

The Arts of Japan

A TEACHER'S GUIDE



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*Freer Gallery of Art and
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery*

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FRONT COVER Detail, Incense box, Muromachi period, 15th century.
Lacquer on carved wood. H. 8.4 x Dia. 25.0 cm. Freer Gallery of Art,
Smithsonian Institution. Purchase, F1967.9

TITLE PAGE Detail, *Boy and Mount Fuji* by Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849).
Japan, Edo period, ca. 1839. Hanging scroll mounted on panel; ink and color on
silk. 127.5 x 69.5 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of
Charles Lang Freer, F1898.110

Table of Contents

5 Introduction

5 Facts about Japan Today

7 Timeline

7 Overview of the Arts of Japan

8 Japan: The Physical Landscape

10 Shinto

11 FOCUS ON The Story of Amaterasu

13 Buddhism

14 Pure Land Buddhism

14 Esoteric Buddhism

15 Zen Buddhism

16 Cultural Relationships: Korea and China

16 Religion and Philosophy

18 Artistic Exchange

19 Place

19 Sacred Places

19 Significant Places in History and Literature

21 Places of Pleasure

23 FOCUS ON Mount Fuji

27 FOCUS ON Literature in Japan

38 Seasons

43 FOCUS ON Ukiyo-e

44 FOCUS ON Calligraphy

50 Materials

50 Clay

51 Earthenware

52 Stoneware

52 Porcelain

52 Wood

53 Paper and Silk

55 Silver and Gold

55 Ink and Pigments

58 FOCUS ON Tea Ceremony

63 FOCUS ON Lacquer

65 FOCUS ON Japanese Folding Screens

66 Contemporary Voices

70 Vocabulary

73 Lesson Plans

74 LESSON PLAN 1
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL

*How to Haiku: Poetry Reflecting the
Feelings in Art*

80 LESSON PLAN 2
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL AND UP

*Kenzan and Korin: Collaboration and
Integration in Ceramic Design*

85 LESSON PLAN 3
MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL AND UP

Capturing a Moment: Art and Haiku

92 LESSON PLAN 4
HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

*Here and There: Exploring Place in Art
through “Boy and Mount Fuji”*

96 Resources

96 Traditional Music and Performing Arts of
Japan: An Introduction and Resource Guide

104 Bibliography

107 National Educational Resources



嵐七右衛門

豊國

Introduction

THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery has designed *The Arts of Japan: A Teacher's Guide* for educators who would like an introduction to the diverse artistic traditions of Japan. Three central themes explored in this guide—Place, Seasons, and Materials—serve as meaningful starting points for learning about the world of Japanese art.

The guide begins with basic information on Japan—its geography, religious traditions, and cultural relationships with neighboring Asian countries. The guide's featured objects offer more in-depth information on the three themes. Throughout the resource "Focus On" sections provide more detailed examinations of such topics as Mount Fuji and the tea ceremony. The "Contemporary Voices" section presents first-person perspectives on these themes from Japanese residents who live in the Washington, D.C., area. Finally, local educators have developed four lesson plans that relate to the featured objects.

We hope this introduction to the arts of Japan offers educators engaging ways of integrating Japanese arts and culture into the curriculum.

OPPOSITE PAGE Detail, *The Actors Arashi Shichigoro as Edobei and Iwai Hanshiro IV as Fujinami* by Utagawa Toyokuni I (1769–1825). Japan, Edo period, 1798. Woodblock print (oban); ink, color, and mica on paper. 37.0 x 23.1 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of the family of Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer, 1974.97

Japan is a series of islands with a land area roughly equal to the state of Montana.

The population of Japan, as of 2002, was over 127 million people.

Most of the population is concentrated along the southern coast of Honshu, in and around cities like Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka.

Japan's system of government is a constitutional democracy.

The prime minister is the highest executive officer in Japan.

An imperial family has existed in Japan for many centuries.

The emperor is the symbolic and ceremonial sovereign of the country.

Japan's currency is the yen.

Many Americans are familiar with Japanese exports: cars produced by Toyota or Honda, electronic products made by Sony, or toys produced by Sanrio ("*Hello Kitty*").

Other exports popular in the United States are animated films (*anime*) and comics (*manga*).



*S e a
o f
O k h o t s k*

HOKKAIDO

*S e a
o f
J a p a n*

**NORTH
KOREA**

**SOUTH
KOREA**

HONSHU

Tokyo

Kyoto

Osaka

SHIKOKU

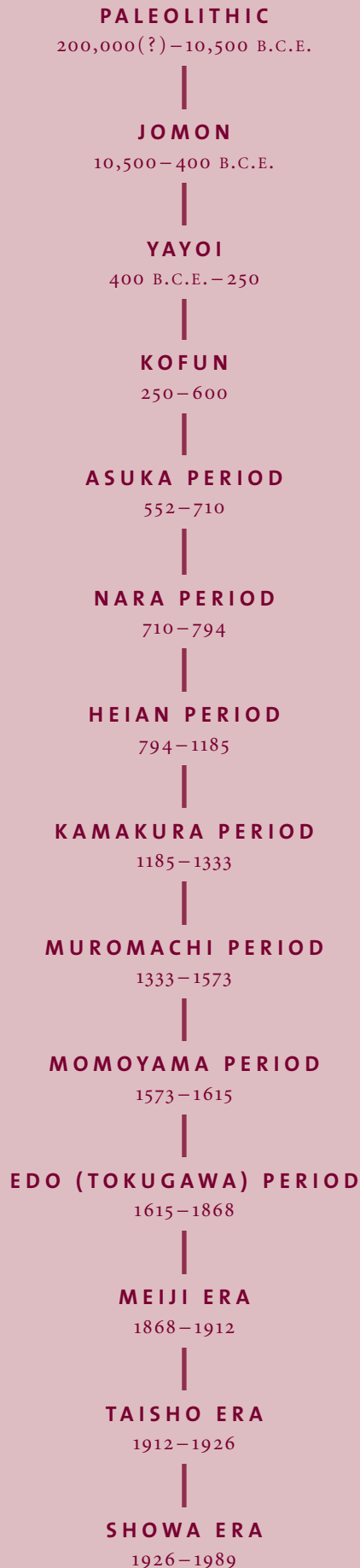
KYUSHU

J A P A N

*P a c i f i c
O c e a n*

*E a s t
C h i n a
S e a*

T s u s h i m a S t r a i t



Overview of the Arts of Japan

THE ARTISTIC TRADITIONS OF JAPAN HAVE A LONG HISTORY—so long, in fact, that archaeological evidence dates the origins of one of Japan’s oldest known pottery-making traditions to approximately twelve thousand years ago. From large six-panel folding screens covered in gold leaf and painted with bright pigments to unglazed ceramic tea bowls, Japan has often produced art of great beauty and originality.

Many factors have contributed to the Japanese aesthetic—among them, the geography, topography, and climate of Japan’s islands, cultural relationships with neighboring and distant countries, and religious beliefs. Exploring these topics and closely examining specific objects are first steps toward understanding the wide range of Japanese artistic expression.

Japan: The Physical Landscape



JAPAN IS AN **ARCHIPELAGO**—A GROUP OF ISLANDS—LYING OFF THE northeast coast of the Asian continent. The four largest of over one thousand islands are Hokkaido in the north, Honshu to the south of Hokkaido, and Shikoku and Kyushu, which both lie off the southwest coast of Honshu. Japan is bordered on the north by the Sea of Okhotsk, on the east and south by the Pacific Ocean, and on the west by the Tsushima Strait, the Sea of Japan, and the East China Sea. No part of Japan is more than one hundred miles from the sea, which is reflected in the depiction of the sea as an important place in Japanese visual art.

The Japanese islands are located in the northern hemisphere and lie between 26° N and 45° N latitudes. Tokyo, capital of Japan, for example, lies close to 36° N latitude—a climatic parallel to Raleigh, North Carolina. Until the 1870s Japan followed a lunar calendar, but today Japan observes the same solar seasons as the United States (for example, autumn runs from September 20 to December 20) and most of Japan experiences four distinct seasons.

Plant life, which thrives on the islands of Japan, is part of the natural landscape that has inspired Japanese artists for thousands of years. The lush vegetation notwithstanding, only the coastal areas are suitable for large-scale agricultural development. Because approximately three-quarters of the land is mountainous, small land holdings are invaluable for farming. In the past, virtually every available patch of land was used to grow food—even small clearings in mountainous areas.

The mountains of Japan also limit urban and industrial development to areas on the coast, causing substantial crowding. As of 2002, the population density of Japan was 873 people per square mile—a striking contrast to the seventy-five people per square mile in the United States. It is easy to understand, therefore, why the land in these coastal areas is so highly valued.

ABOVE Detail, *Boy and Mount Fuji* by Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849). Japan, Edo period, ca. 1839. Hanging scroll mounted on panel; ink and color on silk. 127.5 x 69.5 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1898.110

Japan's terrain was formed by volcanoes, and approximately ten percent of the world's active volcanoes are in Japan. Mount Fuji, the best-known of Japan's mountains, with its distinctive cone shape, is a dormant volcano that last erupted in 1707. Volcanoes are not the only natural hazards for the population of Japan. Devastating tropical storms called typhoons can cause massive damage. Earthquakes are also a danger; though the majority of them are small, the worst earthquake in Japan's recorded history occurred in 1923 on the Kanto plain near Tokyo and resulted in over one hundred thousand deaths, mainly from the fires that ensued. Earthquakes under the ocean trigger the formation of huge waves called tsunamis that periodically hit coastal areas of Japan.

The principal agricultural product in Japan is rice, which not only is a staple food in the Japanese diet but also has played a critical role in the economic and religious life of the Japanese people. Historically, rice crops were a measure of wealth. Rice has also been the central offering to indigenous deities (*kami*) in **Shinto** ritual.

Shinto



Torii The torii is a doorless gate at the entrance of or approach to a Shinto shrine. It delineates the boundary between the sacred and the secular.

SHINTO, WHICH LITERALLY TRANSLATES AS “WAY OF THE GODS,” IS the indigenous Japanese religious tradition that evolved from beliefs in deities known as kami. These deities are believed to inhabit the landscape of Japan in mountains, rivers, waterfalls, and other natural formations. Revered persons, including ancestors, may also become kami.

Shinto shrine complexes contain an inner sanctum in which one or more sacred objects reside. In Shinto ritual, the force or power (*tama*) of a kami is invited to enter a sacred object or natural formation (such as a tree or rock) and offer its blessings. During some ceremonies and festivals, the kami is transported from the shrine into the human community and returned to the shrine at the end of the ceremony. Offerings (including rice, water, salt, and rice wine [sake]) made to the kami are also key elements of Shinto ceremony. At shrines, priests recite ritual prayers (*norito*). Because purification is central to the Shinto tradition, worshipers must rinse their mouths and hands before entering a shrine complex.

The annual rituals in Shinto follow the agricultural cycle in Japan — specifically, rice planting and harvesting. Rice and sake are the main offering to the kami. The festivals or *matsuri* of Japan began as Shinto religious rituals and continue to hold an important place in Shinto today. For example, the *Aoi Matsuri*, which takes place in Kyoto, is a thanksgiving festival directed toward the goddess of water and god of thunder. The celebration is marked by processions between the imperial palace and the main shrines of the two kami, as well as by prayers for good rice harvests.

While shrines serve as sites of worship for Shinto, many areas sacred to Shinto are simply marked with a gate or *torii* that indicates entrance into an area where a kami is believed to reside. Sacred areas may also be indicated by rice straw ropes wrapped, for instance, around the trunk of a sacred tree.

The imperial family of Japan has played an important role in Shinto ritual, as it is believed that Amaterasu, the sun goddess, was the first ancestor of the imperial line. (See Focus on The Story of Amaterasu, page 11.)

The Story of Amaterasu

Amaterasu is the sun goddess, traditionally considered the ancestor of the Japanese imperial family. The mirror associated with Amaterasu (see story below) is housed in Ise Shrine on the island of Honshu. It is one of the three imperial **regalia**, along with the sword and the jewel. Amaterasu is believed to have bestowed these three objects on her grandson, Ninigi, when he was sent to rule the Japanese islands.

Amaterasu, the sun goddess, lived in the heavens. Her brother, Susanoo, god of the sea, was a difficult and temperamental character. One day, when visiting Amaterasu, he released colts into her rice fields, thereby destroying the crops. Furthermore, he desecrated her home by smashing a hole in the roof of her weaving hall and throwing in the skin of a colt. Furious, Amaterasu retreated into a cave, blocking the entrance with a boulder and causing the outside world to fall into complete darkness. The other gods, desperate to restore light to the world, devised a plan to lure Amaterasu from her hiding place.

They dug up a five-hundred-branched tree, decorated it with jewels, and hung a mirror in its branches. Outside the door of the cave, a beautiful young goddess performed a provocative dance and the gods began laughing and making noise. Curious, Amaterasu pushed aside the boulder to peek outside. As she glimpsed her reflection in mirror, another of the gods grabbed her and pulled her outside, thus restoring light to the heavens.



Scene from the life of the Buddha

Gandhara (present-day Pakistan), 2nd century B.C.E.

