

Character Expressions

Grades – 3-8 (with modifications for early elementary and high school)

Time - 2-3 class periods

Essential Questions

- In what ways do portraits tell stories?
- How do characters show emotion through their actions?
- How can you transform into a character?

Key Concepts/Vocabulary/Art Elements

Identity, transformation, character, kabuki, portraiture, collage, mask, printmaking, line, color

Materials

Paper masks, scissors, glue, construction paper, decorative paper, coloring materials (i.e. markers, colored pencils, pastels, paint), magazines or image printouts (optional)

Artworks in Focus

- Tsuruya Kōkei (Japan, b. 1946) *Matsumoto Kōshirō IX as Kamakura Gongorō in "Shibaraku"*, 1991
- Tsuruya Kōkei (Japan, b. 1946) *Ichikawa Ebizō X as Akushichibyōe Kagekiyo in "Kagekiyo"*, 1984

Talking About Art

Take a look at the image *Matsumoto Kōshirō IX as Kamakura Gongorō in "Shibaraku"*, 1991 and answer the following questions:

- What assumptions could you make about the character in the picture?
- Is he strong or weak? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What kind of emotion is he expressing? Cite visual evidence for your opinion
- How does the artist position the figure in the frame? (Does he take up a lot of space or a little?)

Now take a look at *Ichikawa Ebizō X as Akushichibyōe Kagekiyo in "Kagekiyo"*, 1984. What do you notice about the character in this image that is similar to the previous one? What do you notice that is different? What visual details does the artist use to tell us about the characters? With a partner, share your answers.

Kabuki is a form of drama created in Japan around 400 years ago. The word "kabuki" means singing and dancing. It is known for its highly stylized acting, which involves the actors striking and holding dramatic poses, called *mie* (mee-eh). Each pose represents a specific emotion and is used by the actors to bring attention to a scene.

A kabuki actor's transformation into his character begins by applying heavy makeup, called *kumadori*, to his face. The purpose of the makeup is to exaggerate the actors' facial muscles so that they are better able to express their character's changing emotions to the audience. The different colored lines have unique meanings. For example, red represents justice and courage and is often used for a hero. Blue represents malevolent (or mean) emotions and is typically used for a villain. What do you think it means when both colors are used together, such as in the image of Kagekiyo?

Audiences at kabuki performances were very familiar with the various characters and stories told. Actors have stage names which are often associated with specific roles or acting styles. The names hold great honor and importance for the actor and are often passed down from generation to generation.

About the Artist

Tsuruya Kōkei is a contemporary artist living and working in Japan. Born in 1946, Kōkei comes from a family with several generations of artists. He discovered his love of woodblock printing, a traditional Japanese art form, in his mid-thirties. After viewing a kabuki performance, he was inspired to create a series of images of the actors. Kōkei eventually got hired by the Kabuki-za Theater in Tokyo to create prints for each of their productions.

Although inspired by tradition, Kōkei's work is unique because of his use color, exaggeration of figures, and use of materials. He is both an artist and craftsman: designing, carving, and hand printing each artwork himself. Traditionally each part of the process is done by a different person. Kōkei has gained recognition for his work all over the world.

Creating Art

If you were an actor, how would you transform into a character? Would you paint your face or put on a mask or costume? How would you show the audience how you feel?

Select a character from a text read in class and design a mask that will help you transform into that character. Your mask should show emotion and give the viewer some clues about the character's personal traits. Select colors that you think will represent the character. Use paper to cut and fold shapes to give your mask depth, dimension, and texture (see "Paper Folding and Sculpture Techniques" guide). Go beyond the mask template! You may use any coloring materials to add designs to your mask.

Once your mask is complete, use it to transform into your character. Use your body to create poses that show emotional states of your character during important scenes in the story or text. Then, using a camera, phone, or tablet, work with a partner to create a series of photographs of yourself striking the poses in the mask. Talk to your partner about how you want to frame your images. Do you want it to be a close-up? How much of your body do you want visible? Select the best three photos to present to your class.

