

THE WALTERS ART MUSEUM

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

JAPANESE WOODBLOCK PRINTS

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinion

OVERVIEW

Students will examine a Japanese landscape and explore the history, materials and, techniques of Japanese woodblock printing.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Images of [Fuji Sanjurokkei, 1858](#)

ENGAGEMENT

A national symbol since the earliest history of Japan, Mount Fuji was believed to be a source of immortality. *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, designed by Utagawa Hiroshige, is a series of woodblock prints that explore views of the sacred mountain from different places and weather conditions.

Japanese woodblock prints date back as far as the 8th century BCE and the *Ukiyo-e* school of art flourished during Japan's Edo period (1615–1868). At that time, Edo (present-day Tokyo) was the largest city in the world. Despite the politically and socially restrictive military government, known as the Tokugawa Shogunate, the capital city of Edo included bustling tea houses, restaurants, theatres, and red-light districts. *Ukiyo* (the floating world) came to describe Edo's exuberant urban culture. Called *ukiyo-e* or "pictures of the floating world," the prints of famous actors, mighty warriors, beautiful women, and iconic landscapes were viewed, read, collected, and pasted all over Edo.

Japanese woodblock prints are the products of extensive collaborations among publishers, artists, carvers, and printers. The different skills required included carving blocks of wood, coating and drying the paper, and mixing pigments. Japanese printers used water-based pigments and colorants for printing that were extracted from flowers, roots, leaves, buds, and the bark of plants. Inks and a small amount of rice starch were dabbed on the woodblocks and spread using brushes made of horsehair until the relief areas were evenly covered. The addition of the starch adhesive ensured even coverage and allowed for the creation of the flat colored surfaces typical of Japanese prints. The paper used for printing was made by hand from the inner bark of Japanese paper mulberry. The long and strong fibers of the plant were able to withstand the mechanical action exerted by the printer without tearing.

Each color in a composition was printed separately and one of the greatest challenges for the printer included placing the sheet of paper on each of the woodblocks and properly aligning the design. Two notches called "*kento* marks," carved in exactly the same position on each block—typically at the bottom left corner and along the adjacent long edge—helped ensure the proper alignment of each print.

A unique tool of the Japanese printing tradition is the *baren*, a pad made of twisted strips of bamboo, supported with paper and lacquer and covered on the front with bamboo. The paper was positioned on the inked block and the baren was rubbed on the back of the paper in swift motions to transfer the ink. Because of its shape, the baren rode across the top of the block, bridging the cut areas rather than sinking in between them, and thus enabled the printer to obtain clean-edged impressions from the block.

LOOKING AT THE OBJECT WITH STUDENTS

- Describe the lines, shapes, and colors used to create the composition.
- Describe the plants, people, and natural elements you see in this print.
- What season do you think is illustrated in this print? What did you see that made you say that?
- Imagine experiencing this scene with each of your 5 senses- What can you see? Hear? Smell? Taste? Touch?
- Describe the mood or feeling of this scene.

EXTENSION

- Find additional Japanese Woodblock prints from the Walters' collection online at <https://art.thewalters.org/browse/category/japan-and-korea/>
- Explore Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji (designed by Hiroshige) or Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji (designed by Hokusai) to compare and contrast additional views of similar landscapes
- Choose a landmark or location that is important to you and create your own seasonal landscapes



[Fuji Sanjurokai, 1858 \(WAM 95.58\)](#)