

yōkai

GHOSTS & DEMONS
OF JAPAN



PROJECTS

1. Marbled Monoprints
2. Orihon, Japanese Accordion Book
3. Tsukumogami Trading Cards
4. Ema Designs: Yokai Inside Ourselves

RESOURCES

(Additional resources are listed on page 11)

Museum of International Folk Art Online Exhibit

<https://yokai.moifa.org/#/>

Videos - YouTube

Yōkai & Japanese Ghost Storytelling

<https://tinyurl.com/MOIFAYoutube>

NATIONAL VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS

- **Creating:** Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.
- **Presenting:** Interpreting and sharing artistic work.
- **Responding:** Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.
- **Connecting:** Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.

INTRODUCTION

Vivid in Japanese art and imagination are creatures that are at once ghastly and amusing. Yōkai is a catchall word for ghosts, demons, monsters, shapeshifters, tricksters, and other kinds of supernatural beings and mysterious phenomena. Yōkai interact with the human world and spark common notions of frightful things.

Although ideas of such beings have existed all over the world since ancient times, yōkai have held a special place in Japanese popular culture for about four hundred years! Visual arts, theatrical performance, storytelling, print technology, and games are some of the ways that yōkai folklore and images spread and persisted in Japan.

These spooky creatures have an enduring legacy. Their stories might make you sleep with the lights on, empathize with their tragic lives, or laugh out loud. For many, yōkai exist in the tension between the fright and delight that keeps us on our toes!

OBJECTIVES

- To understand how yōkai have played an important role in Japanese art and popular culture for hundreds of years (historical and cultural understanding).
- To learn about visual interpretations of yōkai in print technology, illustrated books, toys, and games (perceiving, analyzing and responding).
- To create art projects inspired by the world of yōkai (creating and performing).

Photo: *Ao Bozu* (Blue Monk) by Kono Junya, 2006, Kyoto. Papier-mache, craft foam, paint. Museum of International Folk Art



MUSEUM OF INTERNATIONAL
FOLK ART

An Abundance of Yokai

Japan is notorious for its variety of yōkai. Early ideas of yōkai were based in religion and they materialized as oni (demons or goblins), complete with horns and fangs.

These important paintings are among the most influential artworks that expanded the assortment of bizarre beings in Japan. They portray a wealth of humorous yōkai engaged in human activity.



"The Earth Spider Conjures up Demons at the Mansion of Minamoto no Raiko" by Utagawa Kuniyoshi, Japan 1843; this edition likely published in the Kaei period (1848–1854), ink on paper. Museum of International Folk Art.

Although the variety of monster images widened, their audiences were still narrow. Emakimono (horizontal, illustrative, and narrative scroll paintings) were kept in temples and shrines or by aristocratic families. Their audiences were limited to those who had access to these places. Images by master artists were hand copied by their students and those copies circulated among the elite.

Fun-Fear Factor

In many Japanese folktales, yōkai appear at borders: on bridges, at dusk, and between villages.

In popular culture, they live on the boundary between belief and amusement, fear and fun. It is easy to imagine that yōkai were created to understand and explain the world before the advancement of science. However, like folks everywhere, past and present, Japanese beliefs and experiences include a wide range of differences. Yōkai are a part of Japanese heritage, and that makes them significant, but it does not mean that everyone has the same opinion about them.

Based on visual art, theatrical performance, literature, games, and popular consumer items, we can say that people had fun with these images and stories since the Edo period (1603–1867)!

Yōkai can definitely be scary, but the experience of fear can also be amusing. When frightening beings copy human behavior, they become less intimidating and can appear playful, relatable, and even cute. But yōkai are not all tame and cute. Perhaps the most terrifying yōkai are those that shed light on the faults of human society.

Do you believe in monsters?
Do you believe in supernatural beings
that can wreak havoc in the human world?
Do you believe in ghosts?
... are you sure about that?

Yokai and Print Technology

In the mid- to late Edo period (1603–1867), yōkai really exploded onto the scene. This is largely due to woodblock print technology, which helped popularize and spread yōkai stories and images.

The technique for creating woodblock prints involves an artist who draws an original design, a woodcarver who transfers the illustration to a woodblock (one for each color), and a printer. Relatively large quantities of impressions can be created in this process. Whereas scroll paintings had limited audiences, prints were accessible and affordable commodities. As specific yōkai depictions began to circulate among the masses, the images became popular cultural references.