Stone, 67.0 x 290.0 cm. overall

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution

Purchase, F1949.9a-d

This image from Gandhara, in present-day Pakistan, depicts Prince Siddhartha at the moment of his enlightenment when, by touching the earth, he called it to witness his transformation.



Buddhism

BUDDHISM, WHICH ENTERED JAPAN IN THE mid-six century from Korea, originated in northern India approximately one thousand years earlier. The founder of Buddhism was Siddhartha Gautama, a prince of the Shakya

tribe in northern India who renounced his worldly possessions and went on a quest to answer a question that haunted him: How could humanity be relieved of its suffering? After a fruitless personal search, he engaged in a prolonged period of **meditation** and thus became **enlightened**. In his enlightened state, he realized that humans can be released from suffering by ending their attachment to things of this world.

Siddhartha, who was thereafter known as the Buddha (“enlightened one”), dedicated his life to teaching the knowledge acquired in his enlightenment. Known as the **Four Noble Truths**, these principles make up the Buddha’s core teachings:

1. Life is suffering.
2. Suffering is caused by desire and attachment to this world.
3. The way to end suffering is to end desire and attachment.
4. To end desire and attain enlightenment one must follow the Eightfold Path.

The **Eightfold Path** is a list of eight guidelines designed to help rid humans of desire and suffering. One guideline, “right aims,” stresses compassion and helping others; another stresses meditation — the skill of clearing and concentrating one’s mind. In addition, the Buddha urged people to follow the “Middle Way,” a path of moderation rather than extremes.

The form of Buddhism that entered Japan was Mahayana Buddhism, which offered universal salvation. Whereas the earliest form of Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism — which continues in South and Southeast Asian countries — emphasizes **monastic** discipline as the path to enlightenment, Mahayana Buddhism offers accessible ways by which any person may attain enlightenment. The principal text of Mahayana Buddhism is the *Lotus Sutra*, which is believed by Buddhists to record the Buddha’s final teaching. In this text, he reveals

ABOVE Detail, *Amida*, Japan, Kamakura period, early 14th century. Wood with gilding. 113.2 x 44.0 x 44.0 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Purchase—The Harold P. Stern Memorial Fund and museum funds in appreciation of Nancy Fessenden and Richard Danziger and their exemplary service to the Galleries as leaders of the Board of Trustees, F2002.9a–f

that all humans — not just those who join monastic communities — are capable of reaching **nirvana**, the highest state of enlightenment.

Mahayana Buddhism developed the concept of multiple Buddhas, of which the historical Buddha Shakyamuni was just one manifestation. Mahayana Buddhism also introduced the **bodhisattva**, an enlightened being who postpones entrance into nirvana to assist other living beings in their search for enlightenment.

Buddhism was adopted as the state religion in Japan within one hundred years of its arrival. It did not replace Shinto, however, and people observed both Buddhist and Shinto practices without any conflict. This holds true to the present day. Shinto and Buddhism perform different roles throughout a person's life. Marriage rituals are often Shinto, and a newborn child is brought to a Shinto shrine to be blessed on the occasion of the first trip outside the home. Funerals, however, are generally carried out by Buddhist temples. This dichotomy is due to the centrality of purification in Shinto and the promise of the afterlife in Buddhism.

Over the course of Japanese history, many Buddhist schools flourished. Three of the most important are:

Pure Land Buddhism

Pure Land Buddhism teaches that all beings can escape the endless cycle of death and rebirth through faith in Amida Buddha. In Pure Land teaching, calling upon Amida Buddha (or the Buddha of Infinite Light) ensures rebirth into Amida's Western Paradise and release from the suffering of life in this world. One of the earliest Buddhist teachings in Japan, this form had spread widely throughout the country as a result of the work of several **evangelical** monks during the Kamakura period (1185–1333). (See "Amida," page 61.)

Esoteric Buddhism

Also called Tantric Buddhism, this form of Buddhist belief and practice holds that all humans contain a "Buddha nature," and the ultimate goal of esoteric Buddhism is to help humans realize that potential. The esoteric schools teach that all humans are unified in the Cosmic Buddha, Dainichi. The teachings, which are secret, emphasize meditation. Followers often rely on **mantras**, or sacred words, and **mandalas**, paintings that map the Buddhist cosmos and deities, to strengthen their meditation discipline. Esoteric Buddhism had been taught

and practiced in Japan in the Tendai and Shingon schools, which were most influential under imperial court patronage from the ninth through twelfth century.

Zen Buddhism

Known as Chan in China and Son in Korea, Zen Buddhism holds that enlightenment can be attained through meditation and the direct teaching of master to disciple. Chinese monks brought Zen teachings of the Rinzai and Soto schools (during the thirteenth century) and the Obaku school (during the early seventeenth century). Zen beliefs were adopted by the ruling military class and others and had a profound effect on the arts of Japan, particularly in ink painting, calligraphy, garden design, and the tea ceremony. (See Focus on Tea Ceremony, page 58.)

Cultural Relationships: Korea and China



FROM ITS EARLIEST RECORDED HISTORY, JAPAN HAS HAD CULTURAL relationships with other countries of Asia — the strongest with its closest geographical neighbors, Korea and China. These relationships were not always steady — sometimes they were strong, and at other times weak. However, over the centuries, opportunities for religious training exchanges, diplomacy, and trade have arisen.

The first written records about Japan and its people are Chinese, and date to the first and second centuries. During that time kingdoms within Japan were already sending envoys to the Chinese court of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.). During the Tang dynasty (618–907) — an age of strength, expansion, and blossoming of the arts in China — Japan held Chinese civilization in such high regard that it not only patterned its centralized government on that of China, but also adopted the Chinese writing system, despite the fact that the Chinese and Japanese spoken languages are unrelated. (See Calligraphy, page 44.)

Religion and Philosophy

Through its relationships with Korea and China, Japan encountered new religions and philosophies. Buddhism, which had originated in India more than a thousand years earlier, was introduced to Japan via Korea in the sixth century. Over the centuries, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese monks traveled back and forth exchanging religious and artistic ideas, sharing sacred texts, and forming Buddhist orders. (See Buddhism, page 13.) They communicated through the Chinese written language.

Confucianism, a cultural force in China, was readily embraced in Japan. Based on a system of thought developed by Confucius (Kong Qiu, 551–479 B.C.E.), Confucianism stresses correct behavior and position in society and government. Confucius believed that a person's correct placement in the family and adherence to filial piety — a child's showing respect for

ABOVE Detail, Incense box, Muromachi period, 15th century. Lacquer on carved wood. 8.4 x 25.0 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Purchase, F1967.9



Visiting a Friend on a Wooded Cliff

by Ike Taiga (1723–1776)

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1750–55

Hanging scroll; ink and light color on paper

197.8 x 45.8 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution

Gift of Sanae Iida Reeves in memory of her father,
Yoshine Iida, F1994.27

Ike Taiga, the artist who painted the image on this hanging scroll, learned his distinctive style from woodblock-printed manuals on the techniques of Chinese painting and drew inspiration for his themes from Chinese sources.

his parents — served as models for a just and compassionate government. Confucian principles were central to the early Japanese government codes and Confucian principles were later strongly promoted during the Edo period (1615–1868), in government and particularly through officially sponsored education. Confucianism in Japan was also closely related to social relationships. In Japan, Confucian principles meshed well with existing views (expressed through Shinto) of the proper place of an individual in family and society.

Another tradition that entered Japan from China was **Daoism**. However, Daoism was never practiced as a formalized religion in Japan and had only a minor impact on the Japanese — primarily in its popular adherence to the ideas of *yin/yang* (the Daoist opposing principles of the universe) and **divination**.

Artistic Exchange

Japan's relationship with China and Korea created opportunities for the exchange of artistic styles and techniques. With the transmission of Buddhism from Korea to Japan came numerous artistic influences: Buddhist texts, **icons**, art, and architecture. Craft specialists from Korea and China migrated to Japan. The styles of Chinese and Korean models influenced Japanese Buddhist architecture, sculpture, and ritual objects — in fact, Korean and Chinese artists often created them. Many early Buddhist temples and other buildings were also built by continental artisans.

Although Japan's relationship with China waned after the fall of the Tang dynasty, (618–907), it was renewed with the establishment of the Song dynasty (960–1279) and the rise to power of the Japanese military government (**shogunate**) in the Kamakura period (1185–1333). During this time, there was intense religious exchange between Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen Buddhist monks, who influenced the **secular** arts of Japan, including tea drinking, garden design, and ink painting. (See Zen Buddhism, page 15.) Later waves of contact with the continent also affected the arts of Japan, including the immigration of Korean potters following a Japanese military campaign conducted in Korea in the 1590s, and the introduction of Chinese **literati** paintings of the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties during the Edo period (1615–1868).

Place



THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE IN JAPANESE ART IS EXPRESSED IN EVERYTHING from depictions of sacred landscapes to urban parks. The desire to situate art forms in particular places was significant in the development of Japanese art and culture, beginning with the association in Shinto of kami with natural sites and features such as mountains or waterfalls. The places represented in Japanese art typically fall into one of three categories: sacred places, significant places in history and literature, and places of pleasure.

Sacred Places

The tradition of Japanese paintings, which often depicts sacred sites, reflects Shinto's emphasis on the spiritual qualities of the landscape. (See Shinto, page 10.) Mount Fuji (or *Fujisan*), the revered sacred peak, for example, is also a favorite subject for Japanese artists, designers, and advertisers and is one of the most popular tourist and pilgrimage destinations in the country. (See Focus on Mount Fuji, page 23.)

Every Buddhist temple marks a sacred place. A rock and gravel garden, built within a Zen Buddhist temple and representing abstract concepts of Buddhism, is not only a work of art and design but also an aid to meditation used by Zen monks. Both temples and shrines are popular pilgrimage destinations, drawing large crowds during major festivals. Pilgrimage has always been an occasion for travel and enjoyment.

Significant Places in History and Literature

In Japan, historical and literary sites were popular — both as destinations for travelers and as subjects for artists. For example, battle stories from the medieval novel *The Tale of the Heike* — a historically based account of the Taira clan, which gained power in the twelfth century only to lose it to the Minamoto clan within the century — inspired travelers to visit the sites of the battles. The epic combat between the two great warrior families was the subject of paintings and plays. Other famous narratives and dramas were alluded to in Japanese art and often the educated viewer could summon up a scene with minimal visual information — even just a few flowers. (See Focus on Literature in Japan, page 27.)

ABOVE Detail, *Boy and Mount Fuji* by Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849). Japan, Edo period, ca. 1839. Hanging scroll mounted on panel; ink and color on silk. 127.5 x 69.5 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1898.110



Fan with images of Narihira and the Pilgrim on one side; chrysanthemums and a brook on the other

by Ogata Korin (1658–1716)

Edo period, late 17th–early 18th century

Fan; ink, color, and gold on paper, 35.6 x 22.7 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution

Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1903.1

One side of this fan depicts a scene from the tenth-century novel, *Tales of Ise*, in which travelers from Kyoto encounter one another while making their way through a pass in the mountains. One wears pilgrim's robes and carries a portable shrine on his back. The literary scene was so well known that even this spare depiction—the ivy-lined path, the traveler with a backpack—would have conjured up the context and emotion of the scene for the well-informed viewer.

Places of Pleasure

Depictions of places of pleasure reached a peak during the Edo period (1615–1868).

Whether viewing local areas of natural beauty, enjoying the amusements of highway post towns, or visiting the entertainment districts in urban centers, Japanese of the Edo period enthusiastically participated in the delights available at a wide variety of sites. During this time, expendable income supported a thriving entertainment industry including theater and pleasure quarters. The population increased in urban areas. Travel was more popular than ever before, due in part to the required travel of feudal lords (daimyos) between their domains and the capital of Edo, and the boom in commerce. Finally, during the Edo period, religious pilgrimages, which provided the amusements of visiting bustling towns, enjoyed unprecedented popularity.

Much Japanese art of the Edo period reflects these social changes. Travelers bought paintings, woodblock prints, and folding screens depicting urban, natural, and/or sacred sites as souvenirs of their journeys. Guidebooks and other forms of travel literature were printed in response to the growing demands of a more mobile population.

People in the big cities did not need to travel far to reach a place of pleasure. As depicted in “Viewing Cherry Blossoms at Ueno Park,” people readily took advantage of the local public places that offered beautiful settings for recreation. (See “Viewing Cherry Blossoms at Ueno Park,” page 42.) People also enjoyed visiting urban theater and pleasure quarters, which offered food, female entertainers, and performing arts.



Boy and Mount Fuji

by Katsushika Hokusai
(1760–1849). Japan,
Edo period, ca. 1839.
Hanging scroll mounted
on panel; ink and color
on silk. 69.5 x 127.5 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art,
Smithsonian Institution.
Gift of Charles Lang Freer,
F1898.110

SITTING ON A WILLOW BRANCH THAT EXTENDS OVER A RUSHING stream and facing the magnificent and sacred Mount Fuji, a young fisherman plays his flute. (See Focus on Mount Fuji, page 23.) The budding willow leaves and the deep cap of snow that remains on the top of the mountain show that the season is spring. The artist Hokusai produced an intimate portrait of the imposing Mount Fuji by using soft washes of color, almost without outline, to bring forth the form of the mountain.

