

The Forbidden City: Inside the Court of China's Emperors



Portrait of Emperor Qianlong in ceremonial robe
ink and colour on silk
Qing dynasty, Qianlong period
© The Palace Museum

TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE FALL 2014

Vancouver
Artgallery

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Vancouver Art Gallery

Teacher's Guide for School Programs

The exhibition *The Forbidden City: Inside the Court of China's Emperors* puts on display nearly 200 treasured objects from the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing, many of which are travelling outside China for the first time. The objects are rich and varied, and include works of art, everyday objects, imperial clothing and historic symbols of power. Whether they entered the palace as gifts or were created by the artists and artisans whose sole purpose was to make objects for imperial pleasure, they offer us a rare glimpse into the political, social and cultural developments through five hundred years of China's history.

DEAR TEACHER:

This guide will assist you in preparing for your tour of the exhibition *The Forbidden City: Inside the Court of China's Emperors*. It also provides follow-up activities to facilitate discussion after your Gallery visit. Engaging in the suggested activities before and after your visit will reinforce ideas generated by the tour and build continuity between the Gallery experience and your ongoing work in the classroom. Most activities require few materials and can be adapted easily to the age, grade level and needs of your students. Underlined words in this guide are defined in the Vocabulary section.

The tour of *The Forbidden City: Inside the Court of China's Emperors* has three main goals:

- to introduce students to the stories of the time and place, through the belongings of its inhabitants;
- to discover the depth of information that objects can reveal through close looking;
- to explore individual objects within their historical, political, social and cultural contexts.

BACKGROUND TO THE EXHIBITION *The Forbidden City: Inside the Court of China's Emperors*

The Forbidden City, the largest palace in history and for five centuries home to the emperors of China, is now the largest museum in the world. Located in the centre of Beijing, the vast compound was conceived as both royal dwelling and government headquarters, with entry forbidden to all ordinary citizens. The Ming dynasty reigned from 1406 until 1644, after which the conquering Qing dynasty occupied the site and ruled until 1911. Despite repeated destruction by fire over the centuries, the essential design was respected and the palace was rebuilt several times according to the original plan.

The massive walls of the Forbidden City enclose a complete world comprising 178 acres of pavilions, gardens, residences and workshops. The City contains 10,000 rooms, 980 buildings and millions of ceremonial, diplomatic and domestic artifacts spanning a remarkable historical period. It housed thousands of people working to provide for the imperial rulers, feeding and clothing its residents, amusing and entertaining the emperor and his concubines.

For the first time, objects from these dynasties have travelled to Canada, offering a rare opportunity to consider the political, social and cultural developments of five centuries of China's imperial history. The objects on display are treasured for their capacity to reveal the two realities that coincided in the Forbidden City: the everyday existence of the rulers and their complex families, and the show of wealth and power these objects conveyed.

Twenty-four emperors reigned from the Forbidden City's inauguration in 1420 until imperial rule was replaced by a republic in 1912. The palace opened in 1924 as Beijing's Palace Museum. The objects collected by the families over the centuries, some of them everyday artifacts, others priceless works of art, comprise the core of the museum's collection. In 1961 the Forbidden City was designated one of China's foremost protected cultural heritage sites, and it became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987.

In China the palace is known by many names, one being Zijincheng, the Restricted Walled Palace of the Purple Star (as the North Star is known in China). The emperor was considered the centre of the universe, and the palace was positioned directly under the Purple Star around which the universe revolved. Today it is usually referred to as Gugong, the Former Palace.

This exhibition is organized by the Royal Ontario Museum and the Vancouver Art Gallery. It is curated by Wen-Chien Cheng, Curator, Louise Hawley Stone Chair of Far Eastern Art, ROM; Chen Shen, Vice President and Senior Curator, Bishop White Chair of East Asian Archaeology, ROM; and coordinated by Timothy Brook, Republic of China Chair, Department of History and Institute of Asian Research, University of British Columbia; and Daina Augaitis, Chief Curator/Associate Director, Vancouver Art Gallery.

