

Revised October 2012

**FAMOUS ARTISTS SERIES: Hokusai (1760 –1849)**

***In the Hollow of a wave off the Coast at Kanagawa from  
36 Views of Mt. Fuji, 1831***

**Supplies needed:**

- \* Framed poster from Art Gallery
- \* 9 laminates in supply box
- \* large example of stamp from supply box
- \* rollers from supply box
- \* large ink pads from supply box
- \* Foam sheet from supply box (*Note: Ahead of time: cut foam into 3 1/2 x5-inch pieces.*)
- \* large piece of roll paper from teachers work room for a table covering
- \* Paper towels, wet wipes-**this is a really messy one!!**
- \* White construction paper (cut) from teachers work room
- \* Black construction paper for matting from teachers work room
- \* project samples from supply box
- \* students will need a pencil
- \* collection of postcards of Hokusai's work from supply box

**Reference Books**

One Day In Japan with Hokusai, Prestel book in supply box

Hokusai: the man who painted a mountain, Deborah Kogan Ray, Francis Foster Books, 2001.

One Hundred Poets, Peter Moise, G. Braziller, New York, 1989.

***AHEAD OF TIME NOTE: Please make copies of the master "Famous Artist Series" letter to hand out to students. As this is an involved project, it might be best to have at least 2 volunteers doing the project.***

Today we are going to learn about an artist who lived a very long time ago. The artist called Hokusai was born in 1760 in a poor section of Edo, Japan. Today Edo is part of the large Japanese city of Tokyo. For most people in America in 1760 Japan was a strange and far away land. (This was around the same time General George Washington was preparing to fight the British for independence in the American Revolutionary War.)

***(Show laminate #1)*** Hokusai lived with his mother and she died when he was 6 years old. He was sent to live with his Uncle's family. When their chores were done, his cousins would run out to the street to play games but Hokusai

would stay inside and draw pictures on scrap pieces of paper and bits of charcoal from the stove.

Hokusai's formal schooling ended when he was 12. This is when he first visited a library and discovered how many books and pictures existed. He spent hours copying the pictures in the books. Finally his talent was noticed and he was offered an apprenticeship as a woodblock engraver in a printing shop. Engravers made the illustrations from the paintings by the artists he had admired in many books. He couldn't wait to get started!

At the print shop, Hokusai learned how the beautiful illustrations ended up in the books he had studied. ***(Pass around examples of stamps)***

Has anyone ever used stamps to make a picture? You can see that even a simple stamp requires many lines to make its image have detail. Imagine "making a stamp" for an entire piece of art! ***(Read laminate #2 – Woodcut Process)***

Hokusai was very skillful engraver. In his hands, the chisels and knives captured each brushstroke of the artist's picture. He soon became a pupil of a famous Japanese artist and began to sell his paintings for book illustrations and posters. ***(laminate #3 shows an engraving)***

Hokusai lived during a time in Japan where the country was ruled by a man called a "shogun". The word shogun means "general". Even though Japan had an emperor who lived in a beautiful palace, the shogun ruled the country and his powerful samurai soldiers enforced his commands. They told the people what they could wear and eat. No books or people that were not Japanese were allowed in the country because the shogun did not want ideas from the outside world to reach the people. Hokusai spent the first part of his life painting in traditional Japanese style. This included paintings of "The Floating World". ***(Show laminates #4, #5 & #6. In addition, you can show or pass around the postcards from the supply box. Try to keep track of how many are passed around!)*** The floating world was a way for the people of Edo to describe all the pleasures and pastimes in life. These included pictures of the theatre, sumo wrestler, dancers and beautiful women.

During the middle of his life the shogun opened up Japan to trade with Dutch traders. They brought books and prints from Europe to Japan. Hokusai was fascinated by the style of the European artists. Instead of the "flat" appearance of the traditional Japanese paintings, these artists used perspective in their landscapes. This meant that things far away looked small and things in the painting that were close appeared larger. Despite criticism from patrons who preferred the traditional Japanese style of art, Hokusai experimented with many new techniques.

Hokusai spent a restless life always looking for new ways to paint. They say he changed his residence over 90 times and went by over 30 different names during his lifetime. One thing remain the same, since he was a little boy drawing with a stick in the sand, Hokusai loved to draw, especially his beloved Mt. Fuji. His mother used to sing him songs about the sun goddess who smiled on them from the sacred mountain. His greatest work of art was a series of woodblock prints that show Mt Fuji from all angles, in all seasons. This work of art, called “Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji”, is considered to be one of the greatest masterpieces in the world today. **(Show laminates #7, #8 & #9)** Can you find Mt. Fuji in all these pictures?

