

Introduction to Japan

Objective: I built an instructional unit based on the over-arching goals of art education (e.g. students will understand the roles and functions of artist and works of art in cultures, time, and place; and to make a valid connection of art, other subject areas in the curriculum, and everyday life.) My primary goal was to teach children to understand and employ techniques and information from the field of art as they explore the world through broad and rich learning experiences. Following this experience I developed a unit for my students that focus on the Japanese culture, society, significant historical art as well as modern Japanese artists.

Materials:

Power Point presentation

Computer with overhead projector.

Artifact from Japan to share with the students. (kimono, obi, woodblock prints, Japanese yen, theater mask, pottery, toys etc.)

Activities and materials to cover: I developed a unit for my students to engage them in a learning experience focusing on the Japanese culture, society, and significant historical or traditional art.

The unit covered Japan's geography as students learned that the country consist of four major islands and nearly 4,000 smaller ones, as they are part of the "Ring of Fire". They explored other landmarks such as Mt. Fuji, Lake Biwa and the river Shinano-gawa. Students were introduced to the word *Nippon* that means "the land of the rising sun". They learned about traditional Japanese homes and what a *tatami* (a thick mat made of rice straw) is. They studied traditional Japanese education and dress such as the beautiful *kimonos* with the *obi* sashes and *tabi* ankle socks. They experienced some wonderful Japanese foods. The students learned about the art of a tea ceremony and understand that this important tradition in Japan focusing on friendship, good manners, and nature, which are three things, that are highly valued in Japan.

Students were introduced to various days of celebration in Japan such as Children's' Day on May 5th, Girl's Day on March 3rd and New Years Eve. We discussed some of the Japanese interest such as the Japanese art of *bonsai*, the popular sport of *sumo wrestling* and *puure booru* or baseball. During this unit students were also introduced to three traditional Japanese theaters: *Noh Theater*, *Bunraku Theater*, and *Kabuki Theater*. Throughout the unit students also had the opportunity to hear different Japanese tales such as "*Urashima the Fisherman*" which ends on a somber note for the hero of the story.

All of this knowledge they gained from understanding the Japanese culture as it contribute to their analyses of Japanese art. For example our art museum here in Toledo, Ohio own some beautiful *Satsuma Ceremonial Tea-bowls*. By studying the significant of the Japanese ceremony, students understood why a potter will spend hours to painstakingly create these intricately detailed bowls. As students viewed the bright, colorful Japanese prints, they relate their knowledge of Japanese architecture and traditional dress to what is illustrated in the asymmetrical compositions. As we discussed the artist Katsuka Hokusai, and view his drawings and prints, students had a better connection with his art as they recognize one of his most famous series of prints of Mount Fugiyama.

Name in Japanese Characters/Sumi-e Calligraphy

Objective:

Students will study the beautiful Sumi-e calligraphy and ink paintings of Japan. After practicing the proper techniques and strokes the students will create their name in Japanese characters surrounded by a decorative boarder on rice paper. Finally, each student will create a personalized Kaman or family crest rubber stamp to sign his or her painting.

Materials:

Images of Japanese Characters, Handout of characters sounds for students to figure out their name, student access to the internet to double check proper way of spelling their name using Japanese characters, calligraphy sets for each student, rice paper cut for practice, 12”X18” rice paper for final project, watercolor paint for backgrounds, colored permanent markers for border designs.

Resources:

- *What is Shodo/Japanese Brush Calligraphy*,
<http://www.jinjapan.org/kidsweb/virtual/shodo/what-is.html>
- *Japanese Writing*, “Hands On Culture of Japan”, Kate O’Halloran; Weston Publishers 1997 “Brush Writing- Calligraphy Techniques for Beginners” by Ryokushu Kuieko
- *Sumi-e Basics Japanese Ink Painting (suiboku-ga) style*, “Sumi-e” by Ukai Uchiyama

Procedure:

(Prior to starting this lesson students will be introduce to the Japanese culture.)

Begin by discussing with the students the different types of calligraphy characters used mainly in Japan. Discuss the Japanese education system and how students learn these forms of characters over the course of their education. Demonstrate the proper setup and techniques for creating the strokes for Sumi-e basic strokes. Next have students practice these techniques and brush strokes on practice rice paper.

Using the wet on wet technique, students are to select a warm or cold color scheme and paint carefully the 12X18 rice paper to give it a *suminagashi* (*paper marbling*) look or style. Allow these to dry.

Students are to use the handout and the Internet to determine the proper characters used to form their first or last names. Once they practiced their names they are to properly brush their names down the center of a 12”X18” rice paper that they previously did a watercolor wash on.

The border of their paper is to reflect their personality in someway with repeated patterns and designs using colored permanent markers.

