
Art Masterpiece: *The Great Wave at Kanagawa* (from *A Series of Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*), by Katsushika Hokusai

Keywords: Contrast, focal point, print, vantage point, woodblock

Grade(s): 4th – 6th

Activity: Styrofoam relief print-making



Meet the Artist:

- Katsushika Hokusai is pronounced “cat-soo-she-kah ho-koo-sigh.”
- He was born in Edo, Japan in 1760, which was before the United States had even achieved independence.
- Hokusai’s family was poor and he was apprenticed to a woodblock engraver. Eventually, he went to work doing drawings and selling them on the streets just to make enough food to eat.
- He started to draw for comic books, making banners, designing greeting cards and illustrating books for the wealthy. Eventually, he married and had children.
- Changing names was a Japanese custom and Hokusai changed his over 30 times! “Hokusai” is the name he kept the longest. The name Hokusai means “Star of the Northern Constellation”.
- Hokusai hated cleaning. When it became too dirty to work where he was, he just simply moved. He moved himself and his family a total of 93 times!
- He was so talented he could draw birds in flight on a single grain of rice. He also was a showman and would do shows by painting while he was hanging upside down or with his feet in front of an audience.
- Hokusai was well known for his landscape paintings but much of his work was woodblock printing. (Woodblock prints are created when the artists

carves their subject into a wooden surface and uses that surface as a relief for printing.)

- Hokusai didn't start his most famous works until he was 68!
- Hokusai painted a series of pictures collectively called "36 views of Mt Fuji." "The Great Wave" was one of those paintings. The series was published around 1830.
- The series was an exercise in perspective to him, using landscape as a way to show it. He painted the same mountain (Mount Fuji) over and over again. You can see Mt. Fuji in the background of "The Great Wave," which is also a wood block print.
- Eventually, Hokusai painted over 30,000 pieces of art. He lived to 89, dying in 1849. His final name was Gwakio Rojin, meaning "old man mad about drawing".

Possible Questions:

1. What's going on in this picture? Does it tell a story?
2. What is the vantage point of this painting? (The *vantage point* is where you think the artist seems to have been standing when the art was created. (From the sea looking toward land.)
3. Why do you think Hokusai chose to paint Mt. Fuji 36 times? (It was a sacred mountain to the Japanese people)
4. *Contrast* in art is where there is a big difference between two things. Where do you see contrast in this painting? (color, texture, value) How does the contrast enhance the painting? (It builds excitement)
5. A *focal point* is the most important part or area in a work of art. What is the focal point in the painting? How does that artist draw our eyes to this point? (Direct center of artwork)
6. What is the difference between a drawing and a wood block print? A *print* is a kind of artwork in which ink or paint is put onto a block (wood, linoleum, etc.) which has a design carved into it. The block is then pressed onto paper to make a print (copy) of the design. A *woodcut* is a wooden surface on which a picture or design has been cut to form a relief used for printing.

Activity: Foam Relief Print Making

Materials Needed:

- Scratch-Foam Sheets*, 6" X 9," one per student
- Brayers (rollers), one per ink color plus one extra (kept clean)
- Mixing trays to put paint in, one per ink color
- Printing ink – black, red, blue, etc.
- Wooden styluses, one per student
- White scratch paper (copy paper), cut down to the same size as the scratch foam sheets (6" X 9"), one per student
- White construction paper, cut down to the same size as the scratch foam sheets (7" X 10"), one per student
- Black construction paper for mounting (final project will have a large mounted border)
- Newspapers, to cover desks
- Plastic spoons, one per ink color
- Elmer's glue
- Paper towels

*an alternate media instead of using Scratch Foam Sheets is to use Styrofoam dinner plates, cutting off the rim so just the flat bottom is left.

Advance Preparation: Cut white construction paper down to 7" X 10." Cut the scratch (copy) paper down to the same size as the scratch foam sheets, 6" X 9". Copy and glue "parent letter" to the backs of the black construction paper. It is helpful to have extra adults to help with this project. Ask other parents or friends to come help with the lesson.

Set Up: Cover a table with newspaper. This should be set up in a central location, as it will be shared. On the newspapers have the mixing trays, ink, brayers,

spoons, white construction papers. Scoop a spoonful of ink out onto each mixing tray and set a brayer next to each color tray. Keep the extra brayer clean (no ink.)

You will need to pay close attention to time here to allow time for all students to finish their prints as they need to share the ink trays and brayers.

