

FRESH IMPRESSIONS

Early Modern Japanese Prints

Teacher Resource: 6–8th Grades



Natori Shunsen (Japanese, 1886–1960), *Bandō Hikosaburō VI as Servant Matsuōmaru* (detail), from “Creative Prints, Collection of Portraits by Shunsen.” Color woodblock print, 1928. Gift of Hubert D. Bennett, 1939.240

This resource will allow you to lead your students through close looking exercises to enable them to describe, analyze, and interpret what they see in the woodblock print *Bandō Hikosaburō VI as Servant Matsuōmaru* (1928) by Natori Shunsen (1886–1960).

This approach to looking at art is based on the Art of Seeing Art method created by the Toledo Museum of Art. It is discussion-based and will help you and your students explore works of art in the Museum's special exhibition *Fresh Impressions: Early Modern Japanese Prints*, on view at the Museum from October 4, 2013–January 1, 2014.

How to use this resource:

- Print out the document for yourself.
- Read through the document carefully as you look at the image of the work of art.
- When you are ready to engage your class, project the image of the work of art on a screen in your classroom using an LCD projector. Use the questions provided below to lead the discussion.

This exercise is meant for use in the classroom. There is no substitute for seeing the real work of art in the exhibition at the Toledo Museum of Art. We are open Tuesday to Sunday and Docent-led tours are available free of charge. Visit <http://www.toledomuseum.org/learn/tours> to schedule.

Vocabulary:

Emphasis: A Principle of Design. Emphasis is the point or points of focus in a composition.

Kabuki (*kah-boo-kee*): A type of popular Japanese stage drama in which elaborately costumed performers use stylized movements, dances, and songs to enact tragedies and comedies. Only men are Kabuki actors, performing even the female roles.

Kumadori (*koo-mah-doh-ree*): Stage make-up worn by Kabuki actors, specifically bold stripes of color on a white background. The colors and designs often have symbolic meaning relating to the character that wears it.

Mie (*mee-eh*): In Kabuki Theater, a dramatic pose that the actor holds—almost like a close-up in a movie—to express a significant emotional moment in the play.

Woodblock printing: Printmaking technique of carving an image onto a block of wood, covering it with ink, and pressing it onto paper.

Katana (*kah-tah-nah*): A traditionally-made Japanese sword worn by the samurai class of feudal Japan.

Close Looking & Describing Questions

Ask your students to look carefully at this work of art. Have them look closely for at least three minutes and then describe what they see. Start the questioning with the Elements of Art and broad, open-ended questions.

Look closely and describe the facial expression, body language, and hair of the figure.

What adjectives might you use to describe him?

What colors do you see?

Where has the artist repeated the same color?

Where do you see lines in the print?

What kinds of shapes do the lines create?

Where do you see the same shape more than once?

Where has the artist used the lines and shapes to create patterns in the print?

Where has the artist used lines to show us texture?

Describe the textures you see.

Analysis

Once the students have completed listing everything they observed in the print by close looking, begin to ask simple analytical questions that will help to deepen their understanding of the work of art.

Describe what first catches your eye in this print?

*What is the point of **emphasis**?*

What is it that draws your attention: a color? shape? something else?

How many different kinds of lines, shapes, and colors has the artist used?

What are these elements being used to visually communicate?

What do you think is happening in this print?

What clues has the artist given to help us discover the story?

Layering of Information

(Background Information/Research)

Share the background information provided below regarding the artist and the print. This is information that a viewer cannot get simply by looking at the print. Once you have shared the following information, your students will be ready for deeper analysis and interpretation of the work of art.

This print is a portrait of the **Kabuki** actor Bandō Hikosaburō VI (1886–1938) from the play *Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy*. In Japan, prints such as this one showing famous actors would be collected by their fans much as we collect photographs of movie stars in America.

In the play, Matsuōmaru (*math-soo-oh-mah-roo*) is one of a set of triplets. His brothers try to help the hero, but Matsuōmaru is a villain. Each of the brothers can be identified by the symbol he wears; Matsuōmaru's symbol is the pine tree.

Matsuōmaru wears the characteristic stage makeup of Kabuki Theatre called *kumadori* which consists of bold colored stripes on a white foundation. The bold colors of *kumadori* help the actor to communicate emotion and personality during the performance. The blue on the chin and scalp of the actor indicates hair has been shaved close to the skin.

In his hand Matsuōmaru holds a *katana* sword and several of the unique features of this type of Japanese sword can be identified, including:

***tsuka ito* (tsoo-kah ee-toh):** silk handle braid which holds the sword handle together and gives it a good gripping surface

***same* (sah-meh):** ray-fish skin wrap, the characteristic bumps of the grey skin can be seen through the diamond shape gaps in the *tsuka ito*.

***Menuki* (meh-noo-kee):** ornament placed under the *tsuka ito* to improve grip

***Tsuba* (tsoo-bah):** elaborately decorated sword guard

During the performance, the actor might use the *katana* to help him strike a dramatic pose to express his strong emotions. In combination with the dramatic *kumadori* and flamboyant costumes, these poses, called *mie*, bring out a character's personality and mood.

Interpretation

Interpretation brings the close looking and describing questions, analysis, and background information together to aid in better understanding the work of art.

How does the information about the actor reinforce your observations?

What are the features of Matsuōmaru that suggest that he is not dressed for everyday?

What has the artist done to help suggest that Matsuōmaru is a villain?

Why do you think the artist may have included the katana in this image?

Think about the way that Kabuki actors use make-up, props, costumes, and gestures to emphasize the personalities of the characters they play. How does the way that you dress and behave change depending on where you are or how you are feeling?



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