

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT AND THE JAPANESE PRINT

GRADE: 9-12

TIME: Four 50-minute sessions

Frank Lloyd Wright had a deep love of nature. He drew inspiration for his architecture from the natural world around him. He also developed an appreciation for the tradition of Japanese printmaking, in particular Wright admired the simplicity and direct observation of the Ukiyo-e woodblock print. In this lesson, students will record and reflect on the small details of daily life through journaling, drawing or photography. Students will then choose an image from this reflection and create prints using the block printing method. Students will look closely at the Ukiyo-e style for inspiration.

INTEGRATED SUBJECTS: Visual Arts, Social Studies, Social-Emotional Learning

OBJECTIVES

MATERIALS | RESOURCES

4" x 6" Soft-Kut Printing Block
Block Printing cutter handles and blades
Water based printing ink
Plexiglass approximately 12 x 18" for
rolling out ink (Tip: Set up 5 printing
stations with plexiglass, baren, brayer,
paper, and ink)
Barens
Block printing paper and/or rice paper
Tracing paper
Drawing pencils 4B or 6B
Designated drying area (drying rack,
windowsill, or hallway floor)
Putty knife (useful for removing ink from
plexiglass prior to washing)
Newspaper or butcher paper to cover work
surface

1. Explore the Japanese printmaking method called Ukiyo-e
2. Hypothesize why Frank Lloyd Wright admired and collected Japanese prints.
3. Reflect on our habits of everyday life and create a block print using this imagery.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. Why was Frank Lloyd Wright interested in Japanese Ukiyo-e prints?
2. How are block prints created?
3. How can culture and/or everyday life be reflected in a block print?

LESSON PROCEDURE

EXPLORE

Session One

- Introduce the Japanese Ukiyo-e print tradition and the aesthetic influence they had on American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. Introduce the images and material from the following article: <https://www.wrightsjapan1905.org/learn/a-quickenig-inspiration/>
- Explore the influence of Japanese art on Western art. <https://smarthistory.org/japonisme/>
- Provide time for students to make their own digital Japanese print. <https://woodblock.artsbma.org/>
- Demonstrate the carving and block printing technique. This may be enhanced with several videos. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcwUMYMYCT0>
- Challenge students to name objects, plants, or buildings they notice during the day. Discuss the “quiet eye” concept of close looking and personal reflection to slow down and pay attention to daily surroundings. Ask students to make a note of any emotions they may be feeling. For more information: <https://cpet.tc.columbia.edu/news-press/building-social-emotional-skills-through-self-reflection>
 - Optional Extension: Ask students to write an account of a single morning in their life. This could include a description of a toothbrush, bar of soap, or the student’s means of travel to school. This may be a written account, photographs, or a sketchbook drawing.
- Instruct students on clean-up procedures that will include washing and drying all materials. Allow 15 minutes for clean-up.
 - Differentiation: If a sink is not available, consider use of stamp pads for inking. Tip: Use a stamp pad with a raised pad.

ENGAGE

Session Two

- Encourage students to share their observations of daily life. (If applicable, have them share their sketches, photos, or journal entry with a small group of classmates.)
- Challenge students to find a connection between the Ukiyo-e prints and their own lives.
- Have students develop an image from their ideas and draw it on the tracing paper. (Tip: Participants should trace the outline of the Soft-Kut block onto the tracing paper and draw within that shape.)

DESIGN

Session Three

- Have students transfer the drawing onto their Soft-Kut by flipping the tracing paper over with the graphite side down onto their block. Demonstrate how to gently rub the back to transfer the drawing. The pencil lines can then be darkened with a fine point sharpie.
- Students will use care when carving and always carve away from their hands. Remind students that the negative spaces will remain white or the color of the background paper. The areas that remain uncarved will be the color of the ink.
- Students may want to test their design by doing several “practice” prints. They can wash off the ink and continue to carve their block.

LESSON PROCEDURE (continued)

DESIGN

Session Four

- Demonstrate how to roll out a small amount of ink on the plexiglass with the brayer. Roll a thin layer of ink so as not to fill in any fine lines on the block. Then roll the ink onto the block rolling in all directions. Lay the paper onto the block and apply even pressure using a baren or the back of a wooden spoon. Encourage students to look at their prints by lifting only a corner to ensure an even transfer of ink. Then, participants should remove the entire paper from the block. This process is called “pulling a print.”
- Encourage experimentation and revisions. Students may carve out more areas, create texture, or try various amounts of ink and different types of paper. A block that is printed twice without re-inking is called a ghost print.
- Remind students that it can take many attempts to have one or two successful prints.

CRITIQUE & INTERPRET

Session Four

- Ask students to describe what was challenging and what methods worked best for them.
- Leave time for any revisions.
- Discuss what images were created by reflecting on the small details of the day. Have students consider: Were there any surprises? Did using a “quiet eye” influence the choice of image?
- Display the prints in the classroom and ask students to write descriptive feedback for their classmates.
- Discuss the following quote from Frank Lloyd Wright and whether it resonates with students after completing this project: “I remember when I first met the Japanese prints. That art had a great influence on my feeling and thinking....I began to see nature in a totally different way.”