Grade Level Modifications

Lower Elementary — Ask students to identify a part of a story where the character is showing emotions and have them act out the scene using their masks and poses.

High School — Have students research and read a kabuki play or read one together as a class. Then have students make masks based on a selected character in the play and either make a series of photographs with a partner, self-portraits (selfies), or a short video in which they create dramatic poses (*mie*) that show the character's emotional states.

Reflection

- Describe your process of transforming into a character. What was it like?
- How is the experience of embodying a character different from reading about them?
- In what ways do you think visual and performative interpretations of literature add to the understanding of a story?

Curriculum Connections

National Core Arts Standards

Creating

3rd - VA: Cr1.2.3a - Apply knowledge of available resources, tools, and technologies to investigate personal ideas through the art-making process.

5th - VA: Cr2.1.5a - Experiment and develop skills in multiple art-making techniques and approaches through practice

6th - VA: Cr1.2.6a - Formulate an artistic investigation of personally relevant content for creating art.

Presenting

3rd - VA: Pr6.1.3a - Identify and explain how and where different cultures record and illustrate stories and history of life through art.

Responding

5th - VA: Re.7.2.5a - Identify and analyze cultural associations suggested by visual imagery

6th - VA: Re.7.1.6a - Identify and interpret works of art or design that reveal how people live around the world and what they value

Connecting

3rd - VA: Cn11.1.3a - Recognize that responses to art change depending on knowledge of the time and place in which it was made

HS Proficient - VA: Cn11.1.1a - Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art

CCSS for ELA – Reading Standards for Literature K-5

3.2 – Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

3.3 – Describe characters in a story (e.g. their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.

4.3 – Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in a text (e.g. a character’s thoughts, words, or actions).

3.6 – Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters

CCSS for ELA – Reading Standards for Literature 6-12

7.3 – Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g. how setting shapes the character or plot)

8.3 – Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

6.7 – Compare and contrast the experience of reading a story, drama, or poem to listening to or viewing an audio, video, or live version of the text, including contrasting what they “see” and “hear” when reading the text to what they perceive when they listen or watch.

9-10.3 – Analyze how complex characters (e.g. those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact, with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

9-10.6 – Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

CCSS for ELA – Speaking and Listening K-5

3.5 – Create engaging audio recordings of stories or poems that demonstrate fluid reading at an understandable pace; add visual displays when appropriate to emphasize or enhance certain facts or details

5.5 – Include multimedia components (e.g. graphics, sound) and visual displays in presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of the main ideas or themes.

CCSS for ELA – Speaking and Listening 6-12

8.5 – Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

9-10.5 – Make strategic use of digital media (e.g. textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

Resources

- Explore other works by Tsuruya Kōkei in the museum collection:
<http://pamcollections.usc.edu/mwebcgi/mweb?request=record;id=153;type=901>
- Video interview of Tsuruya Kōkei with exhibition curator:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=iggVtYEkOPM
- Sadler, A.L. Japanese Plays: *Classic Noh Kyogen and Kabuki Works*. Tuttle Publishing, 2010
- *Kanjincho* was adapted by James R. Brandon and Tamako Niwa:
Kabuki Plays (The Zen Substitute and The Subscription List). (1966) New York: Samuel French, ISBN 978-0573622601.



Tsuruya Kōkei (Japan, b. 1946) *Matsumoto Kōshirō IX as Kamakura Gongorō in "Shibaraku"*, 1991
Woodblock print; Ink and pigment on paper
Gift of Drs. Aziz and Deanna Khan
1998.66.2



Tsuruya Kōkei (Japan, b. 1946) *Ichikawa Ebizō X as Akushichibyōe Kagekiyo in "Kagekiyo"*, 1984
Woodblock print; Ink and pigment on paper
Loaned by Drs. Aziz and Deanna Khan

Paper Folding and Sculpture Techniques



Zig-zag Fold



Fringe



Tabs



Cone

Spiral



Triangular Prism



Cube

Torn strips



Feather



Curl



