

2024/25



OVERTURE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

# ONSTAGE STUDENT FIELD TRIP RESOURCE GUIDE



## The Peking Acrobats

[overture.org/onstage](https://overture.org/onstage)



## ABOUT OVERTURE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Overture Center for the Arts fills a city block in downtown Madison with world-class venues for the performing and visual arts. Made possible by an extraordinary gift from Madison businessman W. Jerome Frautschi, the center presents the highest-quality arts and entertainment programming in a wide variety of disciplines for diverse audiences. Offerings include performances by acclaimed classical, jazz, pop, and folk performers; touring Broadway musicals; quality children's entertainment; and world-class ballet, modern and jazz dance. Overture Center's extensive outreach and educational programs serve thousands of Madison-area residents annually, including youth, older adults, people with limited financial resources and people with disabilities. The center is also home to ten independent resident organizations.

## RESIDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society  
Children's Theater of Madison  
Forward Theater Company  
Kanopy Dance Company  
Li Chiao-Ping Dance Company  
Madison Ballet  
Madison Opera  
Madison Symphony Orchestra  
Wisconsin Academy's James Watrous Gallery  
Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra

Internationally renowned architect Cesar Pelli designed the center to provide the best possible environment for artists and audiences, as well as to complement Madison's urban environment. Performance spaces range from the spectacular 2,250-seat Overture Hall to the casual and intimate Rotunda Stage. The renovated Capitol Theater seats approximately 1,110, and The Playhouse seats 350. In addition, three multi-purpose spaces provide flexible performance, meeting and rehearsal facilities. Overture Center also features several art exhibit spaces. Overture Galleries I, II and III display works by Dane County artists. The Playhouse Gallery features regional artists with an emphasis on collaborations with local organizations. The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters' Watrous Gallery displays works by Wisconsin artists, and the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art offers works by national and international artists.



## Dear Teachers,

In this resource guide, you will find valuable information that will help you apply your academic goals to your students' performance experience. We have included suggestions for activities that can help you prepare students to see this performance, ideas for follow-up activities and additional resources you can access on the web. Along with these activities and resources, we've also included the applicable Wisconsin Academic Standards in order to help you align the experience with your curriculum requirements.

This Educator's Resource Guide for this Onstage performance of *The Peking Acrobats* is designed to:

- Extend the scholastic impact of the performance by providing discussion ideas, activities and further reading that promote learning across the curriculum;
- Promote arts literacy by expanding students' knowledge of music, dance, storytelling and theatre;
- Illustrate that the arts are a legacy reflecting the values, custom, beliefs, expressions and reflections of a culture;
- Use the arts to teach about the cultures of other people and to celebrate students' over heritage thorough self-reflection;
- Maximize students' enjoyment and appreciation of the performance.

We hope this performance and the suggestions in this resource guide will provide you and your students opportunities to apply art learning in your curricula, expanding it in new and enriching ways.

Enjoy the Show!

Overture Center Department of Education & Community Engagement

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### We Want Your Feedback!

OnStage performances can be evaluated online! Evaluations are vital to the future and funding of this program. Your feedback educates us about the ways the program is utilized and we often implement your suggestions. [CLICK HERE](#) to fill out an evaluation. We look forward to hearing from you.

# The Peking Acrobats

The Peking Acrobats are from the People's Republic of China. The company began as an act in the Great China Circus which was a popular form of entertainment during the 1920's. Later, as the acrobats gained popularity, the Peking Acrobats separated from the circus and became developed their own professional acrobatic company in 1958.

The artists of this troupe are lead by director and choreographer, Hai Ken Tsai, a famous performer whose family has been perfecting the art of acrobats for three generations. Although Chinese acrobats rarely perform with live music, the Peking Acrobats are accompanied onstage by the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra. The musicians play traditional instruments like the Pipa (similar to the Western lute), the Er Hu, a bowed instrument with two strings and a sound box covered with snake skin, and the Di Zi, a flute made of bamboo or wood.

In their performances, The Peking Acrobats make possible feats of the seemingly impossible, right before your very eyes! To be able to do this requires a lot of dedication, determination, and years of study and practice. In China, being selected to become an acrobat is an honor, and brings with it a great deal of prestige and the possibility of international travel. Parents encourage their children to audition for acrobatic schools; however, this is also a great sacrifice for parents and students. If selected, the acrobatic school they attend will often be far away from family, friends, and the lives with which the students are familiar. Once selected to attend a special acrobatic school, students take their general education classes in the morning hours. In the afternoon, they will practice gymnastics, juggling, martial arts, and the dynamics of balance, speed, and timing to perfect their craft - the students do this *every day, six days a week!*

Most acrobats begin their life in art at around age 6, but are not selected to become part of a professional performing troupe until they are 16 to 18 years of age. Imagine being chosen for a professional troupe and traveling the world at such a young age! While on tour, the acrobat will see many corners of the globe and will meet new and different people. The Peking Acrobats are truly representatives of their country and art, and they take great pride in being selected to perform for audiences like you!

Among the finest acrobatic artists in China today, members of The Peking Acrobats bring an ancient folk art to life, along with the pageantry and spectacle of a Chinese circus. Through their performance, you will experience a taste of Chinese culture.



# Observe, Engage and Respond

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While it is important to discuss one's perception of the performance, we encourage you to notice the basic elements of the performance before interpreting it. By taking time to notice the basics of what you see and hear, you will be open to the fullest possibilities of interpretation. Use the questions to the right and below for class discussion and individual contemplation that will enhance your experience of the performance.

