

Edo Avant Garde

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

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

ELEMENTARY LESSON

In this lesson, students will explore the concept of creativity through an investigation of the development of new artistic techniques in a variety of works from the **Edo** period (江戸, 1615-1868 CE, pronounced: “eh-DOUGH”).

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- What is creativity and what factors may impact its development?
- How might religious beliefs/worldviews impact the creation of art?
- How does one paint using *tarashikomi* (溜込, pronounced: “ta-RAH-SHE-koh-me”) and *mokkotsu* (没骨, pronounced: “moh-COAT-sue”), two techniques that we see used in Japanese paintings of the Edo period?

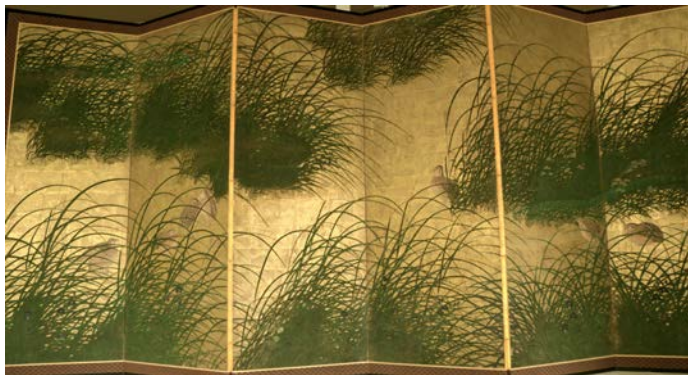
ACTIVITIES:

1. Explore the concept of “creativity” by asking students what is meant by this term and by describing the factors that impact its development.
 - Ask students to provide examples of the ways in which they express their own creativity.
 - How might current events and/or life experience impact creativity? Provide several examples.
 - How does science impact creativity? How has our knowledge of items such as plants and animals grown since the development of the microscope and x-rays?
2. Investigate the idea that one must know something about an object in order to be able to work with it. How much does one need to know in order to write or draw or paint something?
 - Explore the concept of textures in nature through a hands-on investigation. Provide several examples of plants, flowers, rocks, bark, and leaves for students to first examine visually, then through touch, and finally through the creation of texture rubbings made by placing the objects under a sheet of paper and coloring over the top of the paper with crayons. Watch video segment 58:22-59:05 to see how the artist has translated 3D space into 2D space.
 - After students have completed several texture rubbings, you could give students one longer sheet of white or light pastel construction paper (6” x 18” would be ideal) to create a series of rubbings which can then be folded, accordion style, to create a mini-screen.

- Students could also cut out several of their rubbings and work on arranging a composition that creates a sense of movement through a work of art.
- Examine the following examples for inspiration:



Studio of **Sōtatsu** (宗達派, pronounced: “SOH-taht-sue”)
Trees (1600-1630)
 Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian



Unsigned
Quail and Autumn Grasses (1590-1600)
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Studio of **Sōtatsu**
Summer and Autumn Flowers (1600s)
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Sakai Hōitsu (酒井抱一, 1761-1828 CE, pronounced: “SAH-kai | HOH-eet-sue”)
Wisteria, Lotus and Maple (early 1800s)
MOA Museum of Art

- Discuss the ways in which artists are inspired to create work. How does an artist’s work reflect their knowledge, experience, beliefs, and values?
 - View film segment: 26:50-28:41
 - How do these works show the artist and their understanding of the world around them?



Nagasawa Rosetsu (長沢芦雪, 1754-1799, pronounced: “nah-GAH-SAH-wah | ROW-set-sue”)
Nachi Waterfall (那智滝, pronounced: “NAH-chee”)
Asian Art Museum



Yamazaki Joryū (also read Ryūjo; 山崎龍女, 1716-1736 CE, pronounced: “yah-MA-zah-key | JOE-ryou”)

Crane and Pine in a Rainstorm

The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Unsigned

*Illustrated Legends of the **Kitano Tenjin Shrine*** (北野天神縁起絵巻, pronounced: “key-TAH-no | ten-jean”)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

- How do we show our respect for nature and our world?
- Children’s books to use as resources:
 - *Moth and Wasp, Soil and Ocean: Remembering Chinese Scientist **Pu Zhelong’s*** (pronounced: “poo | JER-long”) *Work for Sustainable Farming* by Sigrid Schmalzer (2018 Freeman Book Award Winner)
 - *The Phone Booth in Mr. **Hirota’s*** (pronounced: “HE-row-tah”) *Garden* by Heather Smith (2019 Freeman Book Award Winner)
- Two of the leading artistic groups of the Edo period were the **Kano** (狩野派, also written Kanō, pronounced: “kah-NO”) and **Rinpa** (also written Rimpa, 琳派, pronounced: “RIN-pah”) schools.

- The academic Kano school predated the Edo period, and was patronized primarily by the military elites, but also to some extent by the imperial court and wealthy merchants. Painters working in this bold style were known for skilled productions in both color and monochrome ink that reflected a high degree of training in copying the works of previous Kano masters. Chinese precedents played a major role in the subjects and styles for which the Kano were known. With an emphasis on formal training lasting at least ten years and the ability for teams of painters to work together on large group projects, the Kano school was the official academic school of the Edo period.
- The Rinpa “school” wasn’t an organized school but rather a group of Edo period artists who expressed interest in Japanese literature and art from the **Heian** period (平安, 794-1185 CE, pronounced: “HEY-yawn”), and took inspiration from the Rinpa artists who preceded them from the 17th century on. The Rinpa school can best be described as a style of making art rather than a physical group of artists participating in some sort of formalized training. Works of this school typically show bold colors and innovative designs, intricate patterns, and a strong use of gold and silver while producing works in a variety of media from scroll and screen paintings to lacquerware and ceramics.
- What might studying the art of former painters provide when it comes to the development of this knowledge and experience?
- Additional resource: https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rinp/hd_rinp.htm

3. Continue by investigating two techniques which helped to make Edo art so unique: *tarashikomi* and *mokkotsu*.

- *Tarashikomi*: A painting technique in which pale black ink (*sumi*, 墨, pronounced: “sue-ME”) or a color (including gold or silver) is brushed onto an area of a painting, and then either darker *sumi* or the same or a contrasting color is dropped into the first before it has completely dried, creating an effect of pooled colors with softly blurred edges.