The Forbidden City: Significant Milestones

1368	Ming dynasty, to 1644
1406	Emperor Yongle of the <u>Ming dynasty</u> (the third Ming emperor) begins construction of the 178-acre imperial city, later to be known as the Forbidden City <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For fifteen years, over a million people work on construction of the city • Outer Court is created for government, Inner Court for the imperial family • The best materials are brought from all over China, including “golden” bricks, logs from rare trees, blocks of marble • Grand terraces and large carvings are made of stone, some so heavy that they must be dragged along channels of ice created in winter
1420	Beijing becomes China’s capital and the Forbidden City is established as the emperor’s official residence
1421	Fire destroys front three palaces
1440	Palace is rebuilt
1557	Front three palaces and major gates destroyed by fire; rebuilt by 1561
1597	Another big fire destroys front and back three palaces; rebuilt by 1627
1644	Last Ming ruler, Emperor Chongzhen, commits suicide as rebels storm and burn down the city; <u>Manchu</u> army takes control and creates new <u>Qing</u> dynasty
1644	Qing Dynasty, to 1911
1661	Emperor Kangxi begins an astonishing 61-year reign
1715	Italian Jesuit missionary, Giuseppe Castiglione appointed as Qing court painter, remains through three emperors’ reigns; introduces Western painting techniques
1695	Reconstruction of the Forbidden City completed
1722	Emperor Yongzheng, a shrewd politician, rules ruthlessly for the next 12 years, enforcing economic reforms
1735	Qianlong becomes emperor, begins extensive 60-year reconstruction
1796	Emperor Jiaqing ascends the throne and rids the court of rampantly corrupt officials including his father’s chief aide, Heshen
18 th , 19 th centuries	Trade increases exponentially between Europe and China, as demand for Chinese goods grows in the West. China reluctantly forced to participate; British traders flood China with opium, causing widespread addiction
1860	During the Second Opium War (one of two trading wars), Anglo-French forces defeat the once all-powerful Qing dynasty and briefly occupy the Forbidden City
1850’s - 1908	A <u>concubine</u> later known as Empress <u>Dowager</u> Cixi enters the palace. In 1861 she becomes <u>regent</u> for her five-year-old son, Emperor Tongzhi. She assumes virtual power, putting her nephew on the throne after her son’s demise. Barely outliving him (amidst rumours of poisoning), she puts two-year-old Puyi on the throne before she dies
1912	Puyi, the last emperor of China, is forced to abdicate, bringing an end to more than 2,000 years of imperial rule. Inner Court is retained for family use; Outer Court is taken over by Republican authorities
1914	Museum is established in Outer Court
1924	Feng Yuxiang takes control of Beijing in a coup; Puyi is expelled from the palace
1925	Renamed Palace Museum; treasures and curiosities housed there are gradually catalogued and put on public display
1961	Designated as one of China’s foremost protected cultural heritage sites
1987	Declared UNESCO World Heritage site
2005	19-year extensive repair started

Imperial lives: Interesting Facts

- Everything the emperor needed was brought to him in the Forbidden City. The emperor could only leave the confines of the palace grounds with official escorts carrying him in a sedan chair—the emperor did not walk in public—and only to attend an official function or travel to another palace. Empresses and concubines led even more sheltered lives: they were never allowed to leave the palace.
- Every morning before dawn, the emperor would rise to take care of official business. Several thousand officials would arrive early and wait in line to pay their respects, and foreign envoys to present gifts. Soldiers stood guard or paraded about to control and monitor the crowds; servants attended the officials and carried messages back and forth. The court maintained a troupe of elephants that were lined up every morning outside the palace, in addition to the horses and other beasts of burden a city needed. No one except the emperor was allowed to ride in a sedan chair or on horseback inside the gates of the Forbidden City. The city was filled with people walking on foot throughout the vast complex.
- Absolute silence prevailed when the emperor ascended his throne. Only when invited by the emperor was anyone permitted to talk in his presence. Every detail was ritually correct, a constant reminder that the emperor was at the centre not just of the palace, but of the country and the entire world. The emperor not only ruled China; he was understood to be the Son of Heaven on earth. The Forbidden City was understood to be Heaven's equivalent on earth.
- The part of the Forbidden City that officials entered was the Outer Court, the zone where the business of the empire was conducted. The Inner Court contained the living quarters, where the emperor lived in seclusion from the larger world. Only his concubines and his eunuchs were allowed in this section, and only if they followed the strict imperial rules. This was where he conducted his daily non-official life; eating and drinking, reading and writing, officiating at rites, being amused and entertained.
- The emperor himself was trapped in the system built around the cult of his heavenly self. His life and the lives of his empress and concubines were, in effect, not their own. From the moment they rose until they went to sleep—and even while they slept—they were closely guarded by eunuchs, so that they never experienced any real privacy. In the Inner Court the only men allowed, besides the emperor, were eunuchs, to ensure the purity of the imperial line.

