

VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY
World Explorers and Japanese Travel Art and Literature
(An Interdisciplinary Activity)

Grade Level

This lesson is intended for an 8th-grade Language Arts class as an interdisciplinary activity following the student's study of world explorers in History class. The level of class and state standards can be adjusted to meet the needs and abilities of grades 8-10.

Objectives

- To analyze the different experiences, obstacles, and details of both Japanese travelers and world explorers
- To connect Japanese travel art and literature to a study of world explorers in History class
- To examine the presence of travel accounts in Japanese literature and art
- To portray the role of the explorer and recount one's journey in the manner of Basho's travel narrative
- To learn and practice the art of haiku and diary writing

Concepts

- Compare/ contrast
- Diary writing and travel logs
- Haiku – an unrhymed verse form of Japanese origin in three lines comprised of 5, 7, 5 syllables, respectively; haiku pertain to an idea of nature or the seasons or an attempt to capture a moment in time
- Japanese “sense of place” – the focus on one specific location in their art and literature
- Japanese travel art, particularly woodblock prints
- Japanese travel literature
- Overcoming odds
- Pastoral settings – the placing of a painting, poem or story in a natural, rural, or countryside environment
- Seasons and their reflection in nature
- Sensory images – the use of words, ideas, or images that pertain to the five senses
- World explorers and map skills (Interdisciplinary Studies)

Key Ideas

- The recounting of travel tales plays a major part in various aspects of Japanese culture, particularly Japanese woodblock prints and travel literature.
- World explorers often documented their travels in logs or diaries that specifically detail their long, arduous journeys.
- *The Narrow Road to Oka* documents the travels of Matsuo Basho (1644-1694) in a unique blend of narrative, expository writing, and haiku. (Note that the title of this book has also been translated as *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*.)

- Japanese travel art and literature closely resemble the travel logs of world explorers.
- Japanese travel art and literature embody a “sense of place” in that the artist or writer is trying to describe or capture the essence of a particular place.
- Nature and the four seasons play a prominent part in Japanese art and literature.
- Both Japanese art and literature and the journals of the world explorers reveal similar themes of adventure and discovery in exploring the world’s landscapes.

Materials

Evening Snow at Kambara (from the series Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido), , CMA 1985.317

Light Rain at Shono (from the series Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido), 1833, CMA 1948.306

Map of Japan showing place names and major routes

Basho, Matsuo. *The Narrow Road to Oka* (translated by Donald Keene). Tokyo:

Kodansha Int’l., 1996 (the title has also been translated as *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches*).

Paper, writing implements, and string to tie paper in a bound format

Procedure – 5-Day Lesson

Day 1 – Pictures and Postcards (Japanese Travel Art and Literature)

1. This lesson will take place as an interdisciplinary activity in English class at the end of a historical unit on World Explorers.
2. For roughly 4-5 minutes, students will begin by informally writing out the activities of their day up until class time. Items to be documented should include:
 - a. How did you get to school?
 - b. Difficulties or obstacles
 - c. Important events
 - d. Social interactions or occurrences
 - e. Discoveries
3. In a whole-group discussion, sample student responses from their “travel log.” Ask students why it is important to reflect on their day and the intimate details of it and lead a discussion about the ideas presented.
4. Use student responses as a lead-in to a discussion of Japanese travel art and literature. Hundreds of years ago, Japanese travelers, artists, and writers essentially did the same thing the students just performed in making their “travel log,” but using the mediums of art and literature.
5. Discuss the role of art and literature in travel or exploration and ask students to draw on their knowledge of world explorers.
 - a. Why would explorers document their journeys?
 - b. Why and how are these documents important?
 - c. What effect would these accounts have on others?
 - d. What types of information would be found in these descriptions?
6. To connect to modern times, the teacher might point out references to ‘Captain’s Log’ in “Star Trek.”