The following lesson students are to design a Kaman or family crest on a rubber eraser to be used to sign their Name painting.

Japanese Calligraphy

Background Information:

The Japanese often use a special handwriting called calligraphy (Kuh-LIG-ruh-fee). The writing is so beautiful it is considered art. Calligraphers often make writing of famous poems or songs. The shape of the writing might show the mood of the word. In Japan, people go to calligraphy exhibits, just as people might go to a show of other types of art.

The Chinese first created this kind of calligraphy more than 3000 years ago. The Japanese adopted calligraphy later, after seeing Chinese calligraphy on Buddhist scriptures.

Calligraphers study for many years to learn their art. They draw with black ink and special brushes. They often use quick drying paper. If calligraphers make mistakes, they cannot be corrected. Artists have to be very skill to get it right the first time.

Calligraphers form the letters with lines, dots, slanting strokes and hooks. To make a more beautiful picture, artist might make some letters different sizes or they might draw the same letter in different ways.

SHODO: Japanese Brush Calligraphy

These days most Japanese use pencils, ballpoints, or felt-tip pens to write letters and other documents. But the art of *Shodo* (calligraphy), where an ink-dipped brush is used artistically to create Chinese *Kanji* and Japanese *Kana* characters, remains a traditional part of Japan's culture. Works of calligraphy are admired for the accurate composition of the characters, of course, but also for the way the brush was handled in their creation, the shading of the ink, and the balanced placement of the characters on the paper.

Beginning in elementary school, students learn the basic of calligraphy in penmanship classes. At the beginning of each calendar year the children gather to take part in an activity known as *Kakizome*, where they create calligraphic works symbolizing their wishes for the new year. Students practice their penmanship to improve their calligraphy, sometimes copying outworks by famous calligraphers from the past. Some elementary and secondary students even go to a special school to learn the art, attend classes in the evening and on the weekends to become able to write beautiful characters.

The art of *Shodo* originated in China and came to Japan in the sixth or seventh century, along with methods for making brushes, ink, and paper. In those days, calligraphy was an essential part of the education of the ruling noble families. But as time went by the art spread among the common people as well. Now a days calligraphy is not just an art form to be admired; people use it to write New Years Eve cards, and in other situations in their daily lives.

Different types of calligraphy include *kaisho* or "square style", where the strokes in the characters are precisely drawn in a printed manner, *gyosho*, or "semi cursive", which is written faster and more loosely, and *sosho*, or "cursive", is much freer, more fluid method where the character stokes can bend and curve. A wide variety of paper can

also be used for *shodo*, in one kind of calligraphy called *chirashi-gaki*, for example, a traditional 31-syllable Japanese poem (called *waka*) is written on a square piece of paper. The writers can begin the lines of the poem at different levels on the paper to portray the rhythm of the verse, or write in darker or lighter shades of ink to give the sense of depth to the words, making the work look almost like a landscape painting.

The Origin of Characters

Calligraphy is a graphic art, which uses characters as a means of expression. With this in mind, consider the origin of the characters. It is impossible to date when the characters first made their first appearance in China. However, judging from the artifacts taken from archaeological site, scientific test have proven that they existed to least 3,500 years ago. It can therefore be implied that characters got their start before then. *Kanji*, Chinese characters, are complexly different from their Western phonetic counterparts in that they combine the elements of shape, sound, and meaning. The picture element of *Kanji*, which gives characters their meaning, have made them complex. Because of this, characters have been justifiably called pictographs. It would, however, be more nature to think of the characters having their origin in numerals. Characters arose out of mankind's need for them and, though the economy may have been limited at the time, and there may have been currency, trade was occurring. It would have been difficult to draw a picture of fifty sheep. And, considering an age when writing was done on bones and wood, it is likely that the characters got their start as numbers and simple instructions. The perfect solution would be to write down a number and character of what was being traded. In any event it would be logical to think of pictographs and instructional as being developed at the same time. Once our ancestors noticed that the language could be symbolized many characters were created through the combining of symbols. These have come to be called pictographs and ideographs. If you are interested in this research, I recommend *Setsumonkaiji* by *Kyoshin*.

Information obtained from <http://www.jinjapan.org/kidweb/virtual/shodo/what-is.html>
<http://www.Meitokai.com/lec.htm>

A Calligraphy Set Consists of:

- **Bunchin:** Metal stick to weight down the paper during writing.
- **Fude:** Brush. There is a large brush for writing the main characters and a smaller one for writing the artist name. The small one can be used for writing characters too. Depending on the project, very large brushes are sometimes used.
- **Fudemaki:** A special mat made of bamboo slates used for carrying and storage of brushes.
- **Fudemakura:** Brush pillow. A resting place for brush/brushes when not being used during a shodo session.
- **Hanshi:** Special, calligraphy paper.
- **Shitajiki:** A soft, felt mat, usually black or green in color. It provides a comfortable soft surface.
- **Sumi:** Solid black material that must be rubbed in water in the *suzuri* (stone) to produce the black ink which is used for writing. Of course, "instant ink" in bottles is also available.

