

ART ACROSS THE CURRICULUM | LANGUAGES (JAPANESE)

INTRODUCTION TO *UKIYO-E* AND *KABUKI*

LEVELS 5–8

OVERVIEW

This resource introduces students to a style of Japanese woodblock prints called *ukiyo-e*. They will focus on two different types of *ukiyo-e* - *yakusha-e* (actor prints) and *musha-e* (a type of story print) - and examine their links to the stories and characters in kabuki theatre. Students will build their Japanese language skills by discussing their observations, expressing their opinions and generating short imaginative texts inspired by the prints in Japanese.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain some of the social and historical context of *ukiyo-e* and *kabuki*
- Describe people represented in *ukiyo-e* using basic Japanese
- Make inferences about character, setting and plot in *ukiyo-e* prints and use Japanese to express these interpretations
- Investigate a print from the NGV 's *ukiyo-e* Collection and give a short presentation about it using Japanese

LINKS TO THE VICTORIAN JAPANESE CURRICULUM

Level 5 and 6

- Listen to, read and view different imaginative texts such as anime, folk stories and manga, describe and give opinions about characters and events, and identify cultural elements (VCJAC150)
- Create and present or perform imaginative texts for a variety of purposes and audiences (VCJAC151)

Level 7 and 8

- Locate key points of information in a range of texts and resources and use the information in new ways (VCJAC004)
- Listen to, read and view texts such as folk stories, video clips and television commercials, share reactions and describe aspects such as characters and contexts (VCJAC006)
- Analyse and respond to a range of imaginative texts, noticing cultural elements and comparing with English-language texts created for similar audiences (VCJAC168)
- Create a range of spoken, written and multimodal texts that involve imaginary characters, places and experiences to entertain others (VCJAC169)

WARM UP



IN SCHOOL

1. INTRODUCTION TO *UKIYO-E* (浮世絵) AND *KABUKI* (歌舞伎)

After centuries of military upheaval in Japan, the Edo period (1603–1868) brought a new era of peace and stability. Social, economic and political changes led to rapid population growth in the cities - Edo (now Tokyo), Kyoto and Osaka - and the emergence of a newly wealthy merchant class. While the ruling samurai class sat at the top of the social hierarchy and held all the political power, affluent merchants came to vastly outnumber them and were increasingly influential as patrons of the arts. This shift in cultural power gave rise to new and popular art forms such as *ukiyo-e* (浮世絵) and *kabuki* theatre (歌舞伎).¹

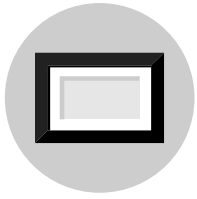
Ukiyo-e, literally meaning 'pictures of the floating world', are multi-coloured paintings and mass-produced woodblock prints that were first produced for sale to the public during the Edo period. The multicolored prints can be compared to magazines and posters of the current day and give us an insight into the tastes and lifestyle of the people of Edo Japan. The period was characterised by a vibrant consumer culture, new fashions and recreational pursuits. People's interest in travel, sport and the arts flourished and these interests are reflected in the subject matter of *ukiyo-e*.² Popular subjects for *ukiyo-e* included landscapes, beautiful people, celebrities such as actors and sumo wrestlers, famous tales of brave warriors, folk tales and scenes from *kabuki* theatre.

Still a popular art form today, *kabuki* theatre developed as a popular live theatre performance that was enjoyed by the masses. *Kabuki* is characterised by colourful costumes, music, stylised movement and dramatic poses known as *mie* (見得), which were adopted by the actor at a climactic moment. Popular themes and stories include chivalry, love, betrayal, tragedy and revenge.³ *Ukiyo-e* artists produced prints that celebrated famous *kabuki* actors, dressed in character and posed in *mie* poses, as well as theatre prints that captured dramatic *kabuki* scenes. These works were readily purchased, collected, and adored by the general population of Edo Japan.

1. Use the information about ukiyo-e to answer the following questions.
 - a. What is *ukiyo-e*? The kanji うきよえ 浮世絵 means 'the floating world', what ideas do these words suggest?
 - b. *Ukiyo-e* were often mass produced and were comparatively cheap to buy. Who do you think would have bought *ukiyo-e* in Edo Japan?
 - c. What kinds of topics did *ukiyo-e* artists depict?
 - d. How might looking at *ukiyo-e* help us understand more about *kabuki* and about Edo Japan?
 - e. You may have seen some examples of *ukiyo-e*. It is still a popular art form today. In your opinion, what are some qualities of *ukiyo-e* that make it popular and attractive?
2. You might also like to watch a video from NHK's *Kabuki Kool* website as an introduction to *kabuki* theatre: <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/tv/kabukikool/> ⁴
 - a. What do you notice about the costumes, make-up, sets and acting? Write down some notes in English.
 - b. Practice making sentences in Japanese to describe the features.
 - e.g. はで コスチュームは派手です。The costumes are bright/showy.

