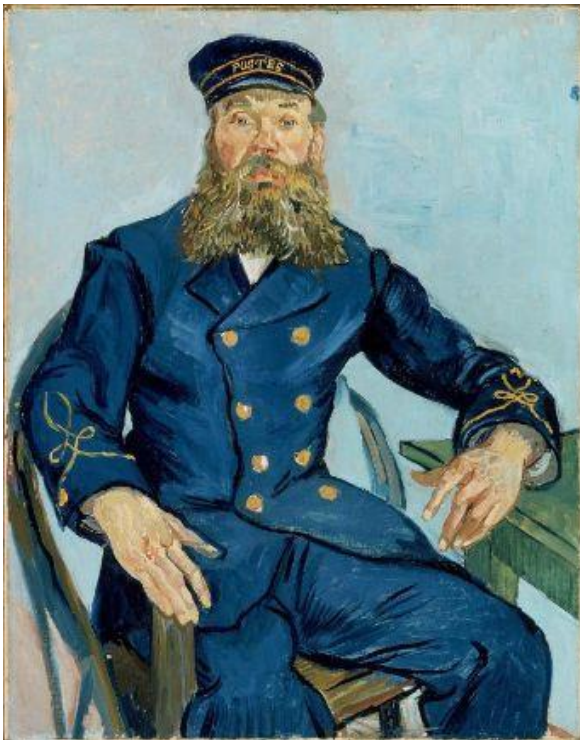


# LOOKING EAST

## Western Artists and the Allure of Japan



Teacher Resource Guide

**THE FRIST**  
CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS

# LOOKING EAST

Western Artists and the  
Allure of Japan

## Teacher Resource Guide

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**Cover (Left to right):** Vincent van Gogh. *Postman Joseph Roulin*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 32 x 25 3/4 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Robert Treat Paine, 2nd, 35.1982; Utagawa Kunisada I. *Actor Onoe Kikujirō II as Takiyasha-hime*, 1862. Woodblock print, 20 3/4 x 16 3/4 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, 11.15480. All photographs © 2014 MFA, Boston

## Preparing for your visit

This teacher resource packet was designed to help teachers prepare students for their gallery visit and classroom follow-up discussion. This packet contains a Teacher Resource Guide, related Art Trunk activities, and art reproductions.

### Teacher Resource Guide

This guide focuses on the exhibition *Looking East: Western Artists and the Allure of Japan* and explores the themes of culture, innovation, and nature. Each section discusses and compares objects from the exhibition. The highlighted works of art include questions that encourage you and your students to look closely and critically. Each section includes questions and corresponding educator activities that focus on overarching themes. The educator activities are interdisciplinary and are compatible with language arts, social studies, and science.



This symbol denotes opportunities for additional research. You will see this throughout the resource guide. One or more sources will be cited to help you begin further research. If you view this guide digitally at [www.fristcenter.org](http://www.fristcenter.org), blue underlined web citations will serve as links to the web sites referenced. A bibliography of cited sources can also be found in the Additional Resources section of this guide.

**Bolded words** are listed under the vocabulary subheading in each section and are included in the glossary on pages 38 and 39 of the packet.

### Art Trunk Activities

Included in the Teacher Resource Guide are extension art activities as part of the Art Trunk program. Art Trunks are mobile educational kits designed for community partners to enrich the appreciation and understanding of present and past art exhibitions at the Frist Center. The Art Trunk program provides unique opportunities for participants to become more informed about works of art, their meanings, and the artists who created them. Participants in the Art Trunk program receive the Teacher Resource Guide that includes the necessary materials to complete the guided lesson plans for three activity sessions.

## Curriculum Connections

Docent-guided school tours support the Tennessee State Curriculum Standards by introducing ideas relevant to the visual arts, language arts, and social studies curricula. Specific standards are addressed according to grade-appropriate levels. View connections for all grade levels (K-12) at <http://www.state.tn.us/education/curriculum.shtml>.

This teacher resource packet also acknowledges the Common Core State Standards Initiative coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers. By aligning the goals of this packet with Common Core State Standards, the Frist Center makes offsite learning effective for students and easy for teachers. The following Common Core State Standards are implemented in this teacher resource packet:

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.**RI.1.1, RI.1.2, RI.1.3, RI.1.4, RI.1.6, RI.1.7, RI.1.9; RF.1.1, RF.1.2, RF.1.3, RF.1.4; W.1.2, W.1.8; SL.1.1, SL.1.2, SL.1.3, SL.1.4, SL.1.5, SL.1.6; L.1.1, L.1.2, L.1.4, L.1.5, L.1.6

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.**W.2.5, W.2.7, W.2.8, SL.2.1, SL.2.1a, SL.2.1b, SL.2.1c, SL.2.2, SL.2.4, RI.2.1, RI.2.6, RL.2.7, L.2.1, L.2.2

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.**W.3.3, W.3.4, SL.3.1, SL.3.1b, SL.3.1c, SL.3.1d, SL.3.2, SL.3.3, RI.3.6, RL.3.3, RL.3.7, L.3.1, L.3.2, L.3.3

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.**W.4.3, W.4.4, SL.4.1, SL.4.1b, SL.4.1c, SL.4.1d, SL.4.6, RL.4.9, L.4.1, L.4.2, L.4.3

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.**W.5.3, W.5.4, W.5.8, W.5.9, SL.5.1, SL.5.1b, SL.5.1c, SL.5.1d, SL.5.6, RI.5.6, RI.5.7, RL.5.6, L.5.1, L.5.2

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.**RH.6-8.2, RH.6-8.6, RH.6-8.7, RH.6-8.8

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.**W.6.3 (a-e), W.6.4, SL.6.1, SL.6.2, RI.6.7, L.6.1, L.6.2

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.**W.7.3 (a-e), W.7.4, SL.7.1, SL.7.2, L.7.1, L.7.2

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.**W.8.3 (a-e), W.8.4, SL.8.1, SL.8.2, RI.8.7, L.8.1, L.8.2

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.**RH.9-10.6, RH.9-10.9

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.**RH.11-12.6, RH.11-12.7, RH.11-12.9

## Introduction

### About the Exhibition

*Looking East: Western Artists and the Allure of Japan*  
January 31–May 11, 2014

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed an explosion of interest in all things Japanese that prompted a correspondingly radical shift in modern art dubbed *japonisme* by the Parisian critic Philippe Burty in 1872. Some of the greatest American and European artists were inspired by Japanese art and culture during this period to create works of singular beauty.

The Frist Center will be the first museum to present *Looking East: Western Artists and the Allure of Japan*. The exhibition explores the fruitful encounter between East and West by showing Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints and decorative arts alongside the paintings and prints of Mary Cassatt, Edgar Degas, Vincent van Gogh, Claude Monet, Edvard Munch, and the furniture of Frank Lloyd Wright. The exhibition is drawn from the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which has one of the finest collections of both Japanese art and American and European art of this period in the world.