## OBSERVE

- How the acrobats use their bodies
- The choices of color, shape, and space on stage, in costuming or props and lighting
- How qualities of movement convey story and emotion
- Your own emotional response

## LISTEN

- How does the music add to or work with the visual and bodily elements of the performance?

## FEEL

- Your own responses. What gives you excitement? Do any elements, acts, or stunts make you uncomfortable?

## THINK

- How do the acrobats' movements tell a story?
- How do the theatrical props, costumes, music and lighting add to the meaning and experience?
- Many Chinese theatregoers believe that theatre should be an illusion of life, showing the struggle of humans to succeed and survive, as well as the joys of living. What messages about the human experience and relations do you think the Peking Acrobats are trying to convey?

## DESCRIBE

- How would you describe this performance to someone who hasn't seen it?
  - What did the music sound like?
  - What did the stage set look like?
  - What did the costumes look like?
  - What did the lighting look like?
  - What kind(s) of movement did the performers use?
- How was the performance similar to or different from what you expected?
- Which forms of communication seemed to have the biggest impact on you – body movement, colors, use of space, lighting, music?
- What were your feelings during the performance?
- How did the music impact your understanding of the performance?

## WRITE IT DOWN

- Write a review of the Peking Acrobats performance. Like a critic who writes for a newspaper, your job is to review the performance for the public. Identify important elements of reviews, such as the name of the theater and performance, your opinions about the choreography and acrobatic feats and opinions about other artistic elements such as music, costumes, lighting and scenery.
- Write a philosophical evaluation of the performance. What messages about the human condition were the artists trying to convey? Were the messages specific or universal? Were the artists successful? Bring your own personal experience to your perception of the performance.

## CREATE A VISUAL INTERPRETATION

- Use markers, pen and ink, pencils, paint, pastels, collage or found and recycled materials to create a visual interpretation of the performance.

## RESEARCH

- Research other types of performances that are popular in China and present your findings to the class. Other kinds of performance may include: Peking Opera, Quyi, Shadow Play, Kung Fu, or Folk Dance. How are these disciplines similar to or different from the acrobatic performance you saw? Were any of these other disciplines included in the Peking Acrobats show?

# History of Acrobatics in China

Chinese acrobatics is an art that dates back more than 2,000 years, reflecting everyday life experiences in work, war, and religion. At one time, almost everyone in China practiced acrobatics, believing it to be a skill that could increase their will, physical strength, and accuracy of movement. In the period between 206 B.C. and 220 A.D., the best Chinese acrobats were first invited to perform for the emperor, especially when he wanted to impress visiting foreign dignitaries. The various acts of tumbling, singing, dancing, and juggling that they performed became known as “The Hundred Entertainments.” Over the centuries in China, acrobatics continued to develop into an art form, with each generation of acrobats adding its own improvements and embellishments.

As the cultural and political center of China, Beijing houses political institutions, prestigious universities, art museums, and theatres. Beijing has a long and rich theatrical history, dating back centuries to the Shang dynasty (1523-1028 BC).

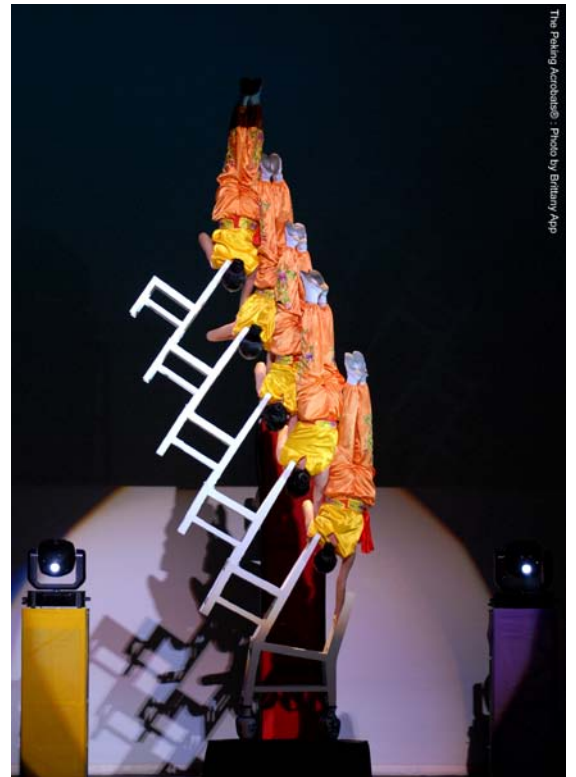
During the rule of the Shang dynasty, “seers” performed ceremonial songs and dances to honor the gods, invoking them to drive out pestilence, cause crops to be abundant, or create other “miracles.” By the Han dynasty, (around 202 BC) court entertainers were very popular. Clowns, wrestlers, acrobats, singers, and musicians entertained emperors and their attendants by acting out mythical stories and famous fables.

These entertainments were the precursors of Peking Opera, which is a multi-faceted art form. Peking Opera combines singing, dancing, acrobatics, martial arts, pantomime, highly stylized acting, costume, make-up and more to create fantastic stage productions. The fundamental belief of Chinese theatergoers is that theatre, at best, should be an illusion of life. Good Chinese theatre must show the real struggle of humans to succeed and survive, as well as the joys of living.

The Peking Acrobats take part in the philosophy of Peking Opera and bring it to the world. Acrobatics as an art form displays the grace, beauty, strength, and agility of the human race.

Today, there are as many as 100,000 people in China who attend special schools for acrobats. Schooling takes five or six years and may begin as early as age five. Many graduates join professional citywide troupes. Only the very best acrobats are chosen for a world-touring company such as the Chinese Acrobats. Because of their great skill and talent, members of the troupe are regarded as highly as a movie star would be in this country.

