



Botanical Garden Programs: Japanese Garden

EXPLORING THE ELEMENTS OF A JAPANESE GARDEN THROUGH THE BOOK ARTS



Grades 4–7

I. Introduction

In preparation for a school visit to the Huntington Botanical Gardens, we will construct a book emphasizing the elements of the Japanese Garden and their spatial relationships.

II. Objectives

- ◆ Foster interest and enthusiasm for recognizing the basic elements of a Japanese garden through the construction of a Peepshow book.
 - Basic elements: plants, rocks, water
 - Dominant color: green, occasional seasonal color
- ◆ This hands on activity of producing a book gives students an opportunity to combine powers of concentration and abstract thinking with the hand skills of cutting, gluing, and sequencing to set a visual mood.
- ◆ Through this simple bookbinding technique students will achieve an understanding of perspective by analyzing foreground, middle ground, and background. Students will gain a better understanding of proportion, scale, unity, and balance.
- ◆ Introduce subtlety, simplicity, and symbolism.
- ◆ Encourage an intellectual and spiritual connection between beauty, art, and nature.

III. Background

Book Arts as a Teaching Tool

The current popularity for making handmade books has made possible many teaching opportunities to engage students in a fun activity that combines image and art expression with the traditional discipline of bookbinding.

One of the basic problems of the book as art is finding the right combination of structure and content. That is, using a structure that has meaning, is subtle, creates harmony, and is a natural extension of the subject. The peepshow book structure, usually referred to these days as tunnel book structure, is a perfect book structure to exemplify a Japanese garden since the very structure invites the viewer into the environment (see Figure A).

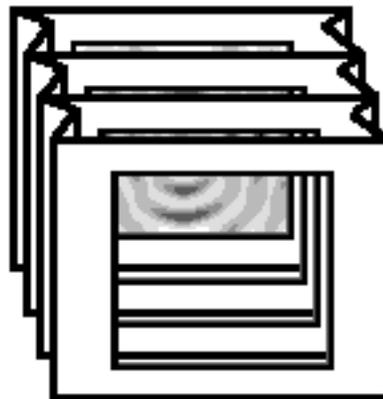


Figure A: Peepshow Book

History of the Peepshow Book Structure

Peepshow books were first made in the middle of the 18th century for children. They gave one the sense of being inside of a scene, and often depicted exotic locations or spectacular events. Those who could not travel could have a glimpse of famous gardens, or even travel back in time to witness naval battles. (A very popular book depicted the view inside of a tunnel under the Thames River in London.) As a teaching tool, peepshows were used to illustrate perspective. This lesson emphasizes both the aesthetic elements and views of the scene, using peepshow to highlight the basic components of a Japanese garden.

Design of a Japanese Garden

Japanese gardens evoke a feeling of being enveloped by atmosphere, of being part of nature, not an observer. In Japanese gardens, the dominant color of green imparts peacefulness and quiet. Any other colors are fleeting like the seasons. Three elements are always present: rocks, plants, and water are placed in a thoughtful and pleasing way to enhance the tone. Sometimes there is a gate, a wall, or a house, and often an object, a gong, a bell, a statue, a vessel for water, or a bridge. But never all of these things in one setting.

A Japanese garden:

- sets a mood for contemplation and reflection using symbolism: pine — longevity; bamboo — strength and flexibility,
- uses rocks as symbols for land mass or figures, and
- is an interpretation of a natural landscape and surrounds the viewer.

Perspective

A fundamental principle of almost all Japanese garden design is to achieve beauty for the beholder from any point throughout the garden. It is intended that the stroller should pause at any point throughout the garden and see a new panorama, or a new aspect of the beauty of the garden. Remember when designing your view to capture a beautiful image. To give the viewer as realistic an experience of the garden as possible, decide for the foreground to choose larger sizes, for the middle ground choose medium sizes, and because far away objects appear smaller use the smallest pictures for the background.

IV. Materials Needed (per book)

- ◆ scissors, glue stick, pencil
- ◆ scrap paper and damp rag for gluing
- ◆ optional: small weights, bone folder
- ◆ sources for pictures: magazines, cards, postcards, photographs, rubber stamps using watercolor markers, copied handouts, freehand drawings cut from colored paper
- ◆ one 5" X 7" card 120# weight for the BACKGROUND
- ◆ three 5" X 7" cards 120# with a 3" X 5" cut out for three WINDOWS (one foreground and two middle ground)
- ◆ two 9½" X 5" strips of heavy weight linen duplex paper (grain short) for the ACCORDION SIDES

V. Lesson Procedure

1. Fold the ACCORDION SIDES (See Figure B.).

- Fold in half forming middle fold M. Open.
- Fold A to M forming fold C. Open.
- Fold A to fold C forming fold B. Fold back these two units (AB, BC), so that C becomes the edge.
- Fold C to M forming D. Now one half of this ACCORDION SIDE is complete.
- Fold W to middle fold M forming fold Y. Open.
- Fold W to Y forming fold X. Fold back these two units (WX, XY), so that Y becomes edge.
- Fold Y to M forming fold Z.
- Repeat with second ACCORDION SIDE.

