

---

## Art Masterpiece: Chinese Calligraphy

---

**Keywords:** Positive and negative space, line, form

**Grade:** 6<sup>th</sup>

**Activity:** Chinese Brush Calligraphy



This pictograph means “dragon.”

### About Chinese Calligraphy:

**Calligraphy** means 'good' 'writing'. Chinese calligraphy is an art form, and calligraphers are highly respected. There are several styles of writing: Seal, official or clerical, regular, running or semi-cursive, and cursive. Each one has its own characteristics and purpose.

There are seven standard strokes. Some calligraphers believe there are up to thirty-two strokes. Either way, there are many interpretations.

The seven strokes are called the '**Seven Mysteries.**' They are:

Horizontal line

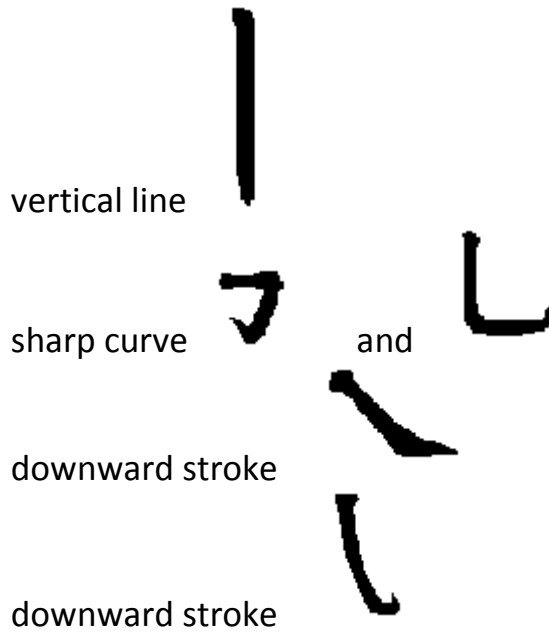


dot



sweeping downward stroke

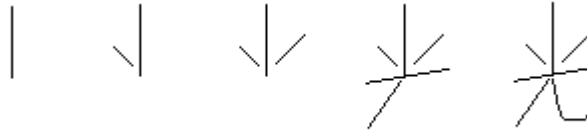




When writing Chinese, you must always keep the brush straight up and down. Do not let your palm touch the brush. You must know how to hold the brush correctly to become a good calligrapher. Calligraphy takes lots of practice.



The stroke order of a character is important in mastering calligraphy. The stroke order creates the correct effect for the character. *(More on stroke order at the end of the lesson.)*



**Chinese** words are made up of characters. These characters have evolved from ancient pictographs.



This character means **field**. Can you see the plots of the farmer's field?



This character stands for **mountain**. It is easy to see the mountain peaks



This character for **woman** is harder to see. The rectangle represents a baby bundled in a mother's lap.



Can you guess this one? This picture represents a **heart**. Each stroke shows the outline of a chamber in the heart.

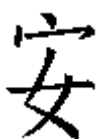
When you combine two or more characters you create new meaning



If you take the character for **field** and draw it on top of the character for **heart**, you create a new character which means **"to think."** Farming was very important in China and to know what to plant required a lot of thinking and planning.



The first symbol means **fire**. The second means **mountain**. Add them together and what do you get? **Volcano!**



You recognize the character for **woman**. The woman is under a **roof**. These characters together mean **peace**. The Chinese people thought one woman in a house, not two, represented peace.



**You** can also change meanings by drawing more than one of the same character.

火

Fire

炎

Flame, Blaze

木

Tree

木木

Woods

木  
木木

Forest, Jungle

### Definitions:

- Line – an outline or boundary of a figure or space. In Chinese calligraphy, the pictograph is created by a specific set of lines, done in correct order.
- Form, Positive and Negative Space – The pictograph is the form that takes up the space on the page. The pictograph itself is the positive space of the image and the white space of the paper is the negative space.
- Shape – Some Chinese pictographs have the shape of the thing they represent. The Chinese pictograph for “fire” looks like an abstract drawing of a campfire.

Western audiences usually appreciate Chinese calligraphy as abstract art. Calligraphy is judged by how aesthetically pleasing it appears. Is it balanced or does it look lopsided? Are the lines fluid or choppy? Is it messy or neat? In fact, some people have gotten tattoos or t-shirts with a Chinese pictograph on it because they just liked the way it looks and not because they understood the meaning of the character. (How would you like to have a tattoo that says “chicken sandwich” in Chinese?)

In Chinese calligraphy, ink blots and dry brush strokes are considered a “natural spontaneous expression” and not a mistake.

### **Activity: Chinese Brush Calligraphy**

For this project, the students’ body position will be just as important as the results they get.

