

Mirrors of the soul: Beijing Opera

Secondary Lesson Plan



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Source

[Access Asia: Secondary Teaching and Learning Units](#)

Learning area

The Arts (visual arts, drama)

Level

Lower secondary

Description

Students experiment with design and technical elements such as symbol, colour and character appropriate to the style of make-up used in Beijing Opera.

Purpose

To develop understanding of the role of colour in determining an audience's perception of character.

Duration

About 100 minutes

Possible outcomes

In relation to *The Arts — a curriculum profile for Australian schools*, this lesson can contribute to outcomes in all strands.

Materials required

A class set of Handouts 1, 2 and 3 from below.

Procedure

1. Introduction

Show the class some examples of cartoon characters (in colour). If these are unavailable, ask students to describe and paint some familiar cartoon characters. Discuss the colours used for skin, eyes, noses, cheeks, lips and hair. Students will see that some colours are associated with particular character traits.

2. **The Beijing Opera**

Use Handout 1 to introduce the Beijing Opera, then explain that the class is going to look at how it uses colour in face painting.

3. **Examples of Beijing Opera characters**

Give students copies of Handout 2 showing the make-up designs of two Beijing Opera characters and ask them to colour in the faces. Spaces on each design have letters corresponding to a colour key. If there is no letter, the space is to be left white.

For Ji Liao, the colour key is: R=light red, B=black, Y=yellow.

For Jiang Wei, the colour key is R=dark red, B=black.

4. **Analysing the characters**

Ask students to write a brief analysis of each character based on their existing understanding of colour associations. Organise the class into small groups to discuss their analyses. After some time, ask students to review their analyses of the characters using Handout 3.

Read the following descriptions of the two characters to students and compare their analyses with the descriptions.

- Ji Liao is a cruel and ambitious man. He became king by dethroning his nephew and this nephew later hired an assassin to kill him.
- Jiang Wei is a commander of the armies of the kingdom of Shu. He has great ability and a profound knowledge of the universe.

5. **Designing face paint for a character**

Ask each student to use the Beijing Opera symbolic colour chart to design a face representing the personality of a particular person. Ask each student to add a few lines of character description to their design. Designs can then be coloured or painted and displayed in the classroom.

Extension activities

1. **Face painting**

Demonstrate the use of water-based make-up. In pairs, students and paint each other's faces according to their designs.

2. **Monologue**

Students create a new character, write a short monologue and perform it with appropriate use of make-up.

Acknowledgments

[Access Asia: Secondary Teaching and Learning Units](#) is part of the Access Asia series, funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training through the Asia Education Foundation.

Related resources

- Watson, R. 1995, [Visions](#), Curriculum Corporation, Carlton, Vic.
- Hegarty, Maggie & Stephens, Margaret 1995, [Images](#), Curriculum Corporation, Carlton, Vic.

Handout 1

Beijing Opera

The Beijing Opera emerged in China in 1790 when a troupe performed for the Emperor's birthday. Stories performed are well known and are usually taken from historical epics and romantic novels of China's past. Characters have painted faces and include members of the military, gods and demons, scholars, clowns and officials. The way faces are painted is strongly influenced by earlier forms of mask and make-up. Facial patterns rely on exaggeration and the symbolism of colour to suggest a character's attributes and natures. They become a *mirror of the soul*. This allows knowledgeable audiences to recognise character type instantly, just as *good* or *bad* characters are recognisable in cartoons. Colours do not, however, always indicate character traits. Sometimes they can be used to represent physical features of a character.

Handout 2

Print out these diagrams below:

Ji Liao

This make-up design belongs to the character Ji Liao. Each space on the design has a letter which corresponds to the colour key. Colour each space the appropriate colour. Spaces not containing a letter are to be left white.

Colour key	
R:	Light red
B:	Black
Y:	Yellow



Jiang Wei

The make-up design below belongs to the character Jiang Wei. Each space on the design has a letter which corresponds to the colour key. Colour each space the appropriate colour. Spaces not containing a colour are to be left white.



Handout 3

Beijing Opera symbolic colour chart

Red: loyalty, courage

Purple: wisdom, bravery, steadfastness

Black: loyalty, integrity

Watery white: cruelty, treachery

Oily white: inflated, domineering

Blue: valour, resolution

Green: chivalry

Yellow: brutality

Grey: an old scoundrel

Gold and silver: supernatural (demons, Buddhas, spirits)

Dark red: loyal, time-tested warrior

Pink: humour