

Painting Nature

Depictions of Close Botanical Observations

FEATURED ART

[Trees by Master of the I-nen Seal](#)



Trees by Master of the I-nen Seal

Objective One

Students will be able to identify the artist, title, date, and time period of this work as well as how screens were used during the Edo period.

Objective Two

Students will be able to identify and understand the difference between deciduous and evergreen trees, carefully examining the artist's use of color.

Objective Three

Students will be able to consider the perspective of the work as well as the role of the viewer in this work of art.

Assigned Readings for Students

1. [Yukio Lippit interview on *Trees*](#)

Recommended Readings for Teachers

1. [Excerpt from *Varied Trees: An I-nen Seal Screen in the Freer Gallery of Art* by Christine Guth](#)
2. [Excerpts from *The Hidden Lives of Trees* by Peter Wohlleben](#)

LESSON PLAN

Objective One

Students will be able to identify the artist, title, date, and time period of this work as well as how screens were used during the Edo period.

On [Google Slides Page 1](#)

Image	Trees by I-nen
Video	Trees Screens: A Closer Look

Show the video *Trees Screens: A Closer Look* WITHOUT audio. Project the featured image of *Trees* on the screen and ask students to consider what they are looking at, the purpose of the work, and where and when it was made. Ask students to list any questions they might have about the work. This can be done collaboratively as a class with the teacher scribing responses on the board or independently, with students taking notes.

Show the video again, this time with audio. Does the music influence or change the students' initial ideas? Provide students an opportunity to review their initial answers and discuss any changes.

Lead a discussion using student responses, first identifying the artist, title, date, and media: *Trees*, signed with the Master of the I-nen Seal, created in mid-seventeenth century Japan, using ink, color, and gold on paper, on a pair of six-panel folding screens. Students may not be familiar with Japanese screens, *byōbu*, and the instructor may need to briefly explain that folding screens were used to demarcate space within rooms, much like furniture. Screens could also be displayed for decorative purposes and were considered works of art, viewed from seated positions on tatami-mat floors.

Objective Two

Students will be able to identify and understand the difference between deciduous and evergreen trees, carefully examining the artist's use of color.

On [Google Slides Page 2](#)

Images	Trees Detail #1 Trees Detail #2
Assigned Reading	Yukio Lippit interview on Trees

Ask students what questions they have about the work. The instructor may need to pose additional questions to fully address the objective. Encourage students to take notes, adding questions using different ink colors from their initial impressions. Collect and review their notes to gauge comprehension. Talking points should include:

- Eight species of deciduous and evergreen trees are painted on the screens in so much detail that they are identifiable as common Japanese trees. Have students look carefully by zooming into sections of the work to appreciate the varying textures and shapes of the leaves and stems and their relationship to each other.
- Each tree is rendered in a stunning range of greens, enhanced by the vivid gold background.
- The gold background offers a sense of cohesion to the work as the eye travels from left to right. At the time this was created, it would have been viewed in natural light or by candlelight. What kind of effects would the gold have had, seen in such light?

Assign students the Yukio Lippit interview on *Trees* to further their understanding of the work's use of color and perspective.

Objective Three

Students will be able to consider the work's perspective as well as the role of the viewer in this work of art.

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Images	Trees by I-nen Trees Detail #2
Video	James Ulak on Trees

Despite the tremendous attention to detail in how the trees are painted, they are neither placed in a recognizable background nor spaced realistically. Instead, the trees are placed against a gold background with a large open space between the trees. Why? From what vantage point did the artist want the viewer to experience this work? Students should reference Lippit's thoughts from the reading. Finally, show the video *James Ulak on Trees*. Point out the scale of the work, seen with Ulak standing in front it. Ask students to consider Ulak's ideas about modernity and various perspectives.

CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Art History

Students can read the full text of Christine Guth's *Varied Trees: An I-nen Seal Screen in the Freer Gallery of Art* to better understand Sōtatsu and the studio established by his followers.

Biology and Studio Art

Working with a biology teacher, art students can use *Trees* as the foundation of further study of deciduous and evergreen trees indigenous to their local area. Students can collect leaves to be used for printing in the art studio after identifying the species and characteristics of the tree from which they came. Students can also draw the leaves to identify their parts and unique characteristics.

Biology or Literature

Using excerpts from *The Hidden Lives of Trees*, students in biology and literature classes can better appreciate how trees communicate with one another and how they need other trees to survive.

Computer Technology

To deepen students' understanding of color relationships, instructors can have students use Adobe or other software programs to manipulate the background of *Trees*, inserting filters and/or other colors. Students can share their results, determining what they like best.