Historical Background

The Terracotta Warriors were discovered in Xi’an, China in 1974 by a small group of farmers. They had no idea that what they unearthed would be the most significant archaeological discovery of the 20th century. The warriors were built in front of Emperor Qin’s tomb and were supposed to guard the emperor in the afterlife. It is estimated that over 700,000 workers from every province worked on building the warriors in the tomb. The warriors and treasures in the tomb were safeguarded from tomb robbers by weapons automatically triggered by tomb activity. The terracotta figures are life-size replicas of warriors and horses, and they are arranged in battle formation. Each figure varies in height, uniform, and hairstyle in accordance with position and rank. It is presumed that each warrior has its own unique facial features. The discovery of the Terracotta Warriors changed the way historians understand Chinese history. Studying the contents of this tomb not only gives us more detailed information about China’s first emperor, but it also helps illuminate this period of Chinese history.
Bellringer

- Using Google Earth, students will “fly” from their hometown to Xi’an, China. This can be done with one computer that projects a world map onto a large screen or on individual computers in a computer lab setting. If a computer is unavailable, a simple map of the world can be used.
- Using Google Earth, explore Xi’an and the Terracotta Warrior pits by looking at photos and other information available on Google Earth.

Body of the Lesson

- Discuss the historical significance of Emperor Qin and how the Terracotta Warriors were built.
- Show a five-minute video clip by National Geographic showcasing the history and unearthing of the warriors. You can find it on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsUE-ZtcUFg.
- Activity: Tell students they are pretending to be archaeologists who are uncovering the Terracotta Warriors. Divide them into small groups. Give each group a “Terracotta Warriors Excavation Kit.” Students will use the tools in the kit to “unearth” their own terracotta warrior. The excavation kit can be purchased for $6.00 per kit at http://pearlriver.com/v2/FramesSearch.asp?search=warrior.
- After the activity, each group will present their terracotta warrior to the class. They will describe the warrior, specifying if the warrior is an archer, general, etc.

Conclusion

Students will answer the following discussion questions:

1. In which Chinese city were the Terracotta Warriors built?
2. When were the Terracotta Warriors built?
3. Who is responsible for building the Terracotta Warriors?
4. In 1974 who found the first remains of the Terracotta Warriors?
5. How many people contributed to building the warriors?
6. Explain what the Terracotta Warriors tell us about Emperor Qin.

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