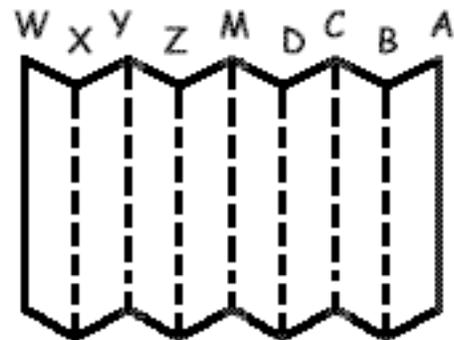


Figure B: Folding Accordion Sides

2. Choose your images. Begin planning an imaginary three-dimensional scene of a Japanese garden by cutting out a selection of images from your handouts and/or photographs that you feel may look good together and achieve a sense of perspective. For additional element, like water features and small hills, use sheets of colored paper and cut them out freehand. Balance them to the BACKGROUND card so that your viewpoint has harmony. Does your selection instill tranquility? Simplicity? Rearrange until you are satisfied with your garden.
3. Arrange your view. Using the WINDOW cards begin to distinguish which of the objects will be glued to which card. Which is closest? What have you chosen for the foreground WINDOW? The two middle ground WINDOWS? The BACKGROUND? Use the ACCORDION SIDES to begin to see the depth of your book. Although the WINDOW cards are not glued in yet, you can set them in place to get an idea of your garden view.
4. Prepare to glue. Once you are ready to glue, remember to have a damp rag handy and a stack of waste paper. As soon as you have applied glue to the back of a piece, fold the waste paper that has excess glue and place on the floor or in a trash bag. Do not ball up as this makes it difficult to recycle. Remember to wipe your hands frequently with the damp rag. These are helpful bookbinding details that eliminate ugly stains. Never use more glue than is absolutely necessary.
5. Glue images. When your images are arranged the way you like them, glue them to the foreground and middle ground WINDOWS and BACKGROUND card.
6. Prepare the accordion sides. (For this step, it is best to have samples for the students to follow.) Mark one edge of each ACCORDION SIDE with the word Back (see Figure C.). To insure the correct order, place the ACCORDION SIDES on either side of the last page with the Back edge tucked under the BACKGROUND card. (The section marked Back will glue to the back of the BACKGROUND.) Starting with one ACCORDION SIDE, mark the third section from the Back with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " line from top, then continue marking a line diagonally to the next fold. Moving to the fifth section, mark a $\frac{1}{4}$ " line from top, then continue marking a line diagonally to the next fold. Do this to the top and bottom of the third and fifth sections (see Figure C.) Now mark the other ACCORDION SIDE, making sure that the marks are a mirror image of the first ACCORDION SIDE. Cut along these lines to create flaps.



Figure C: Marking and Cutting Flaps

7. Glue the ACCORDION SIDES to the WINDOWS. First, the outer edges marked Back glue directly to the back of each side of the last BACKGROUND card (see Figure D.). Then, the flaps you just cut are the only part of the ACCORDION SIDES that is glued to the back of the middle ground WINDOWS. Be careful to keep the middle ground WINDOWS in the correct order. Finally, the last page to be glued is the foreground WINDOW. Glue the free edge of the ACCORDION SIDES to the back of the foreground WINDOW.

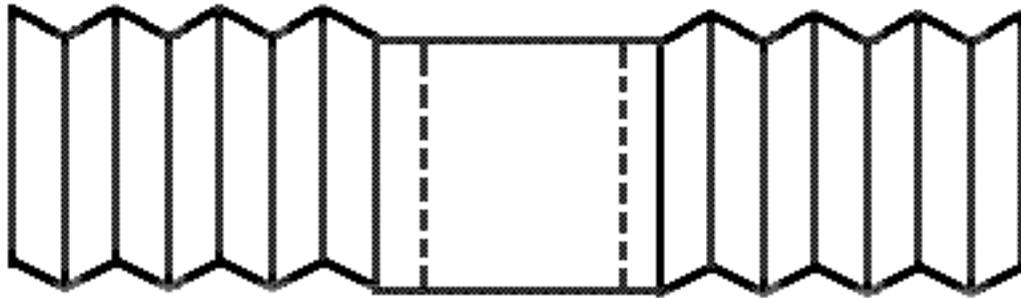


Figure D: Glue Edges to Background

VI. Discussion Questions

1. What are the elements of a Japanese garden?
2. How are views used in a Japanese garden to focus the observer?
3. How is space and size used to create a sense of scale in this type of garden?
4. What kind of mood is created in a Japanese garden, and how do these elements contribute to this mood?

VII. Extension Activities

1. Create a peepshow book of another type of garden, like the naturalistic English or formal Italian garden.
 - a) What elements do these garden styles share with Japanese gardens?
 - b) How are they different?
 - c) How are views used in these gardens?
2. Read or write poetry inspired by your visit to the Japanese Garden.
 - a) Do you think Japanese nature poems are in keeping with the mood of the garden?
 - b) What kind of poetry does the garden inspire in you?