

Lesson Title: Creating an Asian Seal**Class and Grade level(s) 9-12 Art(may be adapted for students K-12**

*See adaptation suggestions below.)

Goals and Objectives**The student will be able to:**

- 1) Study seal carving and understand how it is used in East Asian culture
- 2) Explain why many East Asian paintings have so many seals.
- 3) Explain difference between seals carved in relief or intaglio along with the significance of each.
- 4) Explain the difference between a name seal and a mood seal.
- 5) Recognize materials used to create a seal.
- 6) Create an East Asian-style seal carving
- 7) Stamp painting or paper in the traditional propitious location: Large, square and weighty seals usually stamped in the lower corner of the painting; Irregular, oval and rectangular shaped-seals are usually stamped on the sides.

Time required/class periods needed

1-5 days depending on grade level and complexity of seal.

Primary source bibliography<http://www.art-virtue.com/seals/introduction/intro.htm> (Introduction to Chinese Seals)http://www.margana.com/chinese_seals.htm (examples of mood seals)Rae, Nan. The Ch'i of the Brush. New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 2003. (pgs. 134-137)**Other resources used**Evans, Jane. An Introduction to Chinese Brush Painting (Video, Whitestar) John Henson Associates, 1989.Rae, Nan. The Ch'i of the Brush. New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 2003.<http://asiasociety.org/countries/traditions/chinese-calligraphy><http://www.chinavista.com/experience/seal/seals.html>Mittler, Gene A. Art in Focus. New York: Glencoe, McGraw-Hill, 2000.

Required materials/supplies

- *Introduction to Chinese Seals handout (if student reading is preferred. I prefer to lecture however the handouts are helpful. <http://www.art-virtue.com/seals/introduction/intro.htm> (Introduction to Chinese Seals)
- *handouts with general seals, mood seals and/or zodiac animals. http://www.margana.com/chinese_seals.htm (examples of mood seals) for additional resources follow other resources links.
- *small pieces of drawing paper approximately 2"x2" will work fine.
- *pencils
- *Red Cinnabar ink paste is used traditionally however red tempera or acrylic paint will work.
- *Leather hard clay (most of the moisture has left the clay) or gum erasers can be used to create the seal carving for middle school and high school students.
- *Pencils can be used for the carving of the actual seal if no sculpting tools are available.
- *Sculpting tools if available.
- *Ink brayers
- *Trays for the ink or paint
- *ADAPTATION Cut-up styrofoam meat trays can be used for elementary children with simple Chinese zodiac animals etched into the material with a pencil.

Vocabulary

Seal are impressions made from carved stones or other media pressed into a thick, red, oil-based paste. They are affixed to a document, painting, or calligraphy to certify authorship or ownership. Since artists and writers typically used several names throughout their lives, they had several seals inscribed with their given names, artistic names, the names of their studios, and, possibly, an identifying literary expression. Usually rectangular or round, seal designs are cut into materials such as jade, ivory, and soapstone. If the characters are incised, they will appear white in the impression; if carved in relief, they will appear red. The script often used for seals derives from an ancient script, known as "seal script," used during the late Zhou (ca. 1050–256 B.C.) and Qin (221–206 B.C.) dynasties.

Yang positive (**relief**) seals in which the characters are in red with white space around them. They are airy and lighter in mood, this is the male or groom form. The idea of Yang is said to include the concept of light, heat, day, south, positive, sun, heaven and spirit among others.



Yin Negative (**intaglio**) seals in which the characters are in white with red space around them. The Yin seal is seems heavier. The idea of Yin includes shade, dark, water, black, lower, North, female force principle, moon earth and matter, among other things. Both styles are equally popular and many artists have name seals in both styles.



Mood Seals express thoughts, reflections, poetry and idioms.

Official Seals were conferred upon officials to represent their rank and authority. Up until the Eastern Han Dynasty, the color of ink used to affix official seals was regulated depending on the position of each official.

Private Seals were not regulated by the governments and therefore showed the largest variety in content, shape, size, material and calligraphy styles. Despite of their varied characteristics, they can still be categorized based on their uses. Seals with names, pen names, pseudonyms etc. were used in lieu of a signature by private citizens. This is how artists signed their works and letters. Chinese literati commonly used a number of different pen names.

Collectors' Seals were mainly used for the purpose of authenticating pieces of art. Thus the seal of a famous collector or connoisseur would become an integral part of a work of art and could substantially raise its value. Over the course of several centuries, some Chinese paintings became cluttered with dozens of different seals.

Procedure

- 1) Visual presentation showing examples of Asian paintings that have seals on them and samples of the materials used to create the seals.
- 2) Lecture or handout from <http://www.art-virtue.com/seals/introduction/intro.htm> (Introduction to Chinese Seals)
- 3) Class discussion to check for understanding
- 4) Demonstrate seal carving and stamping technique. Seals can be a simple cube of clay with the seal on the bottom or a seal that also includes a sculptural handle (depending on time and materials).
- 5) Guide students through the design process explaining the need to reverse the image so that it prints properly. Make mood seal and zodiac animal handouts available. Use a window to backlight the backside of the paper so the traced image will be reversed.
- 6) Transfer image to clay, eraser or meat tray by pressing hard enough with stylus or pencil or pen to make an impression on the Styrofoam or clay. If an eraser is used, have the students darken the pencil line on the drawing so that the image will transfer to the eraser.
- 7) Guide the students through the carving process using a pencil or carving tools if available.
- 8) Test seals on scrap paper to learn to control the ink and to check for understanding of proper placement of seals.
- 9) Have students apply seals to their Chinese brush paintings from the previous lesson or to copies of brush paintings taken from art books.
- 10) Encourage students to place their seals on the work of their peers to mimic the use of seals as a means of praising others' art.

Assessment/evaluation

During lecture and guided practice, students will be informally evaluated on their work ethic. Students may be given a written or oral quiz on the new vocabulary. Students will receive a grade based on the completion of their seal as well as proper traditional seal location. This is a performance assessment grade after guided practice.