This exhibition was organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



# The Allure of Japanese Culture

In the late 1850s, the Japanese signed trade agreements with **Western nations**, beginning a new era of engagement with the outside world. The ensuing decades witnessed a striking increase in exports as well as a Japanese campaign to shape its image abroad. The art and culture of the island nation suddenly became fashionable in the West and a generation of artists and collectors across Europe and North America embraced the allure of Japan.

## Guiding Questions

1. Why was the opening of Japan significant to Japan and the West?
2. What is *ukiyo*? How was this idea a reflection of Japanese culture during the nineteenth century?
3. What was *japonisme* and how did this movement impact Western art?

## Vocabulary

Western nations  
Edo Period  
Kabuki  
*Ukiyo-e*

## THE OPENING OF JAPAN

After centuries of self-imposed isolation, Japan fully opened to international trade in the late 1850s. Commodore Matthew C. Perry of the United States Navy and a forbidding fleet known as the Black Ships landed in Edo Bay in 1853, forcing the ruling Tokugawa dynasty to abandon a policy that had largely succeeded in preventing foreigners from entering the country for centuries. Following the opening of trade with Japan, many Westerners discovered the island nation through its art and artifacts. By the 1870s, plenty of opportunities for introduction to Japan existed in Europe and the United States, at specialty shops, World's Fairs, and exhibitions, including an impressive and highly influential display at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



*Commodore Matthew C. Perry, 1915. Photograph, 5 x 7 in. Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., LC-DIG-hec-13274*

## Timeline of Commodore Perry's voyages to Japan

In 1853, Perry was sent on a mission by President Millard Fillmore to establish trade with Japan — a country that had been isolated from the outside world since the seventeenth century.

In July of that same year, Perry lead a squadron of four ships into Edo Bay and presented representatives of the Japanese shogun with the text of a proposed commercial and friendship treaty. The Japanese rejected Perry's demands and Perry withdrew.

Perry returned to Japan in February 1854. This time he appears with seven ships - four sailing ships, three steamers – and one thousand, six hundred men.

After a standoff, Perry landed in Edo on March 8, 1854, and began to negotiate with the Japanese to establish a trade agreement.

On March 31, 1854, Perry signed the Treaty of Kanagawa on behalf of the United States, which established "permanent" friendship between the two countries. The signing of this treaty signaled the end of Japanese isolation.

[\(U.S. Navy Museum n.d.\)](#)

## UKIYO: THE FLOATING WORLD

With no foreign invasions or major internal struggles, Japan during the **Edo period** (1615–1868) was relatively peaceful and prosperous. The social changes that began to occur during this time were similar to those that were then occurring in Europe: growing urbanization, the establishment of a cash economy, and, above all, the rise of a middle class. For the first time in Japan, urban merchants and artisans who were not members of the ruling elite, but nevertheless had significant disposable income, became numerous enough to influence social and cultural developments. A world of popular culture grew up to accommodate the newly affluent urban commoners. The term *ukiyo*, which means floating world, originally referred to specific entertainment areas in major cities such as Edo (now Tokyo), Kyoto, and Osaka; its meaning then expanded to include the world of fashionable pleasures in general, including red-light districts, **Kabuki** theater, restaurants and teashops, sumo wrestling matches, visits to scenic parks and temple grounds, imported curiosities, and horticulture. Woodblock printing, which had been known in Japan since at least the eighth century, became a popular medium in this period. A new style of art known as ***ukiyo-e*** developed for these prints and book illustrations, as well as paintings of the fashionable pleasures of the floating world.

