Criteria for Selecting Representative Art or Artists

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.

Criteria	Reasons to Use This Criterion	Reasons Not to Use This Criterion

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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

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____

Criteria	Reasons to Use This Criterion	Reasons Not to Use This Criterion
Fame		
Popularity (Who liked it—many people or an important few? Has its popularity lasted?)		
Beauty		
Value (as reflected in sale price)		
Influence on Other Art or Artists		
Influence on Society		
Subject Matter that Represents Historical Events or Culture		
Subject Matter that Reflects Cultural Values		
Created/Reproduced via New Technologies or Ones that Embody Enduring Elements of the Culture		

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 Taitei* 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

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