Hokusai's long and productive career, began, according to his own writings, when he was six years old. He began as a print designer and illustrator of *ukiyo-e*, or “pictures of the floating world,” a genre that focused on depictions of urban and common life, particularly urban theater and pleasure quarters. (See Focus on Ukiyo-e, page 43.) In fact, he is known for the sensitivity and originality with which he portrayed common people. His life's work is characterized by tremendous variety: paintings, woodblock prints, illustrations, and art manuals. He produced this painting about Mount Fuji — a favorite subject, particularly in his prints and illustrated books — late in life, during a period of concentration on landscapes.

Hokusai earned wide respect in European artistic circles after his prints and illustrated books became available during the nineteenth century. His work influenced such artists as the French painter and printmaker Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901) and the American *expatriate* painter James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903).

FOCUS ON

Mount Fuji

MOUNT FUJI IS THE MOST RECOGNIZABLE SYMBOL OF JAPAN. THE TALLEST volcanic mountain in the country, it is located not far from Tokyo (formerly Edo) on the Kanto plain and dominates the landscape in that region. It has been revered for thousands of years and is sacred to both Shinto and Buddhism. Kami are believed to reside there, because tall pointed objects are the vehicles by which the kami descend to earth. (See Shinto, page 10.) Even viewing the mountain is considered **auspicious**. Until recent urban development, which generated dense clusters of skyscrapers, the mountain was visible from Edo, and many restaurants and tea houses in the pleasure quarters were situated to offer the best view of Mount Fuji on clear days. Historically, poets and artists have turned to the image of Mount Fuji for inspiration.

By the fifteenth century, pilgrimages to Mount Fuji were already well established. They were so popular during the Edo period that, although women were not allowed to join the religious societies that sent groups out to the revered mountain, several artificial Mount Fujis were built so that women could take pilgrimages as well. Artificial Fujis were also the centerpieces of large “strolling gardens” built by warrior rulers (daimyo).



Tea bowl

by Raku Tannyu (1795–1854)

Edo period, early 19th century

Kairakuen ware; earthenware with Raku glazes

9.2 x 11.7 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution

Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1898.132

Mount Fuji was a popular image to decorate tea bowls intended for use on the New Year or other celebrations. Seeing Mount Fuji at the New Year—even in a dream—was considered good luck.



Kumano Mandara—Nachi Shrine

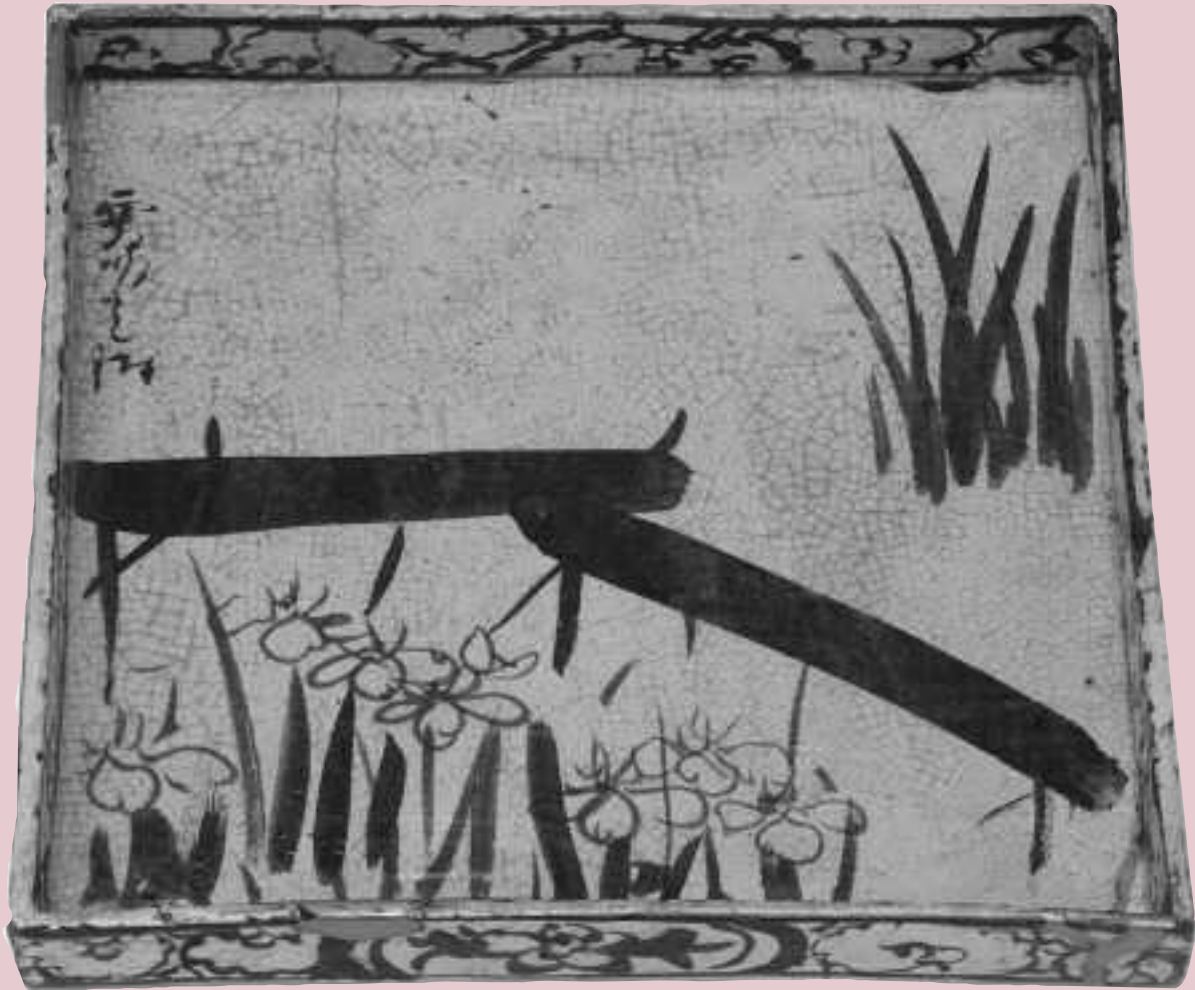
Japan, Namboku-cho or Muromachi period,
late 14th–early 15th century. Hanging scroll;
ink, color, and gold on silk. 220.3 x 76.3 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution.
Purchase, F1958.19

THIS HANGING SCROLL PAINTING DEPICTS THE NACHI SHRINE, ONE OF the three sacred centers within the Kumano region. The mountainous area is located south of present-day Nara and has been a vital religious and pilgrimage destination since ancient times. This painting is one in a set of three that depicts the three sacred sites.

This image of Kumano is considered a mandala. Generally, a mandala (*mandara* in Japanese) is a diagram or painting of the Buddhist universe that aids in meditation. This painting of a sacred landscape is also considered a mandala, the contemplation of which provides a spiritually beneficial visual journey or pilgrimage.

Encircled Buddhist deities are pictured in two intersecting lines along the edges. The shrine complex in the center of the painting is framed by deities that correspond to the Shinto kami associated with Kumano. Both Buddhist and Shinto beliefs often share the same sacred sites.

This painting was produced at the peak of Kumano's popularity as a pilgrimage destination. Diaries written by imperial and aristocratic visitors contain many references to the journey from Kyoto to Kumano. The painting's high quality suggests the patronage of a powerful person.



Square dish with design of “Eight Bridges”

Possibly Ogata Kenzan (1663–1743) and Ogata Korin (1658–1716). Japan, Edo period, early 18th century

Buff clay; iron pigment under transparent lead glaze; gold lacquer repairs, 2.8 x 21.7 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1902.220

THIS CERAMIC SERVING DISH DEPICTS A FAMOUS EPISODE FROM THE tenth-century novel *Tales of Ise*. (See Focus on Literature in Japan, page 27.) A group of travelers from Kyoto stops at a marsh full of blooming iris in Miwaka Province (present-day Aichi Prefecture, east of Kyoto). An eightfold plank bridge spanning the marsh became an icon of this place. The tray shows only a few planks and two clusters of iris.

Featured Objects

One traveler composed a poem in which each line begins with a syllable from the word for iris — *kakitsubata*. The poem expresses the writer’s sorrow at having to leave behind his wife while traveling:

<i>Karagoromo</i>	I have a beloved wife
<i>Kitsusu nareneshi</i>	Familiar as the skirt
<i>Tsuma shi areba</i>	Of a well-worn robe
<i>Harubaru kinuru</i>	And so this distant journeying
<i>Tabi o shi zo omu</i>	Fills my heart with grief

(McCullough, *Tales of Ise*, p. 75)

Typically, a tray of this shape — for light snacks or sweets — would have been made from unlacquered wood. However, this innovative work — likely produced by the potter Ogata Kenzan and painted by his brother Ogata Korin — is made of clay.

Kenzan’s ceramic tablewares became popular during the prosperous Edo period, and his unique and diverse styles spawned numerous imitations. His brother, Korin, was a successful artist in his own right and produced paintings in the style of what was later called the “Rinpa [or Rimpa] school.” Rinpa works feature themes from classical Japanese literature and depictions of the four seasons, as well as of gold, silver, and bright pigments. Kenzan and Korin’s collaboration produced highly original and much admired works in which evocative pictorial images decorated ceramic objects.

This tray was made from a slab of clay shaped around a wood or clay mold. It was then painted with iron pigment, coated with a colorless lead **glaze**, and fired at a low temperature sufficient to melt the glaze. (See Clay, page 50.) On two sides of the tray, repairs in gold **lacquer** illustrate how precious objects were restored and cherished, despite damage. In many cases, objects with imperfections were especially valued for their unique qualities.

FOCUS ON

Literature in Japan

Japan has a long tradition of fine literature that inspired the visual arts. Several of the major literary works or genres with strong links to Japanese art are discussed below:

Manyoshu (compiled mid eighth century)

This anthology of approximately forty-five hundred poems was compiled during the Nara period (710–794). The poems were probably written throughout the century preceding the compilation. The *Manyoshu*, which translates to “Collection of a Myriad Leaves,” contains an array of mostly love poems from different regions of Japan—folk songs of common people, poems by soldiers, and even poems by members of the court, including Emperor Temmu (r. 672–686), Empress Jito (r. 686–697), Princess Oku (661–701), and others. What distinguishes the *Manyoshu* from much of the notable Japanese literature that followed is the variety of poetic forms and voices, as well as bold emotional expression.

The following excerpt, by Yamanoue no Okura (ca. 660–733), describes the poet’s miserable circumstances with candid, expressive language, but also uses humor to poke fun at his own pride:

On nights when rain falls,
 mixed with wind,
on nights when snow falls,
 mixed with rain,
I am cold.
And the cold
 leaves me helpless:
I lick black lumps of salt
And suck up melted dregs of sake.
Coughing and sniffing,
I smooth my uncertain wisps
 of beard.
I am proud—
 I know no man
 is better than me.

(Levy, *The Ten Thousand Leaves*, p. 387)

FOCUS ON

Kokinshu (905)

Kokinshu (*Kokin waka shu*; “Collection of Ancient and Modern Japanese Poems”) captures the sensibilities of the Heian period court. It is an official imperial anthology of 1,100 poems written largely by aristocracy during the ninth century. The central poetic form of *Kokinshu* is the **waka**, a five-line poem of thirty-one syllables which is also called a *tanka* or “short poem.”

The content and tone of the poems differ greatly from those of *Manyoshu*. The subject of love is treated much less directly and more subtly. The restrained approach on the topic of love demonstrates the elite’s regard for “courtly refinement” (*miyabi*) and “sensitivity to things” (*mono no aware*). In addition to love, the subject of the four seasons is given considerable attention.

The poem below, by the renowned poet and compiler of *Kokinshu*, Ki no Tsurayuki (872?–945)—reflects a deep sensitivity to seasonal changes:

Spring has come
And soon its breezes will melt
The water now frozen
In which in summer we dipped our sleeves.
(Vol. 1 poem 2)

(Kato, *A History of Japanese Literature: The First Thousand Years*, p. 131)



Poems from *Kokinshu*

Background design by Sotatsu (fl. ca. 1600–39). Calligraphy by Hon’ami Koetsu (1559–1637)
Momoyama or Edo period, early 17th century. Handscroll; ink on paper with gold, silver, and mica.
33.0 x 1021.7 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1903.309

This **handscroll** with poems from *Kokinshu* is made from fine handmade paper bearing woodblock-printed designs in gold and silver inks as a ground for exquisite calligraphy.

FOCUS ON



Detail, a scene from *The Tale of Genji*, Chapter 2, “The Broom Tree”

by Tosa Mitsuoki (1617–1691) Edo period, 17th century. Six-panel folding screen; ink, color, and gold on paper. 171.6 x 376.7 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1904.118

This painted screen, based on a scene from *The Tale of Genji*, depicts a fifteen-year-old Prince Genji eavesdropping outside the women’s quarters.

The Tale of Genji (ca. 1000)

The Tale of Genji was written by Murasaki Shikibu (978–1016), who was a lady-in-waiting in the Heian court. Its fifty-four chapters deal chiefly with the life of Genji, a charming, attractive, and talented young prince. The bulk of the story recounts his love affairs with women (and a long marriage to one favorite wife) and the social and political goings-on in the Heian court. The story reflects the life of the Heian aristocracy and the dominant aesthetic attitude of the period, “sensitivity to things” or *mono no aware*.

