

Traditions and Customs: Exploring Multiculturalism in the Blevins Japanese Garden

Blevins Japanese Garden (70 minutes) | 2nd- 8th | 60 student maximum

About

“Traditions and Customs” is a learning expedition where your students will explore multiculturalism in the beauty of nature. The Blevin’s Japanese Garden is one of twelve unique gardens on the Cheekwood estate. The garden is directly inspired by traditional Japanese Garden design. This guided tour engages the senses and imagination through hands-on, multi-sensory experiences in three separate stations in the garden.

Objectives

1. Engage with the physical features of the garden and learn about what they represent in the context of Japanese culture.
2. Discuss the meaning of traditions and respect while they participate in a modified Japanese tea ceremony.
3. Collaboratively write their own Haiku as a class.

Pre-Visit

Prior to attending the field trip, it is beneficial to review the content vocabulary listed below. You may also want to introduce multiculturalism. For the best experience, we recommend that you briefly cover important context. This includes but is not limited to Japan’s location, history, and culture. If there are any cultural traditions or customs you are currently covering in your class, let us know. We will do our best to draw parallels between classroom and field trip instruction.

Overview of the Day

1. Greetings and guidelines
2. Break into 3 preassigned groups
3. Stations

STATION 1: Physical features and symbolism in the Japanese Garden (20 minutes)

Students will learn about the features and meanings of the garden by assisting the educator in placing objects in a miniature garden model. They will then complete a creative independent activity regarding the garden.

STATION 2: Discussing culture and traditions around a Japanese tea ceremony (20 minutes)

The educator will introduce tea tools, its history, and the ceremony’s principles: Wa, Kei, Sei, Jaku. Students will steep and taste their own herbal tea and discuss their own traditions.

STATION 3: All about Haikus (20 minutes)

The class will work together to write their own Haiku inspired by nature at Cheekwood. The educator will review the building blocks for Haiku and poetry (syllables, lines, themes, historical significance, etc.).



Vocabulary

Ceremony - a formal act or series of acts done in a particular way to honor a special occasion

Community - the people living in an area; a group of people with common interests especially when living together, shared ownership or participation

Culture - a pattern of behavior shared by a society, or group of people. Many different things make up a society's culture. These things include food, language, clothing, tools, music, arts, customs, beliefs, and religion

Custom - the usual way of doing things or the usual practice of a person or group

Haiku - an unrhymed verse poem of Japanese origin having three lines containing five, seven, and five syllables respectively; usually has a seasonal reference

Multiculturalism - of, relating to, reflecting, or adapted to diverse cultures

Native plant - plants that grow naturally in a particular area or ecosystem

Poem - a piece of writing that uses imaginative words to share ideas, emotions, or a story with the reader

Syllable - a part of a word that contains 1 vowel sound and that is pronounced as a unit

Tradition - information, beliefs, or customs passed down from one generation to another

Tranquility - the state of being calm

Standards Covered

Social Studies

C.2.02 - Compare and contrast the beliefs, customs, ceremonies, and traditions of the various cultures represented in the U.S.

Language Arts

FL.PWR.3 - Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills when decoding isolated words and in connected text.

RL.CS.4 - Describe how words and phrases supply meaning in a story, poem, or song.

RL.KID.2 - Determine a theme or central idea of a story, drama, or poem and explain how it is conveyed through details in the text; summarize the text.

SL.CC.1 - Prepare for collaborative discussions on grade level topics and texts; engage effectively with varied partners, building on others' ideas and expressing one's own ideas clearly.

Post-Visit

Challenge students to use what they learned in a Socratic seminar. Ask an essential question: Why are traditions important? How do your traditions compare to other cultures' traditions? What makes you feel relaxed or happy? How do you connect with others? How do you define respect? Will students be inspired to build their own gardens? Have students write their very own haiku. If you write haikus, please send them to us at schools@cheekwood.org!

Post-Visit Book Suggestions

Ojichan's Gift by Chieri Uegaki and Genevieve Simms

Teatime Around the World by Denyse Waissbluth

One Leaf Rides the Wind by Celeste Mannis

Wabi Sabi by Mark Reibstein

It is the school's responsibility to disclose the serving of peppermint herbal tea to parents/guardians, and take responsibility of overseeing any children who should not receive the tea.

Background on the Japanese Garden

The Blevins Japanese Garden (Shōmu-en) was created by David Harris Engel. The garden guides visitors on a meditative journey to an idyllic image of a mountain retreat. Engel named the garden "Shōmu-en," which translates to "pine-mist forest." This garden transcends cultures by connecting eastern garden design with the native Tennessee landscape. The mist in "pine-mist forest" is suggested by the feathered and light-textured flowers of the smoke bush (*Cotinus coggyria*) that bloom in late summer. The black pines are pruned to appear windswept, with their needles contrasting beautifully with the softness of the *Cotinus*.

Shōmu-en was designed by David Harris Engel, and though he was responsible for several private projects, it is the only public garden attached to Engel. As the first non-Japanese garden designer to ever study gardens in Japan, Engel spent several years in a close apprenticeship with Tansai Sano, Kyoto master landscape architect. He designed gardens in Kyoto and Osaka before returning to the United States to establish a landscape design business in New York.

In 2019-20, thanks to a transformative gift from the Melba and Bill Blevins family, Cheekwood collaborated with landscape architect, Sadafumi (Sada) Uchiyama, Garden Curator at the Portland Japanese Garden in Oregon, to improve and enhance the garden. Uchiyama is a third-generation gardener and landscape architect from southern Japan, where his family has been involved in gardening for over a century. His methods are influenced by a unique blend of traditional Japanese gardening and Western landscape architecture.

With the recent renovation, Uchiyama was respectful of David Harris Engel's original design, planning and executing a fuller enclosure and updating the space for today's standards to be accessible to visitors in wheelchairs or with strollers.