Foot juggling of jars, tables, and rugs is an ancient Chinese folk art that is still performed today. Another very old trick is nose balancing; one variation involves balancing three eggs on the end of a chopstick that is balanced on the acrobat’s nose. Many of the maneuvers are extremely daring. Ladder and chair balancing require years of practice, especially if done while kicking bowls onto your head. In hoop diving, the acrobat flips through a series of stacked hoops without knocking any of them down. Contortionists fold their bodies into shapes that require amazing flexibility. Bicycle tricks are a relatively new addition to the repertoire, as bicycles came to China only about 65 years ago, but the Chinese have already set a record for balancing the most people on one bike — 18! Please see page 4 for a list of acrobatic feats that may be included in this performance.



# Signature Chinese Acrobatic Acts

From University of California, Berkeley's School Time Guide 2010  
Acrobatic acts can be performed solo or in groups. Group acts require team cooperation, trust and constant communication. The disadvantage of a group act is that when one acrobat cannot perform or leaves the act this puts the others at risk in their careers, and they must start over again. But, at least the new acts or new specialties they develop are based on central acrobatic skills; tumbling, flexibility, handstand and dance.

This performance of Peking Acrobats may include the following acts:

**Spinning Plates:** Acrobats spin plates on iron sticks while simultaneously balancing, dancing or tumbling.

**Contortion:** Performers squeeze their bodies into tiny spaces and twist into unbelievable knots while delicately balancing objects.



**Hoop Diving:** With dynamic speed and timing, acrobats jump, dive and tumble through stacked hoops up to 7' high.

**Balancing:** Performers balance precariously perched items on various parts of their bodies and balance themselves on large and small objects.

**Aerial Acts:** Using leather straps or strips of silk acrobats perform feats of strength and daring high in the air.

**Double Pole:** A group of acrobats climb up and down thin poles to execute a variety of dangerous movements. This act requires a considerable amount of upper body and abdominal strength.

**Juggling:** A team of acrobats juggle, throw and catch hats with amazing speed, synchronization and dexterity. Others juggle jars, tables, umbrellas and other objects with their feet.

**Lion and Dragon:** This act comes from Chinese folk dance developed from Buddhist beliefs. The lion represents the spirit of renewal and is revered for dispelling bad luck. Big Lion is played by two acrobats, while Small Lion is played by one. The lion rolls and jumps, displaying qualities of strength, agility and tranquility.

**Bicycle:** Acrobats perform on moving bicycles creating a human pyramid, pagoda and other stunning shapes and images.

**Finale:** The entire company comes onstage to create striking stage pictures and perform spectacular balancing and tumbling acts.

# The Lion and the Dragon

From the Popejoy School Time Series Guide: <http://www.schooltimeseries.com/webpdfs/ST PekingAcrobats web.pdf>

Of all China's cultural festivities, the Lion Dance is one of the most amazing to watch. It combines theater, music, history and Kung Fu to create a spectacle that dates back thousands of years. The Lion Dance is a part of many festivities like Chinese New Year, planting and harvest festivals, openings of businesses and weddings. The Lion Dance is believed to chase away evil spirits, bring good luck, longevity, happiness and prosperity. The Lion symbolizes strength and happiness, courage and power.

Although lions are not native to China, their stories date back to the Han Dynasty (205 – 220 CE), when they were first sent across Asia via the Silk Road, a major trade route in early and medieval history, as gifts from the Persian Empire to the Chinese emperors. Many different stories have been told about the origins of the Lion Dance.

Inspired by these myths, Lion Dancing has spread from emperors to the people. Usually two dancers enact the lion. One handles the head, made out of strong but light materials like papier-mâché and bamboo, the other plays the body and the tail under a cloth that is attached to the head. Three musicians, playing a large drum, cymbals and a gong, accompany the "animal." A Little Buddha teases it with a fan or a giant ball. The head dancer can move the lion's eyes, mouth and ears for expression of moods. Every kind of move has a specific musical rhythm. The music follows the moves of the lion: the drum follows the lion; the cymbals and the gong follow the drum player.

To the Chinese, the Imperial Dragon or Lung, is considered to be the primary of four benevolent spiritual animals, the other three being the phoenix, the unicorn and the tortoise. The dragon symbolized the emperors of China themselves, who were actually called dragons. Hsi, China's first emperor was said to have a dragon's tail. Shen Nung, his successor was supposed to have been fathered by a dragon. The Chinese emperor sat on a dragon throne, rode in a dragon boat, and slept in a dragon bed. Only the Imperial Dragon bore five distinguishing claws.

## Four Types of Chinese Dragons



### Celestial Dragon (Tien-Lung)

- Protects the places of the Gods

### Spiritual Dragon (Shen-Lung)

- Controls the wind and the rain

### Earth Dragon (Ti-Lung)

- Controls rivers, and water on the Earth

### Underworld Dragon (Fut's-Lung)

- Guards precious metals and gems

# Chinese Folk Tales

Some of the feats Chinese acrobats perform originate in myth and religion. Chinese culture is rich in stories, poetry, and folk tales like "The Disappearing Mooncake." This story is associated with the Moon Festival, which occurs in mid-September when wheat and rice have been harvested in China, and when the moon looks particularly large and bright. Mooncakes, the traditional treat, are round pastries, often made with an egg yolk inside that represents the moon as well as a variety of sweet fillings such as red bean paste and coconut. The Chinese tell stories during this festival in honor of the Moon Lady, who is said to know all about love and secret wishes.

