

# EXPLORING THE QINGMING SCROLL

What does an idealized image of society tell us?  
What does it hide?

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Cyrus Tang Hall of



CHINA

## ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Students will learn about the contradictions contained within the Qingming Scroll and compare it to present-day representations of idealized societies.

If you are planning to use this as part of a visit to The Field Museum, see the field trip guide on page 6.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Along the River during the Qingming Festival, a famous painting from the 11th–12th century AD, provided inspiration for many other versions of the same scene. Although architectural details and the activities of people changed over the years, the basic subject remained the same: an idealized vision of a peaceful and prosperous society during the spring. The Field Museum's copy dates to the late 16th–17th century AD, meaning that it was still popular 500–600 years after its first creation.

The original painting was made during the Southern Song period, soon after the northern part of the empire had been conquered by the Jurchen people. During the Jurchen invasion, hundreds of thousands of Chinese citizens had to pack up all of their possessions and flee to the south—even the capital city was moved. The scroll shows none of this dramatic upheaval.

The painting shows a spring day along the rivers and canals of a city in the Yangtze River delta, an area celebrated for its beautiful landscape, and gives a glimpse of daily life in a southern Chinese town. The festival itself, with its ritual tomb sweeping and praying, is not a big part of the image. Rather, we see celebration, commerce, and community.



Image: Section of Qingming Scroll, © The Field Museum, Cat. No. 33723

**Keywords:** 6-8, 9-12, object-based learning, untold stories, discussion, world history, geography, cultural empathy, social empathy, historical empathy

**Lens:** history, geography, civics

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EXPLORING THE QINGMING SCROLL / CYRUS TANG HALL OF CHINA

The Field  
Museum

## COMPELLING QUESTIONS

What does an *idealized* image of society tell us?

What does an *idealized* image of society hide?

What would be portrayed in an *idealized* image of our lives?

What would not be portrayed?

## OBJECTIVES

Students will analyze idealized images of the China in the past.

Students will pose questions about gaps in historical records (images).

Students will analyze and create idealized images of modern society.

## STANDARDS

### C3 Framework

**D2.Civ.14.** Compare historical and contemporary means of changing societies, and promoting the common good.

**D2.Geo.4** Explain how cultural patterns and economic decisions influence environments and the daily lives of people in both nearby and distant places.

**D2.His.7.** Explain how the perspectives of people in the present shape interpretations of the past.

**D2.His.8.** Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent perspectives of people at the time.

### Common Core

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

### CPS Framework Alignment:

**Grade 6**, Unit 1: Introduction to Geography; Unit 7: Rise of Asia

**Grade 9**, Unit 2: The Roots of Humankind; Unit 4: Interrogating Power

## APPROXIMATE TIME

1-2 class periods

## PREPARATION NOTES

Students will be working in groups to explore content.  
You may consider pre-selecting student groups.

This will work best if students have a chance to fully explore the interactive scroll either through the museum visit or in the online exhibition: <http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/>.

If in the museum, plan to stagger groups so each has enough time with the interactive.

## OTHER MATERIALS

Access to museum content (in exhibit or online:  
<http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/>)

Graphic organizer

Clipboards (in exhibit)

Materials for scroll-making

## OBJECTS OF FOCUS

Qingming Scroll Interactive: <http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/interactive/qingming-scroll>

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## PROCEDURES

### › Engage

As a pre-write or opening discussion, ask students, "If someone were to draw a picture of an idealized version of our society – only the good stuff – what would it include? Do you see those types of representations on TV or online? Where else?"

Students can make two lists, of what parts of society would be idealized (display wealthy people, clean parts of the city, etc.), and where they see representations like this (movies, social media where people only show the best parts of their lives, etc.)

### › Explore (Questions and Inquiry)

Explain that just like today, people in the past sometimes represented their lives in an idealized way. Share with them the Qingming Scroll, an example of an idealized picture of Chinese society.

Have them make **observations** first. Then prompt them to make **inferences** about what they see.

