

ACM WONDERS

Suitable for ages 13 and up

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TABLE SCREEN: GATHERING OF SCHOLARS

Carved in lacquered wood during the Qianlong period of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) in China

Background Information

This exquisitely carved lacquer screen depicts a group of scholars who have gathered to celebrate the Spring Purification Festival in the year AD 353. The famous calligrapher Wang Xizhi is shown at his writing desk, while other scholars compose poems by the river. Wine cups on lotus leaves float along the river.

In addition to their work as government officials and administrators, Chinese scholars spent time pursuing their artistic interests, often in the company of like-minded friends and acquaintances at elegant literati gatherings. During such meetings, poetry was composed, works of art were created and admired, and intelligent conversations were had.

The narrative scene on this table screen is carved through thick layers of red, green, and ochre lacquer. A screen like this may have been placed on a scholar's table in front of the window, protecting the desk from drafts of wind and shielding wet ink from the sun.



Table screen: Gathering of scholars
China, Qianlong period (1736–95)
Lacquered wood,
63.4 x 65 x 23.5 cm
Asian Civilisations Museum
2009-01530

LET'S DISCOVER

Learn more about the artistic and literary pursuits of the Chinese scholar.

FUN FACT

The host of the gathering shown on this screen was Wang Xizhi 王羲之, a scholar-official revered today as the Sage of Calligraphy. Wang's most famous work, *Lantingji Xu* 兰亭集序 (*Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion*), commemorates the Spring Purification Festival, on the third day of the third month of the Chinese calendar. This date is celebrated as the birthday of the Yellow Emperor, the probably mythical deity in Chinese religion.

GLOSSARY

Lacquer is made from a tree resin that dries up to produce a hard and durable finish, often used to decorate wooden objects.

Literati refers to a class of well-educated people interested in literature and the arts.

Produced by the Asian Civilisations Museum
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LET'S LOOK CLOSELY

Use these guidelines to discover details about this object.

1. **LOOK** at the object closely. Roll a piece of paper into a telescope to use as a viewfinder to help you zoom in and focus on different details on the screen. Tell a friend five details you see and challenge them to find all of them.
2. This table screen may have been placed on a scholar's desk, together with paper, ink, writing brushes, and ink stones. **COMPARE AND CONTRAST** your own study desk at home to a Chinese scholar's desk. How is it similar and how is it different?
3. **IMAGINE** yourself as one of the scholars gathered in the scene. What are some of the sights, smells, and sounds around you? What activity would you be doing?

CREATE AT HOME

Continue the experience at home by doing this activity. Send us your work @ACM_SG for a chance to get featured.

4. **CREATE** a table screen for your desk by using a standing picture frame. **DRAW** or **PAINT** a scene from your own life. Include details and objects that you remember in the landscape. Add a surprising detail that others might not expect.