

TEACHING NOTES

Jim Dawson: A Chinese Garden in Seattle

Appropriate Grade Levels: 6 – 8 (This lesson can be used as the start of a larger art or drafting project and career exploration for students in grades 9 – 12)

Implementation Time:

One class period (45 minutes to one hour) required for basic exercise.

An additional class period or more are required if the class moves beyond written descriptions of the garden and into visual depictions.

Materials Needed:

Teaching notes for “Jim Dawson” case study

Student copies of “Jim Dawson”

Notepaper for students to use when writing essays

Internet access and/or architecture and landscape architecture books as well as poster paper and art supplies (if students undertake drawing exercise)

Career Pathway: Arts & Communications

Subject Area: Writing, Social Studies/Arts

Learner Outcome(s): What will happen for learners as a result of this lesson?

Students will explore a career opportunity related to international trade and the arts. They will demonstrate their ability to synthesize and summarize technical information about an art form first in words and then in their own artistic representation. They will review the process of collecting and organizing information and then communicating it to others. Through the assignments suggested with this lesson plan, students will demonstrate technical writing and will synthesize what they have learned into an artistic presentation.

Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements: How will students learn?

- **Writing:** Students will practice writing clearly and effectively in a variety of forms for different audiences and purposes. Students will practice writing for career applications, producing technical and non-technical documents using resources from career settings. (EALR’s 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.4)
- **Communication:** Students will demonstrate listening and observation skills to gain understanding; will practice communicating ideas clearly and effectively; will demonstrate communication strategies and skills to work effectively with others; and will analyze how communication is used in career settings. (EALR’s 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 4.4)
- **Social Studies/Arts:** Students will use arts concepts and principles to interpret artworks, understand that the arts are used for widely different functions, locate and acquire information from a variety of sources and organize and synthesize it in meaningful ways to communicate ideas and create artworks, and consider how a work of art grew out of its time and place, was shaped by its time and place, and how it may have had an effect on its culture. (EALR’s 1.5, 3.1, 3.3, 4.4)

TEACHING NOTES

Jim Dawson: A Chinese Garden in Seattle

Procedure:

This lesson is designed to be taught in one or two sessions..

1. *Distribute the students' version of the "Jim Dawson" case study to your class. If you wish, divide the students into groups of two or three.*
2. *Read aloud to them or let them read one section of the case study at a time. Don't let them read ahead. After each section, ask each group of students what they think Jim should do next. Then, use the questions in the teachers' version of the case study to guide them through a discussion of what Jim should do at each point.*
3. *Finish by either explaining the memo assignment to the students.*
4. *If you wish to move beyond words to artistic representations of a Chinese garden, have each student or student group study Chinese gardens through pictures and words in books or on the internet (a set of internet sites is included with these teaching notes). Then, ask students to create a design for "their" Chinese garden, using watercolors, pastels, or any other medium.*

Closure/Assessment:

Review students' written and/or artistic work both for basic writing or presentation skills, as well as for students' ability to incorporate what they have learned about the basic elements of a Chinese garden. Would their essays convince you to donate money to build a Chinese garden?

Then, in small groups or as a whole group, have students review the steps they should follow when they are confronted with a challenge and don't have enough information to move forward. Ask them to share personal experiences of having to conduct research to solve a problem. What did they do? How did they use the information they gathered? What did they do right or wrong? What would they do if they were confronted with the same problem today?

Jim Dawson: A Chinese Garden in Seattle

Part One - *Read to the bottom of this page then stop.*

Jim Dawson's dream was about to become a reality: a Chinese garden in Seattle. But first he had to help raise a lot of money.

Jim Dawson was an architect who had his own architecture and planning firm in Seattle. He had visited China in 1985 and had become fascinated with Chinese gardens. They were completely new to him and completely unlike gardens in the West. Jim learned as much as he could about them.

Over the years, Jim's interest in Chinese gardens led him to Chongqing, one of Seattle's Sister Cities. Chongqing, which was located on the Yangtze River, was a major inland port, just like Seattle. Citizens in Seattle and Chongqing had exchanged visits and developed close relationships. During the mid-1980s, a group of people in Seattle decided to honor their friends in Chongqing by creating a Chinese garden in Seattle. They would work with designers, craftspeople, and architects from Chongqing to design and build it.