**(Show framed print of The Great Wave Off Kanagawa )** This wood block print was created around 1831. This print is part of the “Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji” collection. What do you see in this picture? **(Have students pick out the three boats. Can they see the tiny humans being tossed about in the big waves? Can they find Mount Fuji? )** Do you see how the foam of the wave seems to have claws reaching out for the fisherman?

Hokusai loved to paint water in motion. The breaking waves frame the central image of Mount Fuji and in fact make the sacred mountain seem small in comparison. **(Compare this print with laminate #6, a traditional Japanese style painting and talk briefly about the perspective of The Wave versus the “flat” style of the others)**

The art of Hokusai influenced many of the artists we have already studied. His work was collected by Claude Monet, Edgar Degas and Henri Toulouse-Lautrec.

## **The Art of The Hokusai Woodblock Print**

A woodblock print is a type of woodcut printed from separate wooden blocks, each carrying a separate color and fitted together to make a complete design, with one color sometimes overlapping another.

First an artist designed a picture and made a black outline drawing of it on thin rice paper. This was called the draft.

Then the engraver glued the draft onto a block of hard cherry wood. Using sharp tools, the engraver carved away the spaces between the lines.

The remaining parts were inked and paper was placed over the top and rubbed with a round bamboo pressing pad to transfer the ink to the paper.

The artist then decided which areas were to be colored and the cutter made separate woodblocks for each color.

Between 150 - 200 prints could be made from each block. The finished prints were then sold by a publisher for book illustrations or posters.

The original drawing was destroyed during this process. Great skill and technique were required for a successful print.

## **Project:**

*(Today's project will let students participate in the art of printmaking. They will create an image and transfer it onto paper. **It will be messy**, so have the paper towels and hand wipes nearby. Please explain the entire project before students get started. Your students will need to take out a pencil, a dull pencil works best, it makes thicker lines.*

*Use the a large piece of paper from the rolls in the teachers work room to cover a table and make a printing station where you can have groups of kids come to ink their creations)*

Today we are going to make a print of Mt. Fuji, or create a print of water in motion, or make a print depicting both Mt. Fuji and water in motion, because these are the images Hokusai loved best. We don't have time to carve woodblocks, so we'll draw our images on foam sheets with pencils. After that, we'll ink the sheets on an ink pad, roll the inked image onto white paper, and let it dry.

--Think about the image you want to "carve."

--The image you draw on the foam will print out the opposite way on paper.

--Using your pencil, lightly draw the image on the foam then press very hard to carve it in. You have to go over the lines several times to make them deep enough to print well.

--Lay your foam piece carved-side down on the ink pad. Use the roller to press and roll over the foam. Press hard enough to transfer the ink to the foam. Roll it in both directions for even coverage. Parents you might need to wipe off the roller between inkings.

--Carefully lift up your inked foam and place it wet ink side down in the center of the white paper. Hold the foam and press it down with the roller to transfer the image to the paper. Parents, you might have to hold the foam and make sure they press hard enough.

--Carefully lift the paper up and admire your work.

--Matte prints on black construction paper. ( If too much ink gets on the white paper you can trim it then matte it.)

*(Note: Please try to close ink pads tightly with a rubber band and seal them in bags to prevent them from drying out. Please wipe off the rollers and ink pads for the next person.)*

**F AMOUS**

**ARTISTS SERIES**

## **Hokusai**

Today in class a volunteer parent presented the works of Japanese artist Hokusai (1760-1849) to your child's class. They learned a little bit about Hokusai, as well as made an art project in the style of his work. Ask your student about Hokusai's work – what is he most famous for? Hokusai created beautiful woodcut prints, most famously of the sacred Japanese peak of Mount Fuji. His greatest work is a series of woodblock prints showing Mount Fuji from all angles and in all seasons. By adding perspective to the traditionally “flat” style of Japanese art, Hokusai brought new ideas about art to his country.

Hokusai's woodcut prints *Ono Waterfall on the Kisokaido Road* and *People Crossing an Arched Bridge* are on display at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Sincerely yours,

**Art Volunteer**