## The Disappearing Mooncake

Once upon a time two brothers lived in a small village. They were very excited because it was the Moon Festival and their mother had just given them each a mooncake to eat. Older Brother ate his in a hurry, but Younger Brother had not yet taken a bite out of his cake. "Would you like me to make your mooncake look more like the moon?" offered Older Brother. "Oh, that would be very nice. Can you really do that?"

Younger Brother eagerly asked. Without hesitating the least bit, the older boy took a bite of the mooncake, making it look just like a crescent moon. The little boy started to cry. "Wait! You don't think this looks good? I can do better--let me give you a half moon!"

Older Brother then nibbled off the corners of the crescent so it now had a smooth edge. He presented the half-eaten cake to his little brother. "But it's half gone!" moaned Younger Brother, who was now becoming very hungry. So Older Brother calmed him down by describing all the phases of the moon--the waxing half moon, the full moon, the waning half moon, and lastly the new moon. "This is when the moon's dark side is pointed toward the earth and can't be seen by anyone," he explained. With that, he gulped the remainder of the cake, raised his hands upward in celebration of the new moon and skipped away.

From *Red Eggs & Dragon Boats* by Carol Stepanchuk, Pacific View Press, Berkeley, California, 1994.

## Discussion

Ask students why they think this story is associated with the moon festival. Why do they think Older Brother acted as he did? Can they see Younger Brother's point of view as well? Imagining that they were Older Brother, what wishes would they have for the Moon Lady? What wishes would they have if they were Younger Brother?

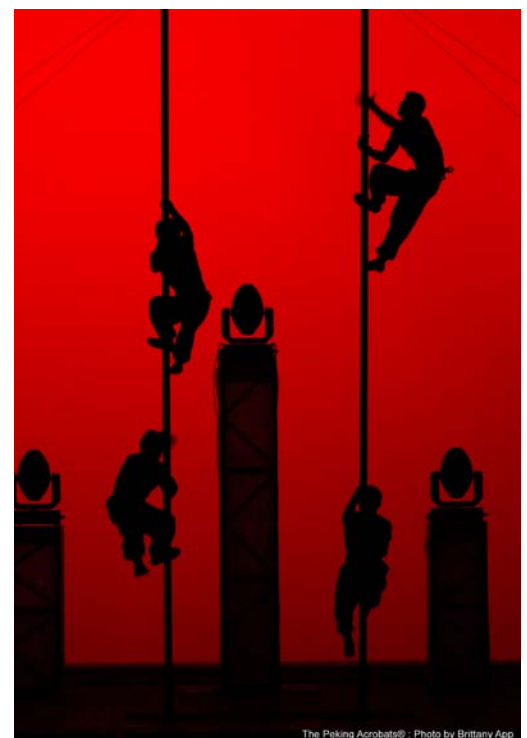
## Activity: Read Chinese Myths

Many Chinese myths exist in anthologies and on various web sites. The following links are excellent sources of Chinese myths:

[www.unc.edu/~rwilkers/frames-china.htm](http://www.unc.edu/~rwilkers/frames-china.htm)

[www.ducksters.com/history/china/chinese\\_mythology.php](http://www.ducksters.com/history/china/chinese_mythology.php)

- Print and distribute copies of different myths. Read and discuss them.
- Assign different students to read different myths and then retell them in their own words.
- Print and read different myths and have students illustrate them. Share the new stories and drawings with children in a younger grade.



# China's Contributions to the World

To introduce the unit, write the following on the board: **What do spaghetti, a wheelbarrow, the compass, paper, gunpowder and acrobatics have in common?**

All of the items mentioned above were invented in China. The Chinese take great pride in what are known as the "four inventions:" compasses, gunpowder, paper and printing. These and other contributions by the Chinese have helped to shape the world as we know it today. These inventions helped change transportation, warfare, literacy, education and culture all over the world.

**Research:** Divide the class into groups of two. Assign each pair of students one of the following Chinese inventions. Using encyclopedias, resource books and the internet, each pair should identify how and when the invention was created. In their own words, students should describe how the invention is used. Students can create posters for their assigned inventions and share their poster and research orally.



A magnetic compass. The Chinese discovered that when a lodestone, a piece of naturally magnetic ore, was placed on a polished bronze surface, it rotated to align itself north and south.

**Inventions:** spaghetti, wheelbarrow, compass, paper, woodblock printing, printing press, gunpowder, silk, porcelain, the Great Wall, Tomb of First Emperor, acrobatics, domestication of horses, I Ching or Book of Changes, bamboo pipe, five tone scale, Silk Road, tea, seismograph

**Discuss:** Once the students have researched the inventions, discuss how they have generally impacted or influenced society. For instance, what might the world be like if explorers did not have a compass? What would farmers do without a wheelbarrow?

## China at a Glance

\* Adapted from University of California, Berkeley's School Time Guide 2010

[http://www.calperfs.berkeley.edu/learn/k-12/pdf/2009/Peking\\_Acrobats\\_Study%20Guide\\_0910.pdf](http://www.calperfs.berkeley.edu/learn/k-12/pdf/2009/Peking_Acrobats_Study%20Guide_0910.pdf)

### Size

China, whose official name is the People's Republic of China, is the third largest country in the world in terms of size.

It is the largest country in the world in terms of population, with approximately 1.3 billion people. About half of China consists of uninhabitable mountains or desert. Most people live in the eastern, flatter portion of the country, where the soil is suitable for farming and the water supply is good. Because of the relatively limited amount of living space, most cities are very crowded.

### Population Control

Married people of the Hun majority (92% of the population) are allowed to give birth to only one child unless the couple consists of two people who are single children themselves. In that case, the couple may have two children. Minority families may have as many children as they wish.