Day 2 – Japanese Travel Art and Literature (Capturing the Essence of One’s Journeys)

1. Explain that Japanese travel art and literature became particularly popular during the 18th and 19th centuries.
2. The Japanese woodblock prints were an important means of depicting the Japanese landscape, both rural and urban, as well as the Japanese love of nature, the changing of the seasons and the Japanese “sense of place.” Describe how the journeys of noted Japanese travelers are depicted in literature and art.
3. View the CMA images by Hiroshige and explain that these are famous examples depicting the journeys of Japanese travelers.
4. Using the map of Japan, ask students to identify specific places illustrated in the woodblock prints. Emphasize the importance to Japanese travel art of capturing specific locations.
5. Returning to the images by Hiroshige, ask students to describe orally the scenes captured in the prints. Possible topics to identify include:
 - a. Actions of characters
 - b. Obstacles or difficulties
 - c. Weather, seasons, and presence of nature
 - d. Landscape
 - e. Sensory imagery

Homework

Read Matsuo Basho’s *The Narrow Road to Oka* and make marginal notes while reading

Day 3 – Japanese Travel Literature (Traveling “The Narrow Road to Oka”)

1. Students will learn that in addition to art, Japanese travelers also portrayed their journeys in written form.
2. Students will take out their copies of Basho’s *The Narrow Road to Oka*. For 5 minutes, students will discuss in pairs their reactions, observations, and notes from the previous night’s reading.
3. In a whole-group setting, sample student responses to their pair discussions. Points to focus on include:
 - a. Specific details of the journey
 - b. Tone and mood
 - c. “Sense of place” – how and when are specific locations highlighted?
 - d. Format of writing – unique style and additions
 - e. Presence of haiku – when, where, why, the effect?
4. Discuss how Basho’s work is similar to and different from the CMA images by Hiroshige (show the CMA images again while you discuss these points).
 - a. What aspects are seen in both?
 - b. What is unique to each one?
 - c. Discuss the themes
 - d. How is nature referenced?

Day 4 – The Role of Haiku in Basho’s *The Narrow Road to Oka*

1. Examine the different aspects and techniques of Basho’s work, such as the combining of narrative and haiku.
2. Analyze further the role of haiku, including:
 - a. When does he use it?
 - b. Why does he use it?
 - c. Effect on the writing?
 - d. Effect on the reader?
 - e. Examples?
 - f. Subject matter of haiku?
 - g. Use of nature?
3. Teach the poetic form of haiku, including the line formats, syllables per line, common themes and uses. Introduce haiku from other sources. Introduce a discussion of whether odd numbers are lucky or unlucky in Japan.
4. Practice haiku by taking students outside for 10-15 minutes and have them select a place or object. Students will then attempt to write a haiku based on the place or object of their choice. Stress the difficulty in writing a short poem and the importance of preserving the strict haiku format.
5. Assign final project.

FINAL PROJECT OVERVIEW

1. Students will create a travel log for a world explorer whom they studied in history class. The travel log should include the following components:
 - a. One (1) illustration of a specific place on the explorer’s journey.
 - b. Three (3) different journal entries that document the travels, obstacles, and describe what the explorer saw. Each entry must include a haiku so that the student’s travel log resembles the work of Basho.
 - c. Other requirements:
 - Written accounts and illustrations must be historically accurate to the explorer.
 - Written accounts and illustrations must be specific to aspects of the explorer’s life and journey.

Day 5 – Sharing the Travel Logs

1. One week later, students will share their final projects in a whole-group setting. Illustrations and written accounts will be jighlighted by each student and discussed for creativity, accuracy, and purpose.

Evaluation

1. Ask students to discuss their own travel literature and art with reference to the works of Basho and Hiroshige. Students can compare/contrast such elements as techniques, effect, and purpose.

Enrichment

- A. Research the Japanese “sense of place” as it evidences itself in Japanese art. Students may wish to analyze examples of Japanese art (woodblocks, scrolls,

- screens) in which artists capture the mood and essence of a specific location in the Japanese countryside. Possible areas of concentration include artist Ando Hiroshige and specific places might be Mt. Fuji and the Tokaido Highway.
- B. Examine the “local poem” genre in Romantic literature. Students will research the tendency of Romantic poets to capture their feelings in describing the essence of a specific location important to the poet’s life or career. Possible subjects include Percy B. Shelley’s “Mont Blanc” and William Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey.”
 - C. Select one world explorer from history class and one Japanese explorer or traveler and compare/contrast their exploits. Possible areas of focus include: journeys, obstacles, routes, time period, purpose of travel, and possibly a map of journey.

Ohio State Standard for Language Arts (8th Grade)

1. Generate writing ideas through discussion with others and from printed materials.
2. Deliver descriptive presentations that convey relevant information/descriptive details.
3. Use oral and visual techniques to gather and present information that supports a position about the topic.
4. Applying reading comprehension strategies, including comparing and contrasting.
5. Compare and contrast the treatment and scope of ideas from different sources on the same subject.
6. Explain how an author’s (artist’s) choice of genre affect the expression of a theme or topic.
7. Examine symbols used in literary texts
8. Identify and explain various types of characters.

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