A Case Study of Late Twentieth-Century Japan through Art: Tezuka Osamu and Astro Boy

by Mary Hammond Bernson, University of Washington

Introduction:

Teachers are encouraged to read “Late Twentieth-Century Japan: An Introductory Essay,” by historian William Tsutsui, before starting this lesson. The essay may also be assigned to students with advanced reading abilities (grades 11-12). The essay provides a context for this lesson by describing key historic developments in Japan in the years since the end of World War II.

The past 60 years have witnessed remarkable changes in Japan and in Japan’s relations with other countries. Teaching about these decades in Japanese history is complicated by the pace of these changes and the fact that this era is recent enough so that people hold strong attitudes toward it, from the memories of the aging veteran of World War II to the interests of the teenager who loves sushi and manga. Many teachers comment that contemporary Japanese pop culture’s impact on their students makes it simultaneously easier and more challenging to teach about Japan. Some students with passionate interests in popular culture bring powerful images of Japan into the classroom, yet these images may not accurately reflect the Japan of today or of the past eras used as settings for manga, anime, and games.

In reality, the years since 1945 have witnessed the rebuilding of a devastated Japan, demilitarization and political reform, so much economic growth that it seemed to be carrying Japan to the verge of global economic dominance, and then the collapse of the bubble economy. Economic recession precipitated deep questions and concerns about Japanese society and identity. During this same time period, Japanese popular culture was spreading around the world. In the words of journalist Douglas McGray, Japan’s “gross national cool” was reaching new heights even though the gross national product was not.

How are these sometimes contradictory developments reflected in art? Not surprisingly, they are reflected in very contradictory ways. Artists in late twentieth-century and contemporary Japan work in a wide variety of media and genres. Some are producing works that are clearly based upon past subjects and styles, while others are moving in strikingly innovative directions.

Like Imaging Japanese History lessons on earlier periods, this lesson uses a representative artist or work of art to help students understand the time period being studied. In this lesson, that artist is Tezuka Osamu, the creator of Astro Boy and many other characters. Tezuka produced both manga and anime, and his influence on the development of both art forms is unrivaled. They are considered serious art forms in Japan, a view that is increasingly shared in other countries.

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While students are learning about late twentieth-century Japan, the lesson also challenges them to think like historians. They are asked to define or select criteria they would use to choose a representative artist or art form to provide insights into another country and era. Then they analyze whether the author’s choice of Tezuka successfully meets the criteria they have established. Through this process, they expand their knowledge about Japan and develop their analytical skills, while becoming acquainted with a remarkable artist, his creations, and the messages they conveyed. Note that two options for teaching the lesson are provided; teachers should select the most appropriate option for their class based on students’ familiarity with art as a historical source and the sophistication of their thinking.

**Objectives:** At the conclusion of the lesson, students will be better able to:

1. Identify some of the key events and trends in the history of Japan since 1945.
2. Recognize the contributions of Tezuka Osamu to Japanese and global culture.
3. Generate or select criteria for selecting an artist or work of art to represent a particular era in a country’s history.
4. Analyze whether the choice of Tezuka as representative of late twentieth-century Japan meets the criteria the class has established.

**Vocabulary:**

*akabon:* comic books printed on cheap paper and sold on the streets of Japan in the years just after World War II. They were called *akabon* (literally “red books”) because of their bright red covers.

*anime:* short for animation, anime refers to Japanese-style animated stories. In Japan the term is used for all animation. *Tetsuwan Atomu* and *Jungle Taitai* were pioneering anime series on Japanese television.

*Astro Boy/Atom Boy/Tetsuwan Atomu:* the robot boy created by Tezuka Osamu in 1951, first appearing in Japanese manga as *Tetsuwan Atomu* (Mighty Atom in English). As his adventures appeared in serial form in manga (book-length compilations), television, and film, he came to be known as Astro Boy. His date of birth was set in the then-distant future, 2003.