Jim quickly became involved. He helped create a non-profit organization, the Seattle Chinese Garden Society, to help design and build the garden. But the garden couldn't be built without money. In fact, the six acre garden, which would include pavilions, an education center, and all the other components of a traditional garden in China, would cost millions of dollars. That meant asking people for money. But why would they give money to create another garden in Seattle? Seattle had thousands of beautiful gardens.

That was Jim's challenge. Jim's colleagues at the Seattle Chinese Garden Society had asked him to take everything he knew about Chinese gardens and turn it into a simple explanation of what a Chinese garden was and why someone should be interested in donating money to build one in Seattle.

STOP

Jim Dawson: Teaching Notes for Part One

Organizing information is something we all do anytime we make a presentation to another person. Thinking carefully, not just about what we know but what our audience needs to know and will be interested in hearing, is crucial to a good presentation.

Prompt the students to discuss Jim's challenge: he knows a lot about Chinese gardens, but has to convince other people, who know nothing about them, that they should give money to build a Chinese garden in Seattle.

Then, lead them in a discussion of what kinds of information potential donors might be interested in learning.

They probably DON'T want to read a 20-page textbook handout about Chinese gardens! And, if Jim's information isn't carefully organized or doesn't seem relevant to Seattle, they probably won't be interested in giving money.

Ask students what they would do first if they were in Jim's shoes. Have they ever had to explain something they knew a lot about to someone else? What did they do?

****Prompt each student to write down one example of a time they had to explain something to someone else: learning to use a computer program or fix a bike or play a game. How did they go about sharing what they knew in a way that made sense to the other person?**

Part Two - Read to the bottom of the next page then stop.

Jim decided the first thing he needed to do was organize all the information he had. He didn't think many people would be interested in wading through his textbooks with him! He knew that he had to make a Chinese garden both make sense and sound exciting in a very short presentation. He decided the best way to do that was to explain the common elements of a Chinese garden to show how different Chinese gardens are from Western gardens. Jim reviewed ten years' worth of notes and files to decide what information he would use.

Jim knew that Chinese gardens are very different from gardens in America. Every Chinese garden attempts to create a "microcosm" symbolizing the whole universe within the garden. Each garden is actually many gardens, separated by walls or tunnels or buildings. Chinese gardens are designed to inspire thought and spirituality, to let a viewer's mind "travel" to the scenes represented within the garden. To do this, every Chinese garden – large or small – contains several common elements:

Rocks. Rocks and rockeries are critical to the Chinese garden. Rocks symbolize mountains, the body and vitality of the earth. Many Chinese gardens feature distinctive rocks that were carefully collected and then positioned as if they were sculpture. Eroded rocks, etched into shape by water or wind are particularly prized as they show the forces of the elements of the earth working with and against each other.

Water. Water, too, is crucial in a Chinese garden, symbolizing the earth's spirit and life breath. Ponds in Chinese gardens are often lush with greenery to show the living vitality of the water. Water also serves a "mirror" function in Chinese gardens, the clear reflections in the water showing the viewer's inward reflection and cultivation of spirit.

TURN PAGE AND KEEP READING

Architecture. Chinese gardens contain not just walls but buildings and pavilions as well. Most gardens have a large, formal building, situated over an elevated pond, that serves as a central gathering point. Small rustic pavilions often dot the perimeter of the garden. Other buildings create the complexity of spaces that make up the garden.

Trees. In Chinese gardens, evergreens – especially pine, cypress, and bamboo – are the favored trees. These symbolize undying, unchanging strength and moral virtue. Deciduous fruit trees, such as plums or peaches, often serve as contrast to the evergreens, showing the “large in the small.” Chinese gardens tend to have few flowers and no lawn.

Miniature Elements. Many Chinese gardens have a container garden, filled with miniature (or “bonsai”) versions of the full-sized plants in the garden. Container gardens help create variety in a small garden. In addition, the dwarf plants inside the container gardens appear magical or mythical because they are so different from their natural states. Container gardens have traditionally served to ward off evil as well.

Borrowed Scenery. Chinese gardens often rely on “borrowed scenery,” using a window or door or hole in the garden wall to frame the landscape beyond the garden. Then, the visitor in the garden sees the landscape outside the garden as a sort of picture within the garden. Borrowed scenery adds to the garden’s spiritual nature and its ability to help a viewer travel within himself or herself.

STOP

Jim Dawson: Teaching Notes for Part Two

Once students have decided HOW they will summarize information, they then need to do it.

