

# Book Links

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS:  
EXPLORING ANCIENT CHINA  
BY KRISTIN RYDHOLM

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Upper-elementary and middle-school social-studies curricula typically includes the study of ancient cultures. Confucius stated, “If you study the past and use it to understand the present, then you’re worthy to be a teacher.” By studying ancient China, we find a culture that contributed invaluable gifts of technology, philosophy, and art that still inform our understanding of today’s world. Because China’s history covers many thousands of years, it is critical that authors and illustrators of books for children act as tour guides to help young learners put facts into context.

With that notion in mind, the following annotated bibliography is divided into four areas that will allow teachers to act as classroom tour guides. Each book below assumes that readers have limited knowledge of ancient China and provides an easy-to-read text about a very complicated and extensive subject in short but comprehensive descriptions of ancient Chinese culture, paired with detailed illustrations and helpful appendixes. Introducing these titles in small clusters should help educators avoid overloading their students with too much information at once.

Two of the following titles, *Warriors and Wailers* and *You Wouldn’t Want to Work on the Great Wall of China!*, employ a second-person point of view. The advantage here is that students may more easily imagine themselves as an individual living in ancient China. Each of the following categories below begins with a proposed introduction that an educator might use with students to encourage this tour-guide, you-are-there approach to the subject.

## A Day in the Life of Ancient China

Suggested reading prompt for students: “You arrive in ancient China and want to get the lay of the land.” These books present brief historical overviews.

**Ancient China.** By Arthur Cotterell. 2005. 72p. illus. DK, \$16.99 (9780756613822); e-book, \$8.99 (9780756667726). 931. Gr. 3–8.

This book’s format is like a visual dictionary of ancient Chinese culture. The spreads are filled with captioned illustrations of artifacts. One of the book’s unique resources is a list of places to visit in the U.S. that hold priceless items from

ancient China. Additionally, this DK Eyewitness Ancient Cultures series title suggests ways to experience aspects of Chinese culture (e.g., attend a Chinese concert, take kung fu, or see Chinese acrobats).

**Ancient China: Archaeology Unlocks the Secrets of China’s Past.** By Jacqueline Ball and Richard H. Levey. 2006. 64p. illus. National Geographic, \$17.95 (9780792277835); lib. ed., \$27.90 (9780792278566). 931. Gr. 5–8.

This title in the National Geographic Investigates: Ancient Civilizations series describes the types of activities in which archaeologists engage to find, retrieve, and preserve ancient Chinese artifacts. Ball and Levey bridge the past to the present with images and text that assist a young reader in understanding the historical context for specific artifacts that have been discovered.

**The Emperor’s Silent Army: Terracotta Warriors of Ancient China.** By Jane O’Connor. 2002. 48p. illus. Viking, \$17.99 (9780670035120). 931. Gr. 4–7.

O’Connor is a gifted storyteller, and this book tells a story that’s as exciting—and relatable—as an adventure novel. How many kids have shoveled into the ground looking for treasure? In 1974, farmers digging for water unearthed a treasure that is now being shared with the whole world—an army of more than 8,000 sculptures, including soldiers, chariots, and horses. This book, which makes a wonderful read-aloud, is accompanied by large, awe-inspiring photos.

**Imperial China.** By Joanna Cole. Illus. by Bruce Degen. 2005. 40p. Scholastic, o.p. Gr. 3–6.

Cole and Degen connect the known with the new as they explore ancient China in this Ms. Frizzle’s Adventures series title. The story includes a hero’s journey as Ms. Frizzle and her students travel back in time. They seek out the emperor to tell him about suffering crops and to rescue their friends from poverty.

**Life in Ancient China.** By Paul C. Challen. 2005. 32p. illus. Crabtree, paper, \$8.95 (9780778720676); lib. ed., \$26.60 (9780778720379). 931. Gr. 5–7.

This Peoples of the Ancient World title reads like a time-travel brochure for ancient China. As it reveals important aspects of ancient Chinese life, the captivating illustrations and trivia will keep the reader hooked. Although this book may not be a first choice for in-depth research, it can be an excellent introduction to life in ancient China.