*Hokusai:* the famous nineteenth-century artist who is best known for his block prints. In 1814 he adopted the term *manga,* often translated as “whimsical pictures,” for the thousands of sketches he made of everything from bugs to bridges and acrobats to people making funny faces.

*Jungle Taitei (Jungle Emperor):* the Tezuka series about a lion known in English as Kimba the White Lion. Many claim this pioneering manga and anime story was the uncredited inspiration of Disney’s *The Lion King.*

*manga:* the term Hokusai popularized is now used to refer to Japanese-style cartoons. Manga tell stories in both pictures and words. A highly regarded art form in Japan, they are bestsellers read by all ages and covering all kinds of material.

*Phoenix (Hi no Tori):* Tezuka’s most ambitious work, encompassing history and the future and exploring deep themes about the meaning of life and humankind’s search for immortality. It was serialized from 1954 until Tezuka’s death in 1989.

*soft power:* term coined by Harvard Professor Joseph S. Nye, Jr., in discussing cultural and ideological impacts as forms of national power and influence. His ideas are summarized
in “Coping with Japan,” an article in Foreign Policy magazine (Winter 1993, Issue 89). The term is often used in reference to Japan.

Tezuka Osamu: the artist, born in 1928 in Osaka, who created many of Japan’s best-known manga and anime. Tezuka deeply influenced these art forms and the millions of people who enjoy them. Although Tezuka was a licensed physician, he preferred to draw, successfully publishing a wide range of work from 1947 onward. He is often lauded in Japan as the father or “god” of manga and anime. He died of cancer in 1989.

**Materials and Preparation:** In selecting materials, teachers should be aware of a cultural difference that could cause parents to misunderstand this lesson. In the United States, adults tend to view comics as reading material for children, with subject matter appropriate for young people. In Japan, manga are a form of entertainment read by people of all ages, so the subject matter addresses a vast range of material. In this country, we expect books and films, but maybe not comics, to be so wide-ranging. Just as thoughtful teachers choose books and films appropriate for the age of their students, the same good judgment should be applied when choosing manga or anime for classroom use. Astro Boy will probably not cause parental concern; some of the examples online or in reference books such as Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics would.

Materials needed for this lesson will depend on the extent to which students have already studied Japan and the length of time you want to spend in grappling with the challenge of developing criteria. You may choose to emphasize either the overall historic content or the development of critical thinking skills. Whichever you choose, you will need copies of Handout L1 (Version A or B) and Handout L2 for all students.

Depending on how you plan to present the key historic events and trends in late twentieth-century Japan, you may need to give the students copies of the Tsutsui essay provided with this lesson or another essay, such as one of the following:

- “Top Ten Things to Know About Japan in the Late 1990s,” by Carol Gluck, in Education about Asia (Fall 1998) [http://www.aasianst.org/EAA/gluck.htm](http://www.aasianst.org/EAA/gluck.htm).

Alternatively, you might give the students an overview of recent Japanese history, using Professor Tsutsui’s essay and the timeline in the Teacher Background Information as resources in preparing your lecture. A third approach is to have students gather information from multiple sources including any material covered in class, textbooks, and reference materials. If the class has already studied postwar Japan, students can generate a list of key events and trends, turning this part of the lesson into a review of the whole unit (and requiring no additional materials).

If necessary, this lesson could be taught without visuals, although that would make it far less interesting. Visual materials about Astro Boy and other creations of Tezuka Osamu are widely available and segments of the anime versions appear on YouTube. Be sure to check the websites in advance to see if your district blocks them or the sites might be deemed
objectionable. The following are good sources of an image of Astro Boy, to be projected or printed out for display, in roughly declining order of usefulness:


- Tezuka Osamu World, http://en.tezuka.co.jp/tomm/index.html. This is the official website featuring Tezuka’s characters.

- Astro Boy, http://astroboy.jp/. This website has many visuals, but its text is only in Japanese.

