



Crafts Around the World Series China: Michigan 4-H Children's Art Exchange

Enjoy learning how to make simple crafts from six of the seven continents: **Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia, North America, and South America.**

Purpose:

Introduce youth to China through Chinese children's art visually. Participants can begin to understand how art can tell stories, ideas, and feelings; and to explore and experiment with two-dimensional art making.

Objectives:

- ◇ Learn about China through Chinese children's artwork.
- ◇ Inspire global exploration.
- ◇ Develop fine motor skills in creating visual letter art.
- ◇ Increase cultural awareness and creativity.

Education Standards:

- ◇ Understand the visual arts in relation to history and culture.

Encourage thought and discussion with these questions: What happened? What's important? So what? Now what?

Experiential Learning:

- ◇ Create a "visual letter" (painting or drawing) piece of art.
- ◇ Develop fine motor skills in creating visual letter art.
- ◇ Increase cultural awareness and creativity.

Audience: Grades K–6 in all youth educational settings



Photo courtesy of Song Lize, 4-H Youth Development Programming Partner with Binzhou City Education Bureau, Shandong Province, China

CONTINENT: ASIA

Asia is the largest of the world's continents. It is home to 48 countries with three of them (Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkey) having part of their land in Europe. Some areas of the world combine Asia and Europe into one continent called Eurasia.

COUNTRY: CHINA

China, officially the People's Republic of China, is a country in eastern Asia. Currently, China is divided into 23 provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities directly under the Central Government, and two special administrative regions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, n.d.).

PROVINCE: Shandong Province, People's Republic of China

Shandong Province is a coastal province on the east side of China. Shandong means "east of the mountains."

The Michigan 4-H China Project began in 1988 between Michigan 4-H and Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, as a "global education through the arts program" that had reached close to 500,000 Michigan youth in grades K-12. The current Michigan 4-H Children's Art Exchange with China Project, conducted in cooperation with the Shandong People's Republic of China, has been positively affecting youth since 2004 (Knox, n.d.).

LESSON: Visual Letters

Children will create “visual letters” art to send to children their own ages in China. A “visual letter” is just like a written letter in that both can tell stories and share important ideas and feelings. The medium however is different: a visual letter uses images and a written letter uses words. However, both are effective in connecting children on opposite sides of the globe.

TIME: 30-45 minutes or multiple days depending upon the interest to learn more.

MATERIALS:

- ◇ Chinese children’s pictures with descriptions (slides, kits, or received artwork)
- ◇ Globe or world map
- ◇ Art medium materials (crayons, markers, paint, pencils, and others)
- ◇ Paper (12-inch by 18-inch recommended for easier handling and mailing)
- ◇ 5-inch by 7-inch adhesive labels

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Visit the Michigan State University (MSU) Extension 4-H China Project website for further information on the project as well as for a selection of Michigan artwork from the exchange traveling exhibits:

http://msue.anr.msu.edu/program/info/china_project

INFORMATIONAL VIDEO LINK: View this video to discover the history of the 4-H China Project and to guide you in doing a visual letter art exchange: https://mediaspace.msu.edu/media/t/1_eqcuq5mb
View this video, which can be used as an example to guide you in doing a visual letter art exchange either virtually or face to face: https://mediaspace.msu.edu/media/t/1_hrjtizqh

PROCEDURE:

1. Contact your county MSU Extension office to borrow teaching kits that consist of original pictures by Chinese children, descriptions of those pictures, and a study guide.
2. Before the activity, prepare 5-inch by 7-inch labels for the back of each piece of art with headings: name, age, title, gender, and optional story. The facilitator or participants can fill this in after artwork is complete. Make sure that the writing is legible if completed by the participants for documentation.
3. Introduce the Chinese children’s art and China. Find China on a map or globe. Talk about the Chinese children’s art as each picture has a story, an idea, a feeling, or a dream to share. Every piece of art becomes a visual letter to children in Michigan about life in China, as depicted by a child. Ultimately, children will see many similarities between their Chinese counterparts (friends and peers) and themselves.
4. Create visual letters – a painting or drawing. Ask participants to communicate (via art) something important in their lives, such as friends, family, pets, home, school, sports, and holidays. Samples shared through their artwork may include their fears (sick family member, bullying), features unique to Michigan (Mackinac Bridge, Lake Michigan), Michigan wildlife (black bears, deer, robins), patriotism (White House, Fourth of July fireworks, American flag), rural scenes (mid-Michigan corn fields), urban scenes (Detroit street scenes), big ideas (world peace, protecting the environment), and special dreams (Disneyland, a bedroom filled with books).
5. Display the children’s art.
6. Submit for a selection process through a participating county 4-H office to be sent to China.

Reflection Questions:

- ◇ What do you see when looking at the visual letter art from China?
- ◇ What do you think is the visual letter or “story” being told?
- ◇ What did you learn about China?
- ◇ How are you the same? How are you different?
- ◇ Why did you make your visual letter art the way that you did?
- ◇ What surprised you during this creation or process?
- ◇ How did you overcome something difficult?
- ◇ Let’s have a conversation about this piece of art.

Art and Science — Be creative with your visual letter. Experiment with different types of paper (rice paper, cardstock, construction paper), medium (watercolor, pastels, markers), or techniques (collage, ink and brush, paint).

Research other countries, states, or cultural groups you might want to do a visual letter art exchange with. Research other ways of visual letter cultural communications using technology. (Make sure that the children you connect with have access to technology.)

Ask questions and make discoveries!

Reflection Questions: What surprised you and why? When were you the most creative, and why do you think that is? What made you curious today? What can you do with what you learned today?

REFERENCES:

Knox, B. (n.d.). *Michigan 4-H China project* [PowerPoint]. Michigan State University Extension, 4-H Youth Development

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. (n.d.). *Administrative division system*.
https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ljzg_665465/zqjk_665467/3572_665469/t1140993.shtml

ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

The activity was developed by Michigan State University Extension Educator Janis Brinn in 2020, regarding the MSU Extension 4-H China project (http://msue.anr.msu.edu/program/info/china_project). It was updated in 2021.