- Holding the brush: Holding the brush is not the same as holding a pen or pencil. Have the students hold their brushes with thumb, index, and middle finger. When their fingers are holding the brush in this way, there will be a hollow space between their fingers and their palms. This allows the brush to move freely while it is tight in their fingers. Proper brush angle is vertical, approximately 90 degrees from the painting surface. The brush shouldn’t touch their palm, and their arm and hand shouldn’t touch the paper. When the students hold their brushes correctly, it will be easier for them to get the desired brush strokes.
- Stance: It is a good idea for the students to stand when they are painting. One artist explains, “You can transfer your energy from your body to your arm and your fingers, then into the brushstrokes.” Encourage the students to move their arm more than their fingers because it is easier to control the movement.

A good brush stroke is considered to be “confident, without uncertainty.” They should be strong and energetic. Remind your students that ink blots and dry brush strokes are part of their expression and not mistakes.

### **Materials needed:**

- 9 X 12 rice paper OR white construction paper
- Black tempera paint, thinned with water

- Bamboo Chinese calligraphy brush (or regular brush, if you don't have calligraphy brushes)
- Water cups for paint
- Thin point red Sharpie markers (or other red felt-tip marker)
- Paper towels
- Newspaper to cover desks
- Black construction paper (if you wish to mount the finished artwork)

### ***\*\* Troubleshooting Thoughts\*\****

Photocopy the Chinese characters (below) to pass around to students. Alternately, use the classroom document-camera to project the images to students.

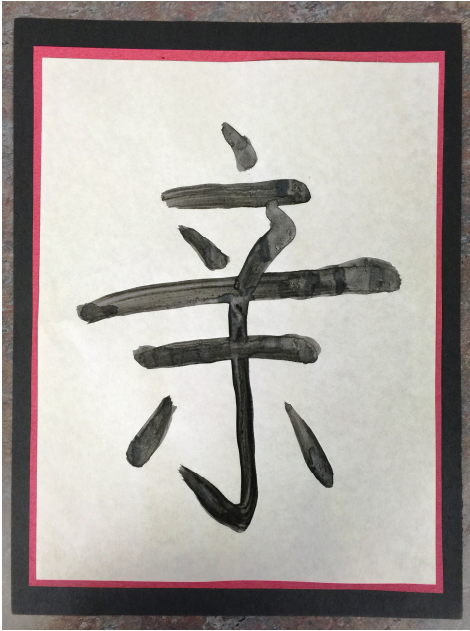
Before the lesson begins, thin the tempera paint with water, and fill each cup with an inch or so of paint. If there are two volunteers, one can do this while the other one teaches.

If you mount the artwork: apply the glue stick to the construction paper first, then lay the rice paper down to adhere. If you try to apply the glue stick to the rice paper, it is fragile and rips easily.

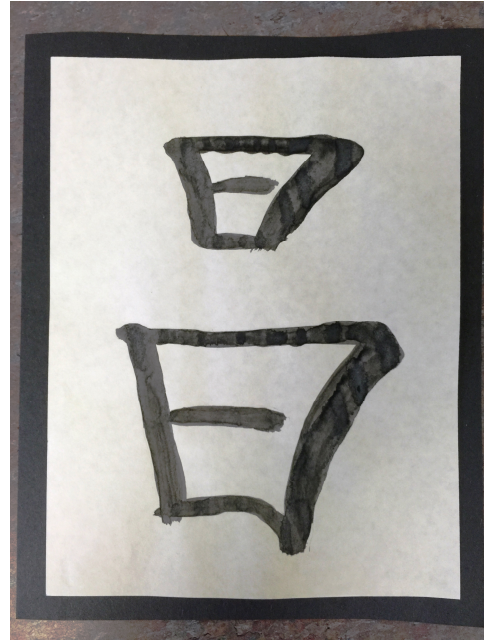
### **Process:**

1. Explain that each student will be making three Chinese pictographs on their paper. If using rice paper, remind the students that the rice paper is very absorbent so they should "load" their brushes sparingly with ink.
2. Pass out copies of popular Chinese pictographs and let the students pick out three that they would like to try. (Another way to do this is have the teacher project the pictographs up on the screen using the document camera.)
3. Remind the students of the proper way to hold the brush (vertically.) When they are ready to paint, encourage them to try it standing up. (If this is uncomfortable because the student is tall and they have to hunch over, they can remain seated.)
4. Have them write with the Sharpie marker what their pictograph means.
5. Remind them to sign their work!
6. When dry, you can hang to display.