**Time Required:** 2 class periods (for deeper insights into late twentieth-century Japan through manga and anime, 2 class periods plus homework or 3 class periods would be preferable)

**Procedure:**

**Part 1, Option A (for Students Familiar with Using Art as a Primary Source)**

1. Tell students that they are going to begin this lesson by applying their analytical skills to the problem of identifying works of art or artists to represent a particular era in Japanese history, late twentieth-century Japan. Reassure them that you are not seeking a single right answer, and that they do not need to know anything about art to be able to contribute to the discussion.

2. Distribute Handout L1 (Version A), and go over the task as outlined there:

   *Imagine that you are a historian who has just been hired by a curriculum publisher. The publisher is developing lessons to teach high school students about different countries through their arts. The publisher explains that the purpose of the series is to provide insights into several historic periods in each country. There will be one lesson for each time period. Your task is to develop the criteria to use in choosing the works of art or artists that will be featured in each lesson. The work of art or artist should represent or provide insights into the time period in that country. The criteria you develop should be general enough that they can be used as tools in choosing art or artists for all the countries and historical periods in this series of lessons.*

   Explain that criteria are guidelines or rules. Provide or solicit an example of a possible criterion students could use in choosing someone or something to represent a whole time
period. Fame is one example: one of the criteria could be that the artist or the work of that artist should be famous. If students find it difficult to generate abstract criteria, start by providing examples of people or art works that could be considered representative of a time and place. Some widely known examples are Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, from the period of the Italian Renaissance; Japanese woodblock prints in the Tokugawa or Meiji eras; or Grant Wood’s *American Gothic*, representing the American Midwest in the 1930s. Ask students to think about why these might be considered representative of a place and time. Why do these artworks provide a window into a place and time?

If students still have difficulty generating criteria on their own, you may need to give them a list such as the one provided in step 5 below and let them accept, refine, or reject the items rather than generating criteria on their own. If they are developing some confidence about being able to generate criteria, ask them to work individually to develop a quick list of criteria. Remind them that they are not choosing the artwork or artists; rather, they are establishing the guidelines for choosing them. Point out again that there are no right answers to this question, and reasonable people may disagree. When students seem to be running out of ideas, gather them into small groups so they can begin the next step.

3. In small groups of two or three, the students should compare the criteria they listed. Ask them to discuss the pros and cons of each standard proposed. For example, if fame is proposed by one student, another might argue that it is not useful as a criterion because an artist can represent an era even if he or she is not famous.

4. The final step for each small group is to choose the five criteria that the group members think are most important. Ask them to spend a few minutes doing this. Anticipate that they may not be able to arrive at agreement or even come up with five possible criteria.

5. Gather the class back into a large group and lead a discussion to debrief their work. As groups report out the criteria they selected, write them on the board or an overhead. Note differences and commonalities among the proposed criteria. The purpose is not to arrive at one perfect list; rather, the purpose is to encourage students to think like historians. How would a historian go about choosing someone or some work of art to provide a window into an entire era?

Among the criteria likely to be proposed are the following:

- Fame, a person or work of art that is recognizable, both domestically and internationally
- “Genius”
- Beauty of the object (or aesthetic value)
- Subject matter that authentically reflects historic events or the culture of the time
- Value as reflected in the sales price of a work of art
- Influence on other art or artists
- Quality, such as a design or technical breakthrough of some kind
- Mass popular appeal or, alternatively, appeal to a particular audience that was important in the time period under study
- Appeal or popularity that lasts over time
- Work that incorporates social values that were commonly shared
• Techniques and technologies—either new ones that were first used at this time or ones that embody enduring elements of the culture. This can include new ways of reproducing and disseminating art.

With older students, you may wish to probe further. For example, you might ask them to consider the following questions:

• Could an artist’s lack of fame actually teach us something significant about the time period when he or she worked?
• Is it even possible for a single artist or work of art to represent a whole era?
• Is there such a thing as a universal definition of genius or beauty?
• Are there criteria that apply very well to one country or era, but not to others?

Opinions on these questions will vary.