## Employment Opportunities

Suggested reading prompt for students: “You realize that if you are going to really understand life in ancient China, you should get a job.” These three books outline occupations that were available in ancient China.

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**The Gods and Goddesses of Ancient China.** By Leonard Everett Fisher. Illus. by the author. 2003. 36p. Holiday, \$16.95 (9780823416943). 299. Gr. 2–5.

Fisher is a prolific and accomplished author and illustrator who approaches each of his topics with thorough research. This book introduces a series of ancient Chinese gods and goddesses. Each spread includes a description and an illustration of a deity. The roles of gods and goddesses were often determined by their lives as humans on earth; consider it sort of an enforced afterlife retirement plan.

**Warriors and Wailers: One Hundred Ancient Chinese Jobs You Might Have Relished or Reviled.** By Sarah Tsiang. Illus. by Martha Newbigging. 2012. 96p. Annick, \$25.95 (9781554513918); paper, \$16.95 (9781554513901). 331.700951. Gr. 4–7.

This Jobs in History series title describes the benefits (and disadvantages) of a variety of occupations in ancient China. With age-appropriate sensitivity, Tsiang covers controversial subjects, such as concubines and eunuchs, and she includes women's roles, which are not widely integrated into many other resources.

**You Wouldn't Want to Work on the Great Wall of China! Defenses You'd Rather Not Build.** By Jacqueline Morley. Illus. by David Antram. 2006. 32p. Children's Press, paper, \$9.95 (9780531124499). 355. Gr. 3–5.

This You Wouldn't Want To . . . series title both appeals and appalls. The book beckons to its reader: You think you have it bad? Well, read on! This book reveals “not-so-great” facts about the famous Chinese wall, but it also lays a foundation for why and how the wall was built. Although the people in the illustrations have exaggerated features, they complement the text and “draw” the reader in.

## Take Me to Your Leader

Suggested reading prompt for students: “You are starting to have a good understanding of daily life in ancient China, but everyone needs a break and a little inspiration. Imagine that these two important figures—Confucius and Kubla Khan—have extended an invitation to you to visit them.” These two picture books share the struggles and successes of two of ancient China's influential leaders.

**Confucius: The Golden Rule.** By Russell Freedman. Illus. by Frederic Clement. 2002. 48p. Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine, paper, \$5.95 (9780439139588). 181. Gr. 4–8.

A study of ancient China would not be complete without looking into the life of one of its greatest teachers, Confucius (551–479 BCE). Many years ago, in a land known as Middle Kingdom, Confucius spoke with his students. His students

were filled with questions, but frequently his responses were challenges to his students to discover the answers on their own. A note to educators: Freedman has, in essence, written an homage to teachers in this title.

**Kubla Khan: The Emperor of Everything.** By Kathleen Krull. Illus. by Robert Byrd. 2010. 48p. Viking, \$17.99 (9780670011148). 950. Gr. 3–5.

Kubla Khan charges directly toward the reader on the cover of this book, and Krull does an excellent job of relaying the story of Khan's life and his contributions to Chinese culture. Byrd capitalizes on the ruler's life of excess and accomplishments with elaborately detailed illustrations.

## Chinese Inventions Reinvented

Suggested reading prompt for students: “You have just read books about Confucius and Kubla Khan, and you can barely contain your excitement! You want to build a compass, make paper, and create your own terra-cotta army? No problem.” These two books include informative texts, simple illustrations, and projects based on ancient China's contributions to the world.

**China: Over 40 Activities to Experience China—Past and Present.** By Debbi Michiko Florence. Illus. by Jim Caputo. 2008. 96p. Williamson, \$16.99 (9780824968137); paper, \$12.99 (9780824968137). 951. Gr. 3–5.

This Kaleidoscope Kids series book matches examples of Chinese culture today with contributions from the past. Packed with hands-on activities for individual children or small groups, it encourages interactive reading and responses.

**Great Ancient China Projects You Can Build Yourself.** By Lance Kramer. Illus. by Steven Weinberg. 2008. 128p. Nomad, \$21.95 (9781934670033); paper, \$15.95 (9781934670026); e-book, \$12.95 (9781619300835). 931. Gr. 4–6.

