

My Willow Plate

Engage with an ancient Chinese art form, and design your own “porcelain” plate!

Pui (Tiffany) Chow

Students will learn a brief history about the origins of blue and white Chinese pottery followed by an in class activity where each student is invited to think of their own “myth”/ story to translate into a design to draw on a paper plate. The class will be split into two segments; the first portion will be a short lecture accompanied by a presentation and printed posters featuring examples of various plates and designs through history and their associated myths/stories. The second segment will be the creative engagement. This project offers students the unique opportunity to learn about an ancient cultural tradition through the practice of pictorial story telling.

Part 1: Brief History and Story of the Willow Plate

Brief History:

“Blue and White pottery”, also called QingHua in Chinese, literally: “blue flowers”, covers a wide range of white pottery and porcelain decorated under the glaze with a blue pigment (cobalt oxide). The decoration on the pottery is commonly applied by hand. The first Chinese blue and white wares were produced as early as the ninth century in Henan province, China during the Tang Dynasty. This ancient Chinese tradition was popularized in England in the 18th century with the commercialization of the “Willow” design, which spurred the form’s (and its design) proliferation world wide. Using this “Willow” design as a starting point for imagery, each student will be asked to design their own blue and white “pottery” plate based on their own invented story (or “myth”)

Story invented for the Willow pattern:

Once there was a wealthy Mandarin (scholar in the government of Imperial China), who had a beautiful daughter (Koong-se/Mai). She had fallen in love with her father’s accountant (Chang). It was inappropriate for them to marry due to their difference in social class. So he dismissed the young man and built a high fence around his house to keep the lovers apart. The Mandarin was planning for his daughter to marry a powerful Duke. The Duke arrived by boat to claim his bride, bearing a box of jewels as a gift. The wedding was to take place on the day the blossom fell from the willow tree.

On the eve of the daughter and the Duke’s wedding, the young accountant, disguised as a servant, slipped into the palace. As the lovers escaped with the jewels, they ran over a bridge, chased by the Mandarin. They eventually escaped on the Duke’s ship and sailed to an island, where they lived happily for years. But one day, the Duke found out where they are and wanted revenge, he sent soldiers, who captured the lovers and put them to death. The gods, moved by their love, transformed the lovers into a pair of doves.

The story then turned into a comic opera, a silent film, a novel and many different forms of myths including poems, heres a famous one:

ask students to look at the image of the Willow Plate carefully and try to find all the elements that are mentioned in the poem.



*Two birds flying high,
A Chinese vessel, sailing by.
A bridge with three men, sometimes four,
A willow tree, hanging o'er.
A Chinese temple, there it stands,
Built upon the river sands.
An apple tree, with apples on,
A crooked fence to end my song.*

Part 2: Design YOUR own *blue and white pottery plate*

All you need is a paper plate, a pencil and a blue marker/color pencil/crayon (ANYTHING BLUE!)

Ask student to design their own plate based on their own invented story or myth. It could be relate to a holiday (X'mas, Chinese New Year etc.)/ a special day or event they remember (ie fort night, birthday, beach day etc.). **Create a word wall** on the board to help inspire student make up their stories, and the pattern around the side of the plate. Also can think about what each of these elements symbolize. Words could include:

different landscapes (places- where?)

favorite animals (birds? elephants? camels?)

pets

trees

people (your best friend? mom/dad? grandparents? a clown?)

Remind students that since the plate is depicting a whole story in one scene, things could be in different proportion and perspective in relation with each other.



