

## *Edo Avant Garde*

### **Worldviews: How did Japanese Buddhism and Shintoism influence Edo era art?**

#### **CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**

##### **ELEMENTARY LESSON**

In this lesson, students will learn how art is sometimes created as a representation of greater spirits or the power of gods. By exploring several primary source quotes, they will discover how **Shintō** (also spelled **Shinto**, 神道, pronounced: “SHIN-toe”) and Buddhist beliefs and values influenced the artists of the **Edo** period (江戸, 1615-1868 CE, pronounced: “eh-DOUGH”).

##### **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

- What motivates an artist to create art?
- How do the elements of nature in a work of art represent Shintō or Buddhist spirits?
- In what ways is the concept of impermanence represented in Edo art?

##### **ACTIVITIES:**

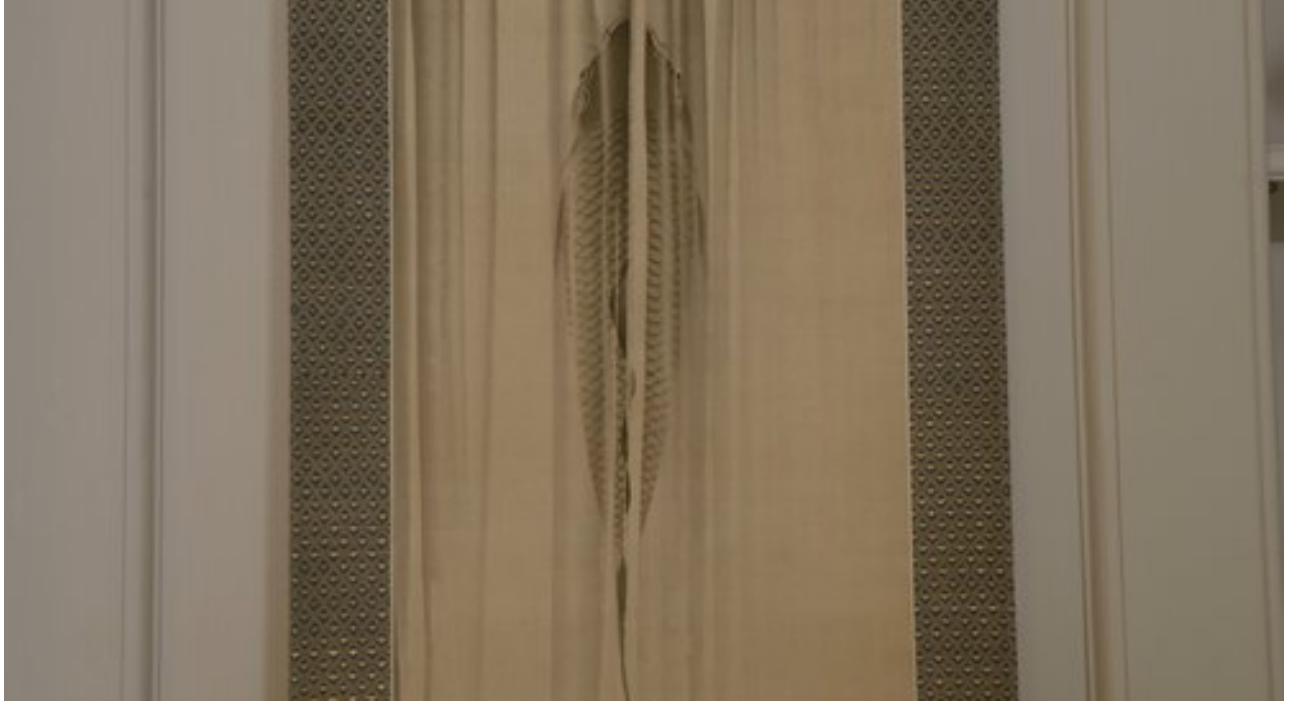
1. Students should begin by watching *Edo Avant Garde* starting at 15:30 through 17:31 in order to explore the work of **Itō Jakuchū** (伊藤若冲, 1716-1800 CE, pronounced: “ee-TOE | JAH-ku-chew”). Discuss with students what they see in the images presented in the film. Based on this visual evidence, what do they believe is the motivation for Jakuchū’s work?
  - Some of the reasons why artists paint can be to express personal beliefs, as a commission for a patron, in the hopes of eventually selling the work for profit, or just for pleasure and personal satisfaction.
    - Read the following quote (or summarize this quote for younger students) from Buddhist priest **Miita Myōkyū** (pronounced: “MEE-tah | MEYOH-cue”) from the transcript of the film director’s interview 13:35: “Their art is a manifestation of those artists’ spirits, which cannot be articulated in words. Their profoundly mysterious worlds. A world for which there are no words, which cannot be articulated. But they wanted to somehow reveal it.” What kind of world does Jakuchū reveal in his works?
    - Ask students to describe why they make art. What worlds are they trying to express or create? Who is the market for their work? How does that affect what they make and how they make it?
2. Explore the ways in which works of art relate to Buddhist and Shintō beliefs.
  - Read the following transcript excerpts from an interview with Buddhist priest, **Kanda Tatsuya** (pronounced: “KAHN-dah | TAT-sue-yah”): “Trees and water and everything in nature, Shintō believes they are all inhabited by gods. Buddhism believes that everything in nature has a spirit. The words may be different but the belief that humans sense a presence throughout nature, in that sense they are fundamentally the same.”