The Objects

The following background information highlights some of the objects in the exhibition.

Photograph of Object	Label, Materials	Description, Information
	<p><i>Women's nail guards</i> Qing <u>dynasty</u> Gold-gilt, silver, beads, gemstones</p>	<p>Imperial women grew extremely long fingernails, an outward sign that they did not do manual labour. To protect the nails and enhance the illusion of long fingers, women wore detailed decorative nail guards on the ring and pinky fingers of each hand. This is an especially elaborate example inlaid with jewels.</p>
	<p>Vase Qing dynasty Qianlong mark and period porcelain with red and blue-green enamels</p>	<p>Although the shape of the vase was common, the red over green glazed porcelain is rare. Double-gourd shapes were popular, and represented fruitfulness and prosperity. One hundred bats, emblems of luck and prosperity, decorated the vase.</p>
	<p><i>Cabbage-shaped vase</i> Qing dynasty jade</p>	<p>The imperial jade collection contains many depictions of cabbages, one of the most common crops in northeast China, the Manchu homeland. Dried and salted cabbages were relied on for food over the long winter. Emperors of the Qing dynasty focused on maintaining Manchu traditions within the dominant Chinese Han culture.</p>
	<p><i>Album of Twelve Months of Seasonal Activities</i> Chen Mei (陳枚, active 1720–1745) Qing dynasty, Qianlong period, 1738 ink and colour on silk</p>	<p>This painting of women in the Forbidden City is part of an album of twelve, one for each month of the year. Each painting bears the imprint of Emperor Qianlong's official red seal, indicating his approval.</p>

	<p><i>Hand warmer</i> Qing dynasty, Yongzheng period gold and black lacquer on wood</p>	<p>An emperor's hand warmer, used during China's cold winters. The outer box is lavishly decorated and inlaid with gold. The elegant finish of the black lacquer did not make it very practical for heat, so this hand warmer was very rare. It is likely a decorative piece, since there is no evidence of charcoal having been in the inner box.</p>
	<p><i>Empress's ceremonial coat (chaogua)</i> Qing dynasty, Yongzheng period silk with gold thread</p>	<p>The chaogua was an important ceremonial dress for empresses. For formal ceremonies, it would be worn over a robe and skirt. This dark blue silk chaogua is embroidered with two gold dragons; the red satin lining is patterned with the shou character, symbolizing longevity.</p>
	<p><i>Ru ware dish</i> Song dynasty (960-1279) porcelain</p>	<p>Fewer than 70 pieces of ruyao ware survive; they were made for the imperial court during the Song dynasty. It was one of the most prized treasures in the Forbidden City, because of the superior artistic and technical quality, which the imperial kilns of the later Qing dynasty were unable to re-create.</p>
	<p><i>Soup-warming vessel with dragon-head handle</i> Six dynasties, 229-589 bronze</p>	<p>Emperor Qianlong's personal collection contained 1,529 ancient bronzes. Four thousand years ago in ancient China, bronze vessels were important ritual utensils, holding offerings to gods and ancestors. During the Song dynasty, these were collected and copied. Emperor Qianlong continued the tradition, valuing the Song antiques as well as the originals.</p>

PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: History & Context—Forbidden City, Then; and Canada, Now (all levels)

Objective:

Students consider the life of an emperor, and compare the life and times of the Canadian prime minister with a Chinese emperor.