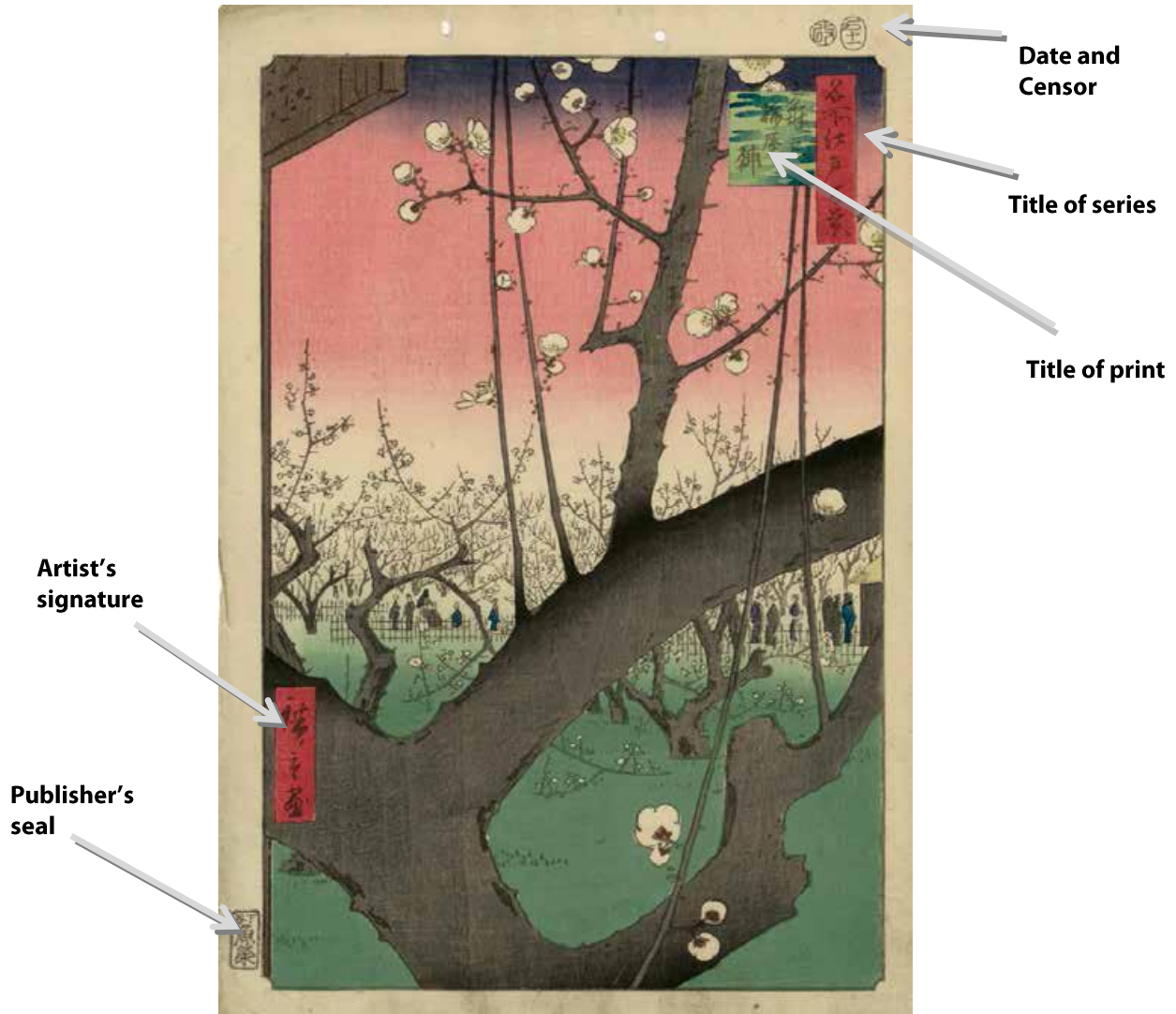
### Characteristics of Ukiyo-e

- limited depth or the appearance of flatness
- emphasis on shapes
- use of outline
- asymmetrical composition
- flat areas of color
- limited or no shading to show depth
- unusual viewpoints
- often a diagonal emphasis in composition
- everyday subject matter



## How to Read a Japanese Woodblock Print

Woodblock printing was at its height in Japan while the *ukiyo-e* style was popular. *Ukiyo-e* prints usually include Japanese characters known as *kanji*, which are read from right to left and top to bottom. This identifies the print and the people involved in its production. Most prints include the title of the series, title of the print, artist's signature, publisher's seal, date, and censor's signature. The censor's role was to examine all printed material on behalf of the government. Only with the censor's approval could the print be published.





Utagawa Hiroshige I. *Plum Estate, Kameido*, from the series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, 1857. Woodblock print. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, 11.45649. Photograph © 2014 MFA, Boston

Utagawa Hiroshige was one of the most celebrated and prolific *ukiyo-e* artists. His series of vertical woodblock prints entitled *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* has ranked among the most recognizable and widely appreciated Japanese prints in the West from the late nineteenth century to the present. The close-up depiction of the flowering plum tree creates an abstract effect across the picture plane in contrast to the park beyond. This sort of play with near and far views, and with the decorative qualities of pictorial elements in landscapes, was unusual to Western eyes at that time. The garden of flowering plum trees at Kameido in Edo (now known as Tokyo), open to the public for a small entrance fee, featured an especially large, old, gnarled tree known as the Sleeping Dragon Plum Tree. In one of the most outstanding examples of Utagawa Hiroshige's compositional technique of extreme foreground close-ups contrasted with distant backgrounds, the rest of the garden is seen through the branches of the tree, with spectators walking along fenced pathways to admire the blossoms. A pink sunset sky sets off the white blossoms.

### A Closer Look: *Plum Estate, Kameido*

- Look at *Plum Estate, Kameido* and describe what you see. What is going on? What stands out to you?
- Refer to the characteristics of *ukiyo-e* listed on page 7. Which characteristics are present in Hiroshige's print?



Find more information about the series of prints entitled *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. Identify and research some of the locations highlighted by the artist. ([Brooklyn Museum n.d.](#))

## JAPONISME

In 1872, French intellectual Philippe Burty coined the term *japonisme* to describe the West's growing interest in Japan, the collecting of Japanese objects, and the exploration of Japanese subject matter and styles in Western art. Artists and collectors were among the first to appreciate the exotic wares arriving in large quantities on Western shores, but the general public soon caught on to the wonders offered by woodblock prints, bronzes, lacquerware, and other unfamiliar objects produced by a culture that had once seemed impossibly remote. These goods soon appeared in Western works of art, reproduced literally as documents of taste and collecting habits, or creatively reimagined as elements of a new style.

Views of Japan also became part of the repertoire of artists who were among the early travelers to visit the country on long voyages of discovery and learning. Their works in turn spread images of Japan to an appreciative audience.



Louis Dumoulin. *Carp Banners in Kyoto (Fête des Garçons)*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 18 1/8 x 21 3/8 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Fanny P. Mason Fund in memory of Alice Thevin, 1986.582. Photograph © 2014 MFA, Boston

Louis Dumoulin's *Carp Banners in Kyoto* is one of a series of paintings inspired by the artist's trips to Asia in 1888 and 1889. The composition is loosely based on a photograph taken by an Italian photographer, Adolfo Farsari, who produced hand-colored photographs for the Western tourist trade. He photographed this site in Kyoto about 1886. His photograph did not include the vivid carp banners, which were traditionally flown in celebration of male children. Dumoulin added the banners to his version of the scene, transforming it into a personal vision of the Japanese site—an amalgam of artistic sources, personal memory, and imagination.

### A Closer Look: *Carp Banners in Kyoto*

- Look carefully at this painting and describe what you see. Why do you think Dumoulin chose to depict this subject? What about it do you think he found intriguing?
- Dumoulin's painting is based on a photograph taken on Shijō Street in Kyoto, Japan around 1886. How did this and other accounts of Japan contribute to the spread of *japonisme* in the West?

## THINKING ABOUT THE ALLURE OF JAPANESE CULTURE

1. How did the opening of Japan benefit both Japan and the West? Where do we still see examples of exchange between both cultures today?
2. *Ukiyo* or “the Floating World” referred to entertainment, fashionable pleasures, and every day events of nineteenth century Japan. Western artists of the time were inspired to depict similar activities in their art. What kinds of entertainment and events would be part of our “floating world” today?
3. What might have been Western citizens’ first impressions of Japan? Would these impressions have been accurate or would they have most likely been incorrect?
4. *Japonisme* was the popularization of all things Japanese. It marked a change in Western views of art and beauty. What are some contemporary examples of fads that have changed the way we see or do things?

## Educator Activity

### Postcards: Pictures and Words

Visual Arts | Language Arts

#### Objectives

Students will make postcards by creating visual representations of places they have visited and communicating their images and experiences through words.

#### Introduction

Imagine Louis Dumoulin's excitement when he visited Japan. He was so inspired that he created a painting to remember his time there and to share his experience with others.

#### Preparation

Think of a place that you have visited before. It can be another country like Japan, or it can be a different American state, city, or neighborhood. How could you share this experience with friends and family back home? With Dumoulin as inspiration, use your memories of this special place to design a postcard that you would send to your loved ones.

#### Activity

On the front of a postcard sized piece of cardstock, draw a picture of the place you visited. On the back write a short message to a friend or family member with descriptive adjectives to give them an idea of what the place was like. What did you see, hear, and smell? Who did you visit? How did you feel when you were there?

#### Conclusion

After students have finished their postcards, separate them into small groups to talk about their chosen locations, and read their postcards. Encourage them to talk about the adjectives they chose to describe their experiences. Have a few students from each group share their postcards with the entire class. You may give them the option of trading their postcards with friends.