Prompt students to talk about what they would do next if they were Jim. How would they summarize this information in a presentation? What would they say to make it interesting to someone who has never heard of a Chinese garden before?

Then have students read on to follow Jim's next steps.

NOTE FOR TEACHERS: The following several pages contain the Seattle Chinese Garden Society's description of the typical Chinese Garden. It is provided for your information. In addition, the web site links listed below all lead to photos, drawings, and/or descriptions of traditional Chinese Gardens.

Chinese garden links

<http://metrotel.co.uk/jpr/iacg1.html>

"In a Chinese Garden" story

<http://dekart.f.bg.ac.yu/~dpajin/gardens/index.html>

Environmental Aesthetics and Chinese Gardens

Dusan Pajin, Ph.D. University of Belgrade

<http://www.intranet.csupomona.edu/~ige/gardens/introlev2.htm>

What Chinese Classical Gardens are About

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Rhodes/5209/SCGSelements.html>

Seattle Chinese Garden Society's description of the Seattle Chinese Garden

Elements of a Chinese Garden, from the Seattle Chinese Garden Society

<http://www.wvmagic.com/scgs/SCGSelements.html>

Introductory Principles

From ancient times, Chinese city planning has been characterized by regularity, predictability, and architectural control of human activities. The placement, scale, and structure of buildings proclaimed the relative importance of each building; walls and gates carefully regulated access. Architecture was a precisely coded visual language which every resident knew how to read.

The Chinese garden, on the other hand, provided a contrast to this sometimes stifling regularity. The Chinese garden symbolized a world which lay beyond limited social concerns and embodied a different, broader range of philosophical interests. As the city was Confucian and oriented toward regulation of the social group, the garden was Daoist and provided a private, liberating experience for the individual. The individual who harmonized with nature was afforded mental health and extended physical longevity. Three basic principles shaped the Chinese garden from earliest times to the present day. First, the garden was to seem more natural than man-made, irregular and spontaneous rather than rigidly geometrical and predictable, complex rather than simple. Though it embodied natural principles, these were not readily apparent and could only be discerned through patient contemplation of the garden's underlying form. Next, the garden was understood as a microcosm, a miniature universe, complete in itself. All the powers and forces of nature were present there, to be used by the owner of the garden. All aspects of the universe were to be found there, yang and yin, combined and intertwined in complex patterns and designs: rocks and water, landscape and horticulture and even a strong architectural component. Finally, since most gardens were literally quite small, the sense of microcosmic completeness was achieved by means of suggestion: spatial complexity presented more than one could see at any one time, constant differentiation of elements revealed an ongoing variety of experience lodged in the garden, surprising plays upon one's expectations suggested an inner psychological or emotional dimension which expanded upon the physical.

Elements of the Chinese Garden

Whereas the European or American garden is primarily horticultural -- flowers, trees and lawns -- sometimes with rockery and occasionally ponds, the Chinese garden exhibits different priorities. Rocks and water come first, then architecture. Trees are essential, as is bamboo. Flowers play a minor and temporary role, if any, and the lawn is entirely absent.

Rocks and water symbolize the basic building blocks of nature, yang and yin, the fundamentals from which life is derived. Rockery represents the body of the earth, its mountain chains, the arterial system through which its lifeblood flows. Water represents the vital spirit of the earth, its life-breath, clouds condensed into liquid, its blood. Rockery symbolizes the active creative forces of the universe, water its serene, contemplative, nurturing potential. Abundant rockery is the distinguishing characteristic of the Chinese garden and a subject of connoisseurship and collection since ancient times. In the past thousand years, the building of abstract garden rocks became China's primary sculptural genre, and the Chinese most greatly appreciated rocks which were complex and convoluted, penetrated by open holes, structured like bones, and veined on the surface. Many Chinese literally worshiped rocks as a store of earthly vitality, and in the garden the best rocks were highlighted and often set in a sculptural assemblage just as a sculpture of the Buddha would be placed on an altar in a Buddhist temple. Water in a Chinese garden was appreciated when alive with plant growth, richly colored with green algae rather than sterile like a modern, chlorinated swimming pool.