This approach—*mono no aware*—was expressed in a particular attention to the changing of seasons and the emotions evoked thereby. The following passage, which recounts Genji’s exile at Suma (in the western part of the modern city of Kobe) in Chapter 12 illustrates that sensibility.

At Suma the sea was some way off under the increasingly mournful autumn wind, but night after night the waves on the shore, sung by Counselor Yukihiro in his poem about the wind blowing over the pass, sounded very close indeed, until autumn in such a place yielded the sum of melancholy. Everyone was asleep now, and Genji had hardly anybody with him; he lay awake all alone, listening with raised pillow to the wind that raged abroad, and the waves seemed to be washing right up to him. Hardly even knowing that he did so, he wept until his pillow might well have floated away. The brief music he plucked from his *kin* dampened his spirits until he gave up playing and sang,

“Waves break on the shore, and their voices rise to join my sighs of yearning:
can the wind be blowing then from all those who long for me?”

(Murasaki, *The Tale of Genji*, p. 244)

FOCUS ON

Tales of Ise (compiled early tenth century)

Kokinshu, *The Tale of Genji*, and *Tales of Ise* are the principal literary works of the Heian period. Loosely framed around the life of a famous courtier and poet, Ariwara Narihira (820–880), *Tales of Ise* contains stories and poems composed during the ninth century, some written by Narihira himself. The works in *Tales of Ise* bear many similarities in style and tone to those poems in *Kokinshu* that reflect the elevated, restrained, and sensitive approach of the Heian aristocracy. In fact, one of the poems in the *Tales of Ise* also appears in *Kokinshu*. This poem, by Narihira, speaks to the careful attention to natural surroundings and the regret caused by recognizing the passage of time:

Must the moon disappear
In such haste
Leaving us still unsatisfied?
Would that the mountain rim might flee
And refuse to receive her.

(McCullough, *Tales of Ise*, p. 10)

For depictions of scenes from the *Tales of Ise*, see Featured Object “Square dish with design of ‘Eight Bridges,’” page 25, or “Fan with images of Narihira and the Pilgrim” page 20.

The Tale of the Heike (compiled early thirteenth century)

This story of war is a fictional account of the Heike or Taira clan and its downfall at the hands of the Minamoto clan during the Minamoto-Taira war of 1180–85. Two fundamental Buddhist themes inform this work. The first is that of impermanence—all things must pass, including the power of the Heike clan. (See Seasons page 38.) The second is that of *mappo* or the “latter days of the law,” which, according to Buddhist belief, is a period devoid of Buddhist law, during which individuals would be unable to reach enlightenment despite their attempts. Religious movements of the period urged people to appeal directly to Buddhist figures such as Amida Buddha for salvation. (See Pure Land Buddhism, page 14, and “Amida,” page 61.) The work’s tone of unease and fear was a result of the conflict-ridden medieval period—a time of spiritual decline. (For the opening passage of *The Tale of the Heike*, see Seasons, page 38.) The story also had a popular life as a narrative performance, which peaked from the late fifteenth to late sixteenth century.

FOCUS ON

Poetry Forms: Waka and Haiku

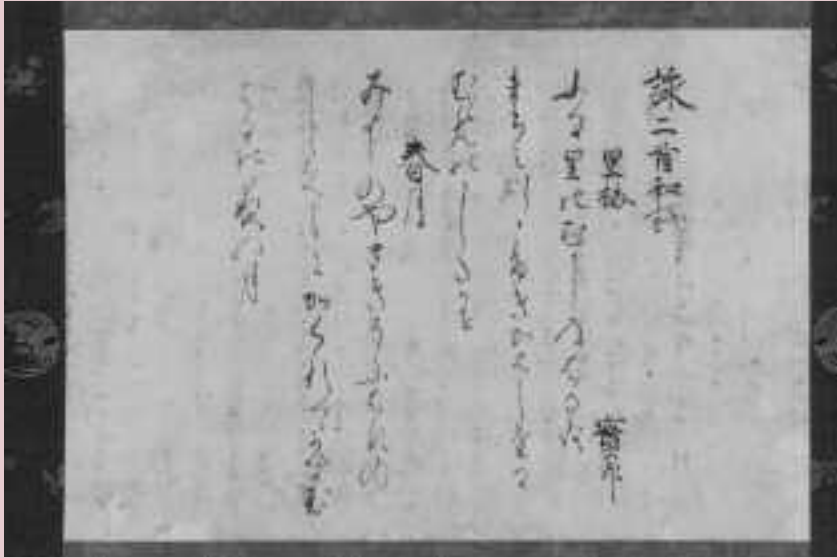
Waka

Waka are poems of five lines of 5–7–5–7, and 7 syllables. As noted earlier, the *waka* form was extant by the eighth century and achieved popularity during the Heian period (794–1185). Most poems collected in *Kokinshu* and *Tales of Ise* are *waka*.

Waka represents a distinctive Japanese form of poetry that achieved popularity following a period when Chinese literary and aesthetic models were considered superior. Although the prestige of Chinese poetry and literature continued, *waka* became important to members of the aristocracy. *Waka* is the core Japanese poetic form, from which others emerged, including haiku and linked verse (a collaboration of three or more poets who link parts of *waka* together to form longer works).

Featured Objects

FOCUS ON



Poetry offering to the Kasuga Shrine

by Jitsuin (mid-13th century). Kamakura period, ca. 1244

Hanging scroll; ink on paper. 29.4 x 43.1 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Purchase, F1984.35

The following two *waka* are translations from a hanging scroll that was presented by members of the aristocratic Fujiwara family to their tutelary (guardian) deities at the Kasuga Shrine in Nara. While the Japanese versions adhere to the *waka* structure, the translation does not.

Beneath a Plum Tree

Furusato no	I am waiting to see
Mukashi no hana wo	The flowers of long ago
Machimitsutsu	In my old home.
Yuki kawashita ni	Beneath the plum,
muni no shita ko to	Has the snow transformed?

Spring Moon

Miyoshino ya	Like lovely Yoshino*
Sakisou hana no	The flowers begin to bloom
Shira kumo ni	In a white cloud
Kakurete kasumi	The spring night's moon
Haru no yo no tsuki	Is concealed in mist.

*Yoshino is located south of the old capital city of Nara in central Honshu.

(Yoshiaki Shimizu, trans., object notes, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1986).

FOCUS ON



Seated Monk and Haiku Poem

by Kobayashi Issa (1763–1827). Edo period,
late 18th–early 19th century. Hanging scroll; ink on paper. 28.5 x 43.2 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Purchase, F1974.18

Haiku

Many westerners are familiar with haiku—a three-line poem of 5, 7, and 5 syllables. The haiku is derived from the first three lines of the five-line *waka* poem. Universally popular today, the haiku reached its height in Japan during the Edo period.

The haiku is an ideal poetic form with which to capture a fleeting experience. The following of the haiku that appears on the hanging scroll painting above was written by the poet Kobayashi Nobuyuki (1763–1827), whose pen name, Issa, means “cup of tea.” The image of the seated monk may be his self-portrait. The haiku evokes Buddhist compassion, articulated by a kind-hearted farmer. The Japanese version adheres to the haiku structure, while the translation does not.

Kari ga na mo
nokete oita zo
sono hatake

Greens for wild geese
have been set aside
in that field

FOCUS ON

Drama: No, Kabuki, and Bunraku

No

No theater developed during the fifteenth century and was favored by elite samurai. This unique form of drama, which combines vocal performance, music, and dance, evolved from Shinto and Buddhist rituals. No plays always deal on one level with the supernatural world and often feature spirits, ghosts, deities, or demons. On another level, these plays illuminate truths about the universe from a religious perspective. Unlike Kabuki, a later theatrical form (see below), No is subtle and poetic in its approach. In a typical production, a cycle of five plays is performed, with comic skits (*kyogen*) interspersed to provide relief from the somber subject matter.

The two principal figures in a No performance are the main character, or *shite*, and a secondary character called a *waki*. Both characters perform in court costumes of the medieval period and the *shite* generally wears a mask that indicates his role, which may be a man or a woman. Reflecting the Buddhist nature of the contents of No plays, the *shite* changes his mask and costume for the second act of the play to show that things are not always what they seem to be—including the nature of his character.



Mask, Okina type

Kamakura period or Muromachi period, 14th century
Wood. 18.7 x 14.8 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution. Purchase and partial gift of
Mr. and Mrs. Willard G. Clark, F1982.34

This mask portrays an old man (*okina*), who is a deity in disguise. *Okina* or a similar old man was the main character in the first of the sequence of No plays. In these exceptional plays the protagonist performs alone, without a *waki*.

Featured Objects

FOCUS ON

Kabuki

Kabuki is probably Japan's best-known form of drama. Characterized by melodramatic, exciting stories of love, loss, and conflict (mostly dating from the medieval and Edo periods), Kabuki performances featured actors in bold, vivid costumes and dramatic makeup. Kabuki originated in the world of social outcasts who resided along the riverbanks in Kyoto—as a kind of outdoor theater performed by women in the early seventeenth century. Samurai, merchants, and other common people were enthusiastic patrons of Kabuki theater with its exciting performances that could last for hours on end. Kabuki actors were celebrities of their time and were frequently depicted in woodblock prints. By the 1870s the theater began to shed the associations with its origins as Japanese officials sought to elevate this popular entertainment to the status of a national theater.



The Actors Arashi Shichigoro as Edobei and Iwai Hanshiro IV as Fujinami

by Utagawa Toyokuni I (1769–1825).
Edo period, 1798. Woodblock print (oban);
ink, color, and mica on paper. 37.0 x
23.1 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution. Gift of the family of Eugene
and Agnes E. Meyer, F1974.97

This print depicts Iwai Hanshiro IV (1747–1800), one of the premier actors of women's roles (*onnagata*), cowering at the feet of fellow actor Arashi Shichigoro, who strikes a highly stylized pose typical of a Kabuki performance.

FOCUS ON

Bunraku (Puppet Theater)

Like Kabuki, the puppet theater known as *Bunraku* reached the height of its popularity during the Edo period, during the early to mid-eighteenth century. The two forms were closely related in repertory and style. One of the most important of all Edo playwrights, Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724), wrote for both *Bunraku* and Kabuki. For *Bunraku* he wrote both historical plays and what are called domestic plays that recount stories of contemporary, urban, and often lower-class Japanese.

Bunraku puppeteers manipulate puppets about one-half life size, while chanters and musicians perform music, as well as the voices of the puppets. *Bunraku* originated in the traveling puppet theater of the Heian period, which offered puppet plays, music, and magic, and in the stories told by traveling monks.



A Puppet Show: The Story of the Potted Trees

by Bunkaku. Edo period, early 18th century.

Six-panel folding screen; ink, color, and gold on paper

152.6 x 377.0 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1898.505

This painting depicts the stage of the Takemoto theater in Osaka during a performance of the puppet play *The Woman's Potted Dwarf Trees*. Today, as in the past, *Bunraku* puppeteers work in full view of the audience. Now, however, each puppet is operated by three puppeteers, with each one responsible for a different part of the body. This configuration lends an increased flexibility to the puppets and gives greater control to the puppeteers.



Shigaraki ware storage jar

Japan, Shiga Prefecture, Shigaraki kilns

Muromachi period, ca. 1400–50

Unglazed stoneware with natural wood-ash glaze

47.0 x 36.8 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution

Purchase, F1982.29

STONEWARE FROM SHIGARAKI—A VALLEY IN THE MOUNTAINS

southeast of Kyoto—is identified by the coarse-grained reddish clay and pale yellow or green natural wood-ash glaze, which formed when ash from burning fuel settled on the jar and was melted by the heat. On this Shigaraki jar, the glaze is evident in the large oval patch on the left and the rivulet in the center.

This jar was almost certainly made by a farmer who was a part-time potter. The potter's amateur status is indicated by the irregular shape. From an early date, narrow-necked Shigaraki jars were used as vessels for tea leaves. In the sixteenth century, however, Shigaraki storage jars began to attract the attention of urban tea connoisseurs. Searching for new sources of tea ceremony utensils (see Focus on Tea Ceremony, page 58), tea masters discovered a special beauty in the appearance of Shigaraki clay. Borrowing a term from literary criticism, they described it as “chilled and withered” and associated it with autumn and winter. (See Focus on Literature in Japan, page 27.) Shigaraki ware became one of the first native Japanese ceramics to find a place in the tea ceremony.

The body of this jar was constructed by using coils of clay, which were smoothed in a sequence of four layers. Although much of contemporary Shigaraki ware is now thrown on a fast **potter's wheel**, this ancient technique, appropriate to the coarse Shigaraki clay, is still employed for building large pieces.