Discussion:

- Terms that might be useful are defined in the Vocabulary section: e.g., symbol, imperial, concubine, eunuch.
- The palace has become known as the Forbidden City. This is because entry into the City was forbidden to ordinary citizens. Only imperial residents or those invited in on official business were permitted through the gates.
- In China today the palace is known by many names, most commonly the Gugong, meaning the Former Palace. It is also called Zijincheng, which means the Restricted Walled Palace of the Purple Star (North Star). The emperor was considered the centre of the universe, and the palace was positioned directly under the Purple Star around which the universe turned.

Materials:

- pencils and paper
- watercolour paints or coloured pencils, and watercolour paper
- age-appropriate books on Canadian government, with images of the prime minister, and on imperial China, especially Qing and Ming dynasties, and/or
- Internet. Some useful websites:
http://www.kinaballoo.com/forbidden_city.html
<http://www.dpm.org.cn/shtml/2/@/8797.html#148>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forbidden_City
<http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/prime-minister-stephen-harper>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Harper

Process:

1. Show students the image of Emperor Qianlong (cover of this guide). Ask students to discuss:
 - What do you know about him or any other Chinese emperors?
 - What can you guess about age, job, status, etc., by looking at the image?
 - What is he wearing and why is he dressed like this?
 - What does his job consist of? His life?
 - Where does he live? What does it look like?
 - If you were his wife or child, what do you think your life would be like?
2. Give students the term “Forbidden City” and have them discuss what it conjures up for them. Who is forbidden? What is forbidden? Is it a secret, mysterious, welcoming or dangerous place? How? Why?
Explain why it became known as this (see above).
3. Have students work in pairs and look on the Internet or in books to see if they can find more information about the emperor.

4. Have them report back to the class, share and compare what they have learned. How are the facts similar or different to what they guessed or deducted?
5. Discuss possible meanings and implications:
“*Being ruler is tough.*” —Emperor Yongzheng
“*The pen is mightier than the sword.*” —Emperor Kangxi
6. Give students copies of the Student Worksheet (next page).
Younger students can be asked to consider one or two sections.
Have them fill in as much as they can, discussing with their partners and continuing research at home. They can use books, the Internet and their families or friends as resources to find information.
7. Have them share findings with their partner, and then discuss as a class.
8. Ask students to use watercolour paint or pencil crayons to make an image of a yellow five-toed dragon or a green four-toed dragon on watercolour paper. What is the difference between the meanings of the two? What do they symbolize? What would happen if they displayed the wrong one in imperial China?

Conclusion:

In considering differences between rulers in imperial China and in Canada today, what about the lives of ordinary people like us?

- How would your life have been different? Your clothes, your home, your family?
- What if you were a servant in the palace? A child of the emperor?

Follow-up:

For younger children, read:

You Wouldn't Want to Be in the Forbidden City! by Jacqueline Morley and David Antram

For older students, watch:

The Last Emperor, a movie directed by Bernardo Bertolucci about the life of Puyi, the last emperor of China, and filmed in the Forbidden City.

Student Worksheet: Life of a Leader, Then and Now

Describe, draw or find & attach <small>(on separate sheet if needed)</small>	Canada Now	China Then
How leader comes to power		
<u>Symbols</u> of power		
Primary residence		
Contact with ordinary citizens		
Personal life		
Skills and talents needed to rule		
Picture or description of leader in formal dress		
Map or description of country and neighbours showing the past and the present	Canada 200 years ago and today	China in 1700 and today

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Object-ivity (all levels)

Objective:

Students consider, discuss and share information about some of the objects they will see in the exhibition.

