

Compare and Contrast: Artist Interpretations

Grade – 3-8 (with grade-level modifications)

Time – one class period

Essential Questions

- How do different artists interpret the same story and/or character?
- How does literature come to life through visual and performing art?

Key Concepts/Vocabulary/Art Elements

Compare and contrast, character, visual analysis, kabuki

Materials

Images of artworks projected and/or reproduced, paper to write on, pencils, excerpts from kabuki play

Artworks in Focus

- Tsuruya Kōkei (Japan, b. 1946) *Self-Portrait*, 2010
- Tsuruya Kōkei (Japan, b. 1946) *Ichimura Uzaemon XVII as Musashibō Benkei in “Benkei Jōshi”*, 1992
- Natori Shunsen (Japan, 1886-1960) *Benkei in “Kanjinchō”*, c.1930s
- Tsuruya Kōkei (Japan, b. 1946) *Nakamura Kichiemoallas Mushashibo Benkei from “Kanjinchō”*, 1988

Talking about Art: Compare and Contrast

Take a close look at the *Self-Portrait*, 2010 by Tsuruya Kōkei. What do you notice about the man in the drawing? How does the artist position himself in the frame? What details stand out to you? Now, take a careful look at the print, *Ichimura Uzaemon XVII as Musashibō Benkei in “Benkei Jōshi”*, 1992. What do you notice about the person in this picture? How would you describe his expression? What assumptions could you make about his personality? What details stand out to you?

Now, compare and contrast the two images. What is similar about the portraits and what is different? How does your perception of the artist’s self-portrait change when it is seen side by side with the print of Benkei? Share your observations with a partner.

Next, take a look at the two artworks portraying the character Benkei and write down your answers to the following questions:

- What is similar about the figures in both artworks?
- What is different about the figures in the artworks?
- Do you think both images are of the same character or a different character? Why or why not?
- Do you think these were made by the same artist? Justify your answer by citing specific observations of the artwork

Next, turn to a partner and share your observations.

Note to teachers: When showing the two images, do not show the title or name of artist until after the discussion.

The Story of Benkei and *Kanjinchō*

Historically, Benkei was a Japanese warrior monk who lived during the end of the Heian Period (794-1185). He is a popular figure in Japanese folklore and the subject of several works of art, including kabuki plays. As a character, Benkei is respected for his strength and loyalty. He is easily recognizable by his clothing, weaponry, and fierce facial expressions.

In the story *Kanjinchō (The Subscription List)*, Benkei is tasked with helping his master, the fugitive Yoshitsune, to cross a mountain path guarded by a loyal warrior named Togashi. To get his master past the gate, Benkei disguises himself as a Buddhist priest, claiming to be passing through in search of donations for his temple. Togashi asks him to prove he is indeed a priest by providing a *Kanjinchō*, or subscription list, of people who had already donated. Benkei does not have such a list, so in a famous scene, he pulls out a blank scroll and begins to read from it. Clever Togashi figures out the scheme, but is so impressed by Benkei's devotion to his master, that he lets them pass.

Benkei and Yoshitsune are about to escape entirely, until they are seen by another one of Togashi's guards. Thinking quickly, Benkei pretends that Yoshitsune is his assistant and begins to hit him for causing trouble. Hitting one's master was considered a serious crime, so assuming that Benkei was being truthful, the guard allows them to pass. Yoshitsune thanks Benkei, who bursts into tears as he apologizes for beating him.

In the end, Yoshitsune escapes while Benkei dances for Togashi, whose guards were not watching. As Benkei leaves, he turns to Togashi in gratitude, knowing that he will need to pay with his own life for helping the enemy.

About Tsuruya Kōkei

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.

Grade Level Modification

Lower elementary – Work with students as a group to create two lists, one with similarities and one with differences between any set of images. Encourage descriptive language and focus on visual details.

Upper elementary – Have students create a Venn diagram for comparing the images. Then prompt them to write a short compare and contrast essay, using the diagram as a guide.

Middle/High School – Have students read the translated script of *Kanjinchō* and then compare and contrast the images of Benkei by Tsuruya Kōkei and Natori Shunsen. How do the two artists visually interpret this classic hero?

Curriculum Connections

CCSS for ELA – Reading Standards for Literature K-5

3.7 – Explain how specific aspects of a text’s illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g. create mood, emphasize aspects of character or setting).

3.9 – Compare and contrast the themes, settings, and plots of stories written by the same author about the same or similar characters (e.g. in books from a series).

