

## World Art and Music Activity 8



### Chinese Porcelain

The best-known Chinese porcelain comes from the Song dynasty and consists primarily of blue designs on a white background. The Chinese first made porcelain in the A.D. 600s, during the Tang dynasty, and they perfected it throughout the Song and Yuan dynasties.

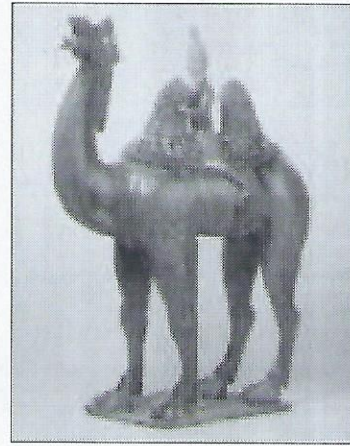
**DIRECTIONS:** Read the passage below about this ancient art. Then answer the questions in the space provided.

**P**orcelain is made of a white clay called *kaolin*. This substance is also referred to as china clay because it is found nowhere else in the world. After an object is shaped out of the clay, it is covered with a glaze and then fired in a very hot oven, called a kiln. The result is a hard object with a durable, glasslike surface.

Tang dynasty ceramics are noted for their beautiful shapes and the development of colored glazes. The pitchers, jars, bowls, and vases usually have strong, simple shapes: a round jar with a small lip, a bowl with slight indentations making it look like a flower, a round pitcher with a handle. These pleasing shapes are combined with a wide range of colors. Chinese artists used various minerals to produce black, blue, green, yellow, and creamy white glazes. Sometimes brown and white clay were mixed together and covered with a transparent glaze, producing a marbled effect.

Most pottery during the Tang dynasty was intended to be placed in tombs. Objects vary in size from toys and animal figures a few inches high to large horses and camels. Many depict soldiers and women on horseback, people dancing and playing a variety of musical instruments, and caricatures of foreigners from central and western Asia. The most extraordinary pieces are the tomb guardians, fierce armed men often standing on demons. They are minutely detailed and glazed in vibrant colors. Tomb ceramics were made cheaply and in bulk. They have been found in tombs of average people as well as those of royalty.

During the Song dynasty, Chinese travelers brought back cobalt from Southwest Asia. This blue



Porcelain figure of a rider on a camel

mineral was the impetus for the era of blue and white porcelain. The contrast between the pure white of the kaolin and the bright blue cobalt is striking. The designs were predominantly flowers, leaves, and vines, often in intricate patterns. Song porcelain was produced for the nobility, which may account for it being more elaborate than Tang wares. Song pieces have a wider range of colors and shapes, and the surface might be carved with various designs.

Song vessels were fired upside down, so the rims had to be left unglazed so they would not stick to the kiln. The rims were later covered in bronze or silver.

The rarest and most esteemed Song porcelain is called *Ju*. Instead of the typically bold Song colors, these delicate ceramics are glazed in lavender, pinkish-yellow, and pale turquoise, a color that has been described as "so subtle that it seems to be emitting light rather than reflecting it."

(continued)



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The Yuan dynasty was a period of much innovation and experiment. Much of its porcelain was produced for export to Southwest Asia and North Africa. These ceramics are elaborate and consist of intricately carved dragons and phoenixes under colored

glazes. Jars have lids with handles in the form of sculptured animals. In addition, auspicious words are included, such as *fu* ("happiness") and *shu* ("long life"). Many figures of gods and goddesses were produced and used in homes as shrines.

## Reviewing the Selection

1. What is porcelain, and how is it made?

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## Critical Thinking

2. **Making Comparisons** Briefly describe how Tang and Song pottery are similar and different.

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3. **Predicting Consequences** Porcelain of the Tang, Song, and Yuan dynasties shows a progression of style. Predict what the ceramics of the next dynasty, the Ming, were like.

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