- **Suzuri:** Heavy black stone used for grinding/holding the ink.

Printmaking

Background: The first people to think about printing on paper were the Chinese, who incidentally, were also the first people to make true paper. Paper was invented, according to legend, in A.D. 105. The combination of this invention with the older tradition of relief carving made possible the easy and inexpensive reproduction of images and text, which was as revolutionary in those days as the computer has been in our time.

The Chinese used printing on paper as a vehicle for spreading the teaching of Buddhism in the form of standard texts called sutras. Because paper deteriorates rapidly, we don't know exactly when the first Chinese prints on paper were made. The oldest existing example is the 17-foot long *Diamond Sutra*, printed in A.D. 868, and discovered in 1907 in the walled up Cave of the Thousand Buddhas in Western China.

Scholars who have analyzed early Chinese woodcuts tell us that text and images were carved on one block of wood. The block was then painted with a water-based ink, and the paper was pressed against the block and rubbed to pick up the impression.

The *Diamond Sutra's* design is anything but primitive. It is clear from its confident, sophisticated imagery and style of calligraphy that it was done years after many similar, preceding works. (prints on paper deteriorate from weather, insects, and sunlight as well as acids in the paper, and we can assume that the first relief prints on paper are long gone.) We can also assume that the *Diamond Sutra*, safe from the elements in its cave, is a representative of a long tradition that began sometime after A.D. 107.

19th-Century Japanese Woodcuts

Imagine unpacking a shipping crate and finding cups and saucers wrapped, not in old newspaper, but in astonishingly beautiful woodcut prints, completely different from any prints you had seen before. This was the experience of many Europeans at the end of the 19th century. The prints were a popular art form in Japan, and were so commonplace and plentiful there that many people used them as packing material in the same way that we use the Sunday Comics.

Japanese woodcut printing had an early history similar to relief printing in Europe. Printmaking was not considered an art form but rather, a medium for reproduction. Most prints were made to spread religious ideas. But around 1660, a group of Japanese artists revolted against tradition and began producing prints that dealt with the transience of everyday life. These prints were called *ukiyo-e*, meaning "pictures of the transient world of everyday life" or "the pageant of passing life" They were different from earlier prints not only in subject matter but also in point of view, composition, treatment of space, interest in flat areas of color, and use of patterns. There were many fine *ukiyo-e* artist, such as Hiroshige and Hokusai and their works are still considered masterpieces today.

Ukiyo-e had great popular appeal. Their subject matter ranged from famous warriors and actors to domestic scenes and landscapes, and all with a focus on the ephemeral nature of everyday life. Because of the great demand for these prints, production was streamlined. Generally, the master painted the design with brush and ink on a thin piece of paper. From there the artisans pasted the design down on a woodblock and carved away the surface of the block from all areas except the lines painted by the artist. Prints were taken from this key block, and they were marked up to show different

color areas. Other artisans glued these marked prints to blocks and carved away all but what was needed to print the colors. Once all the blocks were carved, they were quickly printed with different colors of ink mixed with rice paste. The entire process was done very quickly, much like today's newspaper production.

It took at least a century for *ukiyo-e* prints to reach the western world and two centuries before they were widely known in Europe. Many people know doubt first saw them in packages of China imports from Japan. A few appreciated the refinement and delicacy of the prints and began to collect them. In 1867, the Paris Exposition Universelle showed a great number of *ukiyo-e* prints, and the prints began to have enormous influence on the European artwork, especially the French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters.

•Diehn, Gwen; *Simple Printmaking*, Lark Books 1943

Ukiyo-e Printmaking

Objective:

- Identify major Ukiyo-e artist and the themes and characteristics of their work.
- Describe aspects of Japanese art and culture
- Create an edition of a reduction print of something Japanese.
- Research the topic and write a description of what is in the print.