Materials:

- ❑ writing materials
- ❑ Question Sheet, Student Worksheet: Images (following pages)
- ❑ The Objects (pages 7–8)
- ❑ Internet for follow-up research

Process:

1. Divide the students into ten groups. Give each student a copy of the Question Sheet (page 13) and Student Worksheet: Images (pages 14–15), and assign one image to each group.
2. Ask students to figure out with their group as much as they can about the object, using the questions—or some of them—from the Question Sheet (next page). The number of questions they work with will depend on their age and grade level.
3. Have students discuss the questions first, and then write the information in the appropriate space on the Student Worksheet: Images.
4. Have each group present their findings to the rest of the class while students fill in their worksheets.
5. Give/read students information from The Objects (pages 7–8).
6. Ask students which of their findings were accurate and which parts weren't.
7. Discuss how archaeologists and historians might have gone through a similar deduction process that the students went through and then backed it up with research.
8. Ask students to do some Internet research into their object and see what other information they can gather about it. Have them report back to the class.

Conclusion:

Discuss:

- What were some of the most interesting things that students learned or discovered?
- Which objects are students curious about seeing in the exhibition? Why?
- How do the objects help them learn about or understand this time in the past?

Question Sheet

Discuss questions from the list below to figure out as much as you can about your object. Then write down your responses in the appropriate spaces on the Student Worksheet: Images, on the following page.

- How big do you think it is?
- How does it feel?
- How heavy is it?
- Does it make a noise?
- Describe its colour, shape and decoration.
- Why is it this size?
- What is it used for?
- Is it a single object or are there others like it?
- Does the decoration have a purpose or function?
- Is there lettering on it? If so, what does it tell you?
- What is it made of?
- What is the raw material it is made out of?
- Is this type of object still used today? For what?
- Is this a renewable resource?
- Why was this particular material chosen?
- Could other materials have been used?
- Are there objects like this in use today? How many? For what purpose? Made of what? Made by whom?
- Why isn't it a different colour or colours? Made of different materials? Different shape or size?
- How do you think it was made?
- Is it well designed?
- How could you improve on the design?
- How would it be made today?
- Would it have the same use today?
- What else could it be used for?
- What does it tell you about the place it was used and the people who used it?
- What would/could be used or made in its place today?

Student Worksheet: Images

	How does it look?(Describe)	What is it made of? (Materials)	What is it used for? (Purpose)	When was it made/used?
				
				
				
				

	How does it look?(Describe)	What is it made of? How? (Materials)	What is it used for? (Purpose)	When was it made/used?
				
				
				
				

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Objects Now (all levels)

Objective:

Students consider some objects from their personal lives and what meaning the objects have or develop.

Materials:

- ❑ clipboards and sheets of paper
- ❑ coloured pencils, crayons or pastels

Process:

1. Pick up an everyday object from the classroom (a pen, a sweatshirt or a cellphone, perhaps) and ask students to consider it from multiple aspects. Have students approach it by answering the questions on the Question Sheet (page 13). (Some questions might need to be altered slightly to make sense.)
2. Have students work in pairs to consider an object from their desks using the same process, asking each other as many questions as they can remember or come up with.
3. Give students the Student Worksheet: Objects (page 17). Ask them to fill it out at home using objects that have significance to them.
4. Have each student bring one of the objects to school, if possible. If not, have them bring a photograph of the object. Have them keep the image or object hidden in a bag, without telling or showing other students what they have brought.
5. Without naming the object, have each student describe the object to a partner while the partner tries to draw the object. Switch roles.
6. Then have them show the objects and compare the actual object (or photograph) with the drawing.
7. Have students display each object alongside its drawing, and look at each other's objects and drawings.
8. As a class, talk about the process.

Conclusion:

Discuss with the class:

- How do objects acquire meaning?
- Does an object always mean the same thing or can the same object mean different things to different people, or even to the same person at different times? How?
- Would an object have the same meaning to us today as it would have had to the emperors during their lives? How about the meaning of the same object to a farmer during the emperor's time?

Student Worksheet: Objects

	How does it look?(Describe)	What is it made of? How? (Materials)	What is it used for? (Purpose)	Why is it important? (Meaning)
Object that has special meaning to you				
Object that has special meaning to your family				
Everyday object from your kitchen				
One of your favourite articles of clothing				
Something you use and then throw out the wrapping or container				

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Design—Fit for an Emperor (all levels)

Objective:

Students design objects with the same purpose for themselves and for an emperor.

