



Introduction

From the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

The cymbidium orchid (Chinese: *lan*) has been cultivated in China for hundreds of years. Since the time of the philosopher Confucius (551–479 BCE), the cymbidium has been associated with principled, moral gentlemen whose talent and integrity go unrecognized by the powers that be. Over the centuries, various literary and philosophical works attributed other virtues to the orchid, such as friendship, loyalty, and patriotism. Because of these associations, members of the scholar-official class came to identify strongly with the flower.

The cymbidium orchid became an independent subject of Chinese painting during the Song dynasty (960–1279). Artists created meticulous depictions of the orchid employing outline and color. From the thirteenth century on, most scholar artists chose to paint the leaves and blossoms calligraphically, using only ink. Following the Mongol conquest of the Song in 1279 and the founding of the Yuan dynasty, the "ink orchid" took on strong overtones of loyalty to the fallen regime.

The subject also held appeal for certain groups that flourished at the margins of society. Monk artists belonging to the Chan school of Buddhism, for example, appropriated the ink orchid for their own purposes during the fourteenth century. Similarly, while the plant remained perennially popular among scholar artists, during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties (16th–17th centuries) the ink orchid also became a mainstay for a coterie of renowned courtesan painters, many of whom formed romantic liaisons with prominent scholars of the time.

The purpose of this activity is to illustrate the concept from Chinese Scholar/Monks called "The Four Gentlemen," whereas four plants signify the four seasons and represent sought after Confucian traits. The plum blossom represented winter, the orchid represented spring, the bamboo represented summer, and the chrysanthemum represented autumn.



Vocabulary

- No specific vocabulary, but an understanding of Asian geography

Main Concept:

- Chinese Scholars/Monks associated four plants different plants (one of them being an orchid) with the four seasons. The four plants also represented sought after Confucian traits.

Age/Grade level: Preschool and Elementary School students

Learning Goals:

- To foster a fun learning activity that expands children's knowledge and understanding of history relating to plants.

What you'll need:

- Images of plants representing the four seasons
- Chart of the Four Seasons

Preparation:

- Use scissors to cut out along the dotted lines the plants representing the four seasons.



Activity:

- **Discuss**
Discuss the orchid in Chinese painting and the Four Gentlemen.
- **Play**
Play a fun matching game by using the images of the Four Gentlemen to the appropriate season. There are four correct pictures, along with a few more incorrect ones just to make the choices more challenging.
- **Create**
Create your own Four Gentlemen- If you could choose 4 plants, one to represent each season, what would they be? Why? Draw the plants in the Create Your Own Four Gentleman activity sheet.

Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
Place Plant Here	Place Plant Here	Place Plant Here	Place Plant Here
Represents Hope and Courage	Represents Integrity and Friendship	Represents Strength and Resilience	Represents Honesty and Simplicity



Orchid



Bamboo



Chrysanthemum



Plum Blossom



Honeysuckle



Water Lily

CREATE YOUR OWN FOUR GENTLEMEN

The plant I chose to represent **winter** is:

I chose this plant because:

The plant I chose to represent **spring** is:

I chose this plant because:

The plant I chose to represent **summer** is:

I chose this plant because:

The plant I chose to represent **autumn** is:

I chose this plant because:
