



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Center for Middle Eastern Studies

Class Project Plan: THE GREAT SILK ROAD: A GROUP EXPLORATION THROUGH RESEARCH AND CRAFT

Author: Virginia Pfau Thompson, **Instructor:** Ceramics & 3D Design, Cochise College, Sierra Vista, AZ

Contact: thompsonpfauv@cochise.edu

Class: Ceramics 1 students (also appropriate for intermediate / advanced students)

Timing: Best if placed near the end of semester so that students are already skilled at basic building and surface finish techniques

Prospectus: “The Silk Road was a network of trade routes connecting China and the Far East with the Middle East and Europe. Established when the Han Dynasty in China officially opened trade with the West in 130 B.C., the Silk Road routes remained in use until 1453 A.D., when the Ottoman Empire boycotted trade with China and closed them.” (History.com 2017) This trade route funneled an exchange of goods, ideas, and aesthetics across a large landmass and across many diverse cultures along the way. Raw materials were traded and made into goods, which were again traded along with their designs and functionalities. Ceramics had been utilized and developed in these areas before the major trade route developed, but the exchange it allowed caused great advancements in technologies, techniques, and styles throughout the region. Through this class learning project, students will study Applied Arts history in a region of the world not often covered in Art History classes in American higher education. They will learn about historical craft techniques and aesthetics through physical, hands-on studies, and will present their artifacts along with a visual presentation about their region to the class in order from East to West, forming a comprehensive picture of an important historical cultural and material exchange as a group.

Outcomes: This project meets all 6 of the Cochise College General Education Outcomes:

- **Communication:** Students, using writing and speaking skills, individually and collaboratively, discover, organize, and communicate information, ideas, and arguments in a clear and effective manner appropriate to the audience and purpose.
- **Creativity:** Students perform one or more of the following: analyze, evaluate, and reflect on aesthetic experiences; propose innovative solutions to technical, scientific, social, or individual problems; produce artifacts of self-expression.
- **Critical Thinking:** Students employ logical, analytical, analogical, and reflective reasoning in combination with scientific, mathematical, humanistic, or artistic inquiry to solve problems effectively.
- **Diverse and Global Perspectives:** Students demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of human experience and the interdependent roles of historical, cultural, socio-economic, geographic, and ecological influences on this experience.

- **Information Literacy:** Students recognize that information is needed, and they use both traditional and modern technologies to effectively locate, evaluate, and apply the needed information.
- **Technology Literacy:** Students apply technological skills and processes to effectively acquire, manage, and present information.

Class size: 16 students (can be modified for larger or smaller groups by having groups work individually rather than in pairs or in larger groups, and / or by omitting or adding Silk Road Cities)

Project Introduction: instructor will introduce an overview of the silk road map and video to the class.

Students will draw at random a name of one of 8 important cities on the Silk Road North Route. One city (or pair of cities) has been selected from each modern country along the route based on historical and modern maps. These cities are:

Chang'an (modern Xi'an, China)

Almaty (Kazakhstan)

Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan)

Marakanda (modern Samarkand) & Bukhara (Uzbekistan)

Rhagae (modern Tehran, Iran)

Baghdad (Iraq)

Khalpe (modern Aleppo, Syria)

Istanbul (Turkey)

(for larger groups, I would recommend adding: Wulumuqi (Urumqi- Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China), Dushanbe, Tajikstan, and Herat, Afghanistan)

PROJECT:

Part 1: Artifacts

The two or more students in each city will produce one ceramic artifact replica each from their country during the Silk Road time frame. One artifact should be a "Daily Use" object, such as dishes, lamps, etc. and one artifact should be a "Special Use" artifact such as a cultural relic, a sacred or ritual object, or other special use artifact. They should, to the best of their ability, replicate the building and decoration style of the artifacts in order to explore the design and aesthetic elements of the artifact. Students will have 2 weeks to build the artifact and also research the culture.

Part 2: Presentation

Students will be given a visual presentation template to fill in and creatively adjust as desired to cover location, ethnic groups, languages, social organization, culture, aesthetics (other arts and crafts), ceramic techniques, and ceramic influences from other regions. The presentation template will be a shared google file so that students may divide the work to work independently, or work together on the presentation. I believe it will be helpful to provide a template, as many students have not yet taken

classes with instruction on presentation skills, so it will provide a good, clear model for organization and including pertinent information.

Presentation:

- 1) Title, names, date, class
- 2) Map (old and new, where it is on the silk road)
- 3) Overview: Culture (Ethnic groups, languages, religions, etc.)
- 4) Overview: products / exports on silk road
- 5) Overview: Society (social organization, architecture, lifestyle)
- 6) Ceramic Artifact 1: Special Use – purpose, usage, etc.
- 7) Ceramic Artifact 1: continued -
- 8) Ceramic Artifact 1- other examples of ritual crafted artifacts, ceramics, wood, metal, fiber, etc.
- 9) Ceramic Artifact 1- other examples of ritual crafted artifacts, ceramics, wood, metal, fiber, etc.
- 10) Ceramic Artifact 2: Daily Use – purpose, usage, etc.
- 11) Ceramic Artifact 2: continued
- 12) Ceramic Artifact 2- other examples of daily use artifacts ceramic, fiber / clothing, wood, metal, etc.
- 13) Ceramic Artifact 2- other examples of daily use artifacts ceramic, fiber / clothing, wood, metal, etc.
- 14) Ceramics manufacturing in region: kilns, jobs, locations, etc.
- 15) Material & Technical Influences from Silk Road: including- raw materials trades, technique influences from other cultures, technology exchanges
- 16) Artistic Influences from Silk Road: including style influences from other cultures, patterns and meanings, cultural influences, and ideas
- 17) Conclusion
- 18) Citations

Students will present to the class in order from East to West, divided over several class sessions. Students should have their artifacts completed, and will show or demonstrate them to classmates during their presentation. After each presentation, students will have time for Q&A and discussion on how each region connects to the others presented. I am hoping to provide additional learning immersion through the use of our college's new VR class headsets, which will enable to "visit" a location in each city in VR after the presentation as well through this technology.

RESOURCES:

<https://www.history.com/topics/silk-road>

The Silk Road and Ancient Trade: Crash Course World History #9

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfe-eNq-Qyg>

(great introductory video for project)

The Silk Road: Connecting the Ancient World Through Trade – Shannon Harris Castelo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vn3e37VWc0k>

(shorter TedEd video to introduce Silk Road)