

Cross-Cultural Exchange and Influence in Art

Artists are often inspired by the techniques, subject matter, materials, and style of artworks from other cultures. French Impressionist artists and Japanese artists of the Meiji period exemplify the fascination with and adoption of new forms of visual representation. In this lesson, students will look closely at works of art to identify examples of influence and exchange between cultures. They will also make personal connections reinforcing the importance of cultural exchange and identify how their own lives have been influenced by cultures other than their own.

Grade Level

Adaptable for all grades

Common Core Academic State Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1](#)
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1](#)

National Visual Arts Standards

- Responding: understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning
- Connecting: relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context

C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards

- Dimension 2: History – Change, Continuity, and Context

Suggested Art Images

Click on the titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the museum's website:

- [A Famous Jockey at Shōkonsha](#), 1881, by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi
- [Cooling off at Shijō by the Kamo River](#), 1885, by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi
- [Rain Effect](#), 1879, by Camille Pissarro
- [Strolling: A Fashionable Married Woman of the Middle Meiji Period \(1880s\) Dressed in Western Style](#), 1888, by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi
- [The Jockey](#), 1889, by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
- [The Letter](#), 1890-91, by Mary Cassatt
- [The Soga Brothers Entering an Enemy Camp in the Rain](#), c. 1873, by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi



Strolling: A Fashionable Married Woman of the Middle Meiji Period (1880s) Dressed in Western Style, 1888

Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (Japanese)

Color woodcut

Sheet (ōban tate-e): approximately 15 1/2 × 10 1/2 inches (39.4 × 26.7 cm)

Purchased with funds contributed by the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, 1989

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Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Look closely to compare and contrast artistic styles
- Understand how artworks can reflect influence and exchange between cultures
- Relate to examples of cultural influence and exchange in their own lives

Materials Needed

- Screen for projecting images
- Whiteboard or chart paper for recording
- **Compare and Contrast worksheets** (optional)
- Print-outs of *Cooling off at Shijō by the Kamo River*, *The Letter*, *The Soga Brothers Entering an Enemy Camp in the Rain*, *Rain Effect*, *A Famous Jockey at Shōkonsha*, and *The Jockey*

Lesson Process

1. Before beginning this lesson, prepare a large Compare and Contrast chart on your whiteboard or chart paper. Make copies of the worksheet for your students if they are independent writers. Read background information about the artist Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, the time period in which he lived, and the ukiyo-e printmaking tradition on the teaching poster for *Yoshitoshi: Spirit and Spectacle*.
2. Tell students that today's lesson is about the ways that different cultures influence each other, and how we can see cultural exchange represented in artwork.
3. Ask students to brainstorm examples from their daily lives of cross-cultural influence. Do students play *Pokémon* or read, watch, or play other anime-inspired entertainment? Do they eat foods or enjoy going to restaurants that represent other cultures? Do they listen to music by artists from other countries? Give students time to share with a partner, and then with the class.
4. Ask students why these influences that we enjoy or benefit from in our daily lives are interesting and important to notice.
5. Explain to students that artists who belong to different cultures and live in different places are often influenced by each other. Ask why and how they think this might happen. Tell students that they will be comparing and contrasting works of art made by artists who were working at the same time in different parts of the world.
6. Project an image of *Strolling: A Fashionable Married Woman of the Middle Meiji Period (1880s) Dressed in Western Style*. Give students a minute to look quietly, and ask them to describe what they see. Guide them to focus on observations, holding off on any inferences about who the woman is or where she might be from. Ask, "What do you see that makes you say that?" when you hear an inference. See the **Troubleshooting** section for additional suggestions for facilitating a safe and inclusive conversation.
7. Once students have described this first image, pass out copies of *The Letter*. After sharing a few observations with the whole class, ask pairs of students to look together. What do they notice that is similar about the two images? What do they notice that is different? Encourage students to compare elements of the artworks like color, pattern, and use of space, as well as the subject matter. Invite them to ask questions about anything that makes them curious.

