

# LESSON PLAN

## Step 2

### LOOKING FOR CLUES: PAINTINGS AS INFORMATION SOURCES

#### Objectives

- Interpret Japanese and American paintings.
- Evaluate paintings as sources of cultural and historical information.

#### Materials

- Copies of Activity Pages 2A, B, and C.
- Pens or pencils.

#### Subjects

- Art, social studies

#### Procedure

1. Tell your students that they'll be acting like detectives in this activity. Ask them what detectives look for to solve a mystery. Answers may vary, but students will probably conclude that detectives seek clues that suggest a particular sequence of events in the past. Emphasize that they'll now be looking for clues in paintings that can provide insights into the daily lives of people in earlier times who lived in Japan and the United States.

2. Give each student a copy of Activity page 2A and 2 copies of 2C. Ask them to examine carefully the painting on Activity Page 2A and answer the accompanying observation questions from

Activity Page 2C. (*Do not tell your students the title or subject of the painting at this time.*) When your students have finished answering the questions, begin a class discussion based on their responses. Students will probably conclude that the painting depicts a town in the United States during the early twentieth century. Be sure to tell your students that the scene was painted by American artist Willard Leroy Metcalf in 1917 and is entitled *October Morning—Deerfield* (*see inset for teacher's notes*).

3. Give each student a copy of Activity Page 2B and repeat the procedure described in Lesson Plan Step 2. (*Again, do not tell your students the title or subject of the painting yet.*) In the class discussion, students may conclude that the painting depicts a rural area in Japan sometime in the past. Be sure to tell your students that the painting, entitled *Country Scenes*, was painted by Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai during the early decades of the 1800s (*see inset for teacher's notes*). Stress that the painting was done on panels that combine to make a six-fold screen, a form of traditional Japanese art your students will study in the next activity.

4. Review what students learned about both scenes by observing the paintings. How would they characterize the

daily lives of the peoples depicted? How are the two scenes alike or different? Ask your students to consider whether paintings are good sources for clues to another culture. They will probably conclude that paintings are valuable sources of information. If they do not note any limitations of paintings as information sources, be sure to stress that paintings capture only a single moment in time, in a particular place, and may express only the viewpoint of the artist. Have students create a list of questions they have about the lives of the people depicted for which the paintings do not provide answers. What do the paintings tell us about life in Japan and America today? You may also wish to emphasize that we can misinterpret what we see. Conclude the activity by asking students what other sources of information they might examine for clues to a culture. Answers will vary, but students will probably conclude that paintings by other artists, artwork from different time periods, the accounts of travelers, and contact with people from another culture might provide alternative views of that culture.

### TEACHER'S NOTES

*October Morning—Deerfield, Mass.*

By Willard Leroy Metcalf (American, 1858–1925)

Painted in 1917

Oil on canvas

Freer Gallery of Art accession number 18.154

66.1 x 73.8 cm (26 x 29")

*Country Scenes*

Six-fold screen

By Katsushika Hokusai (Japanese, 1760–1849)