Part 1, Option B (for Students New to Use of Art as a Primary Source)

1. Remind students that historians learn about the past by studying primary sources and artifacts, documents and objects created at the time of the events being studied. Ask: What kinds of primary sources and artifacts might people use to learn about the history of late twentieth-century Japan? (Accept all reasonable answers, but be sure to draw out examples of art.)

2. Tell students that in this lesson they will be focusing on use of art to study late twentieth-century Japan. One of the challenges in using art to study history is deciding to what works of art attention should be given. Distribute Handout L1 (Version B) and go over the Introduction with students. Next, go over the Directions; you may want to work through the criteria in the table with students, determining which apply to the woodblock prints in the Tokugawa period or to a work of art (perhaps a song or movie) currently popular with students.

You may also want to model the process of analyzing strengths and weaknesses of each individual criterion. For example, for the criterion of fame, strengths might be that famous art works will be easier to locate and that the reasons behind the fame of a work may show something interesting about the time period; weaknesses might be that fame does not go hand-in-hand with quality and an artist or art work that is not famous could represent a period well.

3. Organize students into groups of three and ask them to complete the task as described on the handout—analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of each criterion and then selecting the five that their group thinks will be most useful.

4. Gather the class back into a large group and lead a discussion to debrief their work. As groups report out the criteria they selected, write them on the board or an overhead. Are there commonalities among the lists of criteria selected? What are the strengths of the commonly chosen criteria? What criteria were not selected by any of the groups (or by few)? What weaknesses kept them from being chosen? Remind students that the purpose is not to arrive at one perfect list; rather, the purpose is to encourage students to think like historians. How would a historian go about choosing someone or some work of art to provide a window into an entire era?
Part 2

1. Start the second phase of the lesson by telling your students that the place and time they are studying, late twentieth-century Japan, presents several challenges to historians. The time period is recent and ongoing. Major changes have taken place between the beginning of the era in 1945 and today. In addition, many people hold strong opinions about this era because of the enduring personal and political impacts of events, particularly of World War II.

2. Turn to the subject of key events and trends in late twentieth-century Japan. If a significant amount of material has previously been covered in class, students can generate a list of key points, turning this part of the lesson into a review of the whole unit. If students are not familiar with contemporary Japan, you may want to assign one of the essays mentioned in the Materials and Preparation section as homework, followed by class discussion of the most important points made. Alternatively, you might present the information via lecture, using Professor Tsutsui’s essay and the timeline in the Teacher Background Information as resources in preparing your lecture notes, or have students gather information themselves from multiple sources including any material covered in class, textbooks, and reference materials.

3. Following the review of key events and trends in late twentieth-century Japan, point out to the students that they have developed some knowledge about late twentieth-century Japan and a method for choosing an art work or artist to represent the era. Explain to the class that the next step in this lesson does not ask that they choose the art work or artist. Instead, they will use their analytical skills to do something historians are frequently called upon to do. They will critique someone else’s work—in this case, the work of the author of the lesson. They will apply their own criteria to the author’s choice of a representative artist.

4. Explain that the author chose the artist Tezuka Osamu and his creation, in manga and anime formats, called Astro Boy. After learning about Tezuka and Astro Boy, students will decide if the author met the criteria they consider important.

5. Solicit information about Tezuka and Astro Boy to establish whether your students are familiar with them. Use the vocabulary terms manga and anime in the discussion.

6. Project or display a few images of Astro Boy. Take a few minutes to solicit student observations of his appearance and any visual evidence of his special powers.

7. Distribute Handout L2 and ask students to read it, keeping in mind the criteria they have developed for selecting a representative figure for a historical era, as well as their knowledge of key events and trends in late twentieth-century Japan.

8. Conclude the lesson by asking students to either discuss or write a brief essay explaining why the choice of Tezuka and Astro Boy was or was not a good one. Their answers should provide evidence that they are using the criteria they generated in the first part of the lesson as well as their knowledge of historical events in late twentieth-century Japan.
Note that the Teacher Background Information includes a discussion of why the author chose Tezuka and Astro Boy for consideration in this lesson.