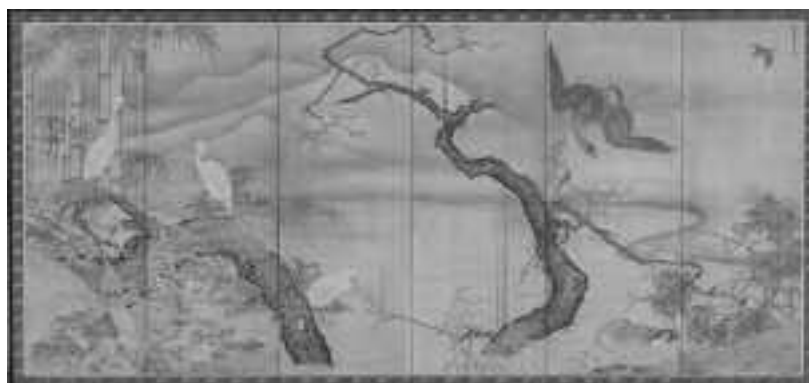
Seasons



THE JAPANESE PLACE GREAT EMPHASIS ON OBSERVING, APPRECIATING, AND interacting with the natural world and pay particular attention to the distinct four seasons that occur throughout much of Japan. Traditional Japanese architecture which emphasizes visual and physical access to the outdoors illustrates this deep interest in nature. Moreover, the time of year is often echoed in the art displayed, such as hanging scroll paintings depicting plants and flowers of the seasons, arrangements of seasonal flowers, the use of specially designed utensils, and foods associated with the time of year. This is true as well in Japanese visual art, which maintains a long tradition of depicting the four seasons using **motifs** and symbols.

Birds and Flowers of the Four Seasons

by Sesshu Toyo (1420–1506)
Muromachi period, late 15th–early 16th century. Pair of six-panel folding screens; ink and color on paper
178.1 x 375.5 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Purchase, F1953.94 and 95



These two screens, painted by Sesshu, reflect the classic Chinese theme of birds and flowers melded with the Japanese theme of the changing seasons: The landscape progresses from spring on the far right to winter at the far left

ABOVE Detail, Nabeshima ware dish with design of reeds and mist. Japan, Edo period, second half of 17th century–early 18th century. Porcelain with cobalt decoration and partial celadon glaze. 5.7 x 20.3 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Purchase, F1964.7



The Four Accomplishments

by Utagawa Toyohiro (1773–1828). Edo period, 19th century. Hanging scroll (mounted on panel); color and gold on silk. 101.3 x 41.1 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution
Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1903.58

This painting illustrates the way in which interior decoration reflects the seasons. Both the subject matter of the hanging scroll painting on the right and the way the environment is incorporated into the living space suggest the Japanese affinity for nature.



Set of five boat-shaped dishes with design of waves and reeds

Edo period, 1700–50. Brown stoneware clay, thin white slip, iron-brown and cobalt-blue pigments beneath a clear glaze. 4.1 x 14.6 x 10.9 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Purchase, F1999.15.1-5

These five boat-shaped dishes are decorated with reeds and waves to further evoke the idea of water. In summer or early autumn, raw fish (sashimi) would have been served on plates like these.

THE APPRECIATION OF THE YEAR'S CYCLE AND THE NATURAL WORLD has its roots in some of the most deeply held beliefs in Japanese culture. The sacredness of the landscape in Shinto belief is one of the primary contributors to this profound connection with nature. (See Shinto, page 10.) In Shinto, mountains, trees, waterfalls, and rocks are considered the home of native deities or kami.

The Buddhist concept of impermanence has also had an impact on Japanese views of nature. In Buddhist belief, everything is in transition — nothing and no one remains the same from one moment to the next. While the ultimate goal is to accept impermanence and resist attachment to things of this world (which is believed to be the core cause of suffering), the Japanese have taken the idea of the transitory nature of all things and imbued it with aesthetic values and strong emotion. For example, appreciating the exquisite beauty of a spring flower in bloom is counterbalanced by the awareness that the flower will soon fade and die.

This awareness of impermanence brings a profound emotional quality to the experience of seasonal change. Autumn, for example, offers both the beauty of the changing leaves and their brilliant colors and feelings of loss and sadness because of the impending transition to winter. The following poem by the courtier Fujiwara Teika (1162–1241) entitled “Autumn Hut” evokes this sense of melancholy:

I gaze afar
And ask for neither cherry flowers
Nor crimson leaves:
The inlet with its grass-thatched huts
Clustered in the growing autumn dusk.
(Brower and Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry*, p. 307)

The theme of impermanence pervades Japanese literature. For example, the first lines of *The Tale of the Heike* make the temporary nature of life stark and clear:

The sound of the Gion Shoja bells echoes the impermanence of all things;
The color of the sala flowers reveals the truth that the prosperous must decline.
The proud do not endure; they are like a dream on a spring night;
The mighty fall at last, they are as dust before the wind . . .
(McCullough, *Genji & Heike*, p. 265)

A different treatment of this same theme appears in the work of Matsuo Basho (1644–1694), a master of haiku. Basho was a monk of the Edo period who wrote prolifically throughout his extensive travels across Japan. (See Focus on Haiku, page 33.) The haiku of Basho capture moments in time and convey visual and emotional impressions with spare descriptive language. His most famous haiku (translated numerous times in various ways) describes a frog he encountered:

An ancient pond
A frog jumps in
The sound of water.
(Varley, *Japanese Culture*, p. 195)

Like the literary examples mentioned above, the visual arts in Japan reflect sensitivity to the four seasons in diverse styles and media. Everything from ceramic objects to large-scale paintings are means by which Japanese artists have approached the four seasons.

Viewing Cherry Blossoms at Ueno Park

by Hishikawa Moronobu (1618–1694)

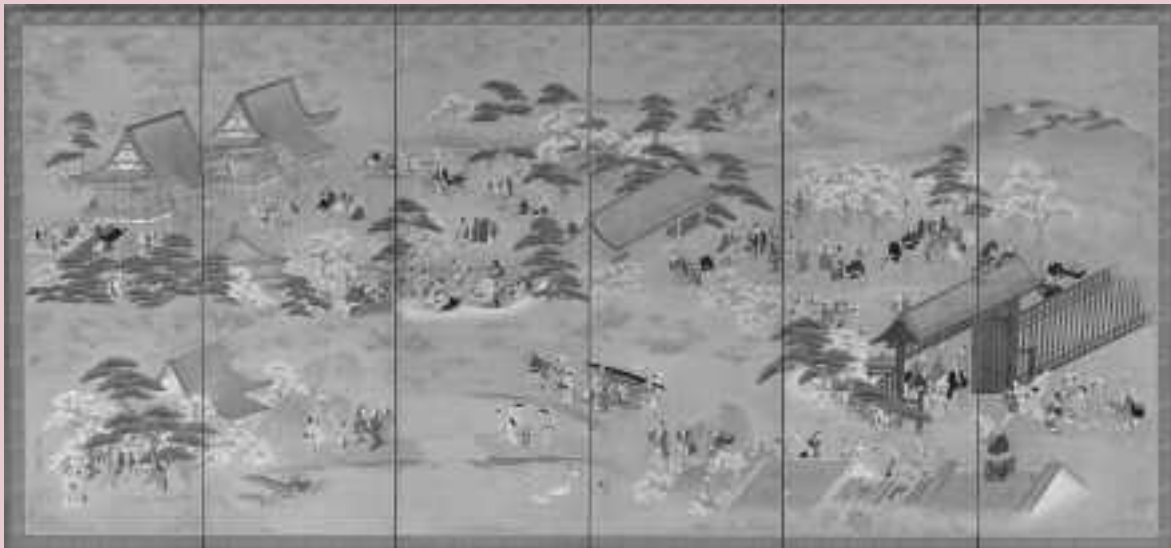
Japan, Edo period, 17th century

Six-panel folding screen; ink, color, and gold on paper

165.6 x 367.8; overall 180.0 x 382.2 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution

Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1906.267



CREATED IN THE ARTIST'S FINAL YEARS, THIS IMAGE REFLECTS Moronobu's celebration of the seasonal pleasures of a resurrected and vital city. Edo (now Tokyo) had experienced a devastating fire in 1657 that killed more than one hundred thousand people. In this painting, however, all appears well as groups enjoy the cherry blossoms — flowers that symbolize the spring — in the Ueno area.

The artist Hishikawa Moronobu, who was born into a family of textile designers, is regarded by some as an originator of the genre known as ukiyo-e (literally “pictures of the floating world”), which depicted contemporary life and fleeting pleasures of the Edo period.

FOCUS ON

Ukiyo-e

The Edo period (1615–1868) was a time of urban growth and the rise of the merchant classes, who now had income to spend on the luxuries of entertainment, art objects, ceramics, food, clothing, and—with woodblock printing—books and prints. Ukiyo-e or “Pictures of the Floating World” captured the amusements of the urban theater and **pleasure quarters**, areas in the city that offered shopping, tea-houses, theater, and female entertainers known as geisha. Beautiful women and Kabuki actors were popular subjects. The designation “Pictures of the Floating World” alludes to the Buddhist view in which pleasures are regarded as illusory and fleeting.

Although ukiyo-e images include both paintings and prints, woodblock prints are most closely associated with the popular understanding of the genre. These prints are made on paper using a series of carved wooden blocks, with ink and plant or other colorants. Initially, woodblock prints were produced in black and white, with ink as the only pigment. However, as the process became more refined, artisans learned how to create beautifully colored prints with a sequence of blocks inked with different pigments and printing in alignment until the image was complete. (See also *Ink and Pigments*, page 55 and “The Actors Arashi Shichigoro as Edobei and Iwai Hanshiro IV as Fujinami” page 35.)

The first bonito catch, an event of early summer, is eagerly awaited each year, and fresh raw bonito (sashimi) is a seasonal delicacy. Cured by drying, this fish also serves as an essential ingredient in soup stock throughout the year.

This painting presents the bonito in the context of a **still life** with poetry in a hanging scroll format. The image includes assorted vegetables (radish, or daikon, and eggplant), a plate, a cup, a lacquer box, a sprig of wisteria, and, most prominently, a fresh bonito on a large blue-and-white dish. The twelve vertically aligned poems at the top, signed by poets who were members of the same circle or club, praise the early summer and write of the cuckoo, peony, cicada, flowers, trees, moon, and summer heat.

Interestingly, Hokkei was a fish monger whose enjoyment for painting eventually developed into a professional talent. He was known for his prints, but in this special case, he produced a painting of unusual quality.



The First Katsuo of the Season

by Totoya Hokkei (1780–1850). Japan, Edo period, late 18th–mid-19th century. Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk. 108.0 x 54.8 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Purchase, F1996.32

FOCUS ON

Calligraphy

Calligraphy—which literally means “beautiful writing”—is called *shodo* in Japanese and refers both to individual characters and entire documents. Unlike writing used simply for record-keeping, *shodo* is a highly respected art form in Japanese tradition. The Japanese learned the art of calligraphy from the Chinese, but later masters transformed the rules of spacing, ink tone, character form, and line width, creating their own distinctive styles.

Prior to the adoption of the Chinese writing system in the fifth through sixth century, the Japanese had no written language. Chinese and Japanese languages are not related, however, and the Chinese characters (*kanji* in Japanese), each associated with a meaning, were not convenient for representing the sounds of the Japanese language. Recognizing this limitation, the Japanese developed phonetic symbols—*kana*—derived from Chinese cursive script. There are two kinds of *kana*: *hiragana*, which is generally used for secular and non-official texts (Buddhist sutras, for example, were still written in Chinese characters); and *katakana* now reserved for foreign language words and other special purposes. Of the two Japanese phonetic scripts, only *hiragana* became an important artistic script. (For an example of hiragana, see “Poems from *Kokinshu*,” page 28.)



Iron Flute (Tetteki)

by Kogetsu Sogan (1574–1643).

Momoyama or Edo period—late 16th–early 17th century

Hanging scroll; ink on paper. 30.6 cm. x 90.5 cm.

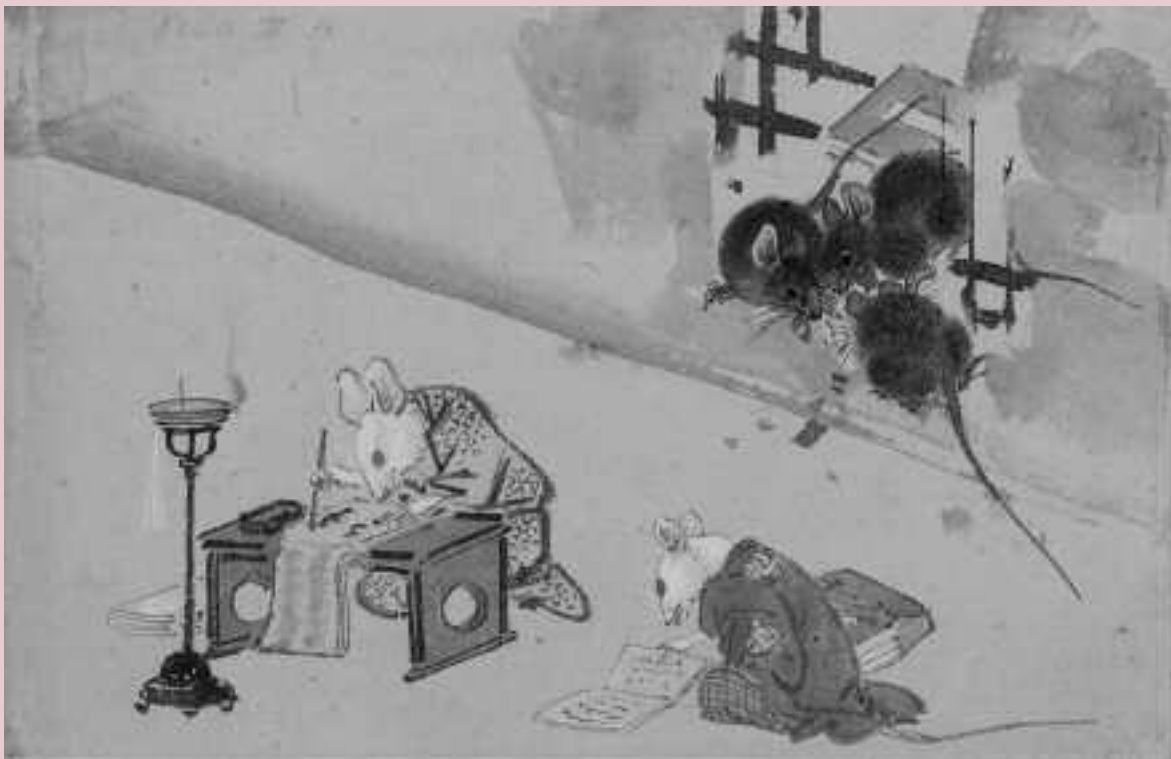
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Purchase, F1981.12

This example of Chinese characters (*kanji*) reads “Iron flute.” The artist **alludes** to the Chinese story of a magical iron flute given to a blind fortune teller.

