Japanese printmaking: Notes for teachers

**Notes for teachers**

**National curriculum links**
- Art and Design
- History of Art

**About this session**
This workshop introduces students to the traditional art of Japanese printmaking with direct reference to works in the collection. Pupils will develop their own design and create a carved wood–block and Japanese prints.

**Location** galleries and studio
**Format** sketching, carving, printmaking and gallery visit
**Capacity** 15
**Duration** from 10.30–14.30, on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays
**Price** £5 per student

**Important note** 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.

**In detail**
- Following a brief introduction to prints and objects in the Japanese Gallery, pupils will create their own sketches based on original works.
- Students 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, students will then finalise their chosen design and transfer it on to their Japanese wood-block.
- Students will cut the design from the block using authentic Japanese tools and traditional techniques.
- After carving, students will print their design in black and white using Japanese ink and paper.

**After your visit**
- 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.
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About the art of 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 into their finished work.

Encourage pupils to bring photographs, textiles, collage, sketches or painted works to use in their Japanese print.