## Art Trunk Activity

### Japanese Woodblock Printing

#### Objectives

Participants will learn about *ukiyo-e* and reference *Plum Estate, Kameido* by Utagawa Hiroshige, one of the most well known *ukiyo-e* artists of the time. They will also learn about the techniques used in traditional woodblock printing and complete their own foam version of a woodblock print that emphasizes the traditional reductive process. Layering colors successfully and using the register successfully are key goals.

#### Introduction

*Ukiyo-e* is a type of Japanese art known for depictions of everyday life and interests of the growing middle class from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. *Ukiyo-e* is most often associated with the woodblock prints of the era. After Japan opened its borders, these prints helped fuel the West's curiosity for Japanese art and style, bringing about *japonisme* or an interest in all things Japanese and influencing Western artists in the process.

Using their first initials, students will create prints inspired by traditional Japanese woodblock printing using **reductive carving**.

#### Materials

Precut foam 4 1/2 x 6 inches	Stylus and texture tools
Printing paper 5 1/2 x 7 inches	Masking tape
Speedball Ink	Pencils
Brayers	Sketch paper 4 1/2 x 6 inches
Styrofoam dish	Chipboard

#### Directions

1. Distribute foam, chipboard, pencils, sketch paper, styluses, texture tools, permanent marker, and masking tape. Each participant will receive two pieces of foam and use the marker to label them #1 and #2.
2. Setting up a register: A **register** allows participants to align their foam properly after every print. Instruct each participant to place a piece of chip board on a flat surface and center her/his pieces of foam on the chipboard. They will mark the location of the foam on the chipboard by placing masking tape along the top and on one side of the foam. They should not tape over the foam. These markings will show exactly where to place the foam and paper for each print.

3. Drawing the image: Have participants use a pencil to draw the first letter of their first name on their sketch paper. The letter should be bold and thick like bubble or block lettering. In order for the letter to print correctly, it must be drawn in reverse as it would appear in a mirror.
4. Etching the image: Demonstrate to participants how to **etch** by using a stylus to press and trace over their design. Place the drawing onto foam #1 and use the stylus to trace the drawing so that deep lines appear in the foam. When the paper is removed, there should be an image of the original drawing pressed into the foam. Participants will use a broad, flat, texture tool to press the background so that the letter appears raised.
5. Have participants return to their original letter drawing and add simple patterns in the background, not changing the actual letter in any way.
6. On #2 piece of foam, repeat step 4. This time, place the paper on the foam, and etch the letter and background patterns onto the second piece of foam. Use a broad, flat, texture tool to press the entire letter making an indentation so that the background appears raised.
7. After foam #1 and #2 are completely etched, distribute a dark ink, brayers, ink plate and printing paper to participants.
8. Inking and printing the image: Place a 3/4 inch daub of ink on a Styrofoam dish. Roll the brayer through the ink and spread ink evenly over the #1 foam piece. Align the corner of the foam with the corner of the masking tape register. Place printing paper on top of #1 foam piece pressing firmly with the palm of the hand over the whole paper. Gently peel paper back to reveal image and let it dry before printing #2 foam onto the paper.
9. Using the print from #1 foam, a clean brayer, and a Styrofoam dish, participants will repeat step 8 using the lighter color on #2 foam piece. Remind the class to use the register tape to line up their #2 foam reusing the original printing paper to layer their image.
10. Have participants sign their print on the bottom of paper and allow it to dry.



## Artistic Innovation in a Changing Society

*Japonisme* coincided with increased urbanization in Europe and the United States. Women began to take on more dynamic roles in society, and Western artists responded to Japan in a variety of innovative ways. Many adopted formal qualities that grew into hallmarks of *japonisme*: asymmetry, broad areas of color and pattern, expressive stylized lines, abstraction, and emphasis on the flatness of the picture plane.

### Guiding Questions

1. How did Japanese *ukiyo-e* influence art in the increasingly urbanized West?
2. In what ways did women in the West influence the growth of *japonisme*?
3. How did portrayals of women in Japanese art influence Western artists?

### Vocabulary

Industrial Revolution  
*Ōkubi-e*  
Geisha  
Kimono  
Modernism

### CITY LIFE

Great changes in cities across Europe and the United States set the stage for the cult status Japanese goods achieved in the late nineteenth century. A distinct urban culture emerged during this period, a result of architectural transformation, the **Industrial Revolution**, and the merging of public and private spheres. This electrifying time captivated a generation of artists who were compelled to move away from tradition toward new subjects and styles that matched the character of modern life. They were fascinated by the major category of *ukiyo-e* devoted to depictions of city life and its diversions. Many welcomed the discovery that the Japanese had engaged seriously with subject matter that critics had dismissed as frivolous or superficial. The newness of Japanese art matched the novelty of popular activities such as horseracing and cabarets and the sensations of immediacy, speed, and theatricality they produced. City life not only encouraged interest in Japanese art, it fostered the development of artistic movements that incorporated Japanese elements so thoroughly that they became part and parcel of **Modernism**.



Utagawa Kunisada I. *Actor Onoe Kikujirō II as Takiyasha-hime*, 1862. Woodblock print, 20 3/4 x 16 3/4 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, 11.15480. Photograph © 2014 MFA, Boston

The extreme close-up portraits of actors that had been popular in the 1790s, nicknamed **ōkubi-e** (big head prints), were made illegal in 1800, perhaps because they were so successful in glorifying their subjects even though such people were, according to the Confucian philosophy of the Tokugawa government, at the bottom of the social scale. However, the prohibition was gradually forgotten; and in the 1810s the artist Utagawa Kunisada, a pupil of Utagawa Toyokuni, cautiously revived the big-head format in the modified form of half-length portraits. The sorceress Takiyasha, who used evil magic to continue her late father's rebellion against the Emperor, was the sexy villainess of a Kabuki play based on a bestselling fantasy novel. Costumed in armor and carrying a sword, with long, wild hair, the noted female impersonator Onoe Kikujirō II simultaneously conveys feminine allure, strength, and menace in the role of the magic-wielding warrior princess.

#### A Closer Look: *Actor Onoe Kikujirō II as Takiyasha-hime*

- Look closely at Utagawa Kunisada's portrait. Based only on what you see, what assumptions can be made about the person in this portrait?
- What does the title of this print reveal about this person? Think about people you know today who are in the same profession. Who would be the subject of a portrait like this now?