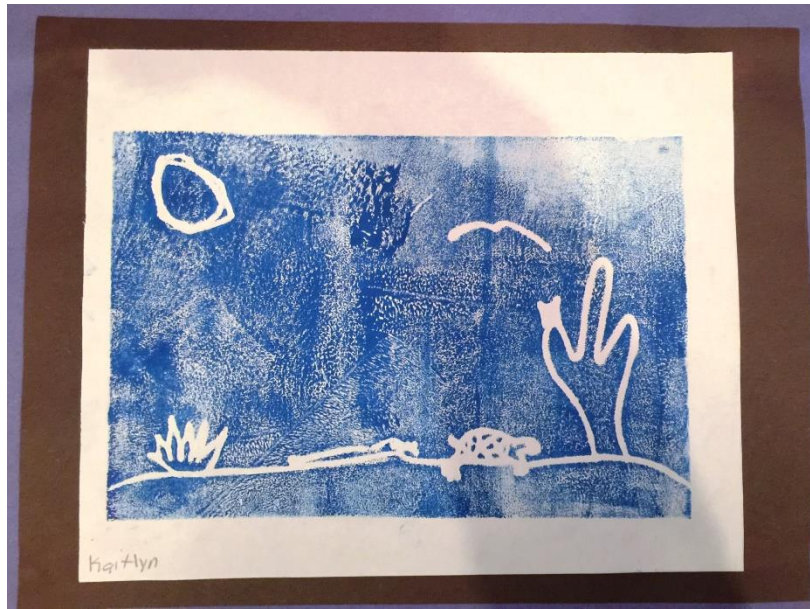
Process:

1. Pass out the scratch/copy paper to the students. Tell them to sketch a landscape scene (mountain, waterfall, ocean, lake, sunset, etc.) Explain that they should keep their pictures *large and simple* (not a lot of small details.) Their landscape should fill the whole paper. No tiny details.
2. When their sketch is completed they should try to reproduce it onto the foam (our version of a woodblock!) One way to do this is to lay the paper on top of the foam and use the stylus to trace around the major parts of their scene to get the general shape onto the foam.
3. When they get the general shape, have them finish their landscape directly onto the foam scratch sheet.
4. To ensure that the print is clear, be sure that they are pressing hard into the foam sheets so that the lines are relatively deep and wide *without poking through!*
5. Have them bring their "woodblock" to the ink area. They can choose one color of ink. Have them form a line in front of the color they want.
6. Here is where the extra help comes in handy. One adult should be stationed per ink tray to help the students ink and print. Adults – using a brayer, carefully roll through the blob of ink, back and forth, until the brayer is uniformly and lightly coated. Hand it to the student.
7. Have the student evenly roll the brayer over their "woodblock" (foam sheet) to cover with ink. If the ink is too heavy, it will simply fill in all the engraved lines and their print will be a solid block of color. If this happens, tell the student to go rinse off their foam sheet, dry it carefully, and return to try again. If the brayer is too loaded with paint, roll it on a piece of newspaper first to get some of the paint off and then roll it on the foam.

8. Have the student place a sheet of white construction paper on top of their inked foam sheet. Make sure it is centered on the foam.
9. Have the student gently but evenly roll the clean brayer across their paper to press the paper into the ink.
10. Gently peel back the paper to see the print. Show them how their print is the reverse image of their woodblock.
11. Have the student carefully write their name in the white margin of their print. Set it aside to dry. When it is dry, mount the final masterpiece on the black construction paper.

Examples:





Parent Note:

In Art Masterpiece today, your child used a style of foam relief print-making to replicate the artwork of Hokusai. We discussed the terms contrast, focal point, perspective, print, texture, vantage point, and woodcut.

The name Hokusai means “Star of the Northern Constellation.” He hated cleaning so, when it became too dirty to work where he was, he just simply moved. He moved himself and his family a total of 93 times! Eventually, he painted over 30,000 pieces of art.

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Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)
(from a series of *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*)



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“Messy Art” Note:

Our next Art Masterpiece lesson might be a little messy.
We will be using _____. Most art
media is “washable” but it still might leave a faint stain.
Please don’t send your child to school in new clothes on
this day: _____ at _____.
(date) *(time)*

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Extra Help Needed Note:

We need extra hands!!

The next Art Masterpiece lesson could use some extra helping hands. If you can, please come and lend your hands on _____ at _____.
(date) (time)

Thanks so much!

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Thanks so much!