

Edo Avant Garde

Why do Ōkyo's puppies look so cute?
The significance of Edo period artists observing nature to create art.
Module 3

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS ELEMENTARY LESSON IDEAS

In this lesson, students will discover that, through careful observation and attention to detail, artists are able to create extremely realistic illustrations of plants and animals while also using their own style and different techniques in order to add some personality to their creations.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- How do the animals native to Japan compare to those we see in our own communities?
- How can an artist use his/her tools in order to create a certain mood or feeling in a work of art?
- How can I use my vocabulary to more accurately describe and differentiate between works of art?

ACTIVITIES:

1. Watch film segment 20:03-24:25 as an introduction to *shasei* (写生, working from life; sketching from nature, pronounced: "shah-SAY"). Following this viewing, ask students to explain why they believe the artwork of **Maruyama Ōkyo** (円山応挙, 1733-1795 CE, pronounced: "ma-RUH-YAH-MA | OH-kyoh") was so popular in the late eighteenth century. Why did wealthy merchants want to own an artwork created by this painter?
 - The type of realism seen in Ōkyo's works was taught to him by his *sensei* (teacher, 先生, pronounced: "SEN-say") **Ishida Yūtei** (石田幽汀, 1721-1786 CE, pronounced: "ee-SHE-dah | YOU-tay"). Examine the following two screens, the first by the teacher and the second by the student. In what ways are they similar and in what ways are they different? Zoom in and look closely at the way in which these two artists painted the feathers of their birds. (A high-resolution image of each screen can be found at the film's website under "List of Artists and Works.") How do these two styles compare?



Ishida Yūtei
Cranes (late 1700s)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Maruyama Ōkyo
Goose and Reeds (1774)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

2. Remind students that these artists were working before the invention of the camera. What were some of the challenges faced by Ōkyo and Yūtei as they drew birds years before the development of photography? How do you think that these artists overcame such challenges?
 - Check out the video footage of the Japanese Giant Salamander at the Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington D.C: <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/news/new-zoo-japanese-giant-salamander>
 - Challenge students to try and draw the salamander based on the short video shown on the website. Ask them what factors made it difficult to accurately draw it (answers may include that students could not see the entire body at once, the movement of the arms and tail, the rough texture and blended colors, etc.).
 - Investigate some of the animals represented in the works featured in the film (chickens, cranes, herons, swans, carp, monkeys, tigers, puppies, etc.) or another animal that is native to Japan by virtually visiting the **Nogeyama** Zoo (野毛山動物園, pronounced: “no-GEE-yah-mah”) in Japan: <http://www.hama-midorinokyokai.or.jp/zoo/nogeyama/animal/>
 - Ask students to carefully observe the animal they selected, creating a descriptive list of characteristics based on the elements of art and principles of design. What colors, types of line, shapes, textures, patterns, and areas of variety, emphasis, or symmetry can they identify in their animal?
 - Model this activity for the class using the Japanese *tanuki* (raccoon-dog, 狸 pronounced: “TAH-new-key”) as an example: <http://www.hama-midorinokyokai.or.jp/zoo/nogeyama/animal/nogeyama/nogeyama37/> After collaboratively creating a list of characteristics, create a line drawing of the animal (this can be simple since it is a quick example) and demonstrate how you would like students to label the drawing using features from their list (for example: “Oval Eyes” or “Symmetrical Ears” with a line drawn from the description written on the side of the drawing to the specific point shown in the illustration.)
 - After students have selected their animals and created lists of descriptive terms, have them draw and label their animal. Make sure that students

create a title for their work based on the animal's name, either in English, Japanese, or using the scientific name.

3. Watch film segment 39:37 - 45:03 featuring the unsigned work, *Crows*, from the early 1600s and a variety of works by **Soga Shōhaku** (曾我蕭白, 1730-1800 CE, pronounced: “so-GAH | SHOW-HA-ku”). Use the following activities to investigate and compare the following two works from that video segment.



Unsigned
Crows (early 1600s)
Seattle Art Museum



Soga Shōhaku
The Heron
Private Collection

- What elements of art were used by these two artists to create balance? (color, space, etc.)
- Look closely at the negative space located between the crows on the unsigned screen. What happens when you stare at this gold for an extended period of time? Do you think the artist would have achieved the same effect if he had left the space white instead?
- How would you describe the different types of brushstrokes used by these two artists? What kind of mood or atmosphere do the artists create in these works through the use of different painting techniques?
 - How does Shōhaku use his brushstrokes to “capture the soul” of the bird?
 - If you had to pick a song to go along with each of these paintings, what songs (or types of music) would you select and why?
- Since the artists did not include any detail in their works about the natural environments of these birds, if you were creating an environment in which one of these two birds could live, what would it look like? What do you think the ideal home for a crow or a heron would be and why?
 - Have students follow up with some research into the natural environments of these birds to see what parts of their descriptions were accurate and where they were incorrect.

4. Encourage students to investigate their own natural environment by bringing in a small object that they pick up outside of their home. This may be a stick, rock, leaf, flower, etc. but should not be larger than their own hand (no boulders) and no small creatures (please leave the spiders at home).

- Demonstrate to students how they can make a texture rubbing of the object, placing the object under a piece of paper and making a rubbing using the side of an unwrapped

crayon. Have students use different colors or overlap the rubbings to create interesting patterns.

- Read an excerpt from the Japanese poet **Kamo no Chōmei** (鴨長明, 1155-1216 CE, pronounced: “kah-MOH | no | choh-may”):

*We pick buds and shrubs
And gather bulbs and herbs.
Or go to the fields
At the foot of the hill
And gather fallen ears of rice
And make different shapes.*

Source: *Hōjōki: Visions of a Torn World*¹

Use this poem to inspire students for the following round-robin drawing activity.