4.9 – Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g. opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g. quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.

5.9 Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g. mysteries and adventure stories) on their approaches to similar themes and topics.

6.9 – Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g. stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.

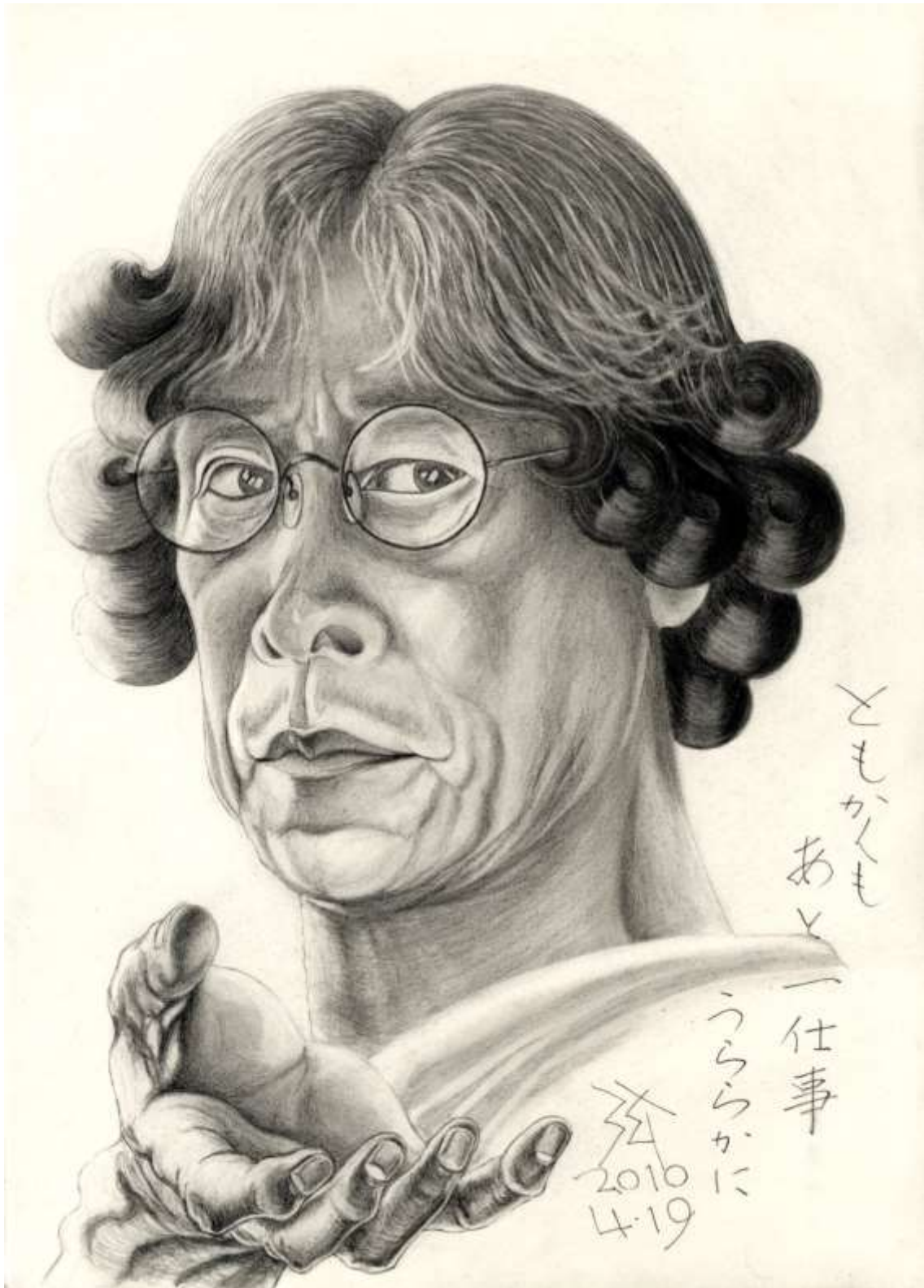
7.9 – Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history

8.9 – Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new.

9-10.9 - Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

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
- *Kanjicho* 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.



