

## **Asia in My Art Room**

**Girls Preparatory School  
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I have been an Art teacher at Girls Preparatory School for 20 years. GPS is a private girls' day school, one of the largest in the country. The Fine Arts Department includes visual arts (art, graphic design, digital media, ceramics and sculpture) and the performing arts (drama, dance, vocal and instrumental music.) I've taught eighth grade art since my arrival in 1985, but I've also taught sixth and seventh grade art. Two years ago I picked up a few seniors who were taking Art II and next year I will team teach a new Digital Media course that will include photography and video editing.

One of my responsibilities outside the classroom includes acting as my department's Tech Mentor. I am charged with helping members of my department learn new programs that would be beneficial to their courses. All students at GPS in grades eight through twelve have a laptop. We are a completely wireless school and every teacher, no matter what course he or she may teach, is expected to use technology in their curriculum. We use Blackboard, a program that acts as an on-line classroom "warehouse." All course documents are available via the internet, all the time, to students, administrators and teachers. Assignments, homework, handouts, e-texts, discussion boards, videos and hyperlinks are at the student's fingertips – in other words, the dog can't eat your homework. It's always there, waiting on-line.

The first part of my action plan is to make use of this phenomenal program to make information available to my students – yes, even art has a Blackboard site! Any

PowerPoint presentation I use in class can be seen again and all the handouts and examples can be accessed outside of class. I will include links to my favorite Asia websites, as well as a list of other resources for those students who wish to explore further.

GPS has launched a new Global Awareness initiative this year, and I plan on sharing much of my information and resources with other teachers via the Faculty Blackboard site. I also am going to request time during a monthly faculty meeting to talk about the NCTA seminar, encouraging other teachers to take advantage of the opportunities it affords. In my classroom, I will use information and resources from the NCTA institute in the art history lessons that accompany new projects, and as examples for design, composition and technique.

The majority of my students are eighth graders. Their Social Studies component for the year is Ancient to Medieval History, and while they do cover China, it is a very brief overview. They don't really look at Japan or Korea at all – the focus for the class is decidedly European. Many of the European innovations and inventions that my students study were actually “discovered” earlier by Asians. Since some of my art projects are tied directly into the Ancient Civilizations course, I would like to give my students a broader global perspective by comparing familiar western artwork art and innovations with work from China and Japan. The timelines (1) and works of art (2) provided on the Asia for Educators website (3) are valuable resources for this purpose. This site will be listed on my Blackboard site and referenced often in class.

For Eighth Grade Art, I start off the year with a realistic drawing project. We discuss line, color, and especially value (lights and darks.) By using high contrasts

between values, the artist is able to create a sense of depth. I'd like to show my students how Asian artists perfected the use of line and value to create that illusion, in both still life drawings and figure drawings. Chinese and Japanese landscapes often picture great distances and that perspective is achieved by using subtle contrasts I value.

Many Chinese and Japanese “drawings” are actually what Westerners would consider ink paintings. Because they are done with a brush, the artist is able to control the width of a line and the value of the ink in the brush. I want to show my students how the use of negative space was so important in these ink drawings. What they see as “empty space” is just as important as the space the actual object occupies. In Chinese and Japanese paintings, the edge of a garment or plant may not be what is actually drawn at all – the edge is implied by the shadow laid in throughout the negative space. What “isn't there” is just as important as the figurative parts of an object. Many times the master painter painted around the object, only showing the shaded areas underneath and behind it. Depth was also achieved with subtle variations in grays. An object may look closer or further away from the viewer depending on its gray value. Scroll painters had mastered the technique of atmospheric perspective, softening the edges of mountains and clouds in the distance. A discussion about all of these subtleties will inherently lead to discussions about Asian culture and sensibilities and how they differ from Western ideas about beauty, form and function. When Asian scrolls are compared to European paintings from roughly the same time periods, the Western artwork looks flat and static, while the Asian ink drawings have energy and depth.