Assessment:

If late twentieth-century Japan is a major unit of study, this lesson can serve as a review of the entire unit. If the students have successfully developed criteria they believe are valid, those criteria can be applied to earlier lessons in the Imaging Japanese History series or to the history of other countries. The teacher can assess whether students are successfully applying the criteria they developed to a different time period or country.

If students write individual responses in Part 2, Step 8 of the Procedure, the best work will show that the student is aware of key events and trends in late twentieth-century Japan and systematically applies the class’s criteria to the question of whether Tezuka and Astro Boy are representative choices. The actual answers to this question will vary depending on the criteria the class chose. Students might decide that Tezuka is not a good choice. Since this lesson is open-ended, some students may say they do not know enough about Tezuka or more recent Japanese history to be able to decide whether he and his work represent the era. Part of the assessment process could be to ask students to identify what more they would need to know to be able to answer the question to their own satisfaction.

Extension/Enrichment:

Manga has deep roots in earlier Japanese traditions, any of which can be explored as a fun way to review earlier lessons or introduce new material. See the Teacher Background Information below on roots of manga. Taking time to look at manga as art can improve students’ visual literacy skills. Invite them to apply concepts such as line, color, shape, and balance and ask them to articulate how these elements add to the impact of manga.

Soft power is a concept that is widely debated, although there is no doubt that cultural and ideological influence can be one form of national power. Involve students in a debate or discussion about whether “soft power” will assume greater or lesser importance among nations as the twenty-first century continues.

Teacher Background Information:

Roots of Manga

Contemporary manga and anime have deep roots in Japanese arts and history. Although scholars and critics have their individual interpretations, many see connections to:

- The format of *emaki*, the scrolls that are unrolled to tell a story scene by scene.
- The spirit and style exhibited in *Choju Giga* (the Frolicking Animals scroll), the animal scroll highlighted in the Heian lesson and referenced in many later art works.
- The way words and pictures are often interspersed in Japanese paintings and prints. At the Seattle Art Museum site, you can see a great example of this in the images and translation of the early seventeenth-century *Poem Scroll with Deer* by the artists Sotatsu and Koetsu.
• The style, realism, and humor of Hokusai’s manga.
• Mass-produced books of earlier eras that included prints of multiple pictures, often divided into boxes like manga scenes.
• Other inexpensive art that was sold to the masses, especially in the cities, such as block prints in the nineteenth century and postcards in the early twentieth century.
• Kamishibai, the storytelling format popular up until the arrival of television in Japan. Traveling storytellers sold candy and then displayed a series of pictures to illustrate the story they were telling. The stories often ended with cliffhangers to attract young customers to return another day.
• Comics, political cartoons, and film from the United States and Europe. Tezuka spoke of the influence of European film technique on the way his manga were designed and moved from frame to frame.

Japanese Language

Unlike English, Japanese is written using a combination of multiple writing systems. Japanese writing is not a series of pictures, but some of the characters used in Japanese are originally based upon pictures. To write Japanese, a person uses characters called kanji, two syllable systems called hiragana and katakana, and romaji, the “Roman” alphabet used in English and many other languages. Students will encounter all of them in looking at manga. The graphic below says Tetsuwan Atomu, combining kanji meaning “mighty” with a – to – mu in katakana, to spell the English word atom.

The Japanese language has a rich vocabulary of onomatopoeia. Many examples show up in manga, often with bubbles around them that reflect that sound and meaning of the word within. For example, a noise for a crashing sound might appear in a jagged distorted shape suggesting the aftermath of a crash.

Author’s Reasons for Choosing Tezuka and Astro Boy

Tezuka is widely known, his work continues to be popular, and other artists credit him as a pioneer. Key events in Tezuka’s life parallel major developments in post-war history, including the hardships of the war, the opportunities and challenges of the occupation years, and then later success and influence.

Many of the messages underlying Tezuka’s work reflect values widely held in Japan, including his opposition to war and his desire for better communication among people.