- Examine the following four works in order to compare and contrast some of the ways in which artists can interpret the spirit of a carp. How do the styles of painting differ? How do the points of view from which the artists are showing the carp differ?

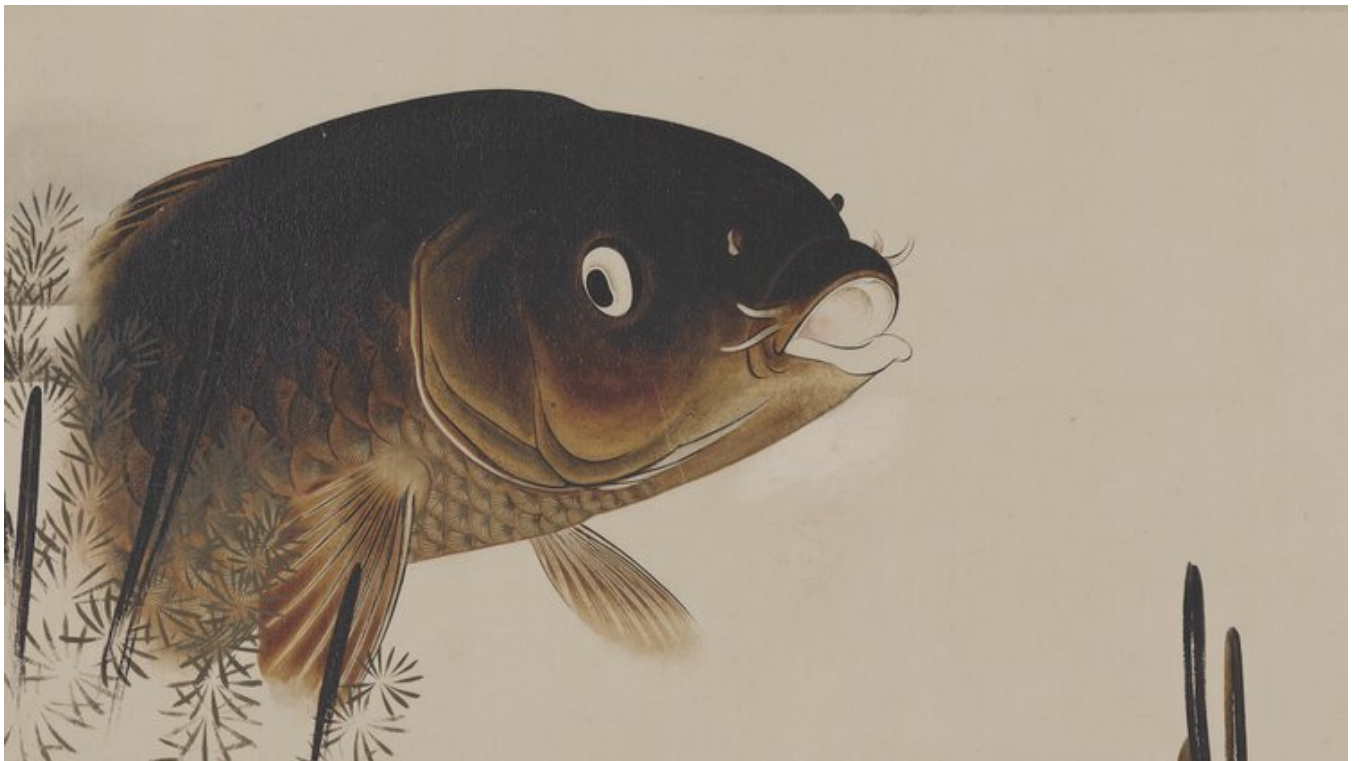


**Ogata Kōrin** (尾形光琳, 1658-1716 CE, pronounced: “OH-GAH-tah | KOH-REEN”)

*Sage Riding Fish* (late 1600s)



**Maruyama Ōkyo** (円山応挙, 1733-1795 CE, pronounced: “ma-RUH-YAH-MA | OH-kyoh”)  
*Carp* (late 1700s)



**Shibata Zeshin** (柴田是真, 1807-1891 CE, pronounced: “SHE-bah-tah | ZEH-sheen”)  
*Carp* (late 1800s)



Ōkyo  
*Carp Breaking Ice* (late 1700s)

- Ask students to describe the different ideas being portrayed by the artists. How might they describe the “spirit” of each of these fish?
  - Ask students to describe how they have seen items from nature such as trees and water shown in another artwork, storybook, or even a cartoon.
  - Students can write a short description of how they have seen nature being illustrated and then exchange that description with a classmate who can draw the object as it was described by their classmate.
  - You may want to share the story *Grass Sandals: The Travels of Bashō* (芭蕉, pronounced: “bah-SHOW”) by Dawnine Spivak for inspiration.
3. Watch the film segment 26:53 - 28:41.
- What qualities can water express? In what ways can it be good? In what ways can it be bad? Consider the following quote from Buddhist priest Kanda Tatsuya as you discuss these ideas:
    - “Shintō is the belief that the natural world, the trees and water and all of nature are all inhabited by gods. That there are eight million gods in this world, that there are so many gods and that we show respect and gratitude to all of them. For instance, in the case of water, it produces crops, but it is also responsible for disasters like typhoons, so people are both grateful and fearful and it contains both elements so, how do you say this, it governs both. The gods are responsible for the good and the bad, so we pray to lessen the burdens.”