FOCUS ON

The Chinese have long referred to the inkstick, inkstone, brush, and paper as the “Four Treasures of the Scholar’s Studio.” Japanese scholars, calligraphers, and painters also regard them as indispensable tools for their work. The inkstick, made of carbon mixed with animal glue, is rubbed with water against the inkstone to produce the ink. The density of the ink can be modified for lighter or darker effects. Brushes are flexible and made of animal hairs or bristles held together with an adhesive and inserted into a bamboo tube. (See also *Ink and Pigments*, page 55, and *Paper and Silk*, page 53.)

Shodo is more than just beautiful writing. As in the Chinese tradition, Japanese calligraphy is viewed as a window into the character of the calligrapher. In fact, the execution of calligraphy, and even the preparation in grinding and mixing the ink, is seen as a meditative act for inner reflection.



Detail, *Mice Transcribing a Book*

by Kawanabe Kyosai. Meiji era (1868–89).

Album leaf; ink and color on paper leaf

25.3 x 36.2 cm. Freer Gallery of Art

Smithsonian Institution. Purchase, F1975.29.9

This album leaf depicts a mouse, brush in hand, transcribing the text that his companion reads aloud.



**Nabeshima ware dish with
design of reeds and mist**

Japan, Edo period, second half of 17th
century–early 18th century. Porcelain with
cobalt decoration and partial celadon glaze.
5.7 x 20.3 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution. Purchase, F1964.7

THE AUTUMNAL IMAGES OF WITHERED REEDS SURROUNDED BY MIST are unusually realistic for a Nabeshima ware, which generally features a more abstract treatment of natural motifs. Iron pigment applied directly to the roughened clay surface suggests the brittle texture and rust color of the dried leaves. The cobalt blue wash in the background and the band of celadon (greenish blue) glaze lend depth to the mist. (See Clay, page 50.)

Nabeshima ware is named for the Nabeshima clan, which established a kiln in Arita (on the island of Kyushu) in the 1670s and produced high-quality porcelain for dining and decoration. The typical Nabeshima ware object is a shallow dish (like that pictured to the left). Asymmetry and abstraction characterize the decorative style. Nabeshima lords (daimyo) used Nabeshima ware dishes as tableware for official functions and for presentation as gifts. Nabeshima ware was highly prized, and the techniques were carefully protected.

IN 1214 EMINENT POET AND CRITIC FUJIWARA TEIKA (1162–1241) composed a sequence of twenty-four season poems featuring a bird and flower for each of the twelve months. These poems were incorporated into the Japanese literary canon as the ideal verse expressions of the seasons. Early in the Edo period, an interest in the court sensibilities of the earlier Heian and Kamakura periods produced many works of art that illustrated these poems. This plate depicts the mandarin ducks and plum blossoms of the twelfth month:

Plum blossoms

It is that time when snow buries the color of the hedge,
Yet a branch of plum is blooming, on “this side” of the New Year.

Mandarin duck

The snow falls on the ice of the pond on which I gaze,
Piling up as does this passing year on all years past,
And on the feathered coat of the mandarin duck, the “bird of regret.”

(Kamens, “The Past in the Present: Fujiwara Teika and the Traditions of Japanese Poetry,” in *Word and Flower*, ed. Carolyn Wheelwright, p. 31)

These paired poems illustrate the visual pleasures of the twelfth month. The plum blossom heralds the New Year, while the mandarin duck — believed to take a lifelong mate — symbolizes fidelity. The “bird of regret” is the mandarin duck left behind by the death of its partner.

The plate depicts a duck at the side of a body of water, under a blossoming plum tree. The outside edge of the plate is decorated with camellias, pomegranate blossoms, cloves, flowers, and scrolls in underglaze blue enamel.

In terms of technique, this plate illustrates how Kenzan’s interest in painting on pottery led to his invention of a method for applying enamel pigments on a ground of white slip under, rather than over, the glaze. In his technique, the colored pigments are painted on the white slip and then coated with a transparent glaze. After firing, the colors have a soft look, similar to the way pigments appear when applied to a paper that absorbs the color.



Square dish with design after poems of birds and flowers

by Ogata Kenzan (1663–1743)

Japan, Edo period, 1699–1712

Buff clay; enamels, white slip, and iron pigment
under transparent lead glaze

2.4 x 16.9 x 16.8 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution

Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1905.58

Materials



TRADITIONALLY, JAPANESE MAKERS AND USERS OF OBJECTS HAVE accorded their materials deep respect. They appreciate materials for their innate qualities, regardless of the intended purpose — utilitarian or aesthetic. Discussed below are important categories of materials used in Japanese art.

Clay

Japan has one of the longest histories of pottery-making in the world, extending back twelve thousand years. Numerous pottery production areas throughout the country used distinctive local clays, techniques, and designs to make a wide range of shapes and styles. Japanese ceramics are usually identified by the area where they were produced — another example of the strong Japanese affinity for place.

Highly valued forms of pottery in Japan range from earthenware Raku ware tea bowls formed by hand, to finely decorated Nabeshima ware porcelain dishes. (See “Nabeshima ware dish with design of reeds and mist,” page 46.) The materials discussed here represent the three main categories of clays and some basic techniques associated with them.



Black Raku tea bowl

Attributed to Hon'ami Koetsu (1558–1637).
Edo period, early 17th century. Glazed earthenware.
8.7 x 12.5 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian
Institution. Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1899.34

Raku ware is associated with a family in Kyoto descended from the potter Chojiro (1516–1592), who introduced the workshop's trademark hand-sculpted, black- or red-glazed bowls used for drinking *matcha*, powdered green tea central to the tea ceremony. (See Focus on Tea Ceremony, page 58.)

ABOVE Detail, Shigaraki ware storage jar. Japan, Shiga Prefecture, Shigaraki kilns. Muromachi period, ca. 1400–1450. Unglazed stoneware with natural wood-ash glaze. 47.0 x 36.8 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Purchase, F1982.29



Jar

Jomon period (10,500–300 B.C.E.), Middle Jomon (c. 3000–2500 B.C.E.). Unglazed earthenware clay. 50.2 x 31.7 x 31.7 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Purchase, F1974.5

This particular Jomon vessel has the elaborately sculpted rim and flat base typical of the Middle Jomon period. The asymmetrical forms projecting from the rim and the combinations of incised (scored) and **relief** designs on the body are characteristic decorative devices.

Earthenware

The oldest pottery made in Japan is **earthenware**, which began to be produced in the Jomon period (10,500–400 B.C.E.). The typical Jomon vessel is a tall, narrow container made by hand. These pots were shaped and decorated with markings that result from the impressions of ropes or cords in the soft clay. Hence, the name “cord marked,” the English translation of the word “Jomon.” The rope was probably wrapped around a stick and rolled over the clay coils to consolidate them. Finally, the pots were fired in a bonfire at a low temperature (400–600° centigrade).

All clays begin as rock and are weathered through heat, pressure, or exposure to wind and rain. Earthenware clay is “secondary clay” — clay that has washed away from its original source and has picked up considerable mineral and organic impurities. It is fired (hardened in heat) by driving off water at low bonfire temperatures and tends to be porous, relatively soft, and red or brown in color. Historically, cooking pots, serving dishes for food and beverages, and storage vessels were made from earthenware. Now replaced in ordinary use by other types of ceramics or other materials, earthenware is still used to make offering vessels for Shinto shrines.

Stoneware

There is no absolute distinction between earthenware and stoneware. Stoneware is a “primary clay” that has stayed close to its source and has fewer impurities than earthenware clay. When fired — at higher temperatures (above 1000° C) — it becomes nonporous. The earliest stoneware in Japan dates from the late fourth to the early fifth centuries. These funerary objects, called *sue* ware, were produced with technology introduced from Korea. *Sue* ware was made on a potter’s wheel and fired in a tunnel kiln, reaching higher temperatures than a bonfire.

Stoneware, like earthenware, can be glazed, and glaze may also coat decorative painting. The high-temperature glazes applied to stoneware have a harder, glassier quality than low-temperature lead-based glazes used on earthenware objects. The combination of glazed stoneware objects and wood-fired kilns creates an element of chance in the finished appearance of the glaze. Practitioners of the tea ceremony developed appreciation for the results of chance in determining the appearance and qualities of the final object. There was also a strong Japanese aesthetic interested in unglazed stoneware.

Porcelain

Porcelain is chiefly composed of the white clay called kaolin — it is a “primary clay.” After firing at high temperature (above 1400° C) it appears white, and may be translucent when very thin. Immigrant Korean potters found deposits of porcelain clay in Arita (on Kyushu) in the seventeenth century. Chinese and Korean potters had already mastered the production of porcelain. Competing with Chinese wares, some of the early Japanese porcelains were made to be exported to Europe, where there was a high demand for East Asian porcelain.

As with earthenware and stoneware, porcelain can be painted with pigment before being glazed. Porcelain can also be decorated with enamels applied over the fired glaze, then fired again.

Wood

WITH FORESTS COVERING THREE-FOURTHS OF ITS LAND, JAPAN HAS a rich tradition of using this natural resource. Numerous varieties — including cedar, cypress, paulownia, and pine — have been employed for architectural structures, sculptures, furniture, shoes, and as the base for lacquer-coated objects (see Focus on Lacquer, page 63). Buildings were traditionally constructed from wood, which explains why the threat of fire was so pervasive, particularly in urban areas.

Plain, unvarnished wood has long been an architectural staple. At the famous Shinto shrine at Ise, the central shrine is believed to have been modeled after an ancient granary. Both shrines and all the outside buildings have been ritually rebuilt every twenty years for the last thirteen hundred years — a practice consistent with the Shinto concepts of purification and renewal and a measure of the spirit-infused status of the wood. Images of Shinto and Buddhist deities carved from wood are believed to retain that material's original sacred qualities. (While originally kami were not represented in any artistic media, Shinto images developed in response to the images of Buddhist figures that accompanied the rise of Buddhism in Japan.)

Wood developed into a popular material for sculpture in the late Nara period (710–94) and shortly thereafter became the primary material for Buddhist sculpture. While this expresses a genuine appreciation for the qualities of the wood, there may also be a connection to the Buddhist tradition that holds that the first image of the Buddha made in India was carved from sandalwood.

There are two basic wood sculpture techniques: single block and multiple block. In single-block sculptures, the sculptor carves the wood roughly at first, then in subsequent stages adds more detail. Multiple-block sculptures are made from several blocks of wood, which are carved into various component parts of the sculpture and then assembled. This technique allows multiple craftsmen to specialize in different parts and increases the overall speed of production.

Paper and Silk

Paper

From writing letters, covering sliding doors and folding screens, to making umbrellas (waterproofed with oil), paper has been used for a range of purposes. Before the modern era, all Japanese paper was handmade, and a number of workshops still produce high-quality handmade papers. Most Japanese handmade paper (*washi*) is made from one of three principal trees or shrubs: *kozo*, the paper mulberry tree, *mitsumata*, which produces a glossy, insect-resistant paper, and *gampi*, a non-domesticated tree that produces an insect-and-moisture-resistant paper of remarkable gloss and thinness. As with ceramics, the quality of the paper produced is dependent on the local environment. The kind of fiber, the quality and source of water, and other environmental factors greatly affect the final product, as do the techniques and skills of the maker.



**Page from the Ishiyama-gire:
Poems of Ki no Tsurayuki**

Traditionally attributed to Fujiwara no Sadanobu (1088–1156). Heian period, early 12th century. Panel-mounted album page; ink, silver, and gold on assembled dyed paper. 20.3 x 16.1 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Purchase, F1969.4

The exquisite paper on which this calligraphy is written is a rare early example of a complex type of ornamented paper. Colored papers dyed purple, yellow, and white were cut or torn and joined along their edges to form a collage, then decorated with scattered patterns painted in silver and embellished with flakes of gold and silver leaf.