Tezuka led his studio to innovative developments in manga and anime design and production. Anime and manga are now widely considered to be “art,” reflecting the blurring of old distinctions between high art and popular culture.
Tezuka’s creations reflect the flow of cultural influences back and forth between Japan and other countries, resulting in new transnational hybrid art forms. For example, he was influenced by Disney productions and, in turn, influenced Disney productions. Cultural exports are widely discussed as “soft power,” a new form of national power and influence.

Images drawn from manga and anime are displacing some older images of Japan, and are widely identified as being Japanese.

Timeline of Selected Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Historic Events in Japan</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Events Related to Tezuka</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Tezuka Osamu born in Osaka</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Manga, the first post-war cartoon magazine, resumes publication</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombed</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Tezuka’s New Treasure Island is published and becomes a best-seller; Tezuka is a 19-year old medical student</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>World War II ends</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Tezuka moves to Tokyo; Japan’s first serialized story manga is published: Tezuka’s Jungle Taitai (Kimba the White Lion)</td>
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<td>1946</td>
<td>Japan occupied by U.S. troops</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Tezuka develops the character Tetsuwan Atomu (Atom Boy/Astro Boy); the robot boy is serialized in manga from 1952 to 1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Japan adopts a democratic constitution</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Tetsuwan Atomu is serialized in manga, appearing from 1952 to 1968 and later reappearing</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Korean War begins</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Tetsuwan Atomu is published and becomes a best-seller; Tezuka is a 19-year old medical student</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>U.S.-Japan Security Pact signed</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Tezuka develops the character Tetsuwan Atomu (Atom Boy/Astro Boy); the robot boy is serialized in manga from 1952 to 1968</td>
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<td>1951</td>
<td>U.S. occupation of Japan ends</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Fuji TV starts broadcasting Japan’s first animated television series, Tetsuwan Atomu</td>
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<td>1954</td>
<td>Summer Olympics are held in Tokyo</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Tezuka meets Walt Disney at the New York World’s Fair</td>
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<td>1963</td>
<td>Japan experiences “oil shocks” from the OPEC oil embargo</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Jungle Taitai becomes Japan’s first animated television series in color</td>
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<td>1973-1974</td>
<td>Mitsubishi Estate Co. buys a 51% stake in Rockefeller Center</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Tezuka Osamu retrospective art exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>Emperor Hirohito dies</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Tezuka Osamu Manga Museum opens in Takarazuka, his home town</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>Economic recession and vanishing wealth</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>April 7, 2003, is celebrated in Japan and abroad as the fictional birth date of</td>
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Teacher Resources:


Gluck, Carol, “Top Ten Things to Know About Japan in the Late 1990s,” in *Education about Asia* (Fall 1998), [http://www.aasianst.org/EAA/gluck.htm](http://www.aasianst.org/EAA/gluck.htm).


Imagine that you are a historian who has just been hired by a curriculum publisher. The publisher is developing lessons to teach high school students about different countries through their arts. The publisher explains that the purpose of the series is to provide insights into several historic periods in each country. There will be one lesson for each time period. Your task is to develop the criteria to use in choosing the works of art or artists that will be featured in each lesson. The work of art or artist should represent or provide insights into the time period in that country. The criteria you develop should be general enough that they can be used as tools in choosing art or artists for all the countries and historical periods in this series of lessons.

On the chart below, list as many criteria as you can think of in the lefthand column. When the teacher asks you to stop writing, you will form small groups to look at each others’ criteria, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each criterion, and then choose the five that seem most useful to the members of your group. Mark those five so that you can use them later.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Reasons to Use This Criterion</th>
<th>Reasons Not to Use This Criterion</th>
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Criteria for Selecting Representative Art or Artists

Introduction

Art is one type of primary source useful to historians. Often, historians pay particular attention to works of art or to artists they believe represent a certain period in history. That means that the art or artist conveys important ideas or information about a period.