Below: The main shopping street in Shanghai



## Changes in Government

Imperial rule—dynasties ruled by emperors—began in 1111 B.C. An Emperor ruled until he died or passed leadership on to a son or nephew. Most of Chinese history is recorded by the family names of the dynasties.

During most of recorded history —through the 15th century— China was the most advanced country in the world in terms of technological development and culture. In 1911, a revolution ended over 2000 years of imperial rule. By 1921, the Communist Party of China was founded. In a Communist state, all businesses, property, foods, goods and services are owned and operated by the government and distributed to the people by the government.

Over the last 30 years, the Chinese government has become a unique political blend. China maintains a communist government within a socialist society and a capitalist economy. The opening up of China to Western ideas has dramatically affected its people. A gap is widening between rich and poor, rural and urban, and eastern and western China. As more of the world's products are being manufactured there, China's gross national product has grown as much 10% over the last few years. After the United States, China now is the second largest economy in the world, but some people have predicted that it will overtake the US as the world's largest economy by the year 2020.

## Pollution

No country has ever emerged as a major industrial power without damaging the environment. Because of its huge growth, China's pollution problems have shattered all precedents. 70% of the water in China is polluted and only 1% of the 560 million city dwellers breathe air that is considered safe. The Chinese are working hard to counter the effects of this tragic situation.

## Five Fabulous Facts

Write the following on a sheet of paper, leaving large white strips between each name: Peking, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Tibet. Make copies and cut into strips. Have students pull a strip of paper out of a hat. This is their assigned topic. Give students time to find five fabulous facts about this city or region. Divide a bulletin board into four horizontal sections. Label one city or region in each section. Have students write their fabulous facts in the appropriate section with markers. Facts may not be repeated! This will encourage students to work promptly. Discuss the findings.

# China on the Map

## Activity

Using the map to the right as a guideline, ask students to research different places in China and then individually or as a group develop a travel brochure for the country. Based on what they have discovered, students can describe and illustrate physical features, cities, historical sites or events that tourists might like to see.



# Chinese Language and Writings

Chinese spoken and written language is different from Western languages. In the United States, most people speak a common English language. Variations around the country consist of differences in dialect. English consists of 26 letters of the alphabet which combine in various ways to make 44 unique sounds. Using these sounds and letters, people speak and read in English. Other Western languages consist of similar systems with alphabets varying from 20 to 40 letters.

Chinese has many different dialects, though unlike in the U.S., speakers of one dialect cannot necessarily understand the other dialects. The largest of these dialects is Mandarin Chinese, which is spoken by 600,000,000 people, the largest number of people to speak any language. This is the language recognized as the official language and taught in all Chinese schools.

Chinese written language is not based on an alphabetic system. In Chinese, symbols take the place of words. Each word, idea or concept has its own symbol. Though speakers across China cannot necessarily understand each other's spoken language, written language is consistent across regions. There are approximately 60,000 different Chinese characters, although most people use about 5,000 characters.

Early Chinese writing used a form of picture symbols. If a person wanted to write "dog" he or she drew a simple picture of a dog. Others could easily understand what was written. This evolved into thousands of different picture symbols used in Chinese writing today.

## Activity

Give each student a sheet of paper and have them draw a word such as fish, house, flower, or goat using very simple pictures, as you would in drawing a stick person. One by one, have each student hold up their drawing and see if others can identify their "word."

Now have students pair up. Have each student write a simple sentence of two or three words using picture symbols that they have made up. Can they identify all or parts of each other's sentences?

## Activity

Look at the following Chinese characters. Do you see the relation to the symbol's design and its meaning? Ask students to create other signs or symbols that they could use at their school.

1. 人

2. 木

3. 心

4. 口

5. 山

6. 水

7. 女

8. 火

**Key:** 1. Man, 2. Tree, 3. Heart, 4. Mouth/Entrance, 5. Mountain/Hill, 6. Water, 7. Woman, 8. Fire

## Take it a Step Further

Access a Chinese symbol dictionary like the one at: <http://www.mandarintools.com/chardict.html>.

Students can look up and copy Chinese symbols for common words in the English language and make a display of Chinese symbols for English words.

# Immigration

Most of the people in the United States originally came from another country or have ancestors who did. A variety of factors such as famine, war, economic opportunity and persecution lead people to leave their home country for another country.



Credit: DN-0089489, Chicago Daily News negative collection, Chicago Historical Society

## Research Activity

The Chinese were just one group who came to America in large numbers. Divide students into groups and have them choose one of the following or another immigrant group. Students will research the immigration of these groups and compare and contrast immigration issues. Reproduce the following chart. Have students complete their portion of the chart and then meet with various classmates to complete the remaining sections.

Possible groups: African, English, Chinese, Irish, Laotian/Hmong, Italian, German, Japanese, Swedish, Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Russian, Jewish

| Immigrant group | Country of origin | Dates of major immigration | Reasons for leaving their home country | Reception and treatment in the US |
|-----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
|                 |                   |                            |  |                                   |

## Topics for Discussion

Describe some challenges in entering and becoming part of a new country. Consider jobs, language, food, schooling, medical care, living conditions, citizenship, and cultural differences.

Early immigrants often believed the streets of America were paved with gold. They saw America as the land of wealth and opportunity. Do you think today's immigrants feel the same way? Why do you think people want to come to America today?

Through the years, America's immigration policies have varied. Do you think US immigration policy should be open or limited? Why?

# Immigration Laws

Throughout history, immigration laws have been written to control the influx of immigrants into the United States. In 1858 California passed a law forbidding the immigration of Chinese. The law was not completely enforced due to the large demand for Chinese workers.

## Activity

Have students investigate and create a timeline of the following laws.