- If possible, use the following children’s book as a way of talking about natural disasters: *The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota’s Garden* (pronounced: “HE-row-tah”) by Heather Smith (2019 Freeman Book Award winner). Ask students to think about the ways in which water brought about both bad (the **tsunami**, 津波, pronounced: “tsu-NAH-mee”) and good (the flowers in the garden) in this story.
  - Experiment with the elements of art to explore connections with the principles of design by creating a work of art using water with the traditional Japanese marbling technique of *suminagashi* (墨流し, pronounced: “sue-ME-nah-gah-she”). There are many video tutorials online, including the following: <https://suminagashi.com/simple-suminagashi/>
    - Instead of using the inks shown in this video, you can use black *sumi* ink (墨, pronounced: “sue-ME”) and a surfactant mixture of ⅓ cup of water and three drops of liquid dish soap. Alternate touching the surface of the water with a brush dipped in the ink and a brush dipped in the surfactant to create the ring effects.
    - Students can use the end of a piece of yarn for dipping into the ink and another piece for dipping into the surfactant instead of using a paintbrush.
    - In order to make quality rings of ink on the water, students should make sure not to puncture the surface of the water with their brush or yarn or else the ink will sink to the bottom.
4. Connect ideas, stories and personal experiences to works of art by taking a look at other excerpts from the interview with Buddhist priest Kanda Tatsuya:
- “Trees and water and everything in nature, Shintō believes they are all inhabited by gods. Buddhism believes that everything in nature has a spirit. The words may be different but the belief that humans sense a presence throughout nature, in that sense they are fundamentally the same.”
  - Using one of the following examples, ask students to take on the role of the tree to observe and describe the people who walk by the screen as it stands on display in the museum from the tree’s point of view:



Unsigned  
*Willow Bridge* (late 1500s)  
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art



**Kanō Sansetsu** (狩野山雪, 1589-1651 CE, pronounced: “kah-NO | SAHN-set-sue”)

*Old Plum* (1646)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art



**Ogata Kenzan** (尾形乾山, 1663-1743 CE, pronounced: “OH-GAH-tah | KEN-zahn”)

*Plum Trees and Hollyhocks* (mid-1700s)

Minneapolis Institute of Arts



**Sakai Hōitsu** (酒井抱一, 1761-1828 CE, pronounced: “SAH-kai | HOH-eet-sue”)

*Paulownia and Chrysanthemum* (early 1800s)

Cleveland Museum of Art

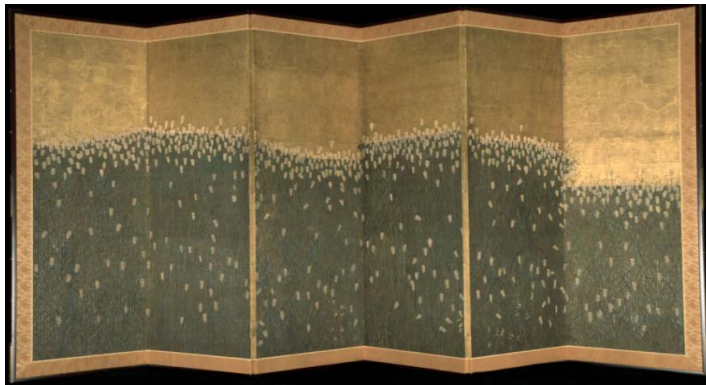
5. Using the Introductory Essay for Module 2 and the example of a snowflake, explain the concept of impermanence. Although the artworks in the film are several hundred years old, some of the objects represented on the screens and scrolls would only survive in nature for a brief time.
- Divide the class into groups, giving each group one of the works below for some close-looking. Using works shown below and clues from their titles, ask students to try to identify those objects represented by the artists that might be seasonal. How might they change over time? Which objects would most likely have disappeared years ago? What object might still be seen in Japan today?



**Kanō Shigenobu** (狩野重信, Early 17th Century, pronounced: “kah-NO | she-GAY-NO-boo”)

*Bamboo and Poppies* (1600s)

Seattle Art Museum



Unsigned

*Barley Field* (early 1600s)

Minneapolis Institute of Arts



Studio of **Sōtatsu** (宗達派, pronounced: “SOH-that-sue”)  
*Boats on the Sea* (1700s)  
Minneapolis Institute of Arts



Unsigned  
*View of Amanohashidate* (天橋立, pronounced: “ah-MA-NO-ha-she-dah-tay”)  
(1600-1625)





Unsigned  
*Bamboo and Moonlight* (early 1500s)



Unsigned  
*Mt. Yoshino, Cherry Trees in Bloom* (1550s) (吉野, pronounced: “yoh-SHE-no”)

- Thinking like an artist, challenge students to explain how each of these screens expresses the idea that objects which last for only a short time should be appreciated. How does the artist show his appreciation for those items which are impermanent?
  - Extend this concept by asking students to write a short reflection of the ways in which they show an appreciation and respect for their own environment. Then have students create a postcard-sized drawing of something they respect or something they do to show respect for an object from nature which is impermanent.

For Freeman Book Awards, please go to the National Consortium for Teaching About Asia website at: <http://nctasia.org>

**Angie Stokes** is the art teacher at Wayne Trace Junior/Senior High School in Haviland, Ohio. She received her undergraduate degree in art and history at the University of St. Francis and her Master’s in Teaching from Chatham University. She spent five years with Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh before

returning to the classroom where she has spent 15 years teaching courses in social studies and art for grades 1 through 12. She currently enjoys teaching her AP Art History, East Asian Art History, and a variety of studio courses along with working with the Freeman Foundation's National Consortium for Teaching About Asia as one of their NextGen Teacher Leaders.

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