Vincent van Gogh. *Postman Joseph Roulin*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 32 x 25 3/4 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Robert Treat Paine, 2nd, 35.1982. Photograph © 2014 MFA, Boston


**"My whole work is founded  
on the Japanese."**

**Vincent van Gogh**

The bright colors and stylized forms of Japanese woodblock prints are immediately apparent in the work of Vincent van Gogh, who collected, copied, and even organized an exhibition of *ukiyo-e*. Japan also affected van Gogh on a spiritual level; he thought of it as a kind of utopia where the sun shone brightly and painters worked together in monastic harmony, an environment he aimed to re-create in "the equivalent of Japan, the South" of France. "My whole work is founded on the Japanese," he wrote from Arles, where he befriended the postal worker Joseph Roulin. Van Gogh's painting of Roulin brings to mind the expressive Japanese genre of actor portraits, as well as a host of non-Japanese traditions, including French folk art and caricature. Combining borrowings from a host of cultures was a hallmark of the European avant-garde.

### A Closer Look: *Postman Joseph Roulin*

- Vincent van Gogh was influenced by Japanese portrait prints like *Actor Onoe Kikujirō II as Takiyasha-hime* by Utagawa Kunisada. Compare van Gogh's painting to Kunisada's print. What are the similarities and differences? Describe the Japanese influence that you see in van Gogh's work.
- Van Gogh was inspired by what he imagined Japan to be like. Think of a place you have always wanted to visit. When you imagine this place, what is it like?

 Van Gogh completed several portraits of Joseph Roulin and his family. Research van Gogh's relationship with Roulin and find other portraits of the Roulins painted by the artist. ([Philadelphia Museum of Art 2007](#)) ([The Phillips Collection 2013](#))

## WOMEN

As women assumed more active roles in public life at the turn of the twentieth century, they became important participants in a number of artistic movements, especially *japonisme*. They were collectors in the market for exotic goods, artists inspired by the art and culture of the foreign land, and themselves subjects of numerous works of art. The taste for Japan was associated early on with female consumers who wore imported silks and decorated their homes with curiosities. Paintings of European beauties dressed in **kimonos** were among the first Japan-inspired works of art in the West, starting in the 1860s and 1870s. Many Westerners imagined Japan to be replete with **geisha**, symbolized by *Madames Chrysanthème* and *Butterfly*, the tragic and fictitious heroines of popular novels, plays, and operas. The frequency with which attractive women, or male actors dressed as female beauties, appear in *ukiyo-e* reinforced this stereotype for some Western observers. Others were challenged by the Japanese artists' frank portrayal of the most intimate or everyday activities of their subjects, as well as the glamorous aspects of their existence. Elements borrowed from the Japanese seemed well suited to a variety of ways of depicting woman, ranging from traditional portraiture to avant-garde experiments with unusual subjects and styles.



Kikugawa Eizan. *Otome*, from the series *Eastern Figures Matched with the Tale of Genji*, ca. 1818–23. Woodblock print, 14 3/4 x 9 7/8 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, 11.17766. Photograph © 2014 MFA, Boston

In this series, Kikugawa Eizan used *The Tale of Genji*, the eleventh-century work written by a Japanese woman, Murasaki Shikibu, and considered to be the greatest work of classical Japanese literature, as a device for presenting scenes of modern women. The inset shows playing cards for an educational card-matching game that helped players learn the titles of the 54 chapters of the classic novel and the poems associated with them. The cards show a feathered court dance costume and headdress that feature in Chapter 21, “*Otome*” (“The Maiden”). Matched with this chapter is a charming present-day scene of a woman with a baby, who reaches for a piece of candy that she holds.

### A Closer Look: *Otome*

- Nineteenth-century Japanese art is known for its simplified forms and minimal detail. Observe *Otome* and explain how the artist applied these elements to the print.
- How would a Western artist's portrayal of mother and child have differed from Eizan's portrait?



Eizan's print was one of a series of prints inspired by the Japanese novel, *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu. Go to the electronic book online by referring to the link in the Additional Resources section of this guide. Read Chapter 21 to further understand the context of the print. ([Shikibu, The Tale of Genji 1021](#))



Mary Stevenson Cassatt. *Caresse Maternelle (Maternal Caress)*, ca. 1902. Oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 28 7/8 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Miss Aimée Lamb in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Horatio Appleton Lamb, 1970.252. Photograph © 2014 MFA, Boston

In *Maternal Caress (Caresse Maternelle)*, Mary Cassatt employs the formal devices of Japanese woodblock prints that she first applied to etchings in the early 1890s. The painting may be compared to an image by nineteenth-century artist Kikugawa Eizan, whose woodblock prints often intimately portray the bond between mother and child. She heightens the focus on her subjects by making the couch on which they sit appear to tilt upward, thereby pushing the figures against the picture plane, which is further emphasized by the flat edge of a painting in the upper right corner. The figures' informal pose is reminiscent of Japanese portrayals of women with their children, very often seen embracing, breast-feeding, or bathing, intertwined with more obvious physical affection than had appeared historically in Western art.

### A Closer Look: *Maternal Caress*

- Look at Mary Cassatt's painting and describe what you see. Discuss the similarities between this painting and Kikugawa Eizan's print? How are the two works different?
- Throughout the history of Western art, numerous artworks have portrayed mother and child. Why was Cassatt's depiction of the interaction between mother and child considered unusual in the West at the time it was painted?





Retailed by Takashimaya. *Woman's dressing gown for Western market*, ca. 1900. Silk taffeta, 13 x 118 1/2 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Elizabeth Ann Coleman, 2001.933.2. Photograph © 2014 MFA, Boston

Japanese silk dressing gowns and jackets produced by “native manufacturers” were sold to a Western clientele from the 1860s on, available from the Japanese department store and exporter Takashimaya among other firms. The chrysanthemum was a popular decorative motif on such garments, having come to signify Japan abroad in the later nineteenth century, especially after the publication of Pierre Loti’s popular novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887), one of the sources for Giacomo Puccini’s 1904 opera *Madame Butterfly*. These heartbreaking stories of naval officers enticing young geishas into becoming their temporary “wives,” soon to be deserted upon the return of the officers to the West, appealed greatly to turn of the century audiences.

### A Closer Look: *Women’s Dressing Gown*

- What factors made this and other Japanese manufactured objects so highly sought after by the West?
- Though created for Western consumers, this Japanese manufactured gown features embroidered chrysanthemums and butterflies, two important symbols in Japanese culture. Do you think these symbols had the same meaning for Western audiences?



Research the symbolism of the chrysanthemum and butterfly to find out what they represent in Japanese culture.

## THINKING ABOUT ARTISTIC INNOVATION IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

1. Some Westerners traveled to Japan after it opened, but for most people, such a trip would have been impossible. The majority of people in the West formed ideas about Japan based on fine art, decorative arts, and literature. What does this say about the importance of arts and culture in society?
2. *Japonisme* encouraged artistic innovation as Western artists began to see Japanese images for the first time. How does seeing something new inspire innovation? Why is innovation important?
3. How was Western society changing during the mid- to late nineteenth century? How did this contribute to the *japonisme* trend? Consider the changing role of women, greater cultural exchange, the emergent middle class, and resulting consumer culture.