Materials:

- ❑ large sheets of paper
- ❑ coloured pencils or markers

Process:

1. Discuss how objects for the same purpose might differ in imperial and regular households. Choose a few objects to compare: a soup bowl, pyjamas, a book.
 - How often is it used?
 - What is it used for, and by whom?
 - Who cleans, repairs and takes care of it?
 - Who puts it away after it's been used, and where is it kept?
2. Ask students to think of an object that they might use, want or need in their lives. It could be an object to look at, to use or to wear. Tell them they are going to design, on paper, the perfect prototype or sample of that object. Students might want to look through some magazines for inspiration or ideas.
3. Consider:
 - What materials would be used?
 - What size is it?
 - What would the surface design be? Why?
 - Is the design abstract, symbolic or realistic? Why?
 - What colours would be used? Do the colours matter? Why?
 - What would it cost to make? What would it be worth?
 - What would be used to decorate it? Buttons? Jewels? Gold? Plastic?
4. Have them sketch it out on a large sheet of paper, using coloured pencils or markers. Make notes across your sketch, giving information such as materials, size, texture, etc.
5. Now have the students design a similar object, but fit for an emperor in the Forbidden City. Have them consider the same questions as above, thinking carefully about their choices, such as what materials would have been available at the time, what colours and designs would have been permissible, etc.
6. On another sheet, draw and annotate the object.
7. Display the two drawings alongside each other.
8. Discuss as a class. Have students question each other and justify their choices.

Conclusion:

What did students discover?

What are some of the major differences between design and production then and now?

Which objects from which time period do they think would be most useful? Most beautiful?

VOCABULARY

abstract: a style of art that can be thought of in two ways:

- the artist begins with a recognizable subject and alters, distorts, manipulates or simplifies elements of it;
- the artist creates purely abstract forms that are unrecognizable and have no direct reference to external reality (also called non-representational art).

character: a written Chinese sign that can be a sound, syllable or whole word. There are thousands of different characters that in traditional calligraphy are created with brush and ink, and considered an art form.

concubine: one of many women in the emperor's palace with whom he had relationships, but who were of lower status than his first wife, the empress. There were also consorts—women who had borne him children, who were of higher status than concubines.

dowager: the widow of a deceased emperor and/or mother of a present emperor. She carried a lot of power in the Inner City.

dynasty: a succession of rulers from the same family line.

eunuch: a castrated man, thousands of whom served the emperor and his family in the Inner Court. Non-eunuch males (excepting the emperor) were not allowed into the Inner Court, to ensure the purity of the dynasty.

imperial: of, or relating to an empire or an emperor; e.g. imperial rule; the imperial palace.

Manchu: a non-Chinese people who came from the North and overthrew the Ming dynasty and founded the Qing dynasty. Inside the palace, Manchu traditions were preserved, but outside the Forbidden City, Chinese ways were left alone.

Ming: dynasty that ruled China from 1368 to 1644.

Qing (pronounced *Ching*): dynasty that ruled China from 1644 to 1911.

regent: an adult who ruled for a child emperor until he came of age.

symbolic: serving as a symbol of something else; for example, an object, emblem or design that represents a deeper meaning or idea. Actions, people, places, words or objects can all have symbolic meanings.

RESOURCES

Print:

- Beguin, G., and D. Morel. *The Forbidden City: Heart of Imperial China*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997.
- Brook, Timothy. *The Troubled Empire (History of Imperial China)*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Johnston, Reginald F. *Twilight in the Forbidden City*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press; 2011.
- Marley, J., and D. Antram, *You Wouldn't Want to Be in the Forbidden City!* New York: Scholastic Inc., 2008.
- Rowe, William. *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing. (History of Imperial China)*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Weng, Wango, and Boda Yang. *The Palace Museum, Peking: Treasures of the Forbidden City*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1982.

Film:

The Last Emperor (1987), directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, about the life of Puyi, the last emperor of China, and filmed in the Forbidden City.

Online:

- http://www.kinaballoo.com/forbidden_city.html
- <http://www.dpm.org.cn/shtml/2/@/8797.html#148>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forbidden_City
- <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/prime-minister-stephen-harper>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Harper

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