Marbled Monoprints

Objectives

- To understand how yōkai have played an important role in Japanese art and popular culture for hundreds of years (historical and cultural understanding).
- To learn about the basic idea of printmaking (perceiving, analyzing and responding).
- To create marbled monoprints and find inspiration within the marbling to create their own yokai character (creating and performing).

Motivations

Introduce your students to the world of yōkai and how these creatures are expressed in Japanese art and imagination. Discusses how printing helped spread yōkai images. Explain how monoprints are unique and different from a painting.

Additional Information

For centuries Japanese artisans have used the marbling technique called *Suminagashi*, often translated as "floating ink". These marbling designs are created by dripping Sumi ink over the surface of the water and then placing paper on top to lift the ink. Usually, two brushes are alternated between ink and water to create irregular circles, a marbled pattern. While the ink floats over the water, it can be manipulated by lightly blowing or fanning it.



One Hundred Aspects of the Moon: The "Yugao" Chapter from The Tale Of Genji (Ghost of Yugao) by Taiso Yoshitoshi, Japan, Asia.

Materials:

- colored chalk (Prang Freart Large Drawing Chalk)
- paper (20lb at least)
- a shallow tub
- popsicle stick or plastic knife
- markers or gel pens

Procedures

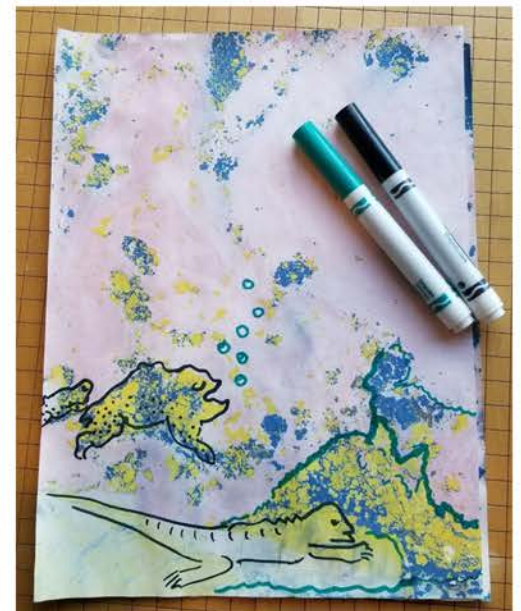
- Add water to your tub, about 1 inch, it does not need to be filled to the top.
- Start scraping your chalk onto the surface of the water using a popsicle stick or plastic knife. * Limit the students to two to three colors to save time and prevent muddy prints.
- Lightly press on the paper around the edges, but don't submerge it. Lift up to reveal your chalk print and set it aside to dry.
- Ask the students to look at their work, while turning it in different directions. Encourage them to find interesting shapes and forms within the marbling.

What things or creatures can you see in your marble print?

- Use markers (dark colors or black) to outline the forms they see. Encourage them to use different lines, hatching, cross-hatching, and stippling.

This marbling technique can be used to make cards, create fun paper for book covers, and for collaging.

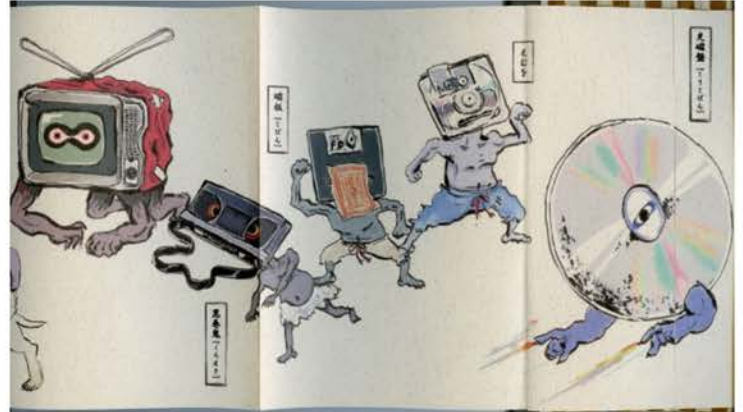
This is a great project to introduce students to surface tension, the force which causes a layer of liquid to behave like film, or a sheet that stops items from sinking.



Illustrated Books & Whimsical Images

Master woodblock printers of the Edo period often referenced tales of monsters. For example, Utagawa Kuniyoshi combined characters from the “Night Parade of a Hundred Demons” (Hyakki yagyo) and another early handscroll, the “Tale of the Earth Spider” (Tsuchigumo zoshi) in a famous printed triptych (a three-part print) titled, “The Earth Spider Conjures up Demons at the Mansion of Minamoto no Raiko.”