Split students into groups to explore sections of the scroll more deeply. Have them continue taking notes on their observations and inferences.

Content can be explored in one of two ways:

- Visiting the museum in person
- Using the online exhibition: <http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/>

Students can explore the scroll individually or in small groups. As a small group, have them discuss the following questions:

- What about this scene do we think is idealized?
- What do we learn from representations of idealized societies?
- What questions do we have about what is missing from this representation?

### › Explain (Apply Disciplinary Lens)

Have students share their observations of the scroll as a whole group. Students can underline what they found in common and list additional alternatives they come to during their conversation.

In a group discussion, have students share what they observed.

- What did they learn about this society based on the scroll?
- What do they think is missing?
- Who do you think used this scroll? Who was the audience?
- Why do we feel compelled to make idealized versions of our society?

## PROCEDURES *(CONTINUED)*

### › Elaborate (Gather and Evaluate Evidence)

Direct students to plan and then create their own “Qingming Scroll” based on the notes they made at the beginning of class and any discussions they have.

Then, have them draw the hidden aspects of society on the reverse side of the scroll.

Examples of these can be found on the Pinterest board:

<https://www.pinterest.com/thefieldmuseum/qingming-scroll-project-idealized-societies/>.

Encourage students to be creative.

### › Evaluate (Develop Claims, Communicate and Critique Conclusions)

Have students conduct a gallery walk of their scrolls with the same guiding questions they used to analyze the Qingming Scroll.

- What do we learn from idealized representations of society?
- What questions do we have about what is missing?

After the gallery walk, students can share their ideas with the authors, either in written form or in small discussion groups.

Finally, students can write a personal reflection using the following prompt.

Did your audience understand what you were showing and what was hidden?

## ENRICHING THE LESSON

### Background Knowledge Needed:

Some general knowledge about Chinese culture during the Ming period would be helpful—dress, daily practice, etc. This can be covered through the exhibition content in the Qingming Scroll portion of the online exhibition.

### Anticipated Misconceptions:

Students may be surprised to learn that historic artifacts can have bias or that they were intended to represent anything other than the truth.

### Methods to Build Empathy:

#### Historic Empathy

This activity asks students to think about daily lives and particularly about the lives of the people hidden by society.

#### Social Empathy

Students will be working together in groups and forming consensus. This will require active listening, restating each other's ideas, and engaging in discussion.

#### Cultural Empathy

Students will see how other cultures represent their idealized societies and connect this to their own communities.

### Opportunities for Informed Action and Contemporary Connections:

After thinking about the untold stories of today, students can address problems they see in media and analyze bias they perceive in the media.

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## DIFFERENTIATION

### Extensions

Share images of your scrolls with us through our Facebook group, Teach + Learn with The Field: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1180147325332232/>. On a regular basis, we will update the Pinterest Board: <https://www.pinterest.com/thefieldmuseum/qingming-scroll-project-idealized-societies/> to include your students' work and tag it with a location. Compare the idealized societies represented in your scrolls to those of students in other locations.

## NOTES FOR FIELD TRIP PLANNING

### Before

The "Engage" section of the lesson plan can be used as a pre-visit activity. You can also model the first part of the "Explore" section as a preview of scroll in the exhibit. It may be helpful to share images of the objects with students before they enter the exhibit so they can easily locate them when they arrive.

### During

While in the museum, students can complete the observations and inferences described in "Explore." You may wish to show students how the interactive works using the online exhibition: <http://chinahall.fieldmuseum.org/> prior to your visit. Because it is a small space, encourage students to make observations throughout the exhibit, and stagger group work time on the scroll interactive.

### After

After visiting the exhibit, students will share their findings in the museum and engage in the discussion and writing described in "Elaborate" and "Evaluate."

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## Graphic Organizer

Observe What do you see?	Infer What about this image is idealized? What do you think is missing from this image?	Question What new questions does this object bring up for you?

STUDENT HANDOUT

What can you learn from this image?

What questions do you have about what is missing from this image?

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