



## **Jade Pagoda Art Teaches Tour Transcript - English**

Hello, welcome to the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art's Soreng Gallery. The Soreng gallery is the gallery of Chinese art. Today we're here at the Myriad Treasures: Celebrating the Reopening of the Soreng Gallery exhibition. My name is Sherri and it's my job at the museum, at the JSMA, to schedule school tours with our Exhibition Interpreters. Today I am really excited to show you one of my very favorite pieces in the gallery.

This structure is called a pagoda. Pagodas are religious structures built for worship, prayer and meditation.

Pagodas developed in China as a cross between an Imperial watchtower, used by guards to watch for enemies and to send signals, and an Indian stupa. A stupa is a religious structure, a shrine that is kind of a mound covered with stone.

Pagodas have lasted hundreds of years, largely because they have a central pillar that makes the structure very strong. In Japan, many pagodas have been made with wood. Horizontal wood beams also give the pagoda a lot of flexibility. Just as your spine keeps you upright, and your arms and legs give you balance, the central pillar and wooden beams make the pagoda nearly earth-quake proof.

There is one famous pagoda in Japan near a temple, which was built in 607 CE. It has withstood magnitude 7 earthquakes 46 times!

Our Chinese pagoda is a model, it has no central pillar, but comes apart in layers, like a stacking toy. This model was commissioned by the second Manchu Emperor in 1711 as a birthday gift for his grandson, who would also become Emperor.

Traditionally, pagodas have an odd number of floors. This one has nine. Nine is a very lucky number in Chinese culture. It is associated with harmony, longevity and the emperor. The word longevity means “long life”. There are many symbols of longevity in Asian art beside the number nine. What are some symbols of longevity that you know or have seen? I want you to write them down or draw pictures of them.

We will pause here so you can respond.

Did you notice the unusual shape of this pagoda? Pagodas can be round, square, or a polygon. This one is an octagon. It has eight sides.

Let’s look closely at what material this pagoda is made of. It’s jade. The Chinese prized jade highly, calling it the stone of heaven. Jade is tough and hard, and it can take a sharp edge.

Today jade is carved using power tools, but when this was made it was much more difficult. This pagoda was made in the Imperial jade workshop by using a foot-powered carving device. It took so long to construct that the emperor’s grandson did not get his birthday gift until he was 24 years old.

The light green jade of this pagoda is called moss in snow and the top piece is called spinach green. I think my favorite color of jade is that deep green of this pagoda called “spinach”, which reminds me of the trees in an Oregon forest. Describe your favorite color in 2 or 3 sentences.

We will pause here so you can respond.

Let’s take a closer look under the eaves; Let’s look at the figure inside the doors. It’s a figure of Buddha seated facing the four directions: north, south, east and west. The Buddha taught that one should meditate or contemplate, and this pagoda was designed for use in a garden, just for that purpose.

The roof tops of this pagoda curve up instead of down or straight. In traditional Chinese culture it was believed that this would ward off evil spirits as spirits were

thought to only travel in straight lines. Many buildings in Asia have these same curved rooflines.

Another protection for this pagoda are the dragons along the first layer of roofline. Dragons are a symbol of great power and of the emperor, who often wore robes with nine dragons embroidered on them. In east Asian culture, dragons are good, kind and smart. Who do you know who is good, kind and smart and what do they do that makes you feel that way? For this activity we would like you to list and describe 4 attributes of a 'good person.' We would like each description to be about two or 3 sentences long.

When you are done you can have a writer's workshop and get together and share your descriptions.

Let's pause here for you to respond.

Let's take a look at more details. There are also bells along the roofline, as this pagoda lived in the garden of the Emperor's summer palace. Imagine the emperor's grown-up grandson, now an emperor himself, coming into the garden, dressed in his fine silk robes, to rest beside this pagoda, listening to bells chime in the breeze, to think or to pray.

Before we end your tour of the Jade Pagoda, I'd now like you to take a paper and pencil and sketch a pagoda that you would like to have in your own garden, one that you can pause by and listen to the bells ring in the breeze. When you're finished with your sketch of your pagoda, write the 4 attributes of your good friend in the space around your drawing.

Thank you for your attention today. There are more lessons about the jade pagoda in your teacher lesson plan. I look forward to seeing you all at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art soon.