Source: <http://www.aisf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/t/tarashikomi.htm>

- Compare the ways in which the following artists used this technique:
 - **Maruyama Ōkyo’s** (円山応挙, 1733-1795 CE, pronounced: “ma-RUH-YAH-MA | OH-kyoh”) *Sudden Rain Over a River Village*, film segment 20:04-21:00
 - Sōtatsu’s *Dragon and Clouds*, film segment 51:30-53:00
 - Sakai Hōitsu’s *The Ivy Way through Mt. Utsu* (宇津の山, pronounced: “UUT-sue”), film segment 59:07 - 1:00:17
- Modern demonstration of painting techniques: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wX8yRYGzSi8>
- *Mokkotsu*: boneless. A painting technique in which objects are rendered without using an outline. It is considered one of two primary painting techniques, the other being *kōroku* (鉤勒, pronounced: “KOH-ROW-ku”), a technique that defines an object by the use of a thin outline, then adding color.

Source: <http://www.aisf.or.jp/~jaanus/deta/m/mokkotsu.htm>

- Using the following works by **Ogata Kōrin** (尾形光琳, 1658-1716 CE, pronounced: “OH-GAH-tah | KOH-REEN”), identify examples of each technique:



Ogata Kōrin
Sage Riding Fish
The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Ogata Kōrin
Landscape
Seattle Art Museum

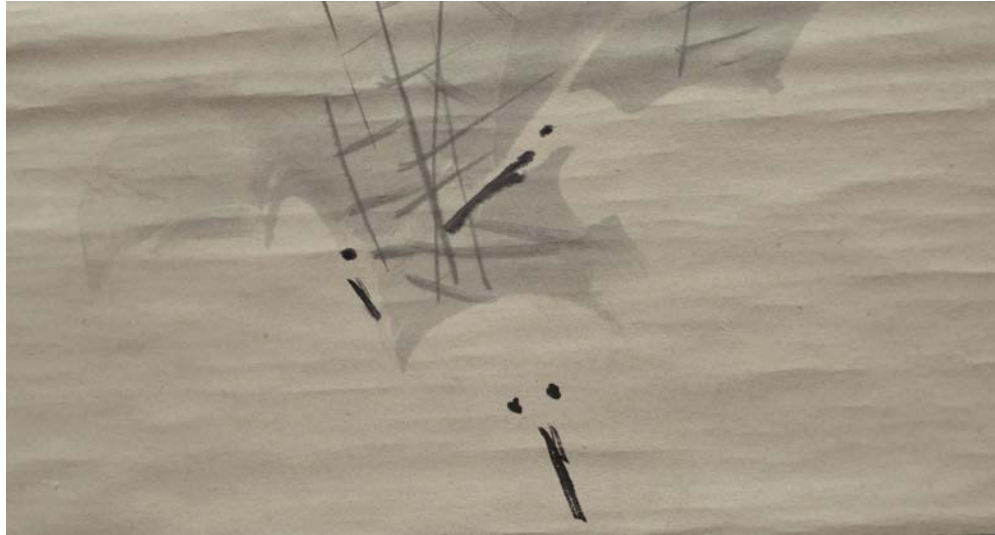


Ogata Kōrin
Red Plum, White Plum
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

4. Complete this lesson by allowing students to create their own creative work of art based on the photograph of a plant or animal. You may also ask students to bring in objects for observation such as fruits, vegetables, leaves, or sticks. Use *The Turnip* by **Itō Jakuchū** (伊藤若冲, 1716-1800 CE, pronounced: “ee-TOE | JAH-ku-chew”) as one example of closely examining and observing the object before painting.
 - Have students work from an image of the plant or animal that they are planning to paint. Give students time to look at and investigate both the shapes of the object and the space surrounding the object. Have students imagine how the composition of their object will fill the space of their blank paper before giving students the brushes and ink to paint. Use the following examples to discuss composition and the use of space:



Unsigned
Crows
Seattle Art Museum



Maruyama Ōkyo

Herons

The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Soga Shōhaku (曾我蕭白, 1730-1800 CE, pronounced: “so-GAH | SHOW-HA-ku”)

The Horse

Los Angeles County Museum of Art



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

Carp

The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Itō Jakuchū

The Turnip

- Provide students with round tip paint brushes, ink, and paper. For a more traditional approach, use bamboo brushes, permanent *sumi* ink made from vegetable soot [better to use the liquid ink that is washable rather than permanent], and the more absorbent *sumi-e* (墨絵, pronounced: “sue-ME-eh”) *hanshi* paper (半紙, pronounced: “HAHN-she”). Encourage students to use the techniques of *tarashikomi*, *mokkotsu*, and/or *kōroku* to paint their works.

- Make signing the work optional. Instead, have students write a description of their artwork or a poem for critique and see if their classmates can match the work of art to the description. Encourage students to consider the feeling or mood of the work they painted, using examples of personification in their writing.
- Finished paintings could be displayed independently or in a series of connected works resembling a scroll or screen.

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.

(2020; updated 2022)