## Educator Activity

### A Conversation Between Artworks

Language Arts | Social Studies

#### Objectives

Students will observe two portraits representing different cultures and create a dialogue based on observations or research of the cultures and time periods.

#### Introduction

Imagine a meeting between the men in the Vincent van Gogh painting and Utagawa Kunisada print. How might they interact? What would they talk about?

What if the two women in Kikugawa Eizan's and Mary Cassatt's portraits met? How would the experiences of nineteenth-century Japanese women and twentieth-century American women have been different? If these women met, what would they share with one another?

#### Preparation

Research France during the late 1800s when van Gogh completed his painting and investigate the early 1800s in Japan when Kunisada completed his print. Research the professions of each subject and their statuses in society. Carefully observe and compare the two works. Identify similarities and differences.

Observe the prints by Cassatt and Eizan. Research the United States in the 1920s and Japan in the early 1800s. What historical events were taking place? Consider the roles of women in America in the 1920s and in Japan in the early 1800s.

#### Activity

With a partner, create a dialogue between the two men featured in van Gogh's and Kunisada's portraits or the two women in Eizan's and Cassatt's portraits. You may want to base this conversation on research, or solely on your observations and the clues that the works present.

#### Conclusion

Have each group share their dialogues. For fun, have them incorporate props or costumes and do dramatic readings. Have the class discuss their observations and research findings. What issues or historical events come up repeatedly in the students' dialogues?



## Art Trunk Activity

### Kamon: Family Flag

#### Objective

Participants will design their own *mon* and re-create their image into a flag by batiking cloth.

#### Introduction

**Kamon** or **mon** are simple graphic designs which serve as family crests. Kamon are most notably worn on a traditional kimono. These **monochromatic** designs are also seen on flags, doorway curtains or other fashions of the time. These designs often reflect nature but some look like geometric shapes. One popular mon we see in the Western world of today is the Mitsubishi symbol of three diamonds, which actually represents three water chestnuts.

**Batik** is an ancient art in which hot wax is painted in intricate designs on fabric which is then dyed, and the wax removed. Participants will explore batik without the challenge of hot wax or dyes by tracing their design onto their muslin flag with washable glue and blue tempera paint. Once dry the glue is then removed with water leaving a white outline of the mon design and blue stained fabric.

#### Materials

One 12 x12 inch piece of muslin	Eraser
Washable gel glue	Masking tape
12 x12 inch design template	Blue tempera paint
Pencil	Paint brushes

#### Directions

1. Refer to Utagawa Kunisada's print *Actor Onoe Kikujirō II as Takiyasha-hime*. Point out the patterns on the actor's kimono. These simple patterns are similar to *mon*.
2. Using the design template and the pencils and eraser, participants draw their *mon* on the template.
3. Tape top of final design template on back of muslin and trace design lightly with glue. Let dry.
4. Once glue is dry, pass out paintbrushes and blue tempera paint and cover entire flag with blue paint. Let them dry.

5. Once paint and glue are completely dry, soak piece in warm water for 30 seconds. Rinse cloth carefully under warm water to peel away softened glue to reveal design. Some paint will discolor the water leaving a softer blue on the cloth than the original paint.
6. Do not squeeze or wring the water out of the cloth. Simply blot it with a paper towel and hang dry.
7. Finally, if you have an iron available you may iron out any wrinkles that may have developed in the process.

[\(Japan National Tourism Organization 2000\)](#)

[\(Dick Blick Art Materials 2007\)](#)

## Nature and Landscape

Landscapes and elements of nature significantly influenced Western artists who were drawn to Japan's fresh approach to natural forms.

### Guiding Questions

1. Why did Western artists find such inspiration in Japanese nature motifs?
2. How did Japan's emphasis on nature impact the design and manufacture of decorative objects in and for the Western market?
3. How did Japanese landscape painting and printmaking influence Western artists?

### Vocabulary

Motif

Decorative arts

*Aizuri-e*

Michel-Eugène Chevreul

## NATURE

Natural **motifs** and styles inspired by Japanese art are hallmarks of several major Western artistic movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is especially true for the **decorative arts** as well as printmaking, poster design, and photography, all of which previously had been considered minor or commercial in comparison with painting and sculpture, but which drew increasingly serious attention at the turn of the twentieth century. Critics imagined Japanese artists and designers to be universally dedicated to the appreciation of flora and fauna and urged their contemporaries to similarly devote their efforts. "The art of Japan leads us to return to nature" was a sentiment shared by numerous writers. A wide variety of organic forms appeared in the Japanese bronzes, ceramics, lacquers, prints, and silks that saturated the Western market in the late nineteenth century. These were especially welcomed by the artists and collectors who valued the revitalization of the domestic interior and incorporated natural references into skillfully designed rooms. Their commitment to the highest level of creativity in all media, whether fine or decorative, found parallels in Japanese culture. Siegfried Bing, one of the great promoters of Japanese art, commented that "Nature" is the Japanese artist's "soul, his revered teacher, and her precepts form the inexhaustible source of his inspiration."



Katsukawa Shunkō II (Shunsen). *Butterfly and Peonies*, Edo period, ca. 1830. Woodblock print, 8 3/4 x 6 1/8 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Porter Sargent, 49.1276. Photograph © 2014 MFA, Boston

Prints done entirely, or primarily, in shades of blue were enormously popular in the early 1830s, when the imported, synthetic color known as Prussian Blue became common enough to be used in prints. Made in Europe and brought to Japan by both Dutch and Chinese traders, it was far more resistant to fading than the blue pigments used previously. With the introduction of the new pigment, two genres that had previously been minor subjects within *ukiyo-e*—landscapes and nature studies—now became major genres. Peonies and butterflies were a favorite combination in Chinese painting, and so the choice of this subject for an **aizuri-e** (blue print) would have seemed appropriately exotic to the Japanese.

#### A Closer Look: *Butterfly and Peonies*

- How does this print illustrate a mutual cultural exchange between Japan and the West?
- Prussian Blue ink was considered exotic to the Japanese, just as prints like *Butterfly and Peonies* were exotic to the West. What is so alluring about the “exotic”?