Materials:

Paper
Pencils
Colored Pencils
Transfer Paper
E-Z Cut Blocks
Linoleum cutters
Brayers
Printing press or wooden spoons
Block printing ink
Plexi-glass palettes

Instructional Resources

Postcards of Ukiyo-e prints
Actual Ukiyo-e prints from Japan
Video- *Japanese Prints: The Floating World*. Double Diamond Corporation.
Art & Man, February 1989 Vol. 19 No 4. *Japanese Prints: Special Features on Hokusai*
Fahr-Becker, Gabriele. *Japanese Prints*. Taschen, 1999
Hillier, J. *Japanese Colour Prints*. Phaidon, 1991
Tadashi, Kobayashi. *Ukiyo-e: An Introduction to Japanese Woodblock Prints*.
Kodansha Ulak, James. *Japanese Prints*. Abbeville Press Publishers, 1995

Vocabulary:

Hanga-the general term for a woodblock print
Hangi-printing block, usually a plank of cherry-wood or boxwood.
Ukiyo-e Woodblock prints of the floating world

The National Consortium for Teaching About Asia

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Bijin-ga Pictures of beautiful women, usually courtesans

Yakusha-e Portraits of Kabuki actors.

Edition- a group of numbered prints that look the same.

Plate- ink is rolled over the uppermost surface of a carved plate and print

Refief-ink is rolled over the uppermost surface of a carved plate and printed.

Press- the machine which inked plates and paper are rolled through to print.

Reduction- the process of alternately cutting and printing one plate

Bench-hook-the metal piece that hooks onto the edge of a table to cut on

Brayer-the roller with which ink is rolled onto a plate

Registration-the process of lining up the different layers of a print

Introduction:

1. Put up a display of postcards of Ukiyo-e prints and actual Ukiyo-e prints.
2. Present a slide show of Japan, telling students about Japanese Art and culture.
3. Introduce the unit by describing the process and the topics of Ukiyo-e prints.
4. Watch the video *Japanese Prints: The Floating World*.
5. Review slide show and choose a topic from the slide show to represent in a print.
6. Print out a picture and research the topic.
7. Summarize their research in a paragraph that will post with the print.

Activity:

1. Students will do a drawing and color it in colored pencils using 4 colors and under (not including white)
2. Demonstrate transferring the image.
3. Students will transfer the drawing onto a piece of E-Z Cut blocks
4. Demonstrate carving
5. Students will carve away the white if they have any.
6. Demonstrate printing
7. Students will print their lightest color 5 times
8. Students will carve away the color they just printed
9. Demonstrate registration
10. Students will print their second lightest color, registering it on top of the lightest color.
11. Students will carve away the color they just printed.
12. Students will continue with steps 10&11 until the colors are printed.
13. Students will choose their best print to frame and display.

Evaluation: *To what extent did students...*

1. Identify major Ukiyo-e artist and the themes and characteristics of their work.
2. Describe aspects of Japanese art and culture.
3. Master the skills and techniques of printing a reduction print.

Write a comprehensive description of the Japanese topic in the print.

(Special thanks to S. Fox/Shrewsbury, Massachusetts for the information on teaching this process)

Resources for Art of Japan

Japanese Cultural Information

- *Multicultural Mini-Units*/T.S. Denison, TSD 2380-1-Japan
- *Origins of the Samurai*; <http://victorian.fortunecity.com/duchamp/410/origin.html>
<http://www.theplatelady.com>
- Nijo Castle brochure
- A comparison of Traditional Japanese and Western Aesthetics. Compiled by the North Texas Institute for Educators on the Visual Arts.
- *A Japanese Potpourri*; <http://www.csuohio.edu/history/japan/japan03.html#pot>
- *Highlights of Japanese Art*, by the Tokyo National Museum
- *Japan Images of a People*;
http://smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/japan_images_people/index.html

• Kamon/Family Crest

Kamon with Contrast-O Paper:

http://www.shrewsbury-ma.gov/schools/SHS/academics/visual_arts/Fried/Kamon_Lesson.html

http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/kids/KPSH_E/hiroshima_e/sadako_etop.html

• Japanese Language and Calligraphy

- *What is Shodo/Japanese Brush Calligraphy*,
<http://www.jinjan.org/kidsweb/virtual/shodo/what-is.html>
- *Japanese Writing*, “Hands On Culture of Japan”, Kate O’Halloran; Weston Publishers 1997
“Brush Writing- Calligraphy Techniques for Beginners” by Ryokushu Kuieko
- *Sumi-e Basics Japanese Ink Painting (suiboku-ga) style*, “Sumi-e” by Ukai Uchiyama
- *Educational reform In Japan*, Presented by Dr. Tsutomu Kimura
- *Education for the Handicapped in Japan*, Presented by Dr. Shigeru Narita Hyogo University
- *Mathematics in Japan*, By NAGASAKI Eizo , Curriculum Director
- *The Great Way of Taoism*, http://edu.dia.org/toa/toaism/activity_social.asp

• Japanese Economy

Japanese Economy: Comparisons with the US, Presented by Takahiro MITAO, International University of Japan

• Japanese Ukiyo-e Printmaking

Postcards of Ukiyo-e prints

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