

CONTENTS



<i>How to Use This Book</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Subject Area Correlation</i>	<i>ix</i>
A Japanese View of Aesthetics	1
Japan: A Closed Society	4
Geography and Japanese Prints	8
Printing from a Block	11
Sushi: What Do You Mean, It's Not Cooked?	16
Gyotaku: Printing with Fish	20
Ichi, ni, san, yon, go: Counting in Japanese	23
Hon, mai, ken: Counting Things in Japanese	28
Making Paper	32
A Game of Go	35
Mon: Heraldic Crests	39
Katazome: Stencil Dyeing	42
Making a Folded Paper Book	48
Haiku	52
Zen Gardens of Sand and Stone	55
Japanese Writing	58
Nihon-no-Kotowaza: Japanese Proverbs	63
<i>Glossary</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Resources</i>	<i>68</i>

How to Use This Book

This book, like the others in this Hands-on Culture series by J. Weston Walch, Publisher, has been designed to help middle school teachers integrate the study of a particular world culture into the curriculum. Textbooks can teach students about the history and geography of an area, but to gain any real understanding, students must also be exposed to the art and traditions of that society as well.

Hands-on Culture of Japan provides 17 ready-to-use activities to help you do just that. Through the projects in this book, students will be exposed to some common Japanese phrases, to the writing and counting systems used in Japan, to Japanese cuisine, Zen Buddhism, and to the art and literature of Japan.

Throughout this book the focus has been on traditional culture, not the aspects of Japanese culture being developed today. That is because so much of Japan's culture, even today, is based on tradition. Learning about the aspects of Japanese culture examined here will help students understand Japanese culture as a whole. Sources like the Internet are excellent ways for students to learn about aspects of modern Japanese culture like *manga* (comic books).

Of course, many important elements of traditional Japanese culture are not included in this book. The theatrical forms of Noh and Kabuki and the related puppet theater Bunraku could take up a book of their own. Japanese clothing and architecture are distinctive, and would offer students a great deal of scope for investigation. Any of these topics would be excellent research projects in addition to the activities presented here.

Most of the projects in this book work well either as individual or as group activities. When a project requires setting up a work station, as in the papermaking and fish-printing projects, you may find it best to divide the class into groups and set up several work areas. You may also find a group approach helpful for some of the other projects. As students deal with such unfamiliar material as the Japanese writing system, they may find it less intimidating to work together to find solutions.

By their nature, all these projects are interdisciplinary. All are appropriate for a social studies class. Most are appropriate for an art class. Some activities are also appropriate for other subject areas; the correlation chart on page *ix* presents these links. If you are teaching about Japan as part of an interdisciplinary team, each teacher can teach the activities appropriate to his or her domain. All the projects have been structured so that the teacher presenting the material does not need to know either the historical context or the procedure for doing the project. Full background details are provided where needed. You can share some or all of this information with students if you wish, but it is not necessary for student completion of the project. The step-by-step student instructions for the activities should need no further explanation. All activities have been tested with middle and high school students.

To motivate students—and continue the theme of Japanese culture—you may wish to tell them that gift giving is an important feature of that society. Small gifts, often beautifully wrapped in handmade paper, are given on almost any occasion—even when there is no occasion at all. You might incorporate this custom into your classroom with small gifts or candy for the first group to finish the Japanese Writing

project correctly, or for the group with the most interesting version of the Japanese proverbs.

To help demonstrate the process for each activity, you may find it helpful to keep one or two examples of student work for each activity. The next time you present the activity, show the student work as models. When dealing with unfamiliar concepts or material, it can help students to see work from their peers and form a general idea about what they might be expected to do.

Finally, check out the resources in your community. If you are lucky enough to be located near a branch of the Japan America Society, you will have easy access to a number of knowledgeable persons. Often, such societies have members who are trained in one or more Japanese arts (such as calligraphy and origami) and who are happy to come into a classroom and demonstrate. Japanese exchange students are another resource. They can often help teach such arts as origami and flower arranging, or they can talk briefly about Japan and demonstrate the three major writing systems of Japan.

I hope that you—and your students—enjoy this book, and that it helps deepen your students' understanding and appreciation of Japan.

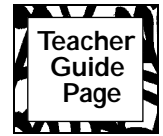
Note: The Japanese character used to set off the directions on the student pages is the character for the word *sui*, “proceed.”



Subject Area Correlation

	MATH	SCIENCE	LANGUAGE ARTS	ART	SOCIAL STUDIES
Japanese View of Aesthetics				X	X
Japan: A Closed Society				X	X
Japanese Prints				X	X
Printing from a Block				X	X
Sushi				X	X
Printing with Fish		X		X	X
Counting in Japanese	X				X
Counting Things	X			X	X
Making Paper		X		X	X
A Game of Go	X			X	X
Heraldic Crests				X	X
Stencil Dyeing				X	X
Folding Paper Book	X			X	X
Haiku			X		X
Zen Gardens	X			X	X
Japanese Writing			X	X	X
Proverbs			X	X	X

A Japanese View of Aesthetics



OBJECTIVES

Art

- Students will understand that the same object can be perceived in different ways.

Social Studies

- Students will see that people from different cultures may approach everyday things in different ways.