- Immigration Law of 1875
- Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882
- Gentleman's Agreement of 1907
- Refugee Relief Act of 1953
- Refugee Act of 1980
- Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986
- Immigration Act of 1990
- Immigration Act of 1994
- USA Patriot Act 2001

## Discuss

Who were the laws designed to protect? Who was harmed by the law? Was the law successful in its mission? Do you think we should have immigration laws? Why or why not?



The Chinese Exclusion Handbill

Credit: British Columbia Archives, Neg #PDP03732

# Chinese Immigration

## Activity

Despite laws, many Chinese were able to immigrate to the U.S. in the 1800's. Unfortunately, no first person accounts of 19th century Chinese immigrants are known to exist. Between 1910 and 1940 more than one million people (mostly Asians) were processed through Angel Island in San Francisco. You can read their first person accounts at the following website: [www.angel-island.com](http://www.angel-island.com)

**Left:** Trying to determine if an immigrant is really entitled to entry, Public Health Service and Immigration Service officers on Angel Island interrogate an immigrant from China.

**Credit:** US National Archive and Record Administration, College Park, MD

# Transcontinental Railroad

In 1865 the Central Pacific Railroad hired Chinese immigrants to work on the building of the first transcontinental railroad. Though only fifty were hired at first, the Chinese proved to be such good workers that within a few years thousands of Chinese workers became the backbone of the railroad labor force. They were polite, orderly, skilled and hardworking. The Chinese used their skill to figure out ways to set the railroad track through the mountains. Rather than earning respect for their great achievement, the Chinese were ridiculed and scorned. People laughed at their uncommon dietary habits, bathing habits and speech. Some people feared they would lose their jobs to the Chinese. After the completion of the railroad, most of the Chinese stayed in America. They moved to cities or took jobs with other railroads.

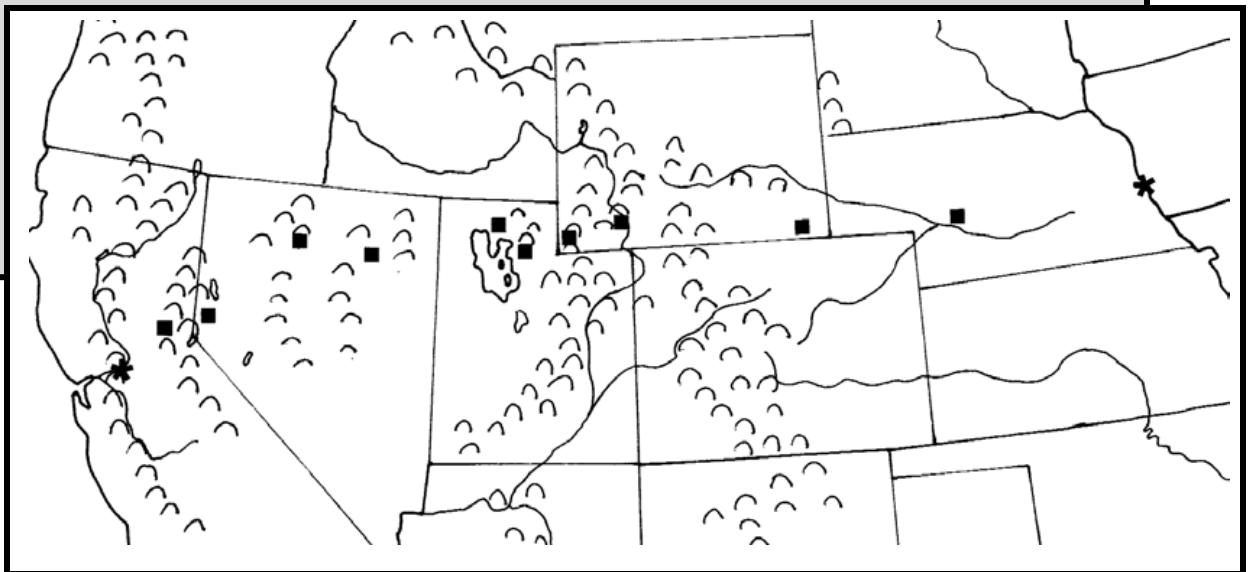


**Credit:** The Bancroft Library and The Ethnic Studies Library at University of California, Berkeley; and the California Historical Society

## Learn More

Read aloud and discuss [Dragon's Gate](#) by Laurence Yep, an excellent young adult novel dealing with the Chinese and the building of the railroad. Find out the path taken by the transcontinental railroad and trace it out on a map.

Trivia Test: Find out what amazing event occurred April 28, 1869. (The Chinese were able to lay a record breaking ten miles of track in a single day.)



# Labor Practices

Conditions for Chinese immigrants working on the railroad were poor. They endured freezing temperatures, snow avalanches, dangerous dynamite blasts, and cave-ins. For their efforts, working twelve hours a day in harsh conditions, they were paid from \$25 to \$40 a month and received no vacations, health care, or time off. The phrase "not a Chinaman's chance" became a popular saying used to describe the terrible plight of the Chinese workers. Many Chinese were killed in the building of the railroad; one report said that ten tons of Chinese bones were sent back to China. Workers who were killed were almost immediately replaced by new Chinese immigrants.



Workers on the Transcontinental Railroad

**Credit:** Denver Public Library, Western History Collection (Neg. #x-21513)

## Discuss

Why do you think the Chinese continued to emigrate to work on the railroad though conditions were harsh and pay was poor?

Consider labor practices today. What laws in our country are intended to prevent workers from being exploited? Some countries do not have these laws. In some parts of the world, including the U.S., people work long hours in very poor conditions, for very little pay. Using the internet or current magazines, find evidence of exploitive labor practices in different parts of the world, including China and the U.S.

