

SPICE IT UP!

Grade Level: 3 to 5

IN THIS LESSON

Students will follow the path of famous explorers on the Silk Road and understand their desire for Asian riches. They will engage their senses of touch and smell by grinding spices using a mortar and pestle.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop habits of historical inquiry by analyzing visual evidence
- To learn how to interpret visual information and improve visual literacy
- To develop language skills and thought processes while working with objects
- To encourage creativity

ILLINOIS LEARNING STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

SOCIAL SCIENCE

Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.

SUGGESTED ARTIFACTS

Mortar and pestle (you can use more than one style/type if desired)

Electric spice grinder

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Artifact Analysis worksheets (<http://www.greatchicagostories.com/classroom/artifact.php>)

World maps

Globe

Paper

Drawing supplies (colored pencils, markers, or crayons)

Blank timeline templates

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This lesson was developed and written by Yollande Gottlieb.

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ACTIVITY

- 1.** Begin class by showing students a mortar and pestle. The activity will be even richer if you can bring a variety of mortars and pestles made of different materials for student analysis. Have the students examine the mortars and pestles and try to guess what these tools are. Pass out the Artifact Analysis worksheets and have students complete them, individually or in small groups.
- 2.** Have students use the internet to research information about mortars and pestles. Describe the medical uses as well as culinary applications. Also research different spices and create a list of spices and their uses/attributes.
- 3.** Create a vocabulary word wheel. Define the following terms: crusade, empire, cartographer, Northwest Passage, conquistador and economy. Create a list of explorers (suggestions include Bartholomeu Dias, Christopher Columbus, John Cabot, Vasco De Gama, Amerigo Vespucci, Vasco Nunez de Balboa and Ferdinand Magellan) and the countries they came from as well as the places they traveled to. (You can prepare this in advance, or have students help generate the information.)
- 4.** Break students into small groups or have them work individually. Distribute world maps and assign each group or student one explorer. Challenge students to trace the route the explorer traveled from their home country to the new land they set out to explore. Based on the explorer's end point, have students predict what new product or resource they found. Allow students time to use the internet to research their assigned explorer and the discoveries for which they are famous. This can also be assigned as a home connection.
- 5.** Introduce students to the Silk Road (see Additional Resources for more information). Important information to share or ask students to research includes: the origins of the name "Silk Road" (Asian silk, one of the major and most desired goods) and why the merchants who controlled the Silk Road charged such high prices for their goods in Europe. Use a map to illustrate the long overland route between Asia and some Arab and European cities. Discuss how camels used to carry goods 4,000 miles across mountains and deserts. Have students create a Venn diagram to compare travel and trade between then and now.

SPICE IT UP!

6. Have students return to the work completed in step 4. Ask them to research and present an oral report on one of the explorers. Students should give a brief biography of their explorers, including information about the countries that sponsored the explorers, the places to which they traveled, and the outcomes of their discoveries (positive and negative). Provide students with a wall map or globe so that they can point out locations and trace routes during their presentation. Alternatively, rather than oral presentations, students can write essays.
7. Create a Venn diagram to compare the goals of Christopher Columbus's two voyages. Discuss what he expected to find when he reached the East Indies. Discuss why so many explorers followed Columbus's route west even though he never made it to Asia.
8. Bring a variety of spices to class (see the reference the list generated in step 2). Break students into small groups. Grind each spice (keeping its name a secret) and pass it around. Use mortars and pestles for grinding. If you want, you can also bring in an electric grinder and compare the two methods. Is the smell different or just the speed of grinding? Challenge students to describe the smell in writing and try to identify the spice. If they associate a specific dish with that scent, they should note it down. Have students take turns trying to grind the spices. Save time to have students compare their answers to the actual name of the spices as well as to share their scent descriptions and food associations. Do any students have a favorite spice, or a traditional family meal that uses a particular spice?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Read and discuss the book *Pedro's Journal* by Pam Conrad. Recommended for moderate readers, ages 9 to 12.

Use the internet to research more information about spices. Identify the countries from which they originate and add this information to the explorer maps created in step 4.

Ask students to discuss or write a response to this question: In what ways does this simple artifact, the mortar and pestle, provide insight into geography, history, and culture?

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<http://spicehistory.net/SPICE%20%20HISTORY.html>

Inspired by the book *The Taste of Conquest* by Michael Krond, the site contains excerpts and other features including maps, graphs, and spice facts.

<http://www.mccormick.com/Products/Herbs-and-Spices.aspx>

Sponsored by the McCormick company, this site contains an alphabetical list of spices with entries on each.

<http://42explore.com/spices.htm>

A clearing house of spice information, this site contains links to other sites as well as activity suggestions.

<http://www.ess.uci.edu/~oliver/silk.html>

This site contains an overview of the Silk Road and an extensive reference list of sources for more information.

<http://www.silk-road.com/toc/index.html>

This site contains history and makes present day connections. It is organized by a nonprofit association dedicated to the study and preservation of Asian culture and art.

<http://www.artic.edu/aic/exhibitions/silkroad/>

This site contains a great deal of information and images of collection objects from the Art Institute that relate to the Silk Road project (now ended) that they sponsored.