



NCTA Lesson Plan

Name: Qiuhui Li, Saint Ignatius High School, NCTA 2020 (Columbus, OH)

Title: Learning about Zen through Enso Circle

Theme/Topic: Numbers and Colors in Our Lives

Introduction (2-3 sentence summary of lesson): This is a hands-on activity, in which students are going to use the paint brush to draw the enso circle in one stroke. The purpose of this practice is to let students understand some key points of Zen, such as “Nothing is perfect”, and “Live at present moment”.

Subject(s)/Grade level(s): Mandarin Chinese/9-12/Chinese I

Duration of lesson: 40 minutes

Connection to standards/common core (2-3 standards):

- Investigate Intercultural Products, Practices and Perspectives
- Compare Intercultural Behaviors

Essential Questions (2-3 questions):

- What does the Enso circle symbolize in Zen?
- How do I implement this idea into my daily practice? (Be mindful and focus on the present moment.)

Learning Objectives (2-3 objectives):

- Students will be able to understand the aesthetic value of paint brush calligraphy in East Asian countries.
- Students will be able to interpret the meaning of the Enso circle in Japanese Zen practice.



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Learning Targets for Intercultural Communication (optional):

Culture: *Intercultural* [Can-Do Statements](#)

- I can tell and appreciate the aesthetic value of paint brush art in China and other East Asian countries.
- I can identify the enso circle, which is a typical practice related to Japanese Zen culture.

Communication: *Interpretive, Interpersonal and Presentational* [Can-Do Statements](#)

- I can count in Mandarin Chinese from zero to 10.
- I can say in Mandarin Chinese the color(s) of an object in our daily lives.

Investigate: In my own and other cultures I can investigate intercultural products and practices to help understand perspectives of another culture.

Interact: I can interact in very familiar intercultural situations using practiced language and behaviors and show cultural awareness. I can provide basic information in Mandarin Chinese on very familiar topics, such as numbers and colors.

Materials Needed:

Pre-Assessment of Prior Knowledge: *How will students show what they already know about the topic of this unit? What activities will be used?*

For pre-assessment, students are going to do a Web Quest in groups and then share with their classmates what they have found through their Web Quest group work for the following assigned topics:

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- 1) What does a paint brush calligraphy in East Asian countries look like? Search online for information (pictures, videos. Prof. Yunshuang Zhang's lecture is a great resource to check in).
- 2) What materials do we need to practice paint brush calligraphy?
- 3) What does enso circle symbolize in Japanese Zen culture?
- 4) How can we implement the ideas from enso circle in our daily lives?

Lesson Activities/Instructional Strategies (5-7 steps):

1. Group presentations with rubrics. (See Appendix)
2. Padlet (www.padlet.com) for formative assessment. As the teacher asks questions, students type the short answers on the padlet page, where it is like posting a note on the wall. Students can raise questions and ask for teacher's help. They can also discuss among their peers and learn from each other.
3. Watch YouTube video: [How to brush the ENSŌ - Zen Circle](#)
4. Now students can do the hands-on activity of drawing Enso circles with paint brushes.
5. Assess student learning with a Google Form quiz to collect information on how much students understand the meaning of enso circle and how well they grasp the techniques in this practice. A sample assessment is created and shared here. Teachers can adapt and modify it according to the ages and levels of their learners. <https://forms.gle/BCZJtPqfznWfdfq76>

Resources:

1. Zen Past and Present (Eric Cunningham)
<https://www.asianstudies.org/bookstore/cunningham/>
2. Key Issues in Asian Studies: East Asian Societies
<https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaas/archives/key-issues-in-asian-studies-east-asian-societies/>
3. "Zen Buddhism teaches us of the importance of living in the present"
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2012/sep/21/zen-buddhism-lessons>
4. [A History of East Asia: From the Origins of Civilization to the Twenty-First Century](#)
(Charles Holcombe)
5. [Enso: The Timeless Circle](#)

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Closing/Reflection Activity: *How are students engaging with ideas from another culture?*

The purpose of this practice is to let students understand some key points of Zen. Nothing is perfect. And nobody is perfect. Another idea about the enso circle is that we should live at and value the present moment. So I can tell my students that this is the circle you draw at this moment, and learn to appreciate it rather than criticize it. Some more interesting ideas could also include the concept of zero in Zen and to value the power of zero, understanding empty also means full.

What does it mean for them?

As many students in today's society are under stress of doing things just right or struggling for being perfect, it is important for them to become tolerant and learn the beauty of imperfection, which is the meaning of Enso circle. When drawing the enso circles, they will learn that it does not have to be a perfect circle. "The principle of controlling the balance of composition through asymmetry and irregularity is an important aspect of the Japanese aesthetic: Fukinsei (不均齊), the denial of perfection." (From the [Wikipedia entry on ensō](#))

Post-Assessment: *How will students demonstrate what they have learned about the topic from this unit? What activities will be used?*

To reinforce the thematic unit, and to drill the language in numbers and colors while students are drawing their circles, we will count in Chinese how many enso circles each group draws, and how many circles the whole class draws. We can talk in Chinese about different colors of the paper and the ink. Google forms for survey questionnaires can be used as an assessment for student learning outcome.



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Extension Activities/Extending the Lesson/Cross-Curricular Connections (2-3 ideas):

1. Field trip: visit local art museums for an reinforcement of paint brush art in East Asian countries.
 2. Class video: [History of Zen Buddhism: Paradox and Tension](#)
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Appendix

Rubric for presentation:

(This is a sample rubric for presentation. Teachers can adapt and modify it according to the types of presentation as well as the ages and levels of the learners.)

míng zì 名字:	Accuracy 10pts	Fluency 10pts	Non-verbal communication 10 pts
Excellent 8-10 points	Pronunciation is correct, clear and easy to understand.	Speech is effortless and smooth with speed that comes close to that of a native speaker.	Many eye-contacts with audience; nice smile showing confidence. Refer to notes naturally as a reminder.
Good 6-7 points	Mostly good and did not interfere with communication.	Speech is mostly smooth but with some hesitation and unevenness caused primarily by rephrasing.	Some eye-contacts, but deliver presentation as if from memorized scripts.
Needs improvement 4-5 points	Slightly unclear with pronunciation at times, but generally is fair.	Speech is slow and often hesitant and irregular. Sentences may be left uncompleted.	A few eye-contacts, but mostly read from notes.
Failed 0-3 points	Unclear in pronunciation.	Speech is very slow, stumbling, and uncertain. Difficult for a listener to understand.	No eye contact with audience. Simply read from notes.
Your score with teacher's comment			