Why do sweatshops and other problematic work sites exist? Why don't people working under miserable conditions just quit?



Do a personal survey of your clothes and other items, reading labels. Where were they manufactured? What can you find out about working conditions in those countries and the labor practices of the companies who make your personal belongings?

### Resources to get started:

- [www.slaveryfootprint.org](http://www.slaveryfootprint.org)
- [www.pbs.org/independentlens/chinablue/more.html](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/chinablue/more.html)
- [www.pbs.org/pov/madeinla/lesson\\_plan.php](http://www.pbs.org/pov/madeinla/lesson_plan.php)

# Additional Activities

**Learn More About China.** Point out mainland China on a map. Acquaint your students with Chinese culture through films, books, or discussions. There are many books about China, its history and culture. Ask students to read these books and report on them and /or set up a reading corner in your classroom using books about China.



## Discuss Family Traditions

Chinese acrobatic troupes historically tend to be members of the same family. The skills of Chinese acrobatics were handed down from "father to son" or "mother to daughter." Even today, many members of Chinese performing troupes are from the same family. Discuss the reason that this might be so. Ask students to identify traditions in their own homes. What have they learned from their parents? What activities do they do as a family (fishing, hunting, skiing, art, etc.)? You may wish to have an open house where students and their families come to share their skills.

## Learn More about Magic, Acrobatics, Chinese Martial Arts and Chinese Dance

Find out if any of the students in your class practice any of the acrobatic feats you will see in the performance of Chinese acrobatics. Have students who are involved in these activities do a demonstration/presentation for the rest of the class.

## Discuss the Acts

Which act looked the hardest? Easiest? Which one do you think took the most training? Why was the act good? Was it the skill of the entertainer, the costuming, the lighting, the music, the personality of the performer on stage? What goes into making an act enjoyable? Do the students think that they could do the same things?

## View Chinese Art

To further your students' knowledge of Chinese culture, travel to museums and view their collection of Chinese ceramics, paintings and sculpture. You may even see imagery of Chinese acrobatics in art which depicts scenes of village festivals and special imperial occasions.

## Study Chinese History

Have students create a time line of ancient China, indicating the approximate period when important Chinese contributions were developed. Younger students may want to illustrate the time line with pictures of each item. Assign student groups a specific dynasty to research and report on. The time line of the Chinese dynasties can be compared to a time line of European/American culture. Note how some of China's dynasties have lasted longer than the existence of the United States of America.

### Design a New Act

Ask students to swing their imaginations into action by creating a new spectacular feat for the acrobats to perform. Ask them to write it down or draw it in pictures. Create a storyboard showing the different high points of the act. Discuss what training and skills would be necessary to perform the act.

### Discuss Career Preparation

Ask your students to relate, from the show and their readings, how these exceptional entertainers train for their work. The fact that acrobats begin training at such a young age can stimulate an interesting discussion on career preparation. What do students want to be? What sort of special training will they require to reach their individual goals? Have them interview a parent or a friend to find out how he or she trained for his or her profession, asking what kind of training was involved, how long it took, etc. Compare and contrast training required for different professions. Discuss how training for acrobatics and other professions will be handled in the future.

### Create a Class Mural

Most of the acts that the students will have seen were once part of village festival celebrations in China. Ask them to imagine the acts they saw as part of a grand outdoor Chinese festival setting. They may wish to do research on Chinese landscapes and classic styles of architecture. Then ask them to create a mural depicting acts they saw which might be seen at such a festival.

### Compare the Chinese Acts to an American Circus

Discuss the similarities and differences between the Chinese presentation and the traditional "3-ring circus" in America. Think of examples of circus acts which have their roots in Chinese acrobatics. You can also focus on other parts of our culture and trace their roots in history and their spread throughout the world. Some examples might be spices, horses and ballet. Just about anything in our daily lives has a history of development that can make studying the past more real for young people.

### Plan Your Own Festival or Carnival

Survey the members of your class to find out what some of their talents are. You may have discussed this before the performance. Plan your own festival which showcases the talents of your class. Rehearse the acts and invite other classes from your school to attend.



The Peking Acrobats® : Photo by Brittany App

# Suggested Reading

Birch, Cyril. *Tales from China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2000.

Birell, Anne. *Chinese Mythology: An Introduction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 1993.

Blumberg, Rhoda. *Full Steam Ahead: The Race to Build a Transcontinental Railroad*. New York: Scholastic, 1996.

Fritz, Jean. *Homesick: My Own Story*. New York: Bantam, 1982.

Keeler, Stephen. *Passport to China*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1993.

Major, John S. *The Land and People of China*. New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1989.

Pitanen, Marti A. *The Children of China*. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books, Inc., 1990.

Steele, Philip. *Journey Through China*. Mahwah, NJ: Troll Associates, 1991.

Stepanchuk, Carol. *Red Eggs & Dragon Boats*. Berkeley, CA: Pacific View, 1994.

Tan, Jennifer. *Food in China*. Vero Beach, FL: Rourke Pub., 1989.

Terzi, Marinella. *The Chinese Empire*. Chicago: Children's Press, 1992.

Waterlow, Julia. *Places and People: China*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1994.

Williams, Tom. *The Complete Illustrated Guide to Chinese Medicine*. Rockport, MA.: Element, 1996.

Yep, Laurence. *Dragon's Gate*. New York: Scholastic, 1993.

Yep, Laurence. *Dragonwings*. New York: Scholastic, 1975.

Yip, Mingmei. *Chinese Children's Favorite Stories*. Boston: Turtle Publishing, 2004.

