

Depicting Birds and Animals

Birds

FEATURED ART

[*An eagle on a snow-laden blossoming plum tree by Soga Nichokuan*](#)



An eagle on a snow-laden blossoming plum tree by Soga Nichokuan

Objective One

Students will be able to decode the arrangement of symbols used in an artwork to tell a story.

Objective Two

Students will be able to compare the ways in which an artist can use various types of brushstrokes to depict the same animal in different ways

Objective Three

Students will be able to develop a persuasive argument based on visual evidence.

Assigned Readings for Teachers

1. [Introduction to Birds](#)
2. [Excerpts from Introduction to *The Genius of Birds* by Jennifer Ackerman](#)
3. [Introduction and bird illustrations in *Codex on the Flight of Birds* by Leonardo da Vinci](#)

LESSON PLAN

Objective One

Students will be able to decode the arrangement of symbols used in an artwork to tell a story.

On [Google Slides Page 1](#)

Image	An eagle on a snow-laden blossoming plum tree by Soga Nichokuan
Video	Objects We Love: An eagle on a snow-laden blossoming plum tree
Assigned Reading	Introduction to Birds
Worksheet	An eagle on a snow-laden blossoming plum tree

Print and cut *An eagle on a snow-laden blossoming plum tree* screen on the Worksheet PDF into six panels and distribute, challenging students to arrange the six panels to tell a story. Ask students to share the order they arranged the panels and the story they think is depicted.

List the objects students mention in the process of decoding this work, and explain how the sun, eagle, and plum tree are symbols of power and the seasons. Show the video with museum curator Kit Brooks to reveal the correct order of the screen panels and a more detailed description of how these key symbols are used.

Objective Two

Students will be able to compare the ways an artist can use different brushstrokes to depict the same animal in different ways.

On [Google Slides Page 2](#)

Images	An eagle on a snow-laden blossoming plum tree by Soga Nichokuan Eagle by Kishi Ganku Heron and willow by Hanabusa Itchō White Herons – Unsigned
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Compare the eagle on the screen painted by Soga Nichokuan to the hanging scroll by Kishi Ganku. Both show a predatory bird in profile, but their body language is quite different. Describe those differences, taking special note by zooming in on the paintings to analyze the

different types of lines and brushstrokes used by the artists, using the Detail Images found under the Art webpage.

Show students Hanabusa Itchō's *Heron and willow* next to *White Herons*. While both are hanging scrolls depicting the same type of bird, again both birds are quite different. Have students discuss in partners what those differences include.

Objective Three

Students will be able to develop a persuasive argument based on visual evidence.

On [Google Slides Page 3](#)

Image	Mynah birds in a plum tree by Yosa Buson
Assigned Reading	Introduction and bird illustrations in <i>Codex on the Flight of Birds</i> by Leonardo DaVinci

By examining the four works in the previous objective, students should have noticed the ways in which Edo artists emphasized the emotional expressiveness of their subjects while Western artists of the same time period often focused on the correct depiction of anatomy. Taking Buson's *Mynah birds in a plum tree* for example, analyze how the composition often simplifies certain lines and shapes while emphasizing details in other areas.

Compare this to some of the avian drawings rendered in DaVinci's *Codex on the Flight of Birds*. Ask students to choose which style they prefer—the one more focused on emotional expression or the more anatomically detailed depiction of the bird? Have students write a paragraph backing up their opinion, supported by visual evidence from the art in this lesson.

CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Science

In Objective One, refer to this segment's Introduction and compare the skills used by students in this activity to the processes they employ in investigating a question using the scientific method.