Artists today are still inspired by the “Night Parade of One Hundred Demons!” Playing off of traditional images found in historical paintings, the contemporary artist, “Sakyu” depicts classical yokai alongside modern yokai. In this contemporary version of the Hyakki yagyo, Sakyu dreams up new tsukumogami, discarded objects that become animated and haunt the owner who failed to appreciate the service they provided. Sakyu includes not only traditional demons, but also spirited floppy disks and an angry VHS tape.



Modern Hyakki yagyo (“Night Parade of One Hundred Demons”) book by Sakyu, Kyoto 2018. Giclée print, digital art, washi paper, cloth, adhesive. Museum of International Folk Art

Orihon, Japanese Accordion Book

Objectives

- To understand how illustrated books were used to spread yōkai stories in Japan (historical and cultural understanding).
- To learn about accordion-style books and their use (perceiving, analyzing and responding).
- To create their own accordion-style books and use as a journal or an illustration book (creating and performing).

Motivations

Introduce your students to the world of yōkai and how these creatures are expressed in Japanese art and imagination. Explain how illustrated books allow yōkai stories to be spread to a larger audience. Discuss how can we use books to share oral stories?

Additional Information

Orihon are accordion-style books, composed of a continuous folded sheet of paper enclosed between two covers. In comparison to scrolls these accordion books were more practical and allow enough space for writing similar to a scroll, but in a compact form. They were used for Buddhist texts, journaling, poetry, and even yōkai illustrations.

Materials:

chipboard for book covers (5.5" x 8.5")

blank paper strips: 2 long strips, 5.5" x 17" for scroll book

patterned paper

pencils & erasers

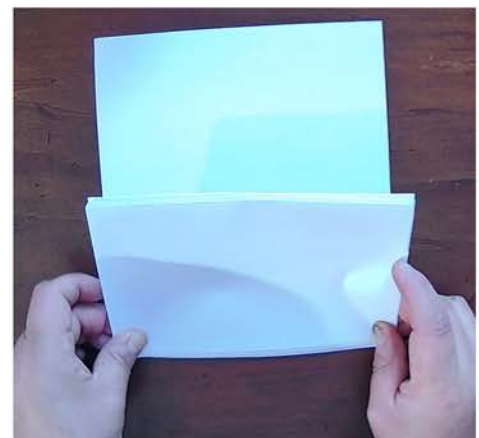
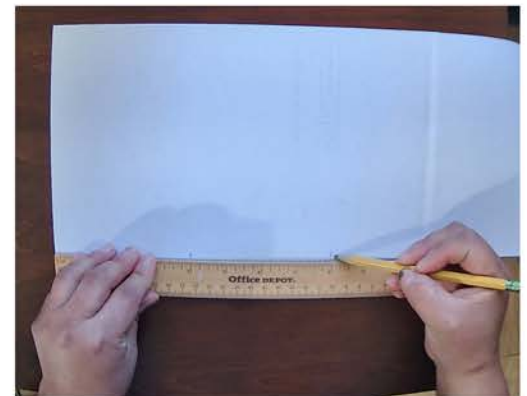
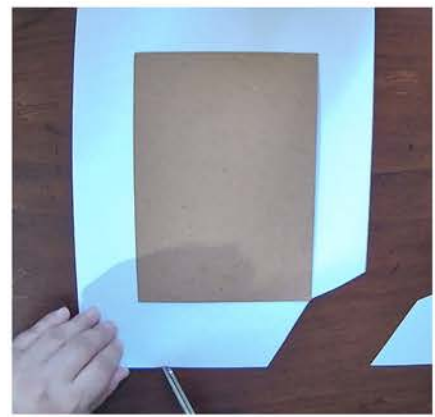
rulers

glue sticks

Procedures

- Wrap the chipboard with the patterned paper to create the front and back covers.
- Glue the two strips of 5.5" x 17" paper together to make a long strip.
- Measure and mark 5" inches on your long strip of paper. Fold the paper at that mark, creasing it well. Continue folding the paper back and forth accordion-style, until you reach the end. Now you have the pages for your book.
- Glue your covers to each end of the paper accordion.

