

# Chinese Ink Painting

(art + history; art + social studies)

In this two-part lesson, students will learn about the tools used in this type of artwork, then employ the tools in a painting.

The right tools are essential to a Chinese brush painter. Students will create their own brush holders and ink pots from glazed and fired clay, then learn the basic brush strokes for branches, bamboo leaves. After the students have practiced these strokes, they enjoy painting several compositions using these three brush strokes.

**Grade Levels** 5-12

## Preparation

1. View examples of tools used by Chinese brush painters and samples of paintings. Two excellent resources:

[The Simple Art of Chinese Calligraphy](#) Book by Qu Lei Lei (71109-1001) with over 200 names, characters, poems and phrases

[The Sumi-e Book](#) by Yolanda Mayhall (70116-1001), teaches basic brushstrokes with easy instruction

[Chinese Designs Clip Art Book](#) (71300-1002)

## Process

1. Using basic pinch-pot building techniques, students create a simple brush holder and ink well out of clay. Brush Chinese symbols and decorative patterns on greenware or bisque with black underglaze. Kiln fire clay.
2. Brush on transparent glaze and fire according to kiln specifications on the jar. This glaze will keep the ink from staining the pieces.
3. Students learn the basic strokes of traditional Chinese painting. Practice on regular drawing paper first, then make a final painting on rice paper.

**The Hold:** The brush is held perpendicularly to the paper. The thumb, forefinger and index finger hold the brush, with the ring finger and little finger supporting it on the other side. The hand is held well away from the bristles and the wrist is kept flexible.

**The Motion:** Mastering the Chinese brushstrokes takes years of study, but students can make satisfying strokes with a little practice. During the process of drawing, the fingers remain almost immobile, gripping the brush firmly. The arm creates the movement, slowly and with great



## Materials

[Amaco® No. 25 White Clay](#), 50-lb carton (30505-1025), share across classroom

[Boxwood Clay Tool Set](#) (30304-1009), set of 36, double-ended tools, share across classroom

[Amaco® Lead-Free Underglaze](#), Black, 2-oz jars (30417-2004) share three jars across classroom

[Amaco® F-Series Clear Glaze](#), pint jar (30406-1026), share two jars across classroom

[Yasutomo® Kozo Sumi-e Paper](#) (12952-1022), 11" x 60-ft roll, cut to 11" x 15" pieces for 48 per roll, need one piece per student

[Blick Bamboo Brush 564](#), size 2, (05409-1002), need one per student

[Yasutomo® Liquid Sumi-e Ink](#), 12-oz bottle (20827-2006), distribute across class with droppers (04958-0000)

## Process, continued

control. Practice short strokes and long ones, making them horizontal, vertical and diagonal. Apply varied pressure to the brush, creating thin lines and thick ones. Next, make strokes that start out thick and end up thin and strokes that go from thin to thick.

**The Ink:** Place a few drops of ink in the the ink dish. Ink is permanent, so use with caution! Dip the brush in and drag the brush across the lip of the ink dish with a rolling motion to remove excess ink. Avoid overloading the ink, or it may form drips.

**The Stroke:** Beginners may learn the stroke to make a **bamboo stalk** first. Here are some simple instructions:

- a) Lightly touch the brush to the paper and press down to form an oval shape.
- b) Without lifting the brush, lighten the pressure and pull the ink up in the direction the bamboo stalk would grow in.
- c) Continue to keep the brush on the paper. When the section reaches the desired length, press down again to form another oval shape.
- d) Lift the brush. To start the next section of the bamboo stalk, leave a small amount of space after the first section and repeat the stroke, moving upward on the page. Each section should get a little bit smaller and a little lighter.

Another beginning stroke is the **bamboo leaf**, painted after the bamboo stalk is complete:

- a) Begin at the leaf stem. Place the tip of the brush lightly on the paper, close to the bamboo stalk.
- b) Begin moving the brush in the direction of the leaf's growth, away from the stalk, forming a line for the stem. At the edge of the stem increase the pressure, creating the wide part of the leaf.

- c) Keeping the brush moving slowly on the paper, lighten the pressure until it makes the tapering point of the leaf, then lift the brush off the page.

### Lesson Plan Idea and Artwork submitted by Sally Brown, West Hartford, CT

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### National Standards

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes

**5-8** Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas

**9-12** Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks

Content Standard #4 — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

**5-8** Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures

**9-12** Students differentiate among a variety of historical and cultural contexts in terms of characteristics and purposes of works of art