ACTIVITY

2. YAKUSHA-E (役者絵)



IN THE GALLERY



IN SCHOOL

Tōshūsai SHARAKU

Actor *Matsumoto Yonesaburō* as *Kewaizaka no Shōshō*, actually *Shinobu* (c. 1794)
(*Matsumoto Yonesaburō no Kewaizaka no Shōshō miwa Shinobu* 松本米三郎のけはい坂の少将 実はしのぶ)
colour woodblock
39.1 × 26.2 cm (sheet)
National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne Felton Bequest, 1966



In this example of *yakusha-e*, Tōshūsai Sharaku depicts the actor Matsumoto Yonesaburō performing as Shinobu, the daughter of a samurai, disguised as a high-ranking courtesan. In 1629 a law was passed banning women from appearing in *kabuki*. After this date *kabuki* was performed solely by men who were required to adopt male and female roles. Male actors who perform in female roles are known as *Onnagata* (女形). We see the craft of the actor depicted here in the delicate hand gesture holding a long pipe, and the beauty of the character shown through her delicate *shibori* dyed kimono and immaculate hairstyle with hairpins and comb.⁵

Utagawa KUNIYOSHI

Daikokuten: Actor *Ichikawa Danjūrō VIII* 1853 from *The seven Gods of Good Fortune on the Sumida River* series 1853
colour woodblock
35.7 × 24.4 cm
(image and sheet)
National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne Gift of Dr Lilian Alexander, 1934



Utagawa Kuniyoshi depicts the famous and immensely popular actor Ichikawa Danjūrō VIII (member of the famous Ichikawa line of *kabuki* actors) in costume. An image of *Daikokuten*, a god associated with wealth and good fortune, is inset at the top right.

Tsuruya Kōkei

Nakamura Tomijuro V as Ko No Moronao in Act 3, Kanadehon Chushingura 1986
colour woodblock
38.8 × 24.9 cm
ed. 25/54
National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne
Purchased with funds donated
by Adam and Yoko Ryan, 2017



Contemporary print maker Tsuruya Kokei creates prints that capture the vibrant modern-day *kabuki* scene. We see here a portrait of late twentieth-century actor Nakamura Tomijuro V depicted as a greedy and violent government official. In the print of the actor Ichikawa Danjuro XII, Kokei depicts the actor playing Benkei – a warrior hero. His fierce facial expression and bulging veins of his eyes, neck and hands show the courage and ferocity of the character.⁶

Tsuruya Kōkei

Ichikawa Danjuro XII as Musashibo Benkei in Kanjincho
1985
colour woodblock
39.1 × 26.4 cm
ed. 25/54
National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne
Purchased with funds donated
by Adam and Yoko Ryan, 2017



2.1 DESCRIBE

1. Choose a *yakusha-e* print you like and answer the following questions about the depicted character. You may have to guess the answers from what you see in the image.

ひと なん

a. この人は何さいですか。 How old is this person?

ひと なん

b. この人のしゅみは何ですか。 What is their hobby?

ひと ひと

c. この人はどんな人ですか。 What kind of a person are they?

ひと なに

d. この人は何をしていますか。 What are they doing?

2. Describe the person's appearance using the sentence structures below.

a. せが_____です。(Height)

b. からだは_____です。(Body type)

c. かみが_____です。(Hair)

d. かおが_____です。(Face)

e. ゆかたは_____でおびは_____です。(Yukata and Obi)

2.2 IMAGINE: STRIKE A POSE

Often the actors in *yakusha-e* are shown in a dramatic pose called *mie* (見得). In *kabuki* theatre, *mie* is performed at the climax of a scene and involves the actor widening their eyes as large as possible and holding their hands, feet and head in a broad gesture. Sometimes the actors even went cross-eyed if it was a particularly climactic moment.

1. With a friend or partner, practise imitating the pose of one of the people portrayed in the prints.
2. Select from the emotions below. Perform a pose that represents this emotion and ask a classmate or family member to guess the pose in Japanese.

さびしい

うれしい

おこっています

わくわく

2.3 WHAT AM I THINKING?

We can look for clues in the actor's stance, their surroundings and even their clothing to guess what might be happening and what might be going through the character's mind. Select a character from one of the prints and write a speech bubble or perform a line for the character in Japanese that explains what they may be thinking.