Kramer makes excellent use of a glossary in this Build It Yourself series title. The selected words are critical social-studies vocabulary for a study of any ancient culture. The glossary words are printed in bold within the narrative and then isolated and defined in side panels, and a full appendix of all the words is available at the end of the book.

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## Common Core Connections

The following are suggestions for implementing the Common Core State Standards with recommended books about ancient China. You can find more information about the standards at [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org).

**In the Classroom:** After reading *You Wouldn't Want to Work on the Great Wall of China!*, have students pair up to write a dialogue between two Great Wall builders. The first builder is a new worker on the Great Wall, while the second is a veteran builder. Apply a question format (who, what, where, when, why, and how) and facts from the book to structure the dialogue. For example:

New Worker: How long have you been working on the Great Wall? Veteran Builder: Too long. My hair is now gray, where it used to be black, and my children, who were little when I left home, now have children of their own.

Once completed, these dialogues can be read aloud in front of the class.

### Common Core Connection

- **W.3.3.** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. Use dialogue and descriptions of actions, thoughts, and feelings to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.

**In the Classroom:** Fisher conveys his interpretation of ancient Chinese deities through the illustrations in *The Gods and Goddesses of Ancient China*. Assign each student to research paintings and sculptures associated with a particular deity (e.g., Jade Emperor Yu Huang Da Di). Explain to the students that they will be doing an image search using either the Bing or Google search engine. Ask the students to select and print out an image as a reference. Using descriptive words, each student should compare and contrast Fisher's illustration with his or her new illustration by filling out a Venn diagram. Using this diagram as a resource, each student should then create an original drawing of the god or goddess on a piece of poster board. Each board should also include the name of the god or goddess in bold letters, a picture, and five facts about the deity. Post the boards in a classroom area designated for ancient China (preferably where the books recommended above are also available).

### Common Core Connections

- **RI.5.6.** Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.
- **RH.6–8.7.** Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

**In the Classroom:** *Great Ancient China Projects You Can Build Yourself* includes a glossary that primarily focuses on words associated with ancient Chinese culture. *Ancient China: Archaeology Unlocks the Secrets of China's Past* includes a glossary that focuses on words associated with archaeology. Combine the lists from both glossaries to create a study guide for the students to take home. As an informal follow-up quiz, select three students from the class to begin a classroom *Jeopardy!* game. Read select definitions from the glossary study guide (e.g., "An ancient Chinese tool created and used for identifying direction"), and then have contestants "buzz in" with the corresponding answer ("What is a compass?"). Substitute another group of three students after a given number of questions to ensure each child has a chance to participate.

### Common Core Connection

- **RH.6–8.4.** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

**In the Classroom:** *Confucius: The Golden Rule* includes many excerpts from *The Analects*, by Confucius. Explain to the class that they will create an advice column based on the wisdom of Confucius, titled "Dear Confucius." Each student should select one saying from the book to be the advice. Discuss with the class what their statements mean; then have them compose a real-life problem where Confucius' statement would be appropriate as advice. All of the advice can then be compiled and published for class distribution.

### Common Core Connections

- **L.5.5.** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. Recognize and explain the meaning of common idioms, adages, and proverbs.
- **W.6.6.** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of three pages in a single sitting.

**In the Classroom:** The Chinese are responsible for many key inventions that are still used today. Using *Great Ancient China Projects You Can Build Yourself*, create a list of these inventions. Assign pairs of students or small groups to present a short infomercial about their invention, pretending that their audience is from ancient China and this is a new product. For reference, have the children watch an infomercial about a product (e.g., the Magic Bullet). Ask the children to respond to the following questions in the context of their infomercial: What kinds of promises can you make about your invention? What object can you add to your product to interest your customer? How much will your product cost? Consider video recording these infomercials.

### Common Core Connections

- **SL.7.4.** Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.
- **SL.7.5.** Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.

**In the Classroom:** Kubla Khan was a force to be reckoned with in ancient China. Using facts from the book *Kubla Khan: The Emperor of Everything*, isolate accomplishments in his life that made contributions to the Chinese civilization. Using a résumé template, have students use facts from the book to complete a résumé for Kubla Khan.

### Common Core Connections

- **RI.6.3.** Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).
- **W.6.6.** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of three pages in a single sitting.