

## Painted Poetry

**Submitted by:** Le Tran

**Subject:** Art – Painting, Poetry, and Calligraphy

**Grades:** 9-12

**Time required:** 10-12 classes (60 minute period)

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### Introduction

Calligraphy on silk is an art that uses beautiful writing as subject matter. In this art lesson, you will select a Vietnamese poem and create a silk painting using the words in the poem for calligraphy. You will also seek inspiration from the poem to paint an image on silk. The possibilities between images and words are to be explored in order to create a unique silk painting that is personal as well as culturally authentic.

### Objectives

Students will:

1. Experience Vietnamese poetry
2. Realize the potential of poems for inspiration in creating a painting
3. Experiment with watercolor/wash
4. Learn the art of calligraphy
5. Learn the elements of design: composition, color, value, and texture

### Materials

- Poetry books (see resources)
- Silk
- Salt
- Antifusant (prevents ink from spreading)
- India ink
- Watercolor
- Watercolor paintbrushes
- Palette, water container
- Drawing paper
- Paper towel, masking tape, exacto knives and stretcher (*optional: foam board*)

### Preparation

Display Vietnamese silk paintings that have around the room. Have a wide selection of poems that interest your students, copy these poems, and compile them into a booklet to use throughout the duration of the lesson.

Other resources to have available in art room:

- A map of Vietnam
  - Postcards of Vietnam: landscape, people and art
  - Books and videos on Vietnam
  - Artifacts and from Vietnam
  - A CD player and several Vietnamese CDs
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## **Lesson 1 - Introduction to Vietnam and the art of silk painting**

**Time required:** Two class sessions

Begin with a KWL handout.

Have students list everything they know about Vietnam, then everything they want to know about this country. (I shared my Vietnam experience with a PowerPoint presentation during this time)

You could find other alternatives to introduce Vietnam, such as:

- invite a person from Vietnam to give a presentation
- attend a Vietnamese community event, such as a Tet Celebration
- view a video or read a book to get a glimpse of the Vietnamese culture

At the end of this lesson, have students list everything they have learned about Vietnam. Then allow some time for students to share what they have written. Introduce the art of silk painting by highlighting the examples displayed around the room. Encourage students to look closely at the examples and make a list of what they see. Compile a list and make the connections between the poems and the images. Look for symbolism found in artwork and compare them to Western symbolisms.

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## **Lesson 2 - Selecting, Interpreting a Poem and Creating a Composition**

**Time required:** One class session

Have students read through the booklet of poems which you have put together and select a poem that inspires them. They will pair up with another student to read over their poem, interpret it and record ideas generated in their sketchbook. (This is an opportunity for your class to collaborate with an English class to interpret poetry)

Some guidance may be needed to help students to understand the poem, such as: identifying the theme, looking for the supporting details and finding the symbolism within the poem.

The students will also select a short verse that captures the essence of the poem. The verse will be “calligraphy” on silk later. Another option for the students is to write their own verse inspired by the poem.

Before experimenting on silk, have students create several compositions to see how their calligraphy and image fit together. Encourage them to sketch as many different compositions as possible and to keep the overall design simple. Avoid literal interpretation of the poem and try not to draw every detail mentioned in the poem.

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### **Lesson 3 - Brushstroke Experiments**

**Time required:** Two class sessions

Students will benefit from doing a number of brushstroke experiments on paper before experimenting on silk. In this exercise, watercolor or India ink can be used. Demonstrate to students how to hold the brush vertically and how to control the pressure to create thick to thin lines. Show them how to load the brush so that they can create interesting textures and values. Prepare handouts for this exercise if needed.

Suggested brushstrokes experiments:

- thick to thin lines
- bamboo bushes
- rocks and mountains
- flowers and trees

Brushstroke experiments are submitted when complete for grading.

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### **Lesson 4 - Calligraphy**

**Time required:** One to two class session

Demonstrate the art of calligraphy to students and or view the video, “Pointed Brush Calligraphy,” by Fran Strom.

With a pointed brush, students can practice writing their verse on paper with watercolor or India ink. The art of calligraphy is to allow the letters to flow freely and gracefully while controlling the pressure of the brush to create thick to thin lines. There are many creative ways to arrange the verse so that it works with the overall composition. Encourage students to play around with the arrangement and look for fresh, new ways to arrange the verse as well as finding a style of calligraphy that they like. The verse could cascade down vertically, diagonally, or horizontally depending on the composition the students want to achieve.

Students could choose to have the calligraphy work to be more dominant than the image if they like.

Calligraphy experiments are submitted when complete for grading.

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### **Lesson 5 - Preparing and Experimenting with Silk Painting**

**Time required:** Two class sessions

Cut silk to desired size. Give each student two pieces of silk, one to experiment, and one for the final painting.

