

Cultural encounters between Japan and the West: Not just a one-way street

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ABOUT THIS LESSON

Utilizing Frank Lloyd Wright's relationship with Japanese artistic styles as an introduction, students will learn about the vast contributions that Japan made to a variety of Western artistic genres. Quite often we focus on Western contribution to East Asia and not the other way around, and this lesson seeks to rectify that imbalance. If teaching this lesson in World History, the recommendation is to teach this in conjunction with the Japanese-American encounters post 1853.

GRADE LEVEL

Grades 9-12

CLASSROOM TIME

Two 50-minute class periods

RESOURCES

[Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation Article](#)

[Smithsonian Article](#)

[Japonisme Video](#)

[Artsper Magazine](#)

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to...

- Describe interactions between Japanese and Western artists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- Describe the contributions of individuals and communities in relation to the art of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- Analyze continuity and change in the influence of Eastern and Western artists upon one another from the late 19th century to the present

STANDARDS

Minnesota State Social Studies Standards

World History:

9.4.3.11.8 Compare and contrast the approaches of China and Japan to Western influence. (The Age of Revolutions: 1750—1922)

United States History:

9.4.4.21.1 Describe the contributions of individuals and communities in relation to the art, literature and music of the period. (Great Depression and World War II: 1920—1945)

LESSON

Encourage students to recall what they have already learned about the encounters between Japan and the United States. Also remind them that they've learned about how Japan selectively adopted many Western technologies and cultural elements. Today's lesson will seek to tell the other side of the story.

Ask students if they know who Frank Lloyd Wright is. Clarify their prior knowledge by doing some concurrent image searching of his most famous work like Taliesin, Falling Water, and the Guggenheim Museum.

Tell them that the goal of today's lesson is to see that the cultural sharing was not a one-way street and that, in fact, the West also benefited greatly from this exchange.

Put students in pairs and give them these two articles:

[Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation Article](#)

[Smithsonian Article](#)

They should each read one article, and while reading they should make a list of how many ways Wright was influenced by Japan. After reading and creating lists, they should share and compare their responses.

Next, the whole class should watch this seven-minute video on Japonisme from the Kokusai Analysis YouTube channel:

[Japonisme Video](#)

While viewing, the students should either add to their previous lists or create new ones based on the Japanese influences on Western artists mentioned in the video.

Students will then receive the following link from Artsper Magazine:

[Artsper Magazine](#)

The title of this article is: "The Influence of Japanese Art on Western Artists"

Read the first paragraph together as a class, then divide the class into small groups. (If you have a small class, the six style groups below can be utilized. If you have a larger class, you might want to assign an individual artist to each small group.

- Claude Monet, Mary Cassatt, and Edgar Degas - Impressionism
- Vincent Van Gogh - Post-Impressionism
- Gustav Klimt and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec - Art Nouveau
- Franz Kline and Jackson Pollock - Abstract Expressionism
- Contemporary Art and the Rise of Manga
- Pop Culture

Students should read their assigned topic, and prepare a brief, three slide presentation for the class.

Slide 1: The Western genre described, with at least one piece of representative art.

Slide 2: The Japanese influence explained, with at least one piece of representative art.

Slide 3: A Western and Japanese image (different images from slides 1 and 2) side by side, with student commentary on how the Western piece was influenced by Japanese forms.

Students will share with the whole class.

Closing activity will be an exit ticket with a 3-2-1 style of questioning.

What are three things you learned?

What are two questions you still have?

What is the number one thing you will remember about this lesson?

POST-LESSON ACTIVITIES

Students can bring this lesson full-circle and learn about how Kengo Kuma, a modern Japanese architect, has been influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright. Here are a couple of resources to support this extension idea:

[4 Minute Video -Kengo Kuma and Sustainability](#)

[Article: Hiroshige' ukiyo-e through the lens of Frank Lloyd Wright](#)

Similar lessons could be structured around other societies and civilizations whose influence might be considered unacknowledged or underrepresented in Western history. Africa and the Middle East are excellent options.

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

The slideshow could be either a summative or formative assessment depending upon how teachers set it up.

If a teacher has time, this could be extended to include a research project, with a formal essay included.

Teachers could incorporate a written or verbal assessment on a unit exam in which they ask students to describe the impact of this lesson, and also to conjecture why Japanese influence in the Western arts is so little known or recognized.