

**Lesson Title:** The Master's Tools: Cultural Revolution and the Democracy Wall Movement

**Class and Grade Level:** World History Grade 11

**Goals and Objectives:**

The student will be able to:

- Understand the venerable tradition of the “Big Character” poster as a means of protest.
- Understand the ironic connection between the use of “Big Character” posters in the Cultural Revolution period of the late 1960's to mid 1970's and the Democracy Wall movement of 1978.
- Apply concepts learned to the creation of their own “Big Character” poster.

**Time required/class periods needed:** 2 consecutive class periods.

**Primary source bibliography:**

*Ten Years of Madness: Oral Histories of China's Cultural Revolution*, Feng Jikai, 1996: China Books & Periodicals, Incorporated ISBN-13: 9780835125840

“Bombard The Headquarters – My First Big Character Poster” *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* [http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9\\_63.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_63.htm) (originally from Peking Review, No. 33, 11-3-1967.)

“Big Character” images online as from:

[http://www.google.com/images?hl=en&source=imghp&biw=1149&bih=557&q=Big+character+poster&gbv=2&aq=f&aqi=g1&aql=&oq=&gs\\_rfai](http://www.google.com/images?hl=en&source=imghp&biw=1149&bih=557&q=Big+character+poster&gbv=2&aq=f&aqi=g1&aql=&oq=&gs_rfai)

**Other resources used:**

“Democracy Wall: A Sudden Explosion in Free Speech, 1979-Unorthodox Opinions Are Heard on the Street”, *TIME Asia*, Wei Jingsheng SEPTEMBER 27, 1999 VOL. 154 NO. 12  
[http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/99/0927/democracy\\_wall.html](http://www.time.com/time/asia/magazine/99/0927/democracy_wall.html)

**Required materials/supplies:**

Copies of the Article “Democracy Wall” for each student,  
Copies of excerpts from “Ten Years of Madness” for each student.  
Large sheets of paper (legal size or larger)  
Assorted pens and markers.

**Vocabulary:**

Big Character Poster

Cultural Revolution

Democracy Wall

Propaganda

## Procedure:

(Day 1)

Introduce the Cultural Revolution to students by reading Mao's "Bombard the Headquarters-My First Big Character Poster". Discuss the historical relevance of the Big Character poster as a traditional means of protest in China, and the growing popularity of this form of protest after 1911.

Have students read excerpts (your choice) from *Ten Years of Madness*. Have them write reactions to the following questions while reading:

- What motives primarily drove people to denounce each other during the Cultural Revolution?
- What kind of social and political climate was created by the Cultural Revolution?
- Was the Cultural Revolution successful in producing societal or political reform?

Discuss reactions and collect them. Ask students to think about possible "criticisms" of the administration of the classroom, to write them down and bring their list to class the next day.

(Day 2)

Have students read the "Democracy Wall" article. Have students write reactions to the following questions while reading:

- Why would people use Big Character posters to denounce the government, even after the Cultural Revolution had created such chaos?
- Why would the author conclude that the Democracy Wall was a success, even though at the time of the writing of the article (21 years after the Wall), he claimed the government still suppressed pro-democracy views?

Collect the written reactions; have students create their own "Big Character posters" using their list of classroom administration criticisms. Hang students' Big Character posters around the room when finished. Discuss the posters. Question prompts: Do you feel comfortable challenging authority in this way? Which posters are personal attacks? Is there difference between pointing out flaws within a system and pointing out personal flaws? What is the difference? How would you contrast the kinds of "criticisms" you read about in "Ten Years of Madness" with your own criticisms? Was the call for more democracy in 1978 a logical extension of the Cultural Revolution's call to criticize? Is there anything like these posters in America today? If yes, what? **IT WOULD BE GOOD FOR THE TEACHER TO HAVE A LIST OF AMERICAN POSTERS OR MATERIALS TO POINT OUT SIMILARITIES IF THE STUDENTS CAN'T COME UP WITH ANYTHING. AND A CLASS DISCUSSION ABOUT THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THESE AND BIG CHARACTER POSTERS WOULD BE VERY INTERESTING. MAYBE EVEN A DEBATE.**

**Assessment/evaluation:**

Evaluate reading responses, looking for relevant, thorough responses that refer back to the readings.

In the event of a debate: Strength of arguments for and against.