Ukiyo-e School, Edo period, nineteenth century

Color and gold on paper

Freer Gallery of Art accession number 02.48

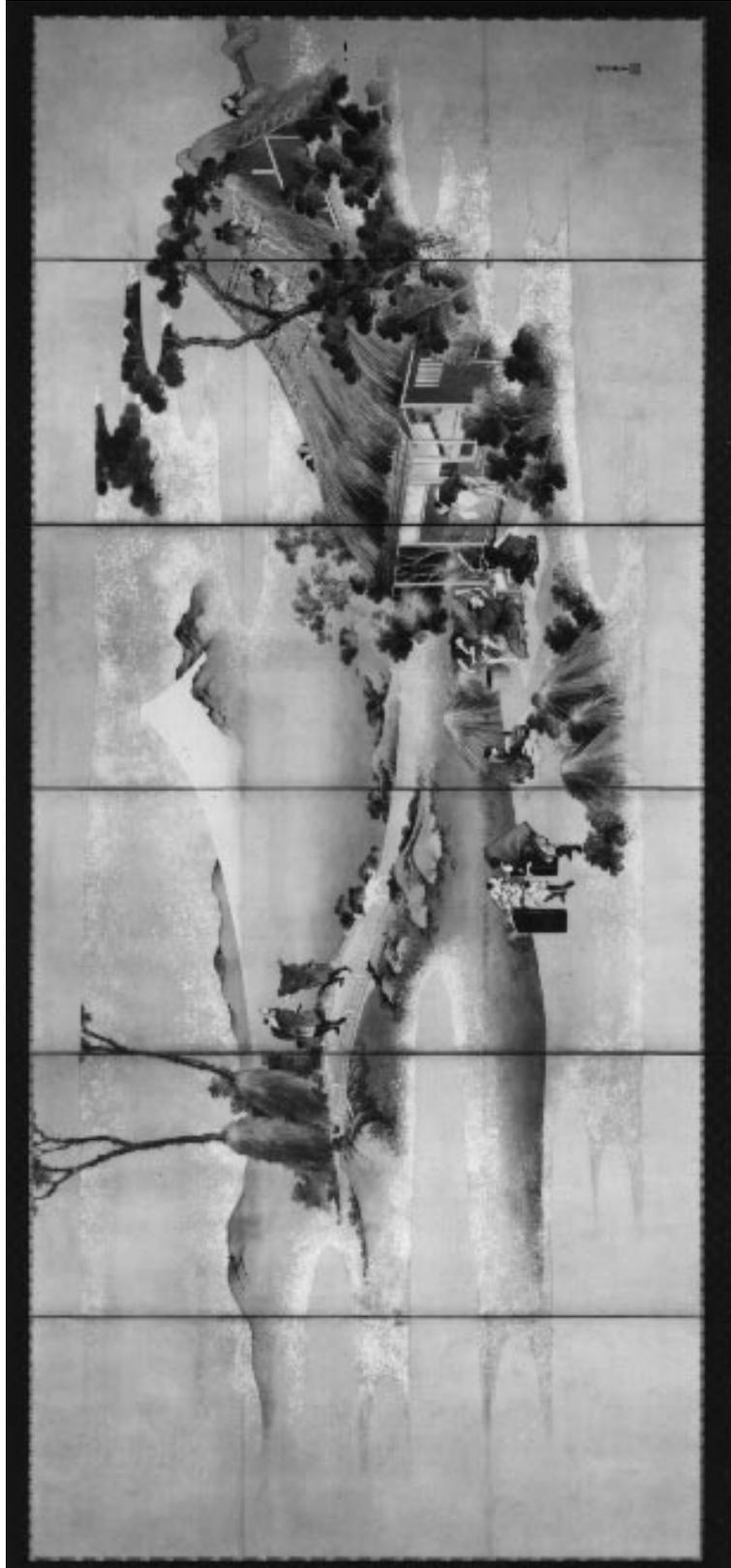
150.9 x 353.1 cm (59 7/16 x 139")

This is a detail from the right screen of a pair of screens. The artist depicts the season, autumn, and the setting, Mount Fuji soaring above the clouds in the distant landscape. On the right side of the screen Hokusai painted a farmer's cottage. Four men are rethatching the roof; additional bundles of thatch are tacked around the trees. In the doorway of the house a man steps forward carrying a bundle of white cloth that he will bring to the two women who are seated on the ground. The women are fulling cloth, a method of processing woolen material with mallets to shrink and thicken it. Beside them stands a young boy, who drags a basket of chestnuts. Beyond this group a man works busily away deepening the grooves in a millstone, while two peddlers with their merchandise pause to chat on the path in the foreground. In the rear of the composition a white dog follows two men who converse on the bridge.

# ACTIVITY PAGE 2A



# ACTIVITY PAGE 2B



# ACTIVITY PAGE 2C

## Observing a Scene

**Directions:** Answer the following questions for each painting that you study.

What types of land and water forms (mountains, valleys, rivers, etc.) do you see?

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Can you tell what season it is?

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What types of buildings do you see? What materials do they appear to be made of?

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What types of weather are these buildings best suited for?

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Describe the clothing that the people are wearing. What type of weather is it best suited for?

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Does this painting depict a scene in the United States or Japan? Why?

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What are the people doing in the picture?

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Is this a scene from the past or the present? Why?

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