

## Katsushika Hokusai



## Artist Study: Katsushika Hokusai

Hokusai was born in October or November 1760 to an **artisan** family, in the Katsushika district of Edo, Japan. Hokusai began painting around the age of 6, possibly learning the art from his father, whose work on mirrors also included the painting of designs around the mirrors. At the age of 12, he was sent by his father to work in a bookshop and lending library, a popular type of institution in Japanese cities, where reading books made from wood-cut blocks was a popular entertainment of the middle and upper classes. At 14, he became an **apprentice** to a wood-carver, where he worked until the age of 18, whereupon he was accepted into the studio of Katsukawa Shunshō.

Soon after, Hokusai began exploring other styles of art, including European styles he was exposed to through French and Dutch copper engravings he was able to acquire. Hokusai also changed the subjects of his works, moving away from the images of actors. His work became focused on landscapes and images of the daily life of Japanese people from a variety of social levels. He produced many brush paintings, called surimono, and illustrations during this time.

In 1820 Hokusai reached the peak of his career. His most famous work, Views of Mount Fuji, including the famous Great Wave off Kanagawa, dated from this period. Hokusai had a long career, but he produced most of his important work after age 60. He died on April 18, 1849.

Hokusai inspired the Hugo Award winning short story by science fiction author Roger Zelazny, "24 views of Mt. Fuji, by Hokusai", in which the **protagonist** tours the area surrounding Mt. Fuji, with each stop being a location painted by Hokusai.

Hokusai's classic woodcut of a **majestic** wave becomes the starting point for the storybook - The Great Wave: A Children's Book Inspired by Hokusai. "In this children's book, the artist's masterpiece is the **genesis** for a simple but **compelling** story, beautifully illustrated in pictures that recall Hokusai's brilliant use of detail, perspective and color."

### Read-Aloud:

The Great Wave by Veronique Massenot and Bruno Pilorget is a children's book based on the art piece of the same name by Hokusai. You can watch the book read-aloud here:



[The Great Wave - Read Aloud](#)

## **What did you learn about the artist?**

- 1 Where and when was Katsushika Hokusai born?
- 2 Where did his father send him to learn at the age of 12?
- 3 Katsushika Hokusai's early work focused on actors. What did he focus on after that?
- 4 What is Katsushika Hokusai's most famous work?
- 5 What is the title of the book based on one of Katsushika Hokusai's masterpieces?

## **Vocabulary**

Artisan-

Apprentice-

Protagonist-

Majestic-

Genesis-

Compelling-

## Art Lesson 1

### Japanese printmaking-

Japanese woodblock printing originated in ancient China and was brought to Japan after the unification of the country and Shogunate rule was established. Japanese woodblock prints, also called ukiyo-e (which means image of the floating world), are a traditional art form, which started to become very popular in the newly created capital Edo (now Tokyo) from around 1600.

Instead of carving into wood, we will use styrofoam sheets to draw impressions into and make our own prints.



**TK-4th:** Draw your favorite thing from the ocean.

**5th-8th:** Draw one of the two images based on the author's work.

Image 1 - Mount Fuji; Image 2 - Cherry blossoms (included in the next page)

#### **Materials:**

Styrofoam sheets, something to draw into the styrofoam like a pencil, small foam rollers, blue and white tempera, and black construction paper.

#### **Steps:**

1. Using the styrofoam sheet and a sharpened pencil, draw your picture. Make sure to press enough to make an impression but not so hard as to break through the styrofoam.
2. Put paint on a paper plate and roll paint onto the foam roller.
3. Lightly roll the foam roller over your drawing on the styrofoam sheet.
4. Place a piece of paper on top of the paint and smooth it with your hand.
5. Peel the paper off and see the print of your drawing.

**You can find more detailed instructions here:**



[Printmaking Detailed Instructions](#)

**Image 1 Mount Fuji**



**Image 2 Cherry Blossoms**



## Art Lesson 2

One of Katsushika Hokusai's most famous pieces of art is titled "The Great Wave." Hokusai is from Japan. Japan is an island nation and the ocean is a big part of life there. There are storms in the ocean that can occur off of the coast of Japan that can cause huge waves. These waves are called Tsunamis. National Geographic defines Tsunami as, "a series of ocean waves that sends surges of water, sometimes reaching heights of over 100 feet, onto land. These walls of water can cause widespread destruction when they crash ashore." It goes on to say that Tsunamis are caused "by large, undersea earthquakes at tectonic plate boundaries. When the ocean floor at a plate boundary rises or falls suddenly, it displaces the water above it and launches the rolling waves that will become a tsunami. Most tsunamis—about 80 percent—happen within the Pacific Ocean's "Ring of Fire," a geologically active area where tectonic shifts make volcanoes and earthquakes common." You can read more about Tsunami here:



[Tsunami - National Geographic](#)



## **The Great Wave Fingerprints- K-8th**

### **Techniques:**

Color mixing, paint with fingers.

### **Materials:**

Dark blue and white tempera, light gray construction paper

### **Steps:**

1. You will want to use at least 2 different hues of blue to add dimension to your wave. Mix your blue tempera with white tempera to create 1-2 other hues of blue. More white will make your blue a lighter color and less white will make it darker.
2. Use your shades of blue to make a swoosh of color with your finger on your gray paper. You can add swipes of blue to the foreground or bottom of your painting to contrast the big wave.
3. Once you have added different blues to swirl and swoosh into a big wave on your paper you will want to wash your hands to add white. Using dabs of white with your fingerprints dab white paint onto the top of your wave to create the foam.



**You can find more information here:**



[Ocean Wave - Art Lesson](#)

## Art Lesson 3

### The Great Wave Pop-up- K-8th

#### Materials

Black and gray construction paper, crayons, glue stick

#### Steps:

1. Fold your black construction paper in half, folding from top to bottom.
2. Cut tabs into the folded side of the paper, this will be what your pop out is glued to.
3. Push the tabs out the opposite way to create your pop-up.
4. Draw your background on the top half of the paper. This can include Mount Fuji in the background, clouds, and lightning. Use light colored crayons to show up on your black paper.
5. On your gray paper, draw your big wave and a smaller wave, cut it out.
6. Glue your big wave to the front of your tab on the left and your smaller wave on the tab on the right.
7. Draw small boats in a crescent shape on your scraps of gray paper. Cut them out.
8. Glue your boats on or between the waves.



See more examples here:



[Great Wave - Pop Up Art Lesson](#)

## **Extension Activity:**

### **K-4th: Write a Haiku poem.**

(Parents - please have younger students tell you their Haiku as you write it down for them.)

**Haiku:** "a type of short form poetry originally from Japan. Haikus follow a strict form: three lines, with a 5-7-5 syllable structure. That means the first line will have five syllables, the second line will have seven syllables, and the last line will have five syllables. The poem will have a total of seventeen syllables. Haikus are a favorite among poets for their challenge to paint a vivid picture in just a few words making each word, or even syllable, count."

Line 1: 5 syllables

Line 2: 7 syllables

Line 3 5 syllables

### **5th-8th: Write a Haiku and Tanka poem.**

**Haiku:** (see definition above)

**Tanka:** "a Japanese poem consisting of five lines, the first and third of which have five syllables and the other seven, making 31 syllables in all and giving a complete picture of an event or mood."

Line 1: 5 syllables

Line 2: 7 syllables

Line 3: 5 syllables

Line 4: 7 syllables

Line 5: 7 syllables