MATERIALS

A Japanese View of Aesthetics handout
reproductions of some Japanese handcrafts, such as pottery bowls,
printed fabric and paper, lacquerwork (or, if available, show some
actual objects)
optional: two or three utilitarian objects for students to draw
drawing materials
paper

BACKGROUND

In the traditional Western perspective, “art” is one thing, “life” is another. Art that is considered great is often only admired or understood by a few people. Art objects are usually created only to be beautiful, not to serve any practical purpose. They are often displayed in museums and galleries along with other pieces of art.

In the Western tradition, an artist’s work somehow separates the artist from “ordinary” people, and the artist isn’t always expected to follow ordinary rules. While potters and metalworkers may make some attractive pieces, their work isn’t usually considered art, and they are not seen as artists.

In traditional Western painting, certain criteria were used to decide whether piece of art was good or bad. First, it had to look realistic; a landscape had to make the viewer think the scene actually existed somewhere, a portrait had to look like a real person. Second, a painting had to create the illusion of depth, using techniques like perspective, light and shadow, and different values of color. And finally, a piece had to have balance and a suggestion of permanence, of unchanging value, to be considered great art.

By contrast, art is very much a part of daily life in Japan. The beauty of a cup, a bowl, or a garden is seen as just as important as the beauty of a fine painting or print. Everyday household items were designed to be beautiful, and many artists were also craftspersons, designing and making things for everyday use. According to the Japanese aesthetic, it is important to find the beauty in humble things.

Another important element of the Japanese view of beauty is an emphasis on appearing simple. That doesn't necessarily mean that an object must *be* simple, merely that it must create the impression of effortlessness, almost inevitability. A formal Japanese flower arrangement of a few flowers and a branch can look as if it just happened that way, as if the angle of the stems was caused by their growth. But, in fact, a great deal of work goes into creating this effect. The flower arranger carefully chooses stems and blooms for their shapes. Leaves that might distract from the overall shape are cut away. Then the stems are bent to achieve the desired balance. Like Rikyu's garden (described on page 3), described on the student handout, a lot of planning is needed to create the effect of simplicity.

In keeping with this idea of simplicity, the traditional Japanese aesthetic emphasizes one visual focus. Unlike the rooms in a beautiful Western home, Japanese rooms are not filled with paintings and sculptures. One piece of art, one flower arrangement, will be displayed in a room to be admired. As the seasons change, so will the art. In spring the flowers will be cherry blossoms, in autumn perhaps a graceful chrysanthemum. From a Japanese perspective, the many objects displayed in a Western home create an atmosphere of confusion, while a Western eye may see a Japanese room as bare and austere.

Although life in Japan has changed dramatically in recent decades, and will continue to change, art in Japan has long been a way of life. The design and order of the home, the utensils used, are often seen in an aesthetic light.

PROCEDURE

1. Distribute the handout. Show students slides or prints of Japanese handcrafts, or display objects, if available. Discuss the different ways in which our culture and that of Japan approach art and aesthetics. Encourage students to look closely at everyday objects. Model by examining some object in the classroom—say, a stool—and trying to see how it can both function well as a stool and be visually attractive.
2. Either direct students to choose and bring in some small, everyday object to draw, or gather a variety of such objects (spoons, ladles, cups, bowls, etc.) in the classroom.
3. Direct students to design their own version of the object in which an attractive appearance is as important as being useful. They should use shading and perspective to create a three-dimensional appearance. Display the finished works with the original objects.

VARIATION

Have students first make a careful drawing of the existing object, then a drawing of their version of the object, and display the two versions together.

ASSESSMENT

Did students attempt to redesign the object to balance form and function? Did students use shading and perspective as directed?



A Japanese View of Aesthetics

When we look at the art of different cultures, it's important to remember that words like *beautiful* can mean different things for different people. One culture may see an object as beautiful and appropriate. Another culture may see the same thing as strange and ugly. When it comes to art, there is really no right and wrong, good and bad. Sometimes, when you come to understand what an object means, you can start to look at it differently.

In Japan, a story is told about Rikyu, a man who was famous for his beautiful garden. An important lord came to view the garden. The lord walked to the small teahouse at the end of the garden. He was surprised to see no flowers in bloom at all. As he walked into the teahouse, he raised his head. On a stand in front of him, he saw one perfect morning glory. To make this one bloom stand out, Rikyu had cut down all the rest.

Does this story tell you anything about the Japanese tradition of art?

The Western world has its own tradition of art. In this tradition, "art" is an activity very separate from "life." Art objects are usually created only to be beautiful, not to serve any practical purpose. They are often displayed in museums and galleries along with other pieces of art.

By contrast, art is very much a part of daily life in Japan. The beauty of a cup, a bowl, or a garden is considered just as important as the beauty of a fine painting or print. Everyday household items are designed to be beautiful, and many artists are also craftspersons, designing and making things for everyday use. According to the Japanese aesthetic, it is important to find the beauty in humble things.

The Japanese view of beauty also involves things looking simple. That doesn't necessarily mean that an object must *be* simple. In the story about Rikyu, the effect of the one morning glory wasn't really simple. Rikyu had to go to a lot of trouble to achieve it. But it probably seemed almost like an accident that there was only one flower to look at.



Over the next few days, try to look at things around you in a different way. Instead of just labeling things—like "clock," "bowl"—look closely at the shapes of things, at the way they are put together. Some things, like stacking chairs, may seem to have been designed to be as useful as possible, without any attention to how they look.

Choose one common object that you think could be useful as well as beautiful. Design a new version of that object that combines function and beauty. Draw your design, using perspective and shading to make it look realistic.