- Divide students into small groups of three or four students each. Have them take the objects they have brought in and arrange them to make different shapes. Ask students to space themselves out evenly around the objects (if four students, have them make a square around the objects, if a group of three, ask them to form a triangle) and sit down to create a drawing of the collective group of nature items. After two minutes of drawing, have them rotate spots and try drawing the group of objects from another viewpoint. Continue this until each student has a chance to draw from each of the three or four locations.
- Debrief this round-robin drawing activity by asking students to evaluate their drawings and decide which is the most accurate. Why might that one be the most accurate—was it the last one drawn when the students had been observing the group for a while? Was it the drawing that featured the object used for the rubbing activity? Ask what students learned by drawing from observation at different viewpoints.

5. Now challenge students to see how well they can use their close observation skills to differentiate between various types of plants. Before class, make a copy of the works of art shown below, and cut out each folding screen so that all of the pictures can be individually placed inside one envelope. Provide students with a master sheet PDF that shows each screen with its title and any other descriptive words that help to identify the plants seen on the screen. You may also provide students with the PDF that shows photographs of the various types of plants and trees seen in these screens (this pdf accompanies this document in this module).

- Familiarize the students with the ten screens and explain that these works represent a variety of painters of the **Edo** period (江戸, 1615-1868 CE, pronounced: “eh-DOUGH”). You may wish to provide students with a link that shows each work up close or give them a PDF with all images or other kinds of printouts which include the artist, title, and date. Ask students to describe what they notice about these works of art.
- Carefully take out the picture of one of the folding screens from the envelope you prepared prior to class so that no one sees which screen you are holding in your hand. Using the format of the game “20 Questions,” ask students to figure out which screen you are viewing by having them take turns asking a series of questions which can be answered by either a “Yes” or a “No” response. Students are not allowed to ask questions regarding the name of the artist or the title, but they may ask questions such as “Does the

screen include images of bamboo?” When they believe they have the right answer, have them identify the work using the complete title.

- As you continue to play rounds, you may eliminate other questions in order to make it more challenging, such as asking if the screen includes a specific color like red.
- You may want to establish a specific order for asking questions, such as going by row so that students each get a turn asking a question and so that they are encouraged to pay attention to the questions previously asked so as not to waste a question.
- Following the game, debrief by asking students to write down a summary of what they observed in the screens and how their perception of these screens changed as the game progressed. Were there items they noticed that made each screen unique? What were some of those items? Were there similarities which made it difficult to differentiate between the screens? If so, what were those similarities?



Studio of **Tawaraya Sōtatsu** (宗達派)
pronounced: “ta-WAH-RAH-yah |
SOH-taht-sue”
Trees (1600-1630)
National Museum of Asian Art



Studio of Tawaraya Sōtatsu,
Summer and Autumn Flowers (1600s)
National Museum of Asian Art



Watanabe Shikō (渡辺始興, 1683-1755,
pronounced: “wah-TAH-NAH-bay | SHE-koh”),
Iris (1700s)
Cleveland Museum of Art



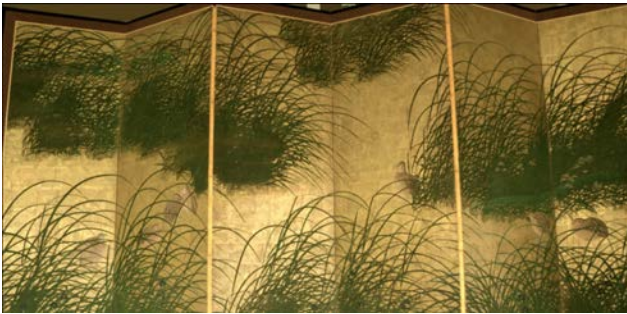
Sakai Hōitsu (酒井抱一, 1761-1828 CE,
pronounced: “SAH-kai | HOH-eet-sue”).
Flowering Plants of Summer and Autumn
(1822)
Tokyo National Museum



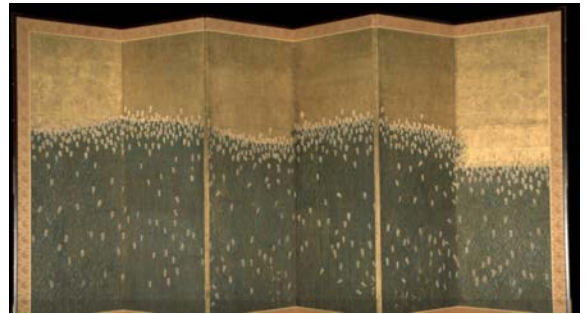
Ogata Kenzan (尾形乾山, 1663-1743 CE, pronounced: “OH-GAH-tah | KEN-zahn”),
Plum Trees and Hollyhocks (2)
Minneapolis Institute of Art



Kanō Shigenobu (狩野重信, Early 17th Century, pronounced: “kah-NO | she-GAY-NO-boo”)
Bamboo and Poppies
Seattle Art Museum



Unsigned
Quail and Autumn Grasses (1590-1600)
Los Angeles County Museum of Art



Unsigned
Barley Field (early 1600s)
Minnesota Institute of Art



Unsigned
Cockscomb (1600)
(Museum page unavailable)



Unsigned
Cockscomb, Maize and Morning Glories (1600s)
National Museum of Asian Art

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¹ *Hōjōki: Visions of a Torn World*, translated by Yasuhiko Moriguchi and David Jenkins (Berkeley, CA: Stonebridge Press, 1996).