

Our Environment

Depicting the *Kami*/Spirits in the Natural World

FEATURED ART

[Crows - Unsigned](#)



Crows - Unsigned

Objective One

Students will be able to summarize the origins and development of Shintō beliefs.

Objective Two

Students will be able to explore the ways in which Edo artists skillfully depicted *kami* in their subject matter.

Objective Three

Students will be able to describe how artists can use proportion and scale to create dramatic effects.

Recommended Readings for Teachers

1. ["The Intersection of Two Religions in Japan" by Brenda Jordan](#)
2. ["Shintō" by Asia for Educators](#)
3. [Introduction to Crows](#)
4. [Excerpts from *Gifts of the Crows: How Perception, Emotion, and Thought Allow Smart Birds to Behave Like Humans* by John M. Marzluff and Tony Angell](#)
5. [Excerpts from Introduction to *The Genius of Birds* by Jennifer Ackerman](#)

LESSON PLAN

Objective One

Students will be able to summarize the origins and development of Shintō beliefs.

On [Google Slides Page 1](#)

Images	Two pheasants on a snow bank – Unsigned Two pheasants on a snow bank Detail #3
Video	Kami: Nachi Waterfall
Assigned Reading	The Intersection of Two Religions in Japan by Brenda Jordan "Shintō" by Asia for Educators

Introduce students to Shintō using information from the *The Intersection of Two Religions in Japan* and the *Asia for Educators* resource page with discussion questions. Focus on two quotes from the resource page in particular: "*kami* may be anything that is extraordinary and that inspires awe or reverence" and "in their world myriad spirits shone like fireflies and every tree and bush could speak." What do these two quotes say about Shintō beliefs?

Further explore Shintō with a close examination of the spirits manifested in the birds seen in *Two pheasants on a snow bank*. Using this work, ask students to describe what they *See* (that is extraordinary), *Think* (about what these birds might be saying to one another), *Wonder* (about what inspires awe or reverence), and *Feel* (about the ways in which these birds embody Shintō beliefs). Ask students to describe how the artist who created *Two Pheasants* expressed Shintō beliefs in their art.

Objective Two

Students will be able to explore the ways in which Edo artists skillfully depicted *kami* in their subject matter.

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Images	Crows – Unsigned Crows Detail #1
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Video	<i>Impressions of Nature: Bird Taking Flight</i>
Assigned Readings	Introduction to Crows Excerpts from <i>Gifts of the Crows</i> Excerpt from <i>The Genius of Birds</i> by Jennifer Ackerman (Page 141)

Take a look at the video of a bird taking flight and talk about the movement of birds. Explore *kami* in the natural world by looking into the spirits of animals using the *Crows* screen. Ask students to describe some of the personalities they see among the ninety crows. Then, have students select one crow for further investigation, pointing out several of the observations made about crows in this segment's Introduction and the excerpt from *Gifts of the Crows*.

Referring to *The Genius of Birds* (page 141), ask students to identify a specific type of call that might be associated with the bird they have chosen and explain why they feel that call matches the spirit of the bird as it was painted by the artist.

Objective Three

Students will be able to describe how artists use proportion and scale to create dramatic effects.

On [Google Slides Page 3](#)

Images	Nachi Waterfall by Nagasawa Rosetsu Crows – Unsigned
Video	Kami: Nachi Waterfall

Continue to explore the *kami* in the natural world by looking into the spirits of mountains, rocks, trees, and animals using the *Nachi Waterfall* scroll. Examine the painting to identify the subject matter and details through a close-looking activity, asking students what they see, think, wonder, and feel about this work of art.

Explain that Nachi has long been a pilgrimage site because of its connection to Shintō beliefs. Ask students to describe how the subject of this hanging scroll relates to the Shintō beliefs and traditions they read about in the assigned readings.

Show the video, highlighting the commentary that the traveler may be “overwhelmed” by their surroundings. Challenge students to consider why the artist might have made the traveler so small in relationship to their surroundings. Ask students to explain how this use of proportion and scale embodies Shintō beliefs.

Finish by examining both *Crows* and *Nachi Waterfall* in tandem, asking students to use visual evidence to describe how these artists manipulated proportion and scale to create dramatic effects.