

Japanese Printmaking

Secondary Workshop

Support Notes for Teachers

Workshop structure

This workshop introduces students to the traditional art of Japanese printmaking with direct reference to works in the British Museum collection.

In the first part of the workshop, pupils will develop their own design. Following a brief introduction to prints and objects in the Japanese Gallery, pupils will create their own sketches based on original works. Whilst sketching they will be encouraged to observe colour, form, shade, technique and style as well as subject matter and traditional Japanese motifs.

Drawing on these sketches for inspiration, and incorporating any other pre-visit ideas, pupils will then finalise their chosen design and transfer it on to their Japanese wood-block. The design is then cut from the block using authentic Japanese tools and traditional techniques. Once the finished design has been carved pupils will print their design in black and white using Japanese ink and paper.

The workshop closes as pupils present their finished work to the group.

Each pupil will take away their carved wood-block and their own Japanese prints

Important note: health and safety

This workshop introduces pupils to new materials and cutting tools and due care must be taken at all times. Japanese ink is water-based and will not permanently stain clothes. However, we would recommend that pupils bring aprons or protective clothing in case of any spillage. Japanese cutting tools are extremely sharp and proper supervision will be provided during the course of the workshop. Pupils should take due care whilst using sharp equipment.

Before your visit: understanding Japanese printmaking

Japanese prints are rooted in an artistic and cultural tradition different from that of the West. They depict popular subjects of their day. Kabuki actors, beautiful women of the pleasure quarters or famous landscapes are shown in bold coloured inks on handmade paper. Produced cheaply for a mass audience in Japan these bold images were admired in the West both for their subject matter and their use of colour, form and style. Before visiting the museum you might like to introduce pupils to Japanese art and culture, drawing attention to similarities and differences between Japanese art and the contemporary art of the west. AS/A Level pupils might consider why the Impressionists (Monet, Degas) and Post-Impressionists (Van Gogh, Gauguin) were so impressed by Japanese prints often collecting, and sometimes drawing directly from, Japanese examples.

Printmaking takes many forms and pupils may already have some experience of lino printing or other forms of printing popular in the West. Before visiting the Museum, focus on different techniques of printmaking and how each method can achieve a particular effect.

Some pupils may wish to incorporate designs or motifs developed prior to their visit in to their finished work. Encourage pupils to bring photographs, textiles, collage, sketches or painted works to use in their Japanese print.

Follow-up activities

Use your Japanese wood-block to print on to different papers or textiles. Any water-based inks can be used, although dark colours will be more effective.

To create your own wood-block back at school, plywood may be used. Experiment with different cutting tools; knives, needles or thick nails will all create different effects.

With reference to the work of European artists such as Albrecht Durer, compare the techniques of Japanese printmaking with methods used in the West; etching, copper-plate engraving and drypoint.

Curriculum links

GCSE criteria for Art and Design

Pupils must demonstrate their ability to develop and explore ideas using media, processes and resources, reviewing, modifying and refining work as it progresses.

AS/A Level Art and Design

Pupils should develop knowledge and understanding of art, craft and design in contemporary society and in other times and cultures.

AS/A Level History of Art

Pupils should be acquainted with the evolution of wood-block techniques, and of the range and variety of subject-matter found in Japanese prints. The assimilation of Japanese prints into Western art of the late nineteenth century by the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists.

Contact details

Department of Learning, Volunteers and Audiences, The British Museum, Great Russell Street,

London WC1B 3DG

Telephone 020 7323 8850/8510

Fax 020 7323 8855

Email learning@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

Please quote the reference *Japanese Printmaking Secondary Workshop* in all enquiries.