Marked by Frederick Elkington. Made by Elkington & Co. *Tea Service*, 1874–75. Silver, gilded silver. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Mrs. Frederick T. Bradbury, by exchange, 1991.541. Photograph © 2014 MFA, Boston

The British silver manufacturer Elkington & Co. borrowed motifs and patterns from Japanese art, akin to those found in *Butterfly and Peonies* by Katsukawa Shunkō, to lend an exotic flavor to an otherwise typically Western Victorian tea set. Tea drinking had long been associated with Japan and China, but by about 1875, when this tea set was manufactured, the practice had also been well established in the West, becoming a quintessentially British tradition with an expected group of accoutrements. The bamboo shoots, butterflies, flowers, and floral medallions provide delightfully idiosyncratic surface ornamentation and grant a natural sensibility to what is actually a fine example of cutting-edge technology in the decorative arts. The set was created with an industrial technique called electroplating that had been patented by the firm's founder, Frederick Elkington. Though this tea set is largely machine-made, its fine imagery and workmanship still manage to cater to the taste for handcrafted, unique objects that also fed the period's mania for all things Japanese.

### A Closer Look: *Tea Set*

- Look closely at this British manufactured tea set and identify the Japanese nature motifs.
- Through Japanese art, Westerners were presented with new ideas of beauty. Japan's focus on the natural world and on the simplification of décor was much different from the West's emphasis on the ornate. Where do you see Japanese and Western ideas of beauty in this tea set?

## LANDSCAPE

Japanese approaches to color, perspective, and light in the depiction of landscapes offered compelling possibilities to Western artists already enamored of the country's sensitivity to nature and its ever-changing beauty. Many painters discovered Japanese art around the same time that they became aware of the new science of color, especially the theories of nineteenth-century chemist **Michel-Eugène Chevreul** (1786–1889), and increasingly questioned the Western landscape tradition. Some observers remarked that the bright colors of *ukiyo-e* prints made them feel as though veils had been lifted from their eyes. Instead of using shadows to create convincing three-dimensional forms, the Japanese employed contrasts in color, the repetition of shapes, and a focus on essential features to animate views of such iconic sites as Mount Fuji. A number of these pictorial devices became part of the Western repertoire. Western artists were drawn, for example, to the atmospheric effects featured in *ukiyo-e* prints, concentrating on the ephemeral nature of the seasons and times of day. Other Japanese motifs that became essential elements of the new Western styles were the repeated trees, trellises, and grid-like structures that offered a way of organizing landscapes. The overhead perspective known as a bird's-eye view also came into favor.



Utagawa Hiroshige I. *Yokkaichi: Mie River*, from the series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road*, also known as the *First Tōkaidō* or *Great Tōkaidō*, ca. 1833–34. Woodblock print, 9 15/16 x 14 9/16 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, 11.30171. Photograph © 2014 MFA, Boston

Following on the success of Katsushika Hokusai's bestselling series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, the second great landscape series of the early 1830s was Utagawa Hiroshige's *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō*, depicting the towns that were official rest stops on the main highway between Edo and Kyoto. Hiroshige had made the trip himself during the summer, but he showed the various stations at assorted times of the year. In one of the most humorous scenes in the series, travelers brave a high wind to cross the bridge over the Mie River just outside the town of Yokkaichi. The town is located beside Ise Bay, and the masts of fishing boats can be seen in the distance. To the right, a traveler holds his raincoat around him with one hand while leaning on his walking stick with the other. To the left, a less cautious pedestrian chases his hat, which has blown off his head and is rolling away. The windblown branches of the tree, as well as the garments of the travelers, clearly indicate the wind that blows across the picture.

### A Closer Look: *Yokkaichi: Mie River*

- This print is a depiction of one of fifty-three locations highlighted by the artist during his travels. The entire series takes the viewer on a tour of the artist's route and his various stops. If you could create a series of images of locations across a state, region, or the entire United States, what would those locations be? Why?



Further investigate Hiroshige's series, *Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō*. ([The Woodblock Prints of Ando Hiroshige 2000](#))





Claude Monet. *Seacoast at Trouville*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 23 7/8 x 32 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, The John Pickering Lyman Collection—Gift of Miss Theodora Lyman, 19.1314. Photograph © 2014 MFA, Boston

Claude Monet occasionally based his work on *ukiyo-e* from his large collection. It was his unusual approach to color and composition that struck his contemporaries as Japanese. In paintings like *Seacoast at Trouville*, Monet moved away from the use of perspective and shading, established Western tools for the organization of convincing representation. He blocked the expected vanishing point of his composition with an expressive tree and emphasized bands of vibrant color to activate the surface of the canvas, while reinforcing its overall integrity. Monet learned these lessons from masters of *ukiyo-e*, including Utagawa Hiroshige.

### A Closer Look: *Seacoast at Trouville*

- Monet was inspired by Hiroshige's *Yokkaichi: Mie River*. How is Monet's *Seacoast at Trouville* similar to Hiroshige's print?
- Look at *Seacoast at Trouville* from a distance and identify the colors he used. Get closer to the image. What colors do you see now? Look at the painting from a distance once more. What happens to these colors when we see them all together from a distance?

**"If you insist on forcing me into an affiliation with anyone else . . . then compare me with the old Japanese masters; their exquisite taste has always delighted me, and I like the suggestive quality of their aesthetic, which evokes presence by a shadow and the whole by the part."**

**Claude Monet**

## THINKING ABOUT LANDSCAPE AND NATURE

1. The West found inspiration through Japan's emphasis on natural elements. Why were Japanese nature motifs so appealing to Western artists and consumers?
2. How are *japonisme*-era Western landscapes different from earlier European and American landscapes by artists like John Constable or Thomas Cole?

## Educator Activities

### Nature Haiku

#### Language Arts

#### Objectives

Students will analyze their surroundings and use descriptive words and sensory language to write their own haiku.

#### Introduction

Haiku are short poems that typically describe a single moment in time, and are often inspired by nature. Many haiku include sensory words that refer to sight, hearing, touch, taste, or smell. Haiku was originally developed in Japan, but has been adopted by poets all over the world.

Haiku are composed of simple language and a 5-7-5 format meaning that the first and third lines have five syllables, and the second line has seven.

Matsuo Bashō was the most famous poet of Japan's Edo period. During his lifetime, Bashō was recognized for his works and even now he is considered one of the great all-time masters of haiku. Here is one of his haiku:

Clouds now and again  
give a soul some respite from  
moon-gazing—behold.

#### Preparation

Go outdoors and observe natural elements such as the sky, trees, grass, dirt, etc. Think about what aspects of nature appeal to your senses of touch, hearing, sight, and smell. What do you see taking place? Are your surroundings calm or active?

#### Activity

Write a response to your experience outdoors in the form of haiku. Try to capture what is happening at a given moment. Remember to keep in mind the 5-7-5 format.

#### Conclusion

Have students share their haiku with classmates. You may have the class visually interpret each other's haiku by exchanging them and creating drawings inspired by one another's poems.

## A World of Color

Science | Visual Art

### Objectives

Students will observe artists' landscapes, especially focusing on depictions of the sky in each work. They will connect these works to scientific concepts relating to atmospheric effects.

