COMMON CORE CONNECTION:
PAINTING AND POETRY IN JAPAN

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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

OVERVIEW
In the Edo period of Japanese history (ca. 1600 to 1868 CE), poetry was linked with other art forms, such as calligraphy, ceramics, flower-arranging (*ikebana*), and painting. Many paintings were inspired by classical Japanese poems from earlier periods; often the text of such poems was inscribed on the painting itself. In other cases, masterful artworks inspired Japanese poets to write poems about the artwork or the artwork's subject.

With this tradition in mind, students will use two Japanese paintings from the Walters Art Museum as the basis for **ekphrastic** poems—that is, poems inspired by art. Using the paintings' visual appearance as well as their own emotional responses to the paintings, students will write prose responses and brainstorm descriptive verbs and adjectives before condensing their thoughts into a series of evocative three-line poems.

SUPPLIES
·   printed copies of artworks (or project them on classroom board)
·   printed examples of Japanese poetry
·   printed copies of Brainstorming worksheet (3 pages)
·   pens/pencils
·   paper

ACTIVITY
❶ Introduce your students to the Japanese poetic tradition using the selection of poems attached to this activity. Read them aloud together.

❷ Lead your students in a detailed visual analysis of each of these paintings. Start with general questions and then become more specific. *How do these two Japanese paintings look different from American or European paintings that you have seen?* (If you need examples of American or European paintings, go to art.thewalters.org.) *What colors do the artists use? What type of art supplies do you think the artists used? What does each painting depict? Why do you think the artists decided to paint these subjects? Do these paintings have a mood? What makes you say that? How do the paintings make you feel? Do you think any of the visual details, like the colors or the way lines are painted, help give the paintings their mood? Why or why not?*

❸ Give your students the following assignment:
Japanese poetry customarily involves short, carefully composed verses that combine observation of the natural world with subtle emotion. Often, Japanese paintings were inspired by poetry. At other times, Japanese poems would be inspired by paintings. In this tradition, you will write a total of four three-line poems based on these two artworks: *Puppies under a Maple Branch* by Nagasawa Rosetsu and *Two Swallows and Wind Bell* by Sakai Hoitsu.

A. Building on the class discussion, free-write on these two Japanese paintings for 15 minutes, describing your aesthetic appreciation of the pieces and what feelings or associations the paintings provoke in you.

B. Once the 15 minutes are up, re-read what you have written. On your *Mining for Words* worksheet, write down the nouns, adjectives/adverbs, and verbs you have used to describe the paintings and your feelings about the paintings. Add to your list by brainstorming synonyms for the words you have already used.

C. Now that you have a list, use these words as the basis for your poems. For each painting, write two three-line poems. Try to focus on one main idea for each poem. Be creative and make your poems as descriptive as possible!

❹ Once students have finished writing their poems, have everyone choose their favorite. Then go around the classroom, each student reading his or her favorite poem out loud.

POSSIBLE EXTENSIONS
❶ Use as an introductory, conclusion, or activity for writing form poetry. A comprehensive list of form poetry, as well as examples, can be found here: *http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/197.*

❷ Ask students to search *art.thewalters.org* for artworks that connect to texts covered in class.

Nagasawa Rosetsu (Japan, Edo period, ca. 1790) *Puppies under a Maple Branch*, ink and pigment on silk mounted on paper and brocade

Sakai Hoitsu (Japan, Edo period, 1780–1828) *Two Swallows and Wind Bell*, ink and colors on silk mounted on paper

The winds that blow–

ask them, which leaf on the tree

will be next to go.

—Kyoshi Takahama

Temple bells die out.

The fragrant blossoms remain.

A perfect evening!

—Basho

BRAINSTORMING WORKSHEET

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I. FREE-WRITING

DIRECTIONS: Thinking back on the class discussion, free-write on these two Japanese paintings. Write down your descriptions of the paintings. Describe how you feel when you look at the works of art.

II. MINING FOR WORDS

DIRECTIONS: Look over what you have written. On the chart below, write down the nouns, adjectives/adverbs, and verbs you have used to describe the paintings and your feelings about the paintings. Add to your list by brainstorming synonyms for the words you have already used.

NOUNS	ADJECTIVES / ADVERBS	VERBS

III. WRITING POETRY

DIRECTIONS: Now that you have a list, use these words as the basis for your poems. For each painting, write two three-line poems. Since space is limited, try to focus on one main idea for each poem. Be creative and make your poems as descriptive as possible!

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