## Web Resources:

Preview/highlights of the performance: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRUIIk8TBQ>

PBS Teacher's Guide for the Transcontinental Railroad:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/teachers-resources/tcrr-teachers-guide/>

PBS Resources for "Becoming American: The Chinese Experience"

[http://www.pbs.org/becomingamerican/ce\\_resources.html](http://www.pbs.org/becomingamerican/ce_resources.html)

# BE YOUR OWN CRITIC

Now it is your turn to tell us what you thought about the performance that you saw at Overture Center! Use this worksheet to brainstorm some ideas. Make sure to use specific examples from the performance. If you forgot anything, ask your friends and teachers who went to the show with you.

Turn your ideas into a rough draft and then send a final copy to us!

I saw \_\_\_\_\_  
(SHOW TITLE)

Overture Center is...



because...

What would you say this show is about?



Two things that I really loved about the performance were...



Two things that could have been better in the performance were...



I thought the artistic elements (scenery, sound/music, lighting, costumes) were...



because...

I would want to meet the character...



in real life because...

If I could ask the performer(s) a question, I would ask them...



Imagine that you're telling a friend about this show. What would you say?



# Wisconsin Academic Standards

## Social Studies

SS.BH1.a.4: Describe how a person’s understanding, perceptions, and behaviors are affected by relationships and environments.  
SS.BH1.b.4: Describe how culture, ethnicity, race, age, religion, gender, and social class can help form self-image and identity.  
SS.BH2.b.4: Give examples of how peoples from different cultures develop different values and ways of interpreting experiences.  
SS.BH3.a.5: Investigate how interpretations of similarities and differences between and among cultures may lead to understandings or misunderstandings.  
SS.Geog4.a.m: Explain how place-based identities can change places over time. Investigate how place-based identity results from the characteristics of a place and can sometimes result in stereotypes of people from a specific place. Describe students’ perceptions of a place that are based on indirect sources (e.g., television, movies), versus on direct sources (e.g., residing in a place, visiting a place).

## Dance

### *Respond*

D.D.R.5.i: Dance Literacy: Identify dance specific vocabulary through verbal, physical, written, and/or digital means.  
D.D.R.6.i: Reflection: Explain how movement communicates feelings and ideas through examples.  
D.D.R.7.i: Analysis: Describe the various components and movement characteristics of the performance.  
D.D.R.8.i: View Performance: Demonstrate developmentally appropriate etiquette skills with guidance in response to a performance.

### *Connect*

D.D.Cn.5.i: Cultural Social Awareness: Explain how dance relates to self, others, and the world.  
D.D.Cn.6.i: Career Connections: Examine dance professions and describe how dance skills translate to other careers.  
D.D.Cn.7.i: Cross Disciplinary: Explore how dance and other content areas interrelate.  
D.D.Cn.8.i: Life Skills: Demonstrate an understanding of how dance can influence healthy lifestyle choices.

## Theater

### *Theatre Performance: Respond*

TP.R.4.i: Analysis: Identify separate elements in a theatrical work such as characters, plot, and performance elements.  
TP.R.6.i: View Performance: Demonstrate developmentally appropriate audience etiquette.

### *Theatre Performance: Connect*

TP.Cn.5.i: Cultural Social Context: Explain how theatre relates to self, others, and the world.  
TP.Cn.6.i: Research: Identify the “given circumstances,” environmental and situational conditions that influence a theatrical work.  
TP.Cn.8.i: Cross Disciplinary: Identify how theatre connects to literature and social studies.

# About Live Performance

Theater, unlike movies or television, is a **LIVE** performance. This means that the action unfolds right in front of an audience, and the performance is constantly evolving. The artists respond to the audience's laughter, clapping, gasps and general reactions. Therefore, the audience is a critical part of the theater experience. In fact, without you in the audience, the artists would still be in rehearsal!

Remember, you are sharing this performance space with the artists and other audience members. Your considerate behavior allows everyone to enjoy a positive theater experience.

**Prepare:** Be sure to use the restroom before the show begins!

**Find Your Seat:** When the performance is about to begin, the lights will dim. This is a signal for the artists and the audience to put aside conversations. Settle into your seat and get ready to enjoy the show!

**Look and Listen:** There is so much to hear (dialogue, music, sound effects) and so much to see (costumes, props, set design, lighting) in this performance. Pay close attention to the artists onstage. Unlike videos, you cannot rewind if you miss something.

**Energy and Focus:** Artists use concentration to focus their energy during a performance. The audience gives energy to the artist, who uses that energy to give life to the performance. Help the artists focus that energy. They can feel that you are with them!

Talking to neighbors (even whispering) can easily distract the artists onstage. They approach their audiences with respect, and expect the same from you in return. Help the artists concentrate with your attention.

**Laugh Out Loud:** If something is funny, it's good to laugh. If you like something a lot, applaud. Artists are thrilled when the audience is engaged and responsive. They want you to laugh, cheer, clap and really enjoy your time at the theater.

**Discover New Worlds:** Attending a live performance is a time to sit back and look inward, and question what is being presented to you. Be curious about new worlds, experience new ideas, and discover people and lives previously unknown to you. Your open mind, curiosity, and respect will allow a whole other world to unfold right before your eyes!

**Please, don't feed the audience:** Food is not allowed in the theater. Soda and snacks are noisy and distracting to both the artists and audience.

**Unplug:** Please turn off all cell phones and other electronics before the performance. Photographs and recording devices are prohibited.





# Overture

CENTER FOR THE ARTS



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OnStage is supported in part by: American Girl's Fund for Children, Nelnet and contributions to Overture Center for the Arts.

Overture Center's mission is to support and elevate our community's creative culture, economy and quality of life through the arts.

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