The papermaking process uses the inner bark, or bast. The cleaned bast fibers are soaked in water, then cooked in lye (an **alkali** solution), usually made with wood ash and water. The cooking process helps the fibers separate easily and bleaches them. After cooking, fibers are placed in cold water and any bits of dirt or other particles are removed by hand. Fibers are then beaten for thirty minutes to an hour for further separation. They are mixed with water and a gelatinous substance taken from the root of the *tororo aoi* plant that aids in suspending the fibers in the water. Sheets are formed on a woven bamboo or grass screen set in a wooden frame that is dipped repeatedly into the fiber solution. The sheets are piled up one at a time, then pressed to drain water. Finally, they are dried on wooden boards. Special papers may be dyed and also decorated with gold and silver.

Silk

Like paper, silk in Japan has many uses—from clothing, to ground for paintings, to the mounting structures of hanging scroll paintings. Silk is made from the fibers of the silkworm cocoon. Domestication of silkworms (the larvae of a moth) began in China around 2700 B.C.E. The silkworm feeds on the leaves of the mulberry tree and spins a cocoon in which to molt. Workers unwind the silk filament from the cocoons by simmering the cocoons in water to kill the worm and release the sericin, a gummy substance that binds the filaments of the cocoon together. Several filaments are unreeled together to create fine thread. These threads (often spun or twisted for strength) are dyed and then woven on looms to make fabric. A small length of silk fabric requires several thousand cocoons. Silkworm domestication was introduced to Japan from China by the second century.

Silver and Gold

JAPAN HAS USED SILVER AND GOLD IN ITS ARTWORK SINCE EARLY IN its history. Initially, gold was extracted from sand collected on the banks of rivers. In the eighth and ninth centuries, however, the discovery of gold and silver mines produced a larger volume of the metals for use in religious and secular objects.

Silver and gold have been employed in various ways to decorate Japanese paintings, screens, lacquer, paper, textiles, ink, and Buddhist sculptures. Gold leaf was a popular decoration on folding screens beginning in the fifteenth century and the gold itself was a useful light reflector in dimly lit Japanese interiors.

Ink and Pigments

JAPAN'S CALLIGRAPHERS AND PAINTERS HAVE PRODUCED BEAUTIFUL and memorable images with ink and colored pigment. The brushes designed to deliver ink and pigments to the paper have also played a critical role in the history of Japanese art, because of the qualities of line, shape, tone, and texture that the brush can produce. In the classical Japanese brush, the hairs are held together with an adhesive and are inserted into a hollow bamboo tube.

Ink

In Japan, ink is made from sooty carbon produced by burning pine, which is then mixed with a solution of animal glue, pressed into molds, and dried. Ink sticks are usually molded into rectangular or round shapes, and they may be decorated with designs of dragons, landscapes, auspicious beings, and gilded inscriptions. Just before the artist begins to paint, he grinds an ink stick with water against an ink stone. The quantity of water affects the ink's consistency. Ink is used for prints, paintings, and calligraphy.

Pigments

In addition to ink in various tones of black, a wide variety of colored pigments have been used in Japanese painting and woodblock printing. Pigments for painting may be either inorganic (either from natural minerals or manufactured) or organic (from plant or animal sources). One variety of green, for example, is made from the mineral malachite. The pigments are mixed with animal skin glue, which acts as a binding agent.

Typically the pigments on woodblock prints are made from plant sources more often than those used on painting. A popular blue comes from the indigo plant and a variety of red is produced from safflower. These vegetable pigments have a translucency unlike the more opaque mineral pigments. However, some mineral pigments, such as an orange-red composed mostly of red lead, are also used. The introduction of vivid aniline (synthetic) dye from the West in the 1860s further extended the technical range of full-color printing, which had blossomed a century earlier.



Ewer or freshwater jar

Japan, Hizen Province, Karatsu ware.
Momoyama period, early 17th century.
Stoneware with iron and rice-straw ash glazes;
lacquered wooden lid. 15.8 x 24.5
(over handle and spout) x 14.2 cm.
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution
Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1898.457

THIS VESSEL COMBINES A BODY THROWN ON A POTTER'S WHEEL WITH a hand-formed spout and handle. A combination of opaque white and iron brown make up the two-color glaze. During firing, the rice-straw ash glaze turned bluish white and the iron ash glaze dark brown. The brown glaze also ran irregularly over the white glaze, and this accidental effect of firing was considered attractive. A lid for the vessel was made from lacquered wood. This jar was used in the Japanese tea ceremony — in fact, Karatsu ware was one of the wares that originally attracted tea masters to native Japanese ceramics. (See Focus on Lacquer, page 63.)

FOCUS ON

Tea Ceremony

Tea drinking was introduced to Japan from China in the ninth century, although it was not until the twelfth century, with another wave of contact from the continent, that the plant began to be cultivated in Japan. Zen priest Eisai (1141–1215), who founded the Zen Buddhist Rinzai school, is credited with bringing tea seeds back to Japan and touting the beverage's health benefits. The tea ceremony (*chanoyu*) took shape in the sixteenth century with the formalization of the protocol and the group of desired utensils. Initially, tea masters used implements imported from China, Korea, and Southeast Asia, but in the sixteenth century interest began to grow in Japanese-made utensils. (See also "Shigaraki ware storage jar," page 37.) During the Edo period, the tea ceremony was enthusiastically adopted by the growing merchant classes interested in entertainment and cultural education. Some participants just liked the taste of tea and the socializing; others were avid collectors of tea utensils.

The tea ceremony takes place in a specially designated tea room or even a separate tea house located in a garden. The ceremony focuses on formalized preparation and partaking of tea and includes enjoyment of seasonal sweets and conversation about and appreciation of the tea bowl, other utensils, and the painting or calligraphy scroll and flowers that adorn the room. The host prepares and serves the guests the beverages made from powdered green tea (*matcha*) and hot water, which is whipped in the tea bowl until frothy. The relationship between host and guests, and the sometimes quiet and meditative nature of the event, contribute to enjoyment of the tea ceremony, which can last for several hours and include a meal.

FOCUS ON



Beauties of the Yoshiwara:

Yamashiroya Matsukaze

by Suzuki Harunobu (1724–1770). Edo period, ca. 1770

Woodblock print; ink and color ink on paper. 21.2 x 14.6 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution

Gift of the family of Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer, F1974.46

Yamashiroya Matsukaze, a courtesan of the Yoshiwara entertainment district in Edo (now Tokyo), is depicted here with a bamboo ladle dipping water from the steaming iron kettle to prepare tea. Other tea-ceremony utensils are arranged near the charcoal brazier. During the Edo period, tea drinking spread to many different areas of society and became a component of entertainment.

BELIEF IN SALVATION THROUGH THE POWER OF AMIDA, THE BUDDHA who presides over the Western Paradise, became widespread in Japan from the eleventh through the fourteenth century. Amida Buddha's promise of salvation provided a simple, direct, and consoling faith for believers who lived in times of frequent warfare and social unrest. Esoteric Buddhism, a system favored by the aristocracy in earlier times, required attention to complex rituals and images. Amida, by contrast, was perceived as compassionate and approachable.

Here, Amida Buddha leans forward toward the viewer with hands forming a ritual gesture, or *mudra*, of reassurance, or “have no fear.” The figure stands upon a stylized lotus blossom composed of multiple, delicately carved petals. In Buddhist belief, the lotus symbolizes purity and is associated with all enlightened beings. In keeping with Buddhist **iconography**, the Amida Buddha is portrayed with elongated earlobes (symbolizing the former life of the Buddha as a prince who wore heavy earrings, only to renounce them along with all other material possessions); a knob on the top of the head (*ushnisha*), which symbolizes his immense knowledge; and a dot in the middle of the forehead (called an *urna*), which represents his great wisdom. (See Buddhism, page 13.)

This figure is made from multiple carved pieces of wood, coated in lacquer that was applied over a layer of linen, and features crystal insets for eyes and complex patterns of gold leaf to indicate the designs on Amida's robes. (See Wood, page 52, and Focus on Lacquer, page 63.)



Amida

Japan, Kamakura period, early 14th century.

Wood with gilding

113.2 x 44.0 x 44.0 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Purchase—The Harold P. Stern Memorial Fund and museum funds in appreciation of Nancy Fessenden and Richard Danziger and their exemplary service to the Galleries as leaders of the Board of Trustees, F2002.9a–f

Featured Objects



Inkstone box

Japan, Edo period, 17th century

Lacquer, gold, and silver on wood; gilt silver and stone fittings. 4.2 x 16.9 x 18.4 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution

Edith Ehrman Fund and museum purchase, F1991.9

THIS BOX DEPICTS IN GOLD AND SILVER ORNAMENTAL LACQUER (*MAKI-E*) a solitary noble person's carriage in a deserted autumn field, which probably alludes to a scene in the tenth chapter of *The Tale of Genji*. (See Focus on Lacquer, page 63, for discussion of *maki-e*.) Large areas of gold and silver heighten the effect of the metallic powders used in this design. (See *The Tale of Genji*, page 29, and Silver and Gold, page 55.)

The insides of the lid and base continue the theme of solitude associated with autumn, presenting a scene of pine trees along a shoreline and a silver crescent moon above. The box contains an inkstone, trays for brushes and inksticks, and a water-dropper in the form of a boat with waves lapping up on the sides. (See Focus on Calligraphy, page 44.)

This box is made from wood coated with black lacquer with textile underlay. The crescent moon on the inside of the lid is made from tin sheet.

FOCUS ON

Lacquer

Lacquer is produced from the sap of the *Rhus verniciflua* tree, which is indigenous to China. The clear sap is harvested, then warmed by the sun or heated to concentrate the sap and strained to remove impurities. The toxic sap can cause allergic reactions, however, and lacquer workers must avoid direct contact.

After its purification, lacquer sap can be mixed with pigments to produce different colors, the two most common being mercury red and carbon black. Japanese lacquer ware technique is unique in its use of gold and silver flakes sprinkled onto the lacquer to create a glittering effect and pictorial designs—a technique called *maki-e*. (See “Inkstone box,” page 62.)

Lacquer is an excellent adhesive sealant as well as a decorative coating. Generally, bases of lacquer objects are made from wood, leather, bamboo, or textile, and objects treated with lacquer range from serving trays to Buddhist sculptures and architecture. Applications of lacquer have even been found on ancient Jomon pottery—probably a waterproofing strategy.



Incense box

Muromachi period, 15th century

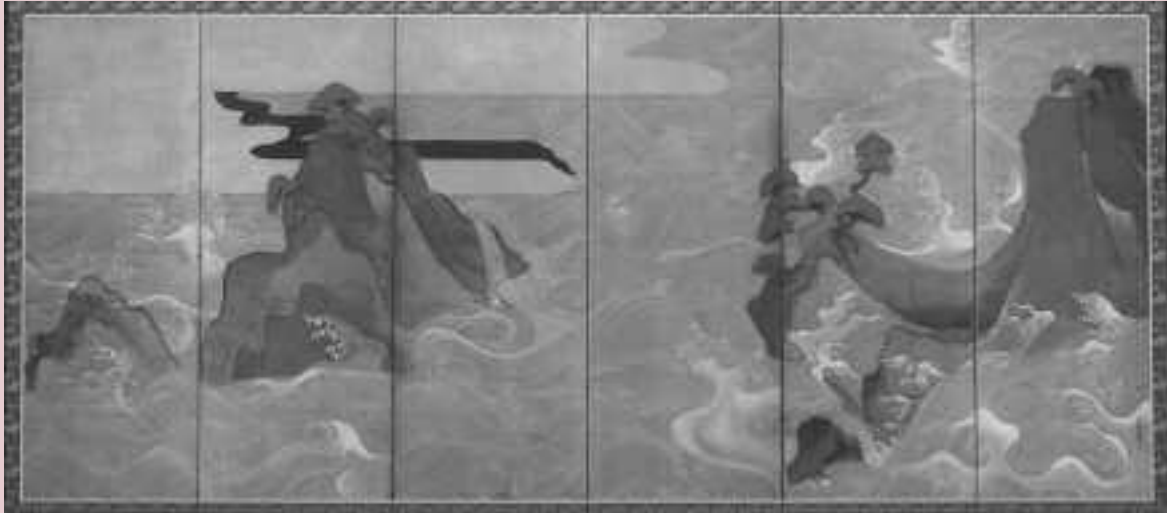
Lacquer on carved wood

8.4 x 25.0 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art,
Smithsonian Institution

Purchase, F1967.9

This lacquer incense box was made using a technique unique to Japan. In the Chinese method that inspired the Japanese artists, layer upon layer of lacquer would have been applied, then carved. In the Japanese technique the wood is carved first, then coated with layers of lacquer.



Waves at Matsushima

by Tawaraya Sotatsu (Japanese, active ca. 1600–39)

Edo period, 17th century

One of a pair of folding screens;

ink, color, gold, and silver on paper.

Image: 152.0 x 369.9 cm.; overall: 166.0 x 369.9 cm.

Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution

Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1906.231

THE BRILLIANT PAINTING ON THIS FOLDING SCREEN (ONE OF A PAIR) is considered a masterpiece. The work is one among only six surviving sets of screens by Sotatsu, a talented and innovative artist who headed a fan painting workshop known as Tawaraya. While living in the city of Kyoto, Sotatsu produced paintings on fans for popular consumption. By the late 1620s, however, Sotatsu was painting for the imperial court, and his works survive in the collection of the Kyoto imperial palace. For his artistic merit, he was granted the honorary Buddhist ecclesiastical title *Hokkyō* (Bridge of the law), which is included in his signature on this screen.

