represents Sakyamuni Buddha (historic Buddha).

**THE JAPANESE CYCLE OF LIFE**

In the past, on the day of the Doll Festival (Hina Matsuri), dolls representing the Imperial court—including the emperor, empress, musicians, and samurai, as well as beautiful accessories—were displayed in homes to bring happiness and good fortune to daughters. Today this festival is still celebrated, but children do not play with these dolls as they did in traditional times; they are family heirlooms. Families have parties with the dolls on display and special food.
Extending Students’ Investigations

Students can extend their research on the animals and geography of Asia in several other Museum halls.

THE HALL OF ASIAN MAMMALS/
THE HALL OF BIODIVERSITY
Many Asian folktales are based on the animals of Asia—the panda, the tiger, the water buffalo, the Asian elephant, or the peacock. The dioramas provide dramatic representations of these animals as well as information on their situation in the biodiversity of Asia.

THE GUGGENHEIM HALL
OF GEMS AND MINERALS
Precious jewels—pearls, jade, and the famous Star of India—are also a part of many Asian folktales. Let students visit the Hall and research a gem and its mythology.

THE GOTTESMAN HALL
OF PLANET EARTH
Mountain ranges, earthquakes, and volcanoes are part of Asian geography. After studying maps, students can discover the forces of nature that created the Asian landscape and the methods scientists use today to understand them.

BIRDS OF THE WORLD
Students can draw good examples of deserts in Mongolia and the landscape and seasons of Japan.
WEBSITES

For information and curriculum guides on Asia. From the Museum site, go to Education, then Cultural Programs. Asian Pacific American Heritage Month at the AMNH/Multicultural programs.

Students can take virtual tours of Asian museums and research other artifacts at www.icom.org/vlmp/. Click on Japan, Korea, or Rest of the World.

This program is for purchase, but the Web site has many links that provide sample curriculum on Asia.

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS:

The Lands, Peoples, and Cultures Series, created by Bobbie Kalman, Crabtree Publishing Company, 1990.

A catalog dedicated to Asian and Asian-American publications.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS:


SILK ROAD
For a review of literature and curriculum on the Silk Road, see “The Silk Road: An Educational Resource,” Morris Rossabi, Education About Asia, 4/1, 1999 available through the Association for Asian Studies, Inc. Ann Arbor, Michigan. www.aasianst.org/eaa/subs.htm or call (734)655-2490 for back issues.
Back in the Classroom

**REVIEW THE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE**
In the field journal sheets the students are encouraged to make notes about and drawings of their observations, just like Marco Polo. Back in the classroom, students can work together in teams to create theater performances or murals of street scenes.
Student activity standards: SS2, ELA1

**RE-CREATE THE SILK ROAD**
Divide students into teams of merchants from various cultures represented along the Silk Road. Discuss some of the inventions and foods that were traded along this route. Assign each team to be one of the countries that participated in the silk trade. Have students bring in spices and food, or make items to trade, and have a bazaar.
Student activity standards: SS3, MST6, A4, ELA 4

**RELATE THE PAST TO THE PRESENT**
Encourage students to bring in photos of modern cities in Asia from calendars, tourist agencies, or magazines. Students can discuss the lifestyles of the people in the past and in the present. If they visited Asia today, which objects from the Hall of Asian Peoples would be seen or used? Discuss the occasions when we wear traditional clothes. Review the student’s observations about the photos of Japanese 100 years ago and today.
Student activity standards: SS2, MST6, ELA4

**CELEBRATE ASIA**
Let students research the food and activities surrounding different Asian festivals. If possible, visit sections of the metropolitan area with large Asian populations during one of these community events with your students and encourage them to sketch festival objects and art.
Student activity standards: A4
The Hall of Asian Peoples
The Hall of Asian Peoples

- **The Lure of Asian Trade**
  1. Samarkand: Crossroads of Asia

- **India**
  2. Theater and Festival
  3. Traditional Wedding Diorama

- **China**
  4. The Frontier
  5. Traditional Theater
  6. Traditional Chinese Wedding Diorama
  7. Street Scene

- **Korea**
  8. Korean Uniqueness
  9. Confucian Tradition

- **Japan**
  10. Traditional House
  11. Continuing Traditions
  13. Cycle of Life
  14. Buddhist Shrine

- **15. The Traditional Trade Routes of Asia**