

Edo Avant Garde

Introducing the Edo era: Why did Japanese artists create so much innovative art? Part I

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS HIGH SCHOOL LESSON 2

Japanese folding screens were not intended to be viewed as flat despite the way in which many museums display these works. Students will consider the role of the viewer in **Edo** period (江戸, 1615-1868 CE, pronounced: “eh-DOUGH”) art by comparing various Japanese screens from this period to works of art that follow the European model of perspective as well as contemporary works that defy that tradition.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- What conditions, attitudes, and behaviors support creativity & innovative thinking?
- What is the role of the viewer in a work of art?
- How does knowing and using visual art vocabularies help us understand and interpret works of art?
- How do images influence our view of the world?

ACTIVITIES:

1. Using the images listed below, ask students to determine where the viewer is in relationship to the subject of the work. This may be done through class discussion or asking students to write their responses and share. From this discussion and additional examples as needed, students should be able to identify and define linear perspective, atmospheric perspective, vanishing point, foreground, background and “bird’s eye view.” Students should also be able to explain that in the case of *Trees* as well as in *Tar Beach*, the artist is leading the viewer’s eye to many places in the work simultaneously through the use of multiple vantage points. *Tar Beach*, Masaccio’s famous fresco and the *Tale of Genji* (源氏, pronounced: “GEHN-jee”) also exemplify a simultaneous or non-linear narrative.
 - *Flowering Plants of Summer and Autumn* - **Sakai Hōitsu** (酒井抱一, 1761-1828 CE, pronounced: “SAH-kai | HOH-eet-sue”)
 - *The Last Supper* – Leonardo da Vinci
 - *The Tribute Money*, Brancacci Chapel - Masaccio
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/early-renaissance1/painting-in-florence/v/masaccio-the-tribute-money-1427>
 - *Woman on a Bridge #1 of 5: Tar Beach* – Faith Ringgold
<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/faith-ringgold>
 - *Tale of Genji* – Unsigned
If time permits, the film offers an excellent discussion of “bird’s eye view” and uses art from European Masters to contrast with *Tale of Genji* screen among other works of art (30.40 to 33.40).

- *Reflection with Two Children (Self-Portrait)* – Lucian Freud
<https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/freud-lucian/reflection-two-children-self-portrait>
 - *Red Plum White Plum* - **Ogata Kōrin** (尾形光琳, 1658-1716 CE, pronounced: “OH-GAH-tah | KOH-REEN”)
 - *Trees* - Studio of **Tawaraya Sōtatsu** (俵屋宗達, d. 1643, pronounced: “ta-WAH-RAH-yah | SOH-taht-sue”)
<https://vimeo.com/289562859>
While the brief video clip of Sōtatsu’s *Trees* is being shown/discussed, explain that James Ulak, the Senior Curator of Japanese Art at the Freer Gallery of Art—who students will “meet” shortly—feels that this work provides viewers “one of the most incredible perspectives in a Japanese screen.” Ask students to consider this statement and explain what the viewer’s perspective should be. This could be done as a class, in smaller groups, or by writing a response independently.
2. This discussion readies students to watch and extend their understanding by viewing film segment 3:03 to 13:20. As appropriate, the instructor should pause the video at points to ask questions, have students take notes, or to point out details. Another layer of understanding can be addressed by considering the comments made by Hollis Goodall, Curator of Japanese Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, in this segment. She notes that “the things that we consider in the West to be so important - logic, space, layout ... understanding things in a sort of linear fashion, [Japanese artists] did not consider important. What was more important was the elegance and the rhythm and the space and the beauty of the layout.” Students could be asked to reflect on this statement and consider the mood of the works that they are looking at in the film as well as the teacher provided examples.
 3. Students are now ready to apply this knowledge in the creation of their own work and will be able to clearly establish the role of the viewer in their work. There are numerous approaches to be considered:
 - Subject matter could emulate the examples shown, focusing on nature and animals, approached in a hyper-realistic or very abstracted style. Students could also create a non-linear or simultaneous narrative of an event or memory.
 - Smaller pieces of paper can be folded or accordion folded to be used for preparatory sketches or considered as the final product depending upon available time and resources.
 - Working independently or collaboratively, students will create a large-scale screen on poster board or otherwise thick paper that can be somewhat self-supporting.
 - A collaborative project could occur with the Industrial Arts department to create a wooden framework from which to hang segments of the screen created by a single student or group using paper or fabric.
 - Found objects and non-traditional materials could be used in the creation of the work depending upon the scale and the strength of the base material.

- In a virtual setting, or to integrate technology, students could take photos with their cellphones to illustrate comprehension of foreground, background, etc. From those examples, students could create a collection of images of a single subject from a variety of vantage points (lying next to the object, climbing on a ladder, etc.).
- A collaborative project with a biology teacher could provide students with microscopic images of animals, and those could be used as patterns or imagery within the work from the molecular level to seeing the animal realistically.
- Considering one's point of view is applicable in many settings outside the art room and these materials could be modified for use with literature in an English class, or by instructors who work with students in an English as a Second Language course and could also be applicable if the school offers a social/emotional component to learning.

Kachina Leigh is an artist and educator who teaches studio art and art history at Muhlenberg High School in Reading, Pennsylvania. She earned her undergraduate degree in English literature, French, and art history at Albright College and holds an MA from Temple University in art history, where she focused on 19th century French artists. She recently completed her MFA at the University of the Arts. Kachina has spent over 20 years at Muhlenberg and is part of a team-taught course called Global Studies in which she, a music teacher, English teacher, and social studies teacher work collaboratively to introduce students to cultures around the globe. She has written about lessons for journals such as *Art & Activities*. Her work with the Freeman Foundation's National Consortium for Teaching About Asia has led to numerous educational opportunities for her and her students, as well as the privilege of writing for *Education About Asia*. Kachina completed her NCTA seminar work in 2009 and traveled to Japan as part of a study tour in 2010. Kachina teaches AP Art History as well as AP studio and maintains an independent studio at the GoggleWorks Center for the Arts in Reading, Pennsylvania where she focuses on teaching advanced textile techniques. Her work can be seen at www.kachinaleigh.com.

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