Matsushima (Pine Islands) is a famous site near the city of Sendai, in northeastern Japan. The beauty of the cluster of islands inspired both poets and painters. Sotatsu's innovative composition creates a dynamic interplay among the land and cloud forms, the bending pines growing on rocky islands, and the churning waves. He depicts the rocks from which pine trees grow in brilliant mineral colors of green, blue, and brown, highlighted with gold.

He delineates the gleaming waves in animated forms by alternating lines of ink and gold. He renders the clouds and embankments using particles of gold leaf accented with silver, which has darkened over time to a soft black tone.

Sotatsu's lifelong experimentation with pictorial composition left a lasting legacy. Later painters of the Rinpa school, such as Ogata Korin (1658–1716), repeated the Matsushima theme in their work.

FOCUS ON

Japanese Folding Screens

The folding screen is one of the most distinctive forms of Japanese art. Adaptable to a variety of settings, screens function as freestanding partitions that define architectural space and serve as formats for the display of painting. Many of Japan's greatest artists created paintings and calligraphy for folding screens, which are known as *byōbu*, or “protection from wind.”

Folding screens ideally suit the flexible environment of traditional Japanese architecture, in which most interior partitions consist of sliding panels (*fusuma*) rather than solid walls. Rooms contain little or no permanent furniture; shelves and a display alcove are built in. Compact when closed, folding screens can be conveniently moved and extended fully to provide a formal setting for a ceremony or official meeting or arranged to encompass a more intimate space for serving tea, reading, writing, or sleeping. In Japanese rooms, such activities take place on the floor, which is covered by tatami mats. The change of a few furnishings can transform the function of the room.

Like sliding *fusuma* panels, folding screens are made of a latticework of wood to which large sheets of paper are attached to form a smooth, continuous surface. Painting and calligraphy for screens are usually executed separately, on paper or occasionally on silk. Either material may be painted in subdued tones of ink or richly decorated with silver and gold. The whole screen is framed in wood, which may be lacquered and embellished with metal ornaments.

The nearly invisible system of paper hinges used to join the panels of a folding screen was invented during the Kamakura period (1185–1333). This innovation enhanced the artistic potential of the Japanese folding screen by providing a continuous surface for large-scale paintings when the screen was opened. (See also “Viewing Cherry Blossoms at Ueno Park,” page 42.)

Contemporary Voices



THE THEMES OF PLACE, SEASONS, AND MATERIALS THAT FRAME THE information in this resource have relevance not only to the historic collection of Japanese art at the Freer and Sackler galleries but also to the Japanese people today. The following passages, contributed by Japanese residents of the Washington, D.C., area, demonstrate ways in which these themes continue to resonate with contemporary Japanese.

Kayoko Kashio

Kayoko recently moved to the United States. Below, she explains what makes her home city unique.

Talking about . . . Place

I came from Kitakyushu, located one hour by train from Fukuoka, which is the biggest city on the island of Kyushu. During the Meiji era and the 1960s and 1970s the city was a symbol of the growing Japanese economy. Because of its iron industry, people called it “Iron city.” But now it’s just a typical local city.

We have excellent seafood because the city is located near the sea. Before and during World War II, the port was one of the most important ones for Japan. It played an important role as an international entrance. If you visit the Moji area, which is located near the old port, you still can see remnants of the past, including a geisha house and an old Western-style café. There was so much money from international trade.

I love Kanazawa and the Noto Peninsula. I visited those places as a tourist and they were both so nice. Many people told about how nice Kyoto is, but for me, Kyoto is too touristy. Kanazawa was more quiet and had a more natural feeling to it.

I think the Japanese have a special interest in Hokkaido and Okinawa because the islands are located in the far north and far south. I think Americans might have the same feelings about Alaska and Hawaii. Don’t you think?

Reiko Yoshimura

Reiko Yoshimura is the head librarian of the Freer and Sackler galleries. In the following passage, she describes ways that the Japanese mark each season with special foods and celebrations.

Talking about . . . Seasons

Cherry blossoms are symbolic of spring, and people of all ages go out with friends and family to appreciate the blossoms and to enjoy picnics. Other springtime festivals include Girls' Day in March and Boys' Day in May. On Girls' Day we view a set of traditional dolls and on Boys' Day we hoist carp-shaped streamers on poles. In both festivals, special feasts are served and we wish good health and happiness for the girls or boys.

The Japanese summer is extremely hot and humid. We enjoy activities to cool ourselves, which include fireworks festivals by riverbanks, boating on rivers, and chasing lightning bugs. We have a star festival (*tanabata*) in July in which we decorate bamboo branches with paper fruit and paper strips on which people write their wishes. We also eat watermelon, shaved ice with sweet syrup, or *somen* noodles (cold wheat noodles with soy sauce dip). Broiled eel is believed to be especially healthy in the heat of the summer. We also use wind chimes to feel cool.

In autumn people hike among the trees to view the beautiful leaves changing to different shades of red or yellow. October is a month for the Full Moon Festival. We make offerings to the moon and eat sweet dumplings made of newly harvested rice. Other foods that represent autumn are persimmons, chestnuts, and a certain type of fish known as *sanma*. We think autumn is a good season for sports, so schools hold athletic festivals.

The biggest event in winter is New Year's Day. We prepare for the festival by cleaning houses thoroughly, we replace household items, and women cook for days. The festival starts on New Year's Eve. We eat buckwheat noodles around midnight and each Buddhist temple strikes the temple bell 108 times to cleanse individuals' misfortunes of the past year. Many people visit Shinto shrines to pray for happiness in the new year. The festival lasts until the third of January. In February we have a bean-throwing festival (*setsubun*). We throw roasted soybeans to chase demons and misfortunes away.

OPPOSITE PAGE Detail, *Boy and Mount Fuji* by Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849). Japan, Edo period, ca. 1839. Hanging scroll mounted on panel; ink and color on silk. 127.5 x 69.5 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution. Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1898.110

Jiro Ueda

Jiro currently works as a conservator at the East Asian Painting Conservation Studio at the Freer Gallery of Art. Below, he comments on his work as a conservator and his interest in the materials he uses in conservation.

Talking about . . . Materials

From the time I was in elementary school, I have been interested in the materials used for Japanese painting conservation. I especially liked the feel of the silk fabric used for the mounting of hanging scroll paintings. My father worked as a painting conservator and after high school, I also went to train as a conservator, although I studied a different technique from my father.

I apprenticed for six years in the city of Kyoto at a conservation studio. I studied with five other students. The head of the studio evaluated our work, but I mostly learned directly from senior students.

When I am repairing and remounting a painting, I work with all the different materials for a hanging scroll painting—paper and silk; bamboo, metal, or lacquer for the rollers; pigments for the colors on the painting; and different silk fabrics for the mounting. I fix damage to pigments, attach different layers of paper to the backing of the painting, and attach new rollers and silk mounting fabric.

I like working with the fabric the best. Mounting the painting on the silk is the final step in the process of repair and remounting—it's like dressing the painting in a kimono. The selection of the fabrics is very important and you have to follow certain guidelines to match the right kind of silk fabric with the style of the painting. Periodically, I go back to Japan to purchase remounting silks. There are about four or five shops that sell these kinds of silks—many fewer than there used to be. If it's available, I might use an antique silk also. I make recommendations about which fabric to use for the remounting, but the curator makes the final decision.

I think that I look at Japanese paintings differently from the average viewer. When I look at the paintings, I think, "What's going to happen to this color ten years from now?"

Discussion Questions

Place

1. Kayoko describes the way the history of her city distinguishes it from other places. Do you know anything about the history of the city, town, or area where you live? What makes it unique?
2. Kayoko reports that the northern- and southernmost areas in Japan hold a special interest for the Japanese. Do you think the states of Alaska and Hawaii hold a special interest for Americans? Why or why not? What areas of the United States do you think are particularly special? Why?

Seasons

1. In her description of seasonal celebrations in Japan, Reiko describes many special foods (like roasted soybeans in winter) and aspects of nature (like the changing of the leaves in fall) that have a meaningful connection to the season. What are some seasonal holidays or festivals that you participate in? (They may also be religious holidays that fall at the same time every year.) What are the foods and natural elements that you associate with those holidays?
2. What is your favorite season? Describe in detail how you feel, what you eat, and what you do during this season. Do you see any similarities between what you do and what Reiko describes?

Materials

1. In his discussion of his work as a painting conservator, Jiro describes how he likes working with the silk fabrics the best. Have you ever noticed what kinds of fabrics you wear? Fabrics on furniture in your home? Blankets and sheets? How do they feel to the touch? What do they look like? Which do you like the best and why?
2. Jiro describes some of the effort and care that goes into the repair and remounting of a Japanese hanging scroll painting. Have you ever taken the time to carefully repair something you own? If so, what was it and how did you repair it? Why did you do that rather than throw it away?

Vocabulary

Aesthetic	related to the beautiful
Alkali	a soluble salt of mostly potassium or sodium carbonate
Alludes	makes an indirect reference, often in a literary context
Archipelago	a series of islands
Auspicious	indicating good fortune
Bodhisattva	in the Buddhist tradition, an enlightened being who chooses not to proceed to nirvana but instead remains on earth to guide others in their path to enlightenment
Buddhism	a religion founded in India in the sixth century B.C.E. based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (ca. 563–ca. 483 B.C.E.). In Buddhist belief, desire is the cause of all suffering, and by adhering to specific moral principles known as the Eightfold Path, one can be released from desire and permanently relieved of all suffering. Buddhism was transmitted to Japan through China and Korea.
Ceramic	made from fired clay
Confucianism	a system of thought based on works attributed to Confucius (Kong Qiu, 551–479 B.C.E., a philosopher of the Eastern Zhou dynasty in China) that stressed the importance of good government, the correct placement of a person in the family and social structure, and the role of proper rites. At different points during Japan's history, Confucianism had a significant impact on social relations and government.
Daoism	a complex system of beliefs that originated in China. Religious Daoism had an impact on popular religion.
Divination	the act of foretelling future events or revealing hidden information with the aid of supernatural powers
Earthenware	clay that has been washed away from its source and has picked up significant impurities. It tends to be porous, soft, and red or brown in color. It hardens when fired to a temperature ranging from 600° to 1000° C.

Ecclesiastical	related to a religious institution
Eightfold Path	the basic moral teachings of Buddhism, the goal of which is to stop all suffering in the world
Enlightened	a state of having great wisdom and understanding; having the highest level of consciousness, believed to be attained through meditation and adhering to the principles of the Eightfold Path; having achieved the ultimate goal of Buddhism
Evangelical	missionary; crusading; attempting to spread beliefs
Expatriate	a person who leaves the country of his or her birth to live in another country
Four Noble Truths	the Buddhist teachings on how to overcome endless suffering by attaining enlightenment
Glaze	a coating that is applied in liquid form to a clay object but hardens to a glasslike substance during the firing process. It has a hard, often shiny finish, and can also act as a sealant.
Handscroll	a painting or text that rolls out into a long horizontal format
Hanging scroll painting	a painting that is created on paper or silk, backed with several layers of paper and bordered in front with silk fabric. It is a vertical format for a painting that is rolled up and stored when not in use.
Icon	an object that represents a figure of religious devotion
Iconography	the traditional visual forms and symbols associated with a particular figure, often religious
Lacquer	a substance made from the sap of the <i>Rhus verniciflua</i> tree, which is indigenous to China. When purified, it can be applied with a brush to objects to serve as both a sealant and a decorative coating.
Literati	class of highly educated persons; in China, scholar-officials
Mandalas	paintings that map the Buddhist cosmos and depict multiple Buddhist figures
Mantras	sacred words often chanted as part of meditation in Buddhist practice

Meditation	the spiritual practice of quieting the mind and focusing on the present moment to detach oneself from distractions of the world and ultimately achieve a state of enlightenment
Monastic	the state of renouncing worldly life to live in a religious community
Motif	a theme or visual image repeatedly employed in a work
Nirvana	a spiritual state of perfect peace beyond selfish attachments to worldly possessions
Pigments	a colored substance made of mineral, plant, or chemical materials that is used to make paint
Pleasure quarters	urban entertainment areas of the Edo period, which offered theater, tea houses, and female entertainers
Potter's wheel	a device on which a lump of clay can be spun and shaped into a vessel, using the centrifugal force of the quickly turning wheel
Regalia	symbols or objects that denote royalty
Relief	three-dimensional forms raised up from a flat surface
Shinto	The indigenous religion of Japan in which deities (kami) are believed to inhabit the natural landscape. Kami may also be the spirits of revered persons or ancestors.
Shogunate	a form of Japanese military government established in the twelfth century
Slip	thin solution of clay and water that is applied to a clay object to add color when fired
Still life	a drawing or painting of inanimate objects
Stoneware	clay that has stayed fairly close to its source and, therefore, has fewer impurities. It is fired at higher temperatures than earthenware (around 1250° C).
Ukiyo-e	paintings and prints from the Edo period that depict the fleeting delights of the urban theater and pleasure quarters
Waka	a Japanese poem of five lines and thirty-one syllables
Wash	a coating of a thin solution of pigment (usually cobalt or iron) in water