Architecture in the Chinese garden is no different from that found outside of the garden, but each building is adapted to the garden site and takes on different functions than found in an ordinary setting. A multi-storied building, for example, takes on the function of allowing from the upper story a broad look around the entire garden vista, even a view of the "borrowed scenery" beyond the garden's outer walls. Symbolically, it elevates one up to the clouds, the home of the immortals in China's Daoist religion. And in that lofty elevation, usually, is placed the garden owner's library, that fount of philosophic wisdom which one ascends toward the heavens to read. Often, main buildings have no solid walls but instead are surrounded by open latticework, to permit an excellent view of the garden. There is always an elegant main hall, placed on an elevated terrace beside the garden pond, a primary gathering place with the best view of

the garden, and a focal point when viewed from afar. In contrast to this, many small, rustic pavilions often dot the periphery of the garden, placed alongside pathways which appear and disappear from view, showing from afar where excellent vantage points are located. Some gardens even have an architectural "boat", one or more buildings combined to look like a boat, placed along the water's edge.

No Chinese garden is, really, a garden. Every garden is actually many gardens, the space broken by walls, covered corridors, and buildings in a sequence of spaces, differentiated so as to produce a series of contrasting experiences. It is in this way that the Chinese garden, whether set on an urban half-acre or a rural hillside, can convey the sense of the ongoing, the endless, the infinite -- which is what a Chinese garden is all about, a microcosm symbolizing a whole universe in one's backyard. Possession of such a "microcosm" imbues its owner with philosophical wisdom and provides him with religious power, a miniature universe under his own control. The walls thus play an essential role in the Chinese garden, complemented by the doorways and windows which provide physical or visual access through the walls. The lattice patterns of the garden windows are a focal point of appreciation, and in many gardens, no two patterns are alike in the entire garden.

In a Chinese garden, the owner or visitor sought harmony, mental health and physical longevity. Pine, cypress and bamboo -- all evergreens -- were the most favored of plants, symbolizing undying, unchanging strength and moral virtue. Early-blooming winter plums, suggesting irrepressible vitality, were also popular, as were peaches, which symbolized immortality. In a pond-oriented garden, the willow with its water-hardy roots was also popular, as were water lilies, lotus, water chestnuts, and wisteria which climbed the trellises of the garden's many covered bridges and walkways. Finally, most Chinese gardens had a courtyard nursery which cultivated miniature trees -- a microcosm within the microcosm of the Chinese garden -- called pencai ("tray planting") or penjing ("tray scenery"), and best known in the West by the Japanese name bonsai.

Part Three - *Read to the bottom of this page then stop.*

Jim had carefully organized his notes. Now, he needed to use this information to show how unique and exciting it would be to have such a garden in Seattle. The garden would be a real cultural attraction, something that would honor Seattle's many ties to Asia while, at the same time, creating a beautiful work of art that all could enjoy.

Jim decided to write a one-page essay explaining what a Chinese garden was and summarizing the major elements of a Chinese garden. That was bound to convince people to donate money to help build the garden.

He wrote a title across the top of the page: "What is a Chinese Garden and Why should we have one in Seattle?"

Jim began to write.

Jim Dawson: Teaching Notes for Assignment

Assignment OPTION One – In-class written exercise

Jim decides to write a one-page essay for people who might donate money to the Seattle Chinese Garden Society summarizing the basic elements of a Chinese garden and why Seattle should have a Chinese garden. He knows most of these people have never heard of a Chinese garden before, so he has to make it simple. He also has to make it sound exciting – otherwise, there is no reason for someone to donate their money. Ask students to write a short essay. The essay should contain the following:

- 1. Short one- or two-sentence introduction to introduce the Seattle Chinese Garden Society’s goal of creating a Chinese garden in Seattle.*
- 2. Brief description of the basic elements of the traditional Chinese Garden.*
- 3. Conclusion that states WHY a Chinese garden should be created in Seattle.*

This exercise will help students demonstrate what they have learned as well as give them practice with writing and communicating for career applications.

After students complete this exercise, ask them how Jim’s approach was the same as or different from their own in the example they wrote down earlier. Have they learned anything about explaining complicated information from helping Jim? If so, what? Will they do things differently in the future?

Assignment OPTION Two – Research and art exercise

If you want to spend more time following this case study and the lessons it teaches about research, writing, and the arts, divide your class into groups of two to three (or have each student work alone).

Ask each group to conduct more research about Chinese gardens. They may use reference books in the library or the web sites listed above in these teaching notes. Ask each group to find visual images of Chinese gardens and study how these visual images conform to what they have learned about Chinese gardens.

Then, have each group (or each student) create an artistic representation of a Chinese garden to “show” potential donors what a Chinese garden could look like. With each artistic representation, the student(s) should include a one-page written description of their picture summarizing the elements it contains.