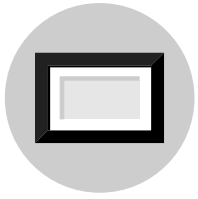
EXAMPLE



きょうはあついで
すね。あそこの川
はずしそうです
ね。このゆかたは
すてきだとおも
いませんか？

ACTIVITY

3. *MUSHA-E* (武者絵) AND FAMOUS SCENES FROM *KABUKI*



IN THE GALLERY



IN SCHOOL

Utagawa YOSHITSUYA

Raiko breaks Hakamadare's magical spell and captures him
1858 (*Kijutsu o yabutte Yorimitsu Hakamadare o karamen to su*
破奇術頼光袴垂為搦)
colour woodblock (triptych)
(a-c) 36.7 × 74.3 cm (image)
(overall) National Gallery of
Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased through The Art
Foundation of Victoria with the
assistance of the Sidney Myer
Fund, Governor, 1994



Raiko breaks Hakamadare's magical spell and captures him, 1858, by Utagawa Yoshitsuya, depicts a scene from a *kabuki* play recounting a story of the legendary warrior Minamoto no Yorimitsu, also known as Raiko. In this scene, the thief Hakamadare Yasukuse has conjured an illusion of a giant snake and what appears to be a small black bear. We see Raiko on the left with his men and the thief Hakamadare seated in the right panel, performing some magical gestures. The three panels are dominated by the writhing form of the snake and we can see black wisps of smoke, perhaps denoting the supernatural powers employed by Hakamadare. The title tells us what happens in the end of the story.⁷

Utagawa YOSHITSUYA
Shuten-doji with his head severed attacks Minamoto-no-Yorimitsu and his retainers 1858
 (Oeyama shutentaiji 大江山酒吞退治)
 colour woodblock
 (a-c) 34.7 × 76.1 cm
 (image and sheet) (overall)
 National Gallery of Victoria,
 Melbourne
 Purchased, NGV Supporters
 of Asian Art, 2015



Shuten-doji with his head severed attacks Minamoto-no-Yorimitsu and his retainers, 1858, tells another story of the legendary warrior. In this story Minamoto-no-Yorimitsu (Raiko) and his men, a group of swordsmen known as the Four Guardian Kings, seek to destroy the blood-thirsty demon or oni known as *Shuten-doji*. The demon continues to attack Minamoto and his men even after they sever his head. In the end Minamoto and his men prevail.⁸

Utagawa YOSHITSUYA
The death of Kusunoki Masatsura 1862 (*Kusunoki Masatsura uchijini no zu* 楠正行討死之図)
 colour woodblock (triptych)
 (a-c) 35.9 × 74.0 cm (image)
 (overall)
 (a-c) 36.4 × 74.0 cm (sheet)
 (overall)
 National Gallery of Victoria,
 Melbourne Purchased, 1993



The Death of Kusunoki Masatsura, 1862, tells the dramatic story of the final battle of a fourteenth century general, Kusunoki. In this historical tale, Kusunoki finds himself surrounded by the enemy. He is depicted in the central panel with two of his retainers on the left and right panel. Together they face a barrage of arrows. We see in their expressive faces a ferocity and determination to fight to the bitter end.⁹

Select one of the story prints to use for the questions below:

3.1 DESCRIBE

なに み

何が見えますか。What can you see? Try to use descriptive language.

なに

何をしていますか。What are the characters doing?

いま なんじ

今は何時ですか。What time is it in the scene?

なに み

何いろが見えますか。What colours can you see?

ふいんきはとうですか。What is the mood/atmosphere of the scene?

3.2 IMAGINE

1. Choose two characters in the scene and write or perform a short dialogue between the characters in Japanese. You could use apps such as 'Chatterpix' to give the characters a voice.
2. What happens next? Discuss with a partner what you think the next scene of the story might be. Perform the next scene with your partner or draw it in your own style.
3. What song would you use if you were directing this scene? Discuss your choice with your class.

WORKSHEET

MUSHA-E (武者絵) AND FAMOUS SCENES FROM KABUKI (歌舞伎)

Explore the story of Minamoto no Yorimitsu.

What can you see?



Utagawa YOSHITSUYA

Raiko breaks Hakamadare's magical spell and captures him (Kijutsu o yabutte Yorimitsu Hakamadare o karamen to su 破奇術頼光袴垂為搦), 1858

- なに
1. 何がみえますか。What can you see in the picture? Look up the words below and circle your answers.

人
へび
木
さむらい
くま
かたな
水
そら

- なんじ
2. いまは何時ごろですか。What time of day is it? Circle your answers.

あさ
ひる
よる

3. 何いろが見えますか。What colours can you see? Circle five answers.