8. Use your large Compare and Contrast chart to record similarities and differences. If questions about the artists have not already come up in conversation, tell students that one artist, Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, was from Japan, and the other, Mary Cassatt, was an American living in France. Share background information about western influence in Japan during the Meiji period. If your students are advanced readers, they might read the information on the [Yoshitoshi teaching poster](#) independently. Ask where they can see western influences in Yoshitoshi's depiction of the fashionable woman.
9. Explain to students that in the same way that Japanese artists were being influenced by western visual culture, western artists like Mary Cassatt were influenced by elements of traditional Japanese printmaking. Students who are more advanced readers might read independently about the ukiyo-e tradition on the [Yoshitoshi teaching poster](#).
10. Project an image of [Cooling off at Shijō by the Kamo River](#). Guide students to notice elements of the ukiyo-e tradition. Yoshitoshi depicts a scene from everyday urban life. He uses bright patterns, strong outlines, blocks of color, unusual angles and points of view, and a close cropping of the image.
11. Ask students to look closely at [The Letter](#) a second time. Where can they see the influence of Japanese printmaking traditions on Cassatt's artwork?
12. Repeat the Compare and Contrast activity with another set of images. Students can work in pairs or small groups to practice independently. Pass out [Compare and Contrast worksheets](#) and copies of either [The Soga Brothers Entering an Enemy Camp in the Rain](#) and [Rain Effect](#), or [A Famous Jockey at Shōkonsha](#) and [The Jockey](#) to small groups. Remind students to look for similarities and differences in both artistic style and subject matter. Circulate and answer questions as needed.
13. Bring everyone back together to share their observations. Ask students to share what new information they learned from their set of images. What similarities did they find? How might these similarities represent cross cultural influence or exchange? In what direction do they imagine the influence traveled—east to west, or west to east?
14. Wrap up the lesson with a reflection on the significance of cross-cultural exchange to western and Japanese artists during this historical period. Why do students think Impressionist artists gravitated toward Japanese stylistic traditions? Why do they think Japanese artists were fascinated by modern western clothing and entertainment? What is the value of learning from and appreciating the traditions of other cultures?

Extension Activity

- Ask younger students to draw or bring in an object from home that represents a way they have been influenced by a culture other than their own. What is the story behind it? Have them write, draw, or speak about why this influence is meaningful in their lives.
- What is the difference between appreciation and appropriation? Have older students research a definition and examples of cultural appropriation. [Dictionary.com](#) is a good place to start. This [Much-Needed Primer on Cultural Appropriation](#) provides a deeper dive into the topic. When students have some background knowledge, invite them to debate whether Impressionist artists who adopted Japanese stylistic traditions were appropriating or appreciating. What evidence can they use to support their opinions?

Troubleshooting

- When looking at and describing artwork that represents other cultures, it is common for students' first impressions to rely on stereotypes and preconceived notions. For example, students may describe the woman in *Strolling: A Fashionable Married Woman of the Middle Meiji Period (1880s) Dressed in Western Style* as Asian, Japanese, or another specific ethnicity because of assumptions about her facial features. When this happens, you can confirm that observations about her eyes or other features, made using respectful language, can be evidence of her ethnicity. But give students a gentle reminder that we can't always make assumptions about other people based on their appearance. Encourage students to look more carefully and use details like the presence of Japanese writing as their evidence, rather than relying on assumptions.
- By the same token, students should be gently guided away from generalizing about all Japanese art and culture based on their observations of the prints featured in this lesson. Make sure they understand that Yoshitoshi is one artist representing Japanese life in his own unique way. His art is not necessarily representative of Japanese art and culture more broadly.

Compare and Contrast

Take a few minutes to look closely at a two works of art.

What do you see that is similar?

What do you see that is different?

Artwork #1

Artwork #2