I teach my students how to write Old English Text calligraphy using a chisel point pen nib. While researching Japanese sumi-e painting (4) I was surprised at the similarities

between the two methods. With both, the arm should be held as if in a cast, with no bending at the wrist or elbow. The whole arm, from the shoulder down, (in fact, the whole body) is involved in making marks. I would like for my students to experience sumi-e so they can start to understand the correct arm position. I'd also like to discuss the science behind the art. The Chinese made ink out of lamp black, and then formed it into sticks or blocks. My students can grind their own ink stick in a slate suzuri ink well and try different strokes with a fude brush. Sumi-e builds one stroke upon another, adding new strokes as previous ones are mastered, which is the same way I teach Old English Text. The Europeans were writing on parchment (the belly skin of a sheep or goat) while the Chinese had already learned how to make paper. Gutenberg's invention of the movable type printing press in 1548 gets top billing in the Ancient Civilizations class, but my students are unaware that the Koreans invented the same thing three hundred years earlier! (5)

After we finish calligraphy, I have my students create castles from clay. We study the architecture of medieval castles and cathedrals – all European of course. I would like to introduce more information about Japanese castles and compare the offensive and defensive qualities of both types of architecture. (6) Again, there are some remarkable similarities - the walls around European and Japanese castles sloped outward, so that any object thrown from above would roll toward the enemy. The ramparts, moats and towers were built with the same purpose in mind in both cultures. During this project I have my students research a famous building or site from a variety of places around the world. Assignments are random and there are no duplications. I assign a standard format and I check each student's work for accuracy before it is uploaded to our Wikispace, (7) where

buildings are grouped by geographical location. I hope to assign more Asian architecture to add to our growing collection.

In the spring, I have my students create linoleum block prints. I will use the abundant resources available from the Freer and Sackler Galleries, a museum that is part of the Smithsonian, located in Washington D.C. (8) to show examples of Japanese ukiyo-e prints by the masters Katsushika Hokusai (1760 – 1849) and Utagawa Hiroshige (1797 – 1858). Hokusai is famous for his series *36 Views of Mount Fuji*, which includes the one of the world's most recognizable images, *The Wave*. Although I don't usually recommend Wikipedia as a reliable source, I found it has the most accessible collection of the series. (9) While my students only print in one color, it doesn't take long before they realize how remarkable these multi-colored Japanese prints are. Ukiyo-e prints are also a good source for visuals when discussing Kabuki Theater and geishas, as many fine prints exist of these genres.

My last project of the year will be a multi-media collage using Japanese Mon (family crests) as inspiration for a circular design. It is an interdisciplinary project incorporating math and art. Students use a compass, a protractor, and a ruler to draw the circular patterns, and employ the art elements of line, shape and color to create a unified pattern. We will look at examples of Japanese Mon (10) and discuss their use by samurai on armor and banners. I want to compare Japanese Mon to European heraldry, since their uses were similar – it was a way to identify groups on the battlefield. (11) I also want to compare European armor with the armor of Japanese samurai from the same time periods to look for similarities and differences. I have created a PowerPoint presentation for students which will be available on Blackboard once it has been viewed in class.

One other interdisciplinary experience that runs simultaneously with my projects is that of music. I like for my students to feel immersed in the time period or culture of the project they are working on and I find music to accompany our work in class. One new source I've found is Radio Asia, which is available for free (12). There are also podcasts, with concerts that change frequently, at Smithsonian Global Sound (13). These resources will be listed on my Blackboard site, as well as the Faculty and Global awareness Blackboard sites.

I am committed to using an interdisciplinary approach to teaching art wherever the opportunity presents itself. Using Asian art, I can incorporate History, Math, Science, Language, and Music into my course and at the same time meet the mission of Global Awareness my school has set forth. Using the technology available to me at GPS, I have the ability to reach not only my students, but all students, plus administrators and teachers. I realize how lucky I am and intend to make use of my good fortune!

One more experience I would like to offer my students will depend on the technology available to our Asian counterparts. I have access at school to videoconferencing equipment, and as my Fine Arts department Tech Mentor, I received training on that equipment several years ago. It would be wonderful to have "face-to-face" meetings with teachers and students abroad, if they can access the equipment. I could sponsor slumber parties with small numbers of students at a time so we could talk to Chinese, Japanese or Korean students in real time. To make contacts like that would fulfill GPS's global initiative of broadening our student's awareness of their place in this big, wide, wonderful world!

## Sources

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