### Introduction

Some of the Japanese and Western artists featured in this exhibition repeatedly painted or printed the same landscapes, but did so to reflect atmospheric effects at different times of day and during changing weather conditions.

### Preparation

Before beginning the activity, consider the following questions and discuss them with your class:

#### *Why is the sky blue on a clear day?*

Light energy travels in waves. The white light of the Sun is actually made up of light waves of the colors of the rainbow. Light waves of different colors travel at different lengths. For instance, blue light waves are shorter than red light waves.

As sunlight reaches Earth's atmosphere, gases and particles in the air cause the light to scatter in all directions. Blue travels as shorter waves and, therefore, scatters more than other colors. This is why we see a blue sky most of the time.

#### *Why does the sky look orange or red during a sunset?*

As the Sun sets, its light has to pass through more of the atmosphere to reach us. Even more blue light scatters, allowing the reds and yellows to pass through to your eyes.

### Activity

Observe the sky throughout the day. Pay attention to its colors and location of the sun, moon, and clouds at different times. Use crayons, pastels, or colored pencils to recreate the colors of the sky in the morning, afternoon, and evening. It may be necessary to blend or layer several colors to get the desired effect.

### Conclusion

Have students share their drawings and talk about their observations. Talk about atmospheric effects and what makes the sky change. You may also have your students research and identify different types of clouds, or learn about John Tyndall and the Tyndall effect, the scattering of light by particles.



## Art Trunk Activity

### Painting with *Sumi-e* and Watercolor

#### Objective

Participants will gain an understanding of the art of looking at nature through the painting style of **sumi-e** and watercolor and comparing the observations of both Japanese and Western artists.

#### Materials

Bamboo brushes  
Sumi ink  
Sketch paper  
Watercolor paints

Water cups  
9 x 12 inch sumi-e paper  
*Japanese Ink Painting: The Art of Sumi-e* by Naomi Okamoto

#### Directions

1. Share the images by Utagawa Hiroshige and Claude Monet. What is happening in the two images? How they different? How are they the same? Look at the date when each work was created. Is it possible one artist may have influenced the other? If so, who?
2. Divide participants into two groups: The first group will focus on the Hiroshige print and the second will focus on Monet's painting. For one minute have each group look at their assigned image. For another minute have participants close their eyes and picture the same image in their minds.
3. Briefly discuss what they remembered or saw. Ask the participants if they have ever experienced something like this painting before? What was that experience like for them?
4. Pass out bamboo brushes, sketch paper, sumi-e paper, and water (no ink).
5. Demonstrate how to hold the bamboo brush, gripping the brush with the thumb and index finger while the rest of the hand remains open, like holding a tomato behind the brush. Refer to *Japanese Ink Painting: The Art of Sumi-e* by Naomi Okamoto included in the Art Trunk for details.
6. Using the bamboo brush, water, and sumi-e paper, participants will draw their images from memory by brushing water onto paper. They should observe how the paper absorbs the water and be careful not to over saturate the paper.
7. Set the sumi-e paper aside to dry. Pass out ink and have participants practice painting lines of various thicknesses on sketch paper.

8. Display the two images to each group once more and have the groups look at the lines and shapes in their images for 2 minutes.
9. Using the same sumi-e paper, have participants use ink and brush to re-create what they remember seeing. Tip: dilute the ink with water to get various shades or **values** of gray and black, which will add depth to the drawing.
10. Once the ink drawing is complete, have participants look at their assigned image once more to observe the colors in the image. Have participants choose three watercolors to add to their sumi-e.
11. On the same paper, have participants clean their bamboo brushes and add their three watercolors to the **composition**. Again, use the water to dilute the colors into various values.
12. Once complete, ask participants about the experience of looking:
  - Did looking and closing your eyes to imagine the image help or hinder the process of painting?
  - Did using water to first record what they remember make it easier to paint?
  - How did looking at lines and shapes help with painting with ink?
  - What colors did you choose from the watercolor?
  - How did you decide which three colors to use?

[\(Asian Art Museum 2012\)](#)

(Okamaoto 1996)

## Glossary

**Aizuri-e:** (ī-zu-ree-ā) Japanese prints made entirely or primarily with blue ink.

**Batik:** A method of dyeing cloth which involves the use of removable wax to repel the dye on parts of the design where dye is not desired.

**Composition:** The placement of elements within a work of art.

**Decorative arts:** A broad term for such art forms as ceramics, enamels, furniture, glass, metalwork, and textiles, especially when they take forms used as interior decoration.

**Edo Period:** (ěd'ō) Also called the Tokugawa period, (1603–1867), the final period of traditional Japan, a time of internal peace, political stability, and economic growth under military dictatorship.

**Etch:** To cut marks into a surface.

**Geisha:** (gā'shə) One of a class of professional women in Japan trained from girlhood in conversation, dancing, and singing in order to entertain professional or social gatherings of men.

**Industrial Revolution:** A rapid change in an economy (as in the United States in the nineteenth century) marked by the general introduction of power-driven machinery

**Kabuki:** (kə'bu-ki) A popular drama of Japan characterized by elaborate costuming, stylized acting, and the performance of all roles by male actors.

**Kamon:** (kə-mōn) A Japanese emblem or crest designed to represent a family. Also known as mon.

**Kimono:** (kə-mō-nō) a long, loose robe with wide sleeves and tied with a sash, originally worn as a formal garment in Japan and now also used elsewhere as a robe.

**Michel-Eugène Chevreul:** French chemist whose theories of color influenced the techniques of French painting.

**Modernism:** An art movement characterized by the deliberate departure from tradition and the use of innovative forms of expression that distinguish many styles in the arts and literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

**Monochromatic:** A painting, drawing, or print in one color, including that color's tints and shades.

**Motif:** A consistent or recurrent conceptual element, usually a figure or design. In a decorative pattern, a motif is the central element in a work, or it is repeated as a theme.

**Ōkubi-e:** (o-koo-bē-ā) A print or painting showing only the head or the head and upper torso, often associated with kabuki actors. Ōkubi-e portraits were banned in Japan for a short time.

**Register:** Correct alignment or position with respect to an object or marking.

**Sumi-e:** (soomē-ā) Japanese black ink painting.

**Ukiyo-e:** (ü-kē-ō-ā) A school of Japanese art that flourished from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century depicting the everyday life and interests of the growing middle class.

**Value:** The lightness (tint) or darkness (shade) of a color. In painting, the value of a color changes as white or black is added to that color.

**Western nations:** Countries in the Western Hemisphere which includes Europe and the Americas.



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# LOOKING EAST

Western Artists and the  
Allure of Japan

January 31–May 11, 2014

This exhibition was organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



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