Students can use their books to record stories or draw their favorite yōkai



Toys & Games Made Yokai Popular

Toys and games are an important part of yōkai culture and a fun way that children have learned about yōkai through the ages. Similar to Pokémon cards, children were especially delighted by paper-based toys with yōkai images that they collected and traded. Toys and games reflect the popular culture of their time and those played with centuries ago still bring joy and challenges to children today.

Produced in large quantities, omocha-e (“paper toys” or “toy pictures”) woodblock prints were inexpensive enough for children to buy. Examples like these, with different images in each square, were intended to be cut. Children would then trade and collect the various images. Monsters, being a persistently popular theme, were a favorite. Putting images together created a catalog of yōkai (like a Pokédex). They are like “Edo period Pokémon cards.”

Tsukumogami are spirited tools or haunted objects. In ancient times, yokai were limited in their physical forms to oni (demons) and religious contexts. The Muromachi period (1336—1573) introduced new sorts of beings with a famous narrative scroll painting called the “*Tsukumogami ki* (The Record of Tool Specters).” According to the story, if tools and other implements are discarded without a proper show of thanks, they become resentful of their former owners and haunt them with a vengeance.



Bakemono Zukushi (“All about Bakemono”) woodblock print. Artist Unknown, Japan Edo period (1603—1867). Courtesy of the Yumoto Koichi Memorial JAPAN YOKAI MUSEUM

The scroll likely served the purpose of spreading Shingon Buddhism, but sarcasm and wit narrate the illustrations. *Tsukumogami* are something to be feared, but they definitely have a comical and entertaining side. By the Edo period (1603—1867) all sorts of “things” could come to life and transform into yokai.

Tsukumogami Trading Cards

Objectives

- To understand how toys and games have made yōkai popular in Japan (historical and cultural understanding).
- To learn about *tsukumogami* and how we are connected to the things around us (perceiving, analyzing and responding).
- To create trading cards about animated objects (creating and performing).

Motivations

Introduce your students to the world of yōkai and how these creatures are expressed in Japanese art and imagination. Explain how toys and games spread yōkai characters and stories to a larger audience. What and who are the yōkai in our toys and games today?

Materials:

- heavyweight cardstock or Bristol board (cut to 2.5" x 3.5")
- variety of coloring materials
- pencils & erasers

Procedures

- Provide one card per student, each child must make at least four cards.
- Creating an animated object. Encourage students to look around for inspiration – it can be any inanimate object: basketball, water bottle, lamp, cup, etc.

If this object was to become animated what human qualities or abilities would it have?

If this object had a personality, what would it be?

What kind of emotions can your object convey?

- Define your character through physical appearance. Does it have big teeth, two or four arms...?
- Students can use the back of their cards for a brief description of their characters.
- Encourage students to trade cards among their classmates. Make sure you set clear guidelines to trade card for students to follow such as "no forced trades" and trade one for one.



Terms to keep in mind:

- **Anthropomorphism** - is attributing human traits to non-human objects and animals. Throughout history animals and objects have been humanized for religious, literary, or artistic purposes.
- **Inanimate** - not alive, especially not in the manner of animals and humans.
- **Animate** - bring to life
- **Character design** - the process which comes after the characterization and consists in defining the character through physical appearance

Ema, Japanese Wishing Plaques

The practice of writing a personal wish or prayer on a wooden plaque, called *ema*, usually takes place at Shinto shrines throughout Japan. This practice dates back to the Nara period in the 8th century, when members of the aristocracy and later the military elite would donate horses (believed to be vehicles of the gods) to the local shrine along with wishes for protection from some negative force. Eventually, painted plaques with horse images came to replace the actual animals as the offerings, and by the Muromachi period (14th – 16th centuries), the subject matter of the plaques expanded beyond just horse images—though the name *ema* remains ("e" means painting or picture; "ma" means horse).

Today *ema* are recognizable as a small wooden plaque with an image painted on the front, often accompanied by the word *gan-i* (meaning "wish"), and a string through a hole at the top for hanging. The traditional roof-shaped top edge is meant to evoke the pitched roof of a horse stable, harkening back to *ema*'s origins. Today, a wide variety of *ema* shapes can now be seen: other animals like the face of a fox (*inari*), or characters from pop culture such as *rilakkuma*, *Hello Kitty* and even *yokai*.



Ema depicting yokai characters from the manga series, "GeGeGe no Kitaro". Totori Prefecture, Japan. 2018. Museum of International Folk Art

Ema Designs: Yōkai Inside Ourselves

- Who are the yōkai in your world?
- How can yōkai help externalize overwhelming emotions of fear, anger & rage?
- How can we portray this feeling?
- How can we use visual elements to draw a representation of my emotion?