オレンジ
みどり
ピンク
あお
くろ
むらさき
しろ
きいろ

4. Complete the following sentences using words for colours.

そらは_____です。
へびは_____です。
くまは_____です。
木は_____です。

あか

5. 赤いろはどんないみがつですか。
What might red represent in this image? Choose two words.
きけん (danger)
へいわ (peace)
あい (love)
ちから (power)

おおきい
あぶない
やさしい

7. The men in the left panel have found a huge and frightening snake in the middle of a dark forest. How do you think they might be feeling? Choose one word.

うれしい
かなしい
びっくり

6. へびはどんなかんじですか。
Which three words could describe the snake?
こわい
ちいさい
かわいい
おもしろい

ABOUT THE STORY

This image tells the story of a legendary warrior called Minamoto no Yorimitsu (also known as Raiko) as it would have been portrayed in a *kabuki* play. Raiko and his men are pictured on the left panel with their swords drawn. The man on the right is an outlaw and thief called Hakamadare Yasuke. He is seated calmly and appears to be performing a magic gesture.

In this scene Hakamadare has conjured an illusion of a giant snake and what appears to be a small black bear. The giant snake looks frightening and powerful with its jaws wide open and ready to strike. We can tell what happens in the end by reading the title.

Mark the statements T(ue) or F(alse) and provide some evidence from the print for your answer in Japanese if you can.

Example

いま

今はあさです。

T/F: [F] (It is morning)

いま

Evidence: そらがくらいですから、今はよるです。The sky is dark, so it is the evening.

ひと

はかまだれ やすけ は やさしい人です。

T/F: []

Evidence: _____

へび が こわいです。

T/F: []

Evidence: _____

つよ

らいこは強いです。

T/F: []

Evidence: _____

へび は ほんとう の どうぶつです。

T/F: []

Evidence: _____

NOTES

1. NGA Washington Education Resource 'Edo: Art in Japan 1615–1868', NGA, Washington, <https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/Education/learning-resources/teaching-packets/pdfs/edo-teach.pdf>, accessed 18 September 2020
2. NGV, 'Asian art resource: Ukiyo-e in Edo Japan', 2013, NGV, Victorian Government, https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/school_resource/asian-art-resource/, accessed 11 September 2020
3. Tony Ellwood, 'A Spotlight on the Kabuki Stage', *NGV email bulletin 25 July 2020*, Victorian Government
4. NHK World Japan, *Kabuki Kool*, NHK World Japan, <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/tv/kabukikool/>, accessed 16 Sep. 2020
5. Tony Ellwood, 'A Spotlight on the Kabuki Stage', *NGV email bulletin 25 July 2020*, Victorian Government
6. Tony Ellwood, *ibid*
7. Fukuoka City Museum Catalogue 'Japanese Ghosts and Eerie Creatures', Fukuoka City Museum, 2012
8. Kelly Grovier, 'Yorimitsu and Shuten-Dōji: The drunken demon of Kyoto', 2019, *BBC Culture*, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20190121-yorimitsu-and-shuten-dji-the-drunken-demon-of-kyoto>, accessed 11 September 2020
9. Mae Anna Pang, 'Art Journal 34. Japanese woodblock prints: a mass medium', 2014, NGV, Victorian Government, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/japanese-woodblock-prints-a-mass-medium/>, accessed 11 September 2020

ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF UKIYO-E

The *ukiyo-e* prints featured in this resource are available to view on the NGV website and in the supporting PowerPoint on the resource page. The works are frequently rotated in the Gallery due to conservation concerns so they may not be on display at the time of your visit. We recommend that you check the NGV website in advance of your visit for relevant works on display.

The questions and activities in this resource have been designed so they can be applied to any of the *ukiyo-e* prints in the NGV Collection. Alternative artwork suggestions have been provided below:

Yakusha-e

- Tsuruya Kōkei, *Ichikawa Danjuro XII as Saint Narukami in Narukami*, 1985
- Utagawa Kunisada, *Actor Iwai Hanshiro as Oyasu*, 1810–1842
- Utagawa Kunisada, *Shirai Gompachi* 1860
- Utagawa Kunisada II, *An Actor seated*

Musha-e

- Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *The frightening tale of the giant cat ghost at an old temple*, c. 1847
- Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *Ushiwaka overcoming Benkei at Gojō Bridge*, c. 1839
- Utagawa Kunisada, *The eight canine heroes of the House of Satomi*, c. 1847–1852
- Utagawa Kunisada, *Yoshitsune battles Konoha crow tengu under the guidance of the monk Sojobo (King Tengu) at Mt Kurama* 1853

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