Cut foam board three to four inches larger than silk size.

Each student will have a foam board to stretch their silk. Using an exacto knife, they will cut an opening that is one inch smaller than the silk piece. Use masking tape to secure silk to foam board. Make sure silk is stretched tightly over opening. Students can experiment on this first piece of silk to see how watercolor and ink spread on the fabric. Try painting a desired composition, including the calligraphy of the verse. To prevent ink and watercolor from spreading too much on the silk, apply a coat of antifusant on the area where needed, especially on the areas where the calligraphy will be. Wait for antifusant to dry before writing on that area. For textural effect, try sprinkling salt on areas where watercolor is still wet.

Have students critique their own artwork and the artwork of their peers when experimentation is done. Give suggestions to each other's work by referring to the elements of design.

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### **Lesson 6 - Final Silk Painting**

**Time required:** Two class sessions

Once students are comfortable with the medium and have worked out a pleasing composition. They can begin their final silk painting. Just peel off the first silk painting from the foam board and stretch on a new piece of silk.

To keep ink or watercolor from spreading when doing calligraphy or fine details, apply a coat of antifusant on area needed and let it dry before painting.

To display artwork, secure silk painting on handmade paper, or on another piece of thicker silk. Then, hot glue backing material on two bamboo sticks to hang.

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### **Assessment**

Students are evaluated on the completion of all assignments given:

- selecting a translated Vietnamese poem to use for this artwork
- define and select a verse that inspires an image
- demonstrate technical competency in calligraphy

- apply proper watercolor/wash techniques
- display an understanding of composition, color, value, and texture

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### Curriculum Connections

**English:** Have students select a translated Vietnamese poem to emulate. Students are to find a similar theme in American culture and write a new poem following the structure of the Vietnamese poem.

**Technology:** Students are to select a translated Vietnamese poem that contains strong imagery. Have them choose a short verse in the poem that captures the essence of the image. Then, have students scan a painting and add the verse to create an original computer generated artwork.

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### Resources

#### Poetry books

- Balaban, John. Translated. *Ca Dao Viet Nam, Vietnamese Folk Poetry*. Copper Canyon Press, 1980
- Balaban, John. Translated. *Spring Essence: The Poetry of Ho Xuan Huong*. Copper Canyon Press, 2000
- Huynh, Sanh Thong. Edited and Translated. *An Anthology of Vietnamese Poems: From the Eleventh Through The Twentieth Centuries*. Yale University Press, 1996
- Huynh, Sanh Thong. Edited and Translated. *The Heritage of Vietnamese Poetry*. Yale University Press, 1979
- \*Jamieson, Neil L. *Understanding Vietnam*. University of California Press, 1993 (contains many significant poems even though it is not a poetry book)
- Nguyen, Ngoc Bich. Edited and Translated. *A Thousand Years of Vietnamese Poetry*. Knopf, 1975
- Nguyen, Ba Chung and Kevin Bowen. Edited. *6 Vietnamese Poets*. Curbstone Press, 2002.
- Nhat, Thich Hanh. *Call Me By My True Names: The Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh*. Parallax Press, 1993.
- Lowenfels, Walter. Edited. Braymer, Nan. Co-editor. *Where Is Vietnam? American Poets Respond; An Anthology of Contemporary Poems*. Anchor Books, 1967

#### Art books

- Noppe, Catherine and Jean-Francois Hubert. *Art of Vietnam*. Parkstone Press, 2003.

#### Silk painting books

- Tuckman, Diane and Janas, Jan. *Creative Silk Painting*. North Light Books, 1995.

- Tuckman, Diane and Janas, Jan. *The Best of Silk Painting*. North Light Books, 1997.
- Tuckman, Diane and Janas, Jan. *The Complete Book of Silk Painting*. North Light Books, 1992.

### **Calligraphy videos**

- *Pointed Brush Painting*. Fran Strom (1992)

### **Feature Films**

- *Nostalgia for the Countryside* Written and Directed by Dang Nhat Minh (1996)
- *Three Seasons*. Directed by Tony Bui (1999)
- *The Scent of Green Papaya*. Directed by Tran Anh Hung (1993)
- *Vertical Rays of the Sun*. Directed by Tran Anh Hung (2001)

### **Documentary Films**

- Video Visits: *Vietnam: Land of the Ascending Dragon*. International Video Network, San Ramon, CA
- Lonely Planet: *The Vietnam Experience*. International Video Network, San Ramon, CA

### **Literature**

- Nguyen, Du. Huynh, Sanh Thong. Translated and Annotated. *The Tale of Kieu*. Random House, 1973

### **Appendices**

- To order silk, ink, antifusant and brushes: Dharma Trading Co., [www.dharmatrading.com](http://www.dharmatrading.com)