Objectives

- To understand the way that *ema* are used in Shinto Temples in Japan and how their imagery has expanded (historical and cultural understanding).
- To learn and discuss the process of making an *ema*, including the use of symbols and imagery, their meaning and the materials that are used (perceiving, analyzing and responding).
- To explore the Japanese tradition of *ema*, create your own plaque and then hang it up in a designated place (creating and performing).

Motivations

Introduce your students to the Japanese tradition of *ema*. Explain the different imagery represented in the plaques. Explain that each student will be making their own *ema* and creating a visual representation of an emotion or behavior. Consider how yōkai help us explain or make sense of the unexplainable, and how yōkai can simply be a reflection of our humanity.

Materials:

- all purpose chipboard 4"x6" (cut to resemble a house with a hole drilled into the top for hanging)
- pencils & erasers
- permanent markers
- paper for drawing drafts
- acrylic paints & paintbrushes
- containers for water
- ribbon or cord for hanging
- hole puncher



Procedures

- Have the students think of an emotion they would like to represent visually. What kinds of emotions do we experience on a day-to-day basis?

If this feeling was a color, it would be...

If this feeling was an object, it would be...

If this feeling had a taste, it would be...

If this feeling was weather, it would be...

If this feeling was a landscape/scene, it would be...

If this feeling was music, it would sound like...

- Ask your students to use their answers to sketch a creature or being that visually represents these ideas.
- With a pencil they can draw their final image on the chipboard or wooden plaque.
- Trace the pencil outlines with a permanent marker and apply paint.
- Once dry, establish an area where the ema can be hung.
- Discuss with your students: how was the process of visualizing their emotions? What did they learn about themselves?

Books

Foster, Michael Dylan, and Kijin Shinonome. *The Book of Yokai: Mysterious Creatures of Japanese Folklore*. University of California Press, 2015.

Katz-Harris, Felicia. *Yokai: Ghosts, Demons & Monsters of Japan*. Museum of New Mexico Press, 2019.

Nakau, Ei. *Something Wicked from Japan: Ghosts, Demons & Yokai in Ukiyo-e Masterpieces*. Pai Intānashonaru, 2016.

Children's Books

Davisson, Zack, and Eleonora D'Onofrio. *Yokai Stories*. Chin Music Press, 2018.

Gollub, Matthew. *Ten Oni Drummers*. Tortuga Press, 2018.

Heller, S. E. *Classic Chapter Book Collection (Pokémon)*. Scholastic Inc, 2017.

Kishimoto, Masashi. *Naruto (3-in-1 Edition), Vol. 1: Includes Vols. 1, 2 & 3*. Viz Media, 2011.

Konishi, Noriyuki, et al. *Yo-Kai Watch*. VIZ Media, LLC, 2021.

Midorikawa, Yuki. *Natsume's Book of Friends: Volume 1*. Viz Media, 2010.

Myers, Tim, and Robert Roth. *Tanuki's Gift: A Japanese Tale*. Marshall Cavendish, 2003.

Seki, Sunny. *The Last Kappa of Old Japan: A Magical Journey of Two Friends*. Tuttle Publishing, 2016.

Sento, Atelier. *Onibi: Diary of a Yokai Ghost Hunter*. Tuttle Publishing, 2018.

Websites

Online Exhibit
<https://yokai.moifa.org/#/>

YouTube
Yokai & Japanese Ghost Storytelling
<https://tinyurl.com/MOIFAYoutube>

Yumoto Koichi Memorial JAPAN YOKAI MUSEUM <https://miyoshi-mononoke.jp/>

Smithsonian Libraries
<https://library.si.edu/books-online/subjects/monsters-in-art>

GeGeGe no Kitaro; The Mizuki Shigeru Museum
<http://mizuki.sakaiminato.net/lang-en/>

Kyoto International Manga Museum
<https://kyotomm.jp/>

Artists Websites

Matthew Meyer: Yokai Art & Database
<https://yokai.com/>

Kono Junya & Hyakuyobako collective
<http://kyotohyakki.com/>

Sakyu
<https://sakyuworks.tumblr.com/>

Mizuki Productions
<https://www.mizukipro.com/>

Pokémon & Folklore

medium.com

M. Lucero
<https://mluce.ro/articles/the-yokai-roots-of-pokemon/>