

Educator Guide

FEATURED WORK OF ART



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource includes factual information, cultural context, glossary of terms, as well as prompts and discussion questions related to the *Vase with the "Three Friends of Winter": Pine, Plum, and Bamboo, 57.1184.*

This resource is recommended for High School students and Social Studies subjects. Students will learn about the historical and religious context of this object to be able to relate and compare it to the industrialization of different cultures, the spread of information and ideas, and their own culture and identity. These suggestions were informed by the Maryland State Department of Education 2024 standards.

[Vase with the "Three Friends of Winter": Pine, Plum, and Bamboo](#)

Unidentified artist

Japan, 1876

Silver, gold

Acquired by William T. Walters, , 1876, acc. no. 57.1184

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Facts about the Work of Art

- This vase was originally made to be displayed at the **World's Fair Exhibition** in Philadelphia in 1876.
- The design on this silver vase depicts a flowering plum, pine, and bamboo, which is a popular East Asian **motif** originating in China known as the "Three Friends of Winter."
- The three plants portrayed on the vase symbolize perseverance, endurance, and integrity under adversity.
- The symbolism associated with these three plants was consistent throughout China, Korea, and Japan.

Cultural Context

- In China, symbols from nature were and are still commonly used in art. China's emphasis on nature stems from philosophical, religious, and cultural beliefs predating but included in tenets of **Daosim** and **Confucianism**.
- Deep respect for nature also was reflected in Japanese artwork and literature. Japan's close relationship with nature greatly influenced the development of its culture, the effects of which can still be seen today even in **post-industrialization**.
- In the 19th century, China and then Japan came under pressure from the West to open to foreign trade and relations. Europe and the United States were able to force Japan to open for trade due to the military and technological advantages they had gained over Asia during the Industrial Revolution. Just as industrialization in the West caused a huge amount of harm to the natural environment, when Japan went through its own industrialization, there was a period of unmitigated pollution, followed by nation-wide sweeping environmental reform. Today Japan is a global leader in environmental protection.
- The end of the period of **isolationism** also had a large impact on Japan's ability to trade their own artwork. For example, 1873 was the first **World's Fair** in which Japan participated; beforehand Japanese objects were largely exhibited by Europeans in a colonial context. At this time, Japan's government embraced modernization and encouraged artists to achieve new levels of technological creativity and sophistication, which this vase embodies.

GLOSSARY

Colonization: Colonization refers to the systemic settlement, control, and subjugation of Indigenous peoples, resources, and land by a political entity.

Confucianism: Confucianism is a religious philosophy that focuses on ethics and morals. Originating over 2,500 years ago, it is one of the most influential religious philosophies in the history of China.

Daoism: A religious philosophy that focuses on balance and harmony in the world. Originating over 2,500 years ago, it is one of the most influential religious philosophies in the history of China.

Isolationism: A political philosophy of remaining separate from the political and/or economic affairs of other countries.

Motif: An important and usually repeating idea or theme in a work of art.

Post-industrialization: A period of social and economic development when a society shifts from an economy of manufacturing and products to an economy of services.

World's Fair: A large international exhibition where countries can showcase their achievements in the fields of culture, industry, science, and technology.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[National Geographic Mapmaker](#)

PROMPTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Look closely at this artwork. Describe what you see.
2. This Japanese vase was originally made to be displayed overseas in the United States at the World's Fair. Explain which achievements you think Japan was aiming to communicate to an international audience and support your statement with evidence.
3. While Japan became an industrialized nation, the country produced a period of unmitigated pollution before emerging as a global leader in environmental protection 25 years later. Compare Japan's path of industrialization with that of the United States. Discuss how they are similar and different.
4. The motifs of pine, plum, and bamboo symbolize perseverance, endurance, and integrity under adversity. Compare these values to your own culture or lived experience. Do you relate to these values? Why or why not?
5. What can we interpret about the people who made this artwork based on the ideas they chose to represent and the symbols they chose to incorporate in the work?
6. Identify three symbols representing the ideas of perseverance, endurance, and integrity under adversity in your own life. Create an artwork based on these symbols.