



SUMI-E

by David Laux

For several years, students have been asking me to do projects centered on *anime*. I don't personally appreciate these cartoons, which makes it difficult for me to translate the subject into teachable material. Furthermore, the students who are interested in anime are already expert.

Deciding to meet them in the middle, I found historically relevant Japanese prints that were rich in imagery and theme. Students were stunned as they recognized parallels between their current pop-culture icons and these ancient works of art.

DAY ONE To begin the project, I provided students with printed copies of samurai warriors from ancient Japanese wood cuts. One can easily find a large number of these online, which will provide for more variety in students' work. I isolated the image from all background clutter and enlarged the copy to 17" x 22" (I taped divided images together because I was using a standard copier). Sounds like too much trouble? Not really; I have since been able to reuse these images in a variety of ways.

< Kameron
 v Nick

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upper-elementary students will ...

- implement painting and sumi-e brush drawing techniques.
- identify and blend analogous colors.
- compose a balanced and dynamic image.

NATIONAL ART STANDARDS

- Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes.
- Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.
- Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others.

MATERIALS

- 12" x 18" watercolor paper
- Water-based markers
- Food coloring
- India ink
- Sumi-e brushes, pens, cut bamboo
- Light boxes (optional)



SAMURAIS

Students were allowed to trace for this project, as the objectives focused on being able to use watercolors and *sumi-e* ink drawing techniques. Tracing accelerated the process, ensured adequate use of detail, and prevented students from drawing too small of an image. By circumventing these pitfalls, all students were prepared for processes that follow.

Students placed a 12" x 18" sheet of watercolor paper on the image and considered their composition, as the entire image would not fit on their paper. Some had difficulty seeing through the thicker paper, so I provided them with simple light boxes and allowed them to tape their work to the windows if needed.

Then they added their own freehand, landscaped background and Japanese *kanji*. Finally, they traced their pencil lines with water-based, school markers. I encouraged them to use a variety of colors and color in only a few small details.



DAY TWO During the following session, we “water-colored” our art work with solutions I had created by stirring food coloring into containers of water in varying strengths. I also added glitter glue to some so they would sparkle.

The food color, glue and marker diffused to create very interesting effects. When students finished, I sprayed the art with a water bottle while they held them vertically, which provided an additional drizzling effect.

Students were instructed to share the brushes, and to always return them to the correct tubs. I suggest labeling the brushes to correspond with each color. This only took an extra five minutes of prep, but it helped prevent colors from getting contaminated.

DAY THREE On their now-dry paintings, students traced over their pencil lines with India ink—also watered down to provide varying transparencies. I encouraged students to use as many tools as were available to them. I provided *sumi-e* brushes, cut bamboo, and pen sets.

The results were amazing. Each finished work was truly unique. It was gratifying to aid students in building a bridge between their personal interests in pop culture today and a rich tradition of the past. And, as a bonus, several parents told me how incredibly proud their children were of their work.

I have tried a few variations with this lesson: We did the

same thing with smaller figures on Dippity-Dye paper to create paper lanterns. Students glued the two ends of the paper together, forming a cylinder, and I helped them coil reeds inside. They looked incredible but, admittedly, it was a bit challenging for this age of student.

I have also done the project on 18" x 24" sheets of paper and sprinkled salt on them. They also looked great, but the size was



△ Ty
< Ethan

prohibitive for both space and time.

Finally, I am thinking about using the same technique for watercolor floral arrangements (minus the black ink). Wish me luck! ■

For the past 15 years, David Laux has been teaching fourth-through sixth-grade art at Wilson Intermediate School in Pekin, Illinois.