

Japanese Floating Lanterns

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Purpose:

The target grade of this Art lesson is middle school students in the 6th grade. Students will create a 3-dimensional, functional, paper lantern influenced by Japanese culture.

Students will:

- Observe traditional Japanese paintings and be able to describe the aesthetics of simplicity, beauty and reverence for nature in the artwork
- Choose patterns, design elements and subject matter that relate to this historic culture for their own artworks
- Decorate their paper with paintings or patterns using a variety of mediums
- Construct their lantern in a secure and stable manner

Essential Questions:

- What are some elements found in traditional Japanese paintings? What words would you use to describe these paintings?
- Is this similar or different than other East Asian art? How does it compare to Western style artwork?
- What are some similarities between the cultures of Japan and the United States?
- Can objects be considered both art and functional? Why or why not (provide examples)?

Materials:

- examples of various Japanese paintings, patterns, interior design, furniture, block prints
- Laptop and projector (optional)
- YUPO Translucent Paper - one 9" x 12" sheet per lantern
- Glue
- Sharpie Markers in assorted colors
- Watercolors
- Black and various colors of India Inks
- Water containers
- Bamboo Brushes
- Bone folder

Lesson Introduction:

On a summer evening in Japan, many cities hold particularly beautiful event called *Toro Nagashi*— the festival of Floating Lanterns. *Toro Nagashi* is related to *Obon*, a 3-day period to honor and guide the spirits of the departed back to the other world. In the United States we may think of similar holidays such as Memorial Day, Halloween or Day of the Dead. Participants inscribe names, messages and drawings

on paper lanterns attached to a wood or bamboo base, place a candle inside, and set it afloat in a lake or river. Hundreds of glowing, reflecting lights drift alongside boaters, often accompanied by music and fireworks. Students can be shown online video of Hawaii's Lantern Floating at <http://www.lanternfloatinghawaii.com/>.

In comparison to Western art, traditional Japanese art is very much a part of everyday life and beauty is found in simple, humble things. Discuss what other items students find in their own surroundings that they may not immediately perceive as works of art.

As in Western art, Japan has a history of artists and movements that spans centuries of development. View examples of Japanese paintings, screens, scrolls, fans, fabrics, furniture, design and block prints to provide students with inspirations and ideas for their design or picture (reference artists may include Utamaro, Hiroshige, Hokusai).

Activity:

In studying Japanese culture, students will make their own lanterns, either to float or to serve as beautiful interior piece. Lanterns can be as simple as a rolled cylinder or intricately designed.

- Prepare preliminary drawings on a separate sheet of newsprint paper.
- If creating a square lantern, make 1/2" crease on the short side. With crease made, fold sheet in half, then fold both ends to center crease. (To create a hard crease use a burnishing tool such as a bone folder.)
- Once finalized, place the preliminary drawing beneath transparent paper for tracing. Allow 1/2" on the edge of the design for gluing.
- Decorate the paper using Sharpie markers or waterproof India Inks, filling in paintings or patterns in design. Then dry artwork flat.

(NOTE: fingerprints on the YUPO surface may leave oils that interrupt watercolor or ink coverage. Use clean, dry hands and avoid touching the surface as much as possible.)

- Once dry, fold or roll the lantern and place a small amount of glue on one edge of the paper to join. Paper clips are helpful in securing the seam while it is drying. Avoid using excessive glue and keep it away from the painting, especially if using water-based media.
- Add a handle to the lantern by punching a hole on either side and twisting a 12" piece of wire through the holes

- The safest way to illuminate the lantern indoors is to use a battery-operated candle with a low-wattage bulb. For outdoor use, place the lantern in a bowl and fill the inside with 2" of sand or pebbles to weight.

Evaluation:

- Group critique
- Art project rubric

Adaptation:

Students in higher grade levels may decide to also incorporate paper cutting and/or cut-out techniques as an option for decorating their lanterns. Extreme care must be used when working with X-Acto knives. Upon completion lanterns can be lit and displayed as a group to simulate *Toro Nagashi*.

Lower grade levels should create cylindrical shaped lanterns only and use watercolors to decorate their lanterns.

Standards:

- Compare and contrast visual forms of expression found throughout different regions and cultures of the world.
- Analyze and demonstrate the stylistic characteristics of culturally representative artworks.
- Recognize and demonstrate the qualities and characteristics of craftsmanship in original works of art.
- Identify and defend artistic decisions using appropriate visual art vocabulary.