Consider one example—woodblock prints. Woodblock prints are often regarded as representing the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) in Japanese history. Why? Woodblock prints developed as a Japanese art form during that period. They convey a lot of information about life during the period. They were cheaply reproduced using new printing technology better than what was available in Europe at the time. Woodblock prints were very popular, reaching even people who were not wealthy. Because so many people owned and enjoyed the prints, they played a role in unifying the Japanese people. Depiction of landmarks like Mount Fuji in numerous woodblock prints made those landmarks symbols of a shared culture. Thus, the prints not only reflected the culture of the time, they helped shape it.

Directions

Imagine that you are a historian who has just been hired by a curriculum publisher. The publisher is developing lessons to teach high school students about different countries through their arts. The publisher explains that the purpose of the series is to provide insights into several historic periods in each country. There will be one lesson for each time period. Your task is to develop the criteria to use in choosing the works of art or artists that will be featured in each lesson. The work of art or artist should represent or provide insights into the time period in that country. The criteria you develop should be general enough that they can be used as tools in choosing art or artists for all the countries and historical periods in this series of lessons.

On the chart on the next page are some criteria or guidelines that might be used in choosing works of art or artists to represent historic time periods. In a small group, go over the list of criteria; if your group can think of others that are not listed, add them to the table. Then discuss each criterion’s strengths and weaknesses. Then choose the five that seem most useful to the members of your group. Write those five below so that you can use them later.

Criteria Our Group Thinks Are Most Useful

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Reasons to Use This Criterion</th>
<th>Reasons Not to Use This Criterion</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fame</td>
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<tr>
<td>Popularity (Who liked it—many people or an important few? Has its popularity lasted?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beauty</td>
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<td>Value (as reflected in sale price)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influence on Other Art or Artists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influence on Society</td>
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<td>Subject Matter that Represents Historical Events or Culture</td>
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Tezuka Osamu and Astro Boy

When World War II ended in 1945, Japan had endured unprecedented devastation. Tezuka Osamu was a teenager at the time. He witnessed the effects of the war, including the firebombing of Osaka, the city where he was born in 1928.

The war had interrupted Tezuka’s childhood in a well-to-do family living in Takarazuka, near Osaka. As a child, he had pursued many interests. He collected insects, went to plays with his parents, and viewed films. He particularly enjoyed Disney classics like *Bambi*, which he reported seeing 80 times. Tezuka loved to draw and was strongly influenced by the cartoons and films that were imported from Europe and the United States before the war. By war’s end, he had drawn 3,000 pages of pictures even though he was busy studying to be a doctor.

In 1945, the hardship and deprivations resulting from the war were very real. Food, fuel, and money were scarce. Japan was occupied by U.S. troops, and the people and ideas that had led Japan into war had lost their power. Artists, writers, and cartoonists who had supported the war effort, either voluntarily or not, now had to rethink their past work and set new directions for the future.

In this time of social and cultural change, Tezuka was hired at the age of 17 to write a four-panel cartoon for the Mainichi newspapers. By 1947, he had written an *akabon* called *New Treasure Island*. *Akabon* literally means red book. The term referred to affordable books with red covers, printed on cheap paper and sold on the streets like newspapers. People were hungry for inexpensive entertainment. *New Treasure Island* became a bestseller, selling 400,000 or more copies and launching Tezuka’s fame and career. It was a manga, a book that told a story primarily through pictures, and it was an exceptionally long manga.

The term manga was popularized by the artist Hokusai in 1814 when he used it to describe some of his drawings. “Whimsical pictures” is one translation of manga, a term that now refers to comics or cartoons.

Manga were not new in the 1940’s, but Tezuka was making bold changes in this art form by expanding its length and subject matter and introducing new styles. The drawings were vivid and the captions were written in boxes that had different shapes to enhance the mood of each scene. He added special effects that he had seen in films from other countries. A reader no longer saw the pictures from one viewpoint, like the audience watching a play. Tezuka’s drawings included scenes drawn from many different angles, zooming in or panning across a scene like a film camera.