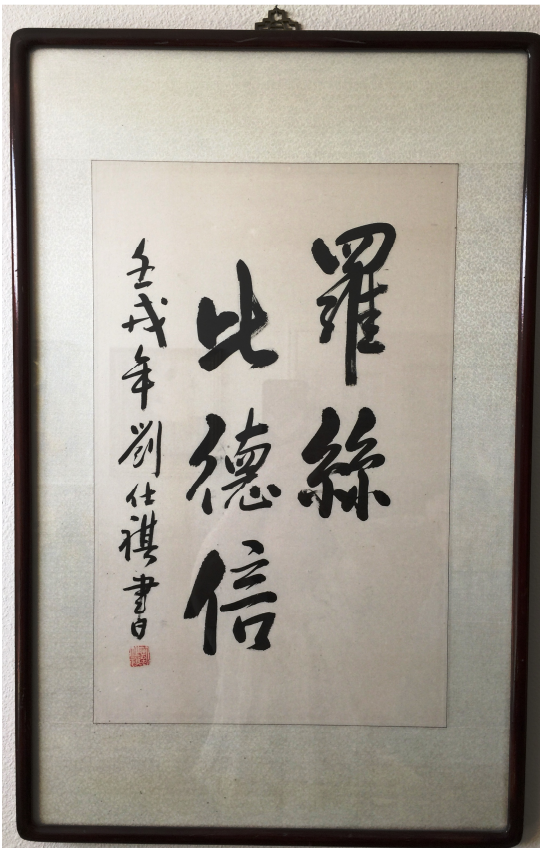
Examples:



"Mother"



"Prosperity"



	<p>“Double happiness” Used in weddings.</p>
	<p>Strength</p>
	<p>Friendship</p>
	<p>Happiness</p> <p>Like</p>
	<p>Hope</p>

梦想	Dream
真相	Truth
火	Fire
永恒	Eternity
母亲	Mother
繁荣 昌隆	Prosperity

	<p><b>Water</b></p>
	<p><b>Twins</b></p>
	<p><b>Beautiful</b></p>
	<p><b>Fate</b></p>










信任	Trust
天命	Destiny
儿子	Son
光荣	Honor
舞	Dance
自由	Freedom

金钱  CHINESE NAMES.ORG	Money
理解  CHINESE NAMES.ORG	Understanding
德  CHINESE NAMES.ORG	Virtue
婴儿  CHINESE NAMES.ORG	Baby
笑  CHINESE NAMES.ORG	Laugh
宁静  CHINESE NAMES.ORG	Serenity

 <p>谢谢你</p>	Thank you
 <p>宽恕</p>	Forgiveness
 <p>爱</p>	Love
 <p>信仰</p>	Faith
 <p>家庭</p>	Family
 <p>和平</p>	Peace

知识	Knowledge
你好	Hello
勿忘我	"Forget me not"
好运	Good luck
勇气	Courage
生命	Life
朋友	Friend

兄弟	Brother (older or younger)
音乐	Music
和睦	Harmony
爹	Father
智慧	Wisdom
变化	Change
业因	Karma

	Daughter
	Sister (older and younger)
	Success
	Longevity
	Healthy
	Respect
	Good

永远  CHINESE NAMES.ORG	Forever
相信  CHINESE NAMES.ORG	Believe
忠诚  CHINESE NAMES.ORG	Loyalty
儿子  CHINESE NAMES.ORG	Son

<http://www.chinesenames.org/chinese-symbols/index.htm>

### **Chinese Calligraphy**

Today in Art Masterpiece we discussed Chinese brush calligraphy. The students learned that Chinese calligraphy is an art form as well as a method of writing. They learned the proper way to hold a Chinese calligraphy brush and how the brush strokes are blended together to create the lines in a Chinese pictograph. Then the students experimented with Chinese brushes and ink to create their own calligraphy.



***This pictograph means  
"dragon."***

### **Chinese Calligraphy**

Today in Art Masterpiece we discussed Chinese brush calligraphy. The students learned that Chinese calligraphy is an art form as well as a method of writing. They learned the proper way to hold a Chinese calligraphy brush and how the brush strokes are blended together to create the lines in a Chinese pictograph. Then the students experimented with Chinese brushes and ink to create their own calligraphy.



***This pictograph means  
"dragon."***



## Additional information:

### Rules for Stroke Order (from <http://www.zein.se/patrick/chinen9p.html>)

“The basic rule, when writing Chinese characters, is to always write from top to bottom, from left to right.

“Within each radical you have six basic rules, which I will now illustrate with sequences of pictures. The complete characters are first shown on a yellow background, and then you see a sequence of pictures from left to right, showing how the character is built up, stroke by stroke, to form the final result:

#### Rule #1 Top down.

:

Special case: Left side of squares is drawn before the top.

毛 丿 ㇏ ㇏ ㇏ 毛

日 丨 冂 冂 日 日

#### Rule #2 Left to right.

:

Exception: Hook on the right side comes first.

州 丶 ㇏ ㇏ 州 州

防 ㇏ ㇏ 防 防

#### Rule #3 Horizontal lines

:

and squares before crossing vertical lines.

Exception: Bottom lines are always drawn last.

中 丨 冂 冂 中

王 一 二 干 王

#### Rule #4 Frames before contents.

:

Note: The bottom line of a frame is

同 丨 冂 冂 同 同

四 丨 冂 冂 四 四

drawn last.

**Rule #5** Centre before  
: symmetrical sides.



**Rule #6** Secondary dots  
: drawn last.