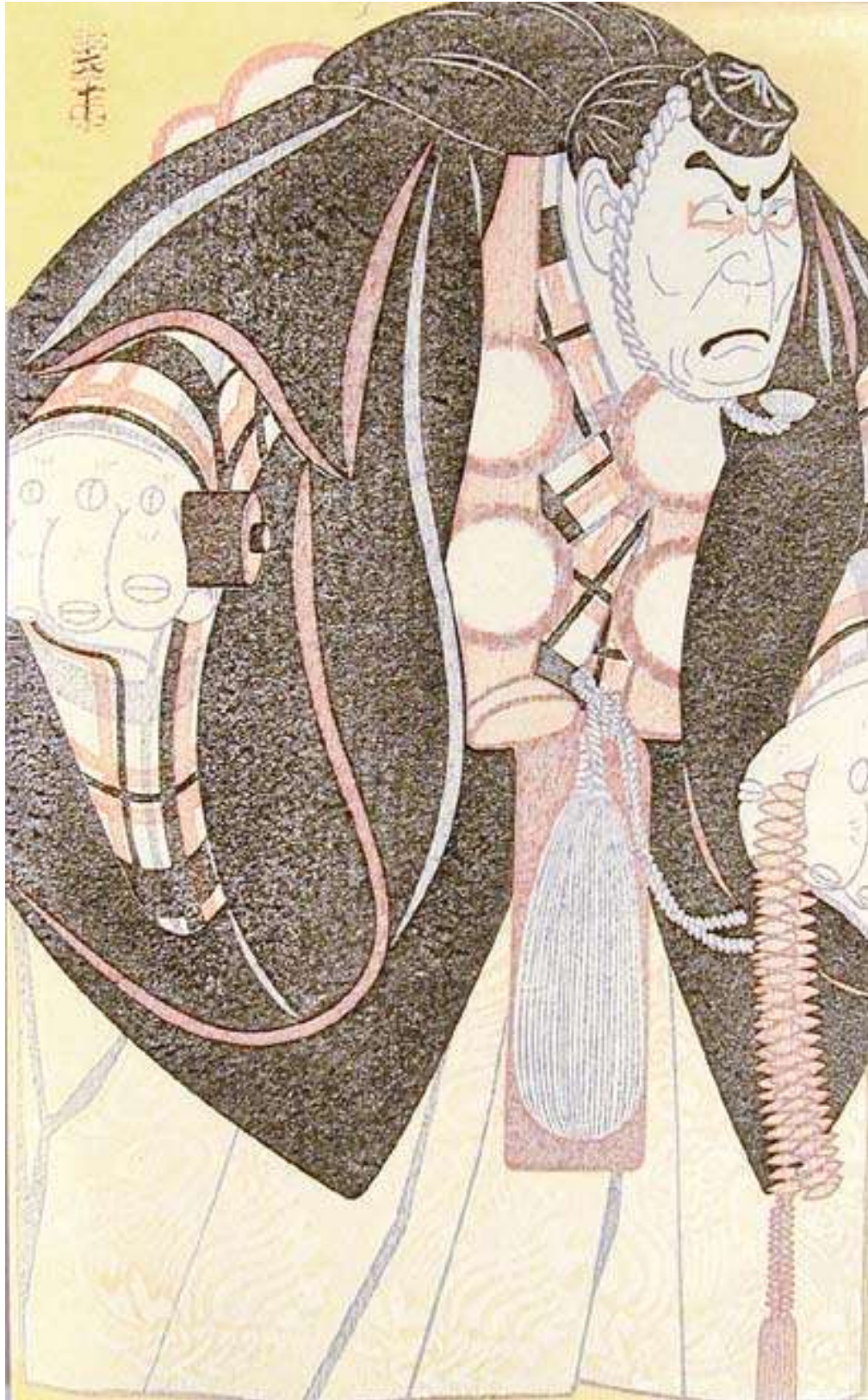
Tsuruya Kōkei (Japan, b. 1946), Self-Portrait, 2010
Pencil on paper
Courtesy of the Artist



Tsuruya Kōkei (Japan, b. 1946) *Ichimura Uzaemon XVII as Musashibō Benkei in "Benkei Jōshi"*, 1992
Woodblock print, ink and pigment on paper
Gift of Drs. Aziz and Deanna Khan
1998.66.7



Natori Shunsen (Japan, 1886-1960) *Benkei in "Kanjinchō"*, c.1930s
Ink and pigment on silk, hanging scroll
Loaned by Darrel Karl



Tsuruya Kōkei (Japan, b. 1946) *Nakamura Kichiemoallas Mushashibo Benkei* from "*Kanjinchō*", 1988
Ink and pigment on paper, woodblock print
Gift of Drs. Aziz and Deanna Khan
2008.L6.37