In 1950, the Korean War began, once again changing the world around Tezuka and Japan. By the next year, the United States and Japan were no longer bitter enemies. They were now allies joined by the U.S.-Japan Security Pact, tied together by fears of spreading communism. Meanwhile, Tezuka was laboriously drawing page after page of manga, including the first story that appeared in serial form, *Jungle Taitei* (Jungle Emperor, later known in English as Kimba the White Lion). In 1951, Tezuka introduced Tetsuwan Atomu (Mighty Atom), a robot boy best known in English as Astro Boy.
Tezuka’s manga carried a message that he wanted to send to the world. Tezuka summarized his message when he wrote the introduction to *Manga! Manga!* by Frederik L. Schodt many years later: “My experience convinces me that comics, regardless of what language they are printed in, are an important form of expression that crosses all national and cultural boundaries, that comics are great fun, and that they can further peace and goodwill among nations” (Schodt 1983, p. 11).

Tezuka’s creations were not limited to the printed page. By 1963, *Astro Boy* appeared on Japanese television as the first animated television series. Two years later *Jungle Tai Tai* became Japan’s first animated television series in color. Japan’s economic recovery was bringing televisions into homes for the first time. Many Japanese today remember the powerful impact these series had in the 1960s. Anime, short for animation, was to become a booming industry in Japan. *Astro Boy* and *Kimba* soon appeared on American screens, too.

Tezuka continued producing *Astro Boy*, created many other characters, and took on monumental tasks like drawing manga of the life of Buddha and Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. He also worked on a series called *Phoenix* most of his adult life. This sprawling series probed the meaning of life and humankind’s search for immortality.

By the 1980s, Japan’s products were selling world-wide, and Japanese businesses were investing in high-profile companies and real estate in the United States. News articles were sometimes accompanied by manga-style images of a powerful Japan, wielding great economic power.

Tezuka died in 1989, the same year the Emperor of Japan died. According to the studio Tezuka founded, he had drawn 150,000 pages of manga, published more than 500 titles, and produced more than 70 animated works in his lifetime. An editorial in the Asahi newspaper noted: “Foreign visitors to Japan often find it difficult to understand why Japanese people like comics so much. . . . One explanation for the popularity of comics in Japan, however, is that Japan had Tezuka Osamu, whereas other nations did not. Without Dr. Tezuka, the postwar explosion in comics in Japan would have been inconceivable” (Schodt 1996, p. 234).

In 1990, the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo held an exhibition of Tezuka’s work. This exhibition was the museum’s first one ever granted to a cartoonist. Tezuka’s hometown, Takarazuka, opened a museum in honor of its famous citizen in 1994. New generations of artists, many of whom had worked with Tezuka, carried manga and anime forward. These forms of popular culture spread around the world. In 2003, people in many countries, not just in Japan, commemorated the date Tezuka had projected as *Astro Boy*’s birth date when he created *Astro Boy* in 1951.

Manga and anime styles and content are reflected in games, fashion, and character goods. Scholars now study Tezuka’s role in laying the foundations of Japan’s “soft power”—Japan’s influence on other countries through its contemporary arts and popular culture. Other artists continue to create new styles of manga and anime and explore their expressive limits in new digital media.
What was Tezuka’s core message? Is it even possible to find the core message of such a prolific artist? Looking at Astro Boy is a good place to begin. He is a little boy robot with special powers. He can fly, speak 60 languages, and detect whether a human being is good or bad. He is powered by an atomic reactor in his chest and has a computer for a brain. He fights to protect the world from people and robots who harm others. Tezuka repeatedly said that Astro Boy stories are about discrimination and miscommunication.

In the year before he died, Tezuka summed up his work to a Japanese interviewer: “My manga have a wide variety of themes—they are a paean to life, they are antiwar and they are antinuclear, and they advocate the preservation of nature—but ultimately they are all one thing. They are the following appeal to young readers, to think objectively about this fragile Earth: When you grow up, don’t forget to look at both Earth and mankind objectively. And always think about what it means to be human” (Schodt 2007, p. 144).

References