

Artistic Techniques

Tarashikomi—Wet on Wet Ink

FEATURED ART

[*Dragons and Clouds* by Tawaraya Sōtatsu](#)



Dragons and Clouds by Tawaraya Sōtatsu

Objective One

Students will be able to explain the challenges of painting with the *tarashikomi* method.

Objective Two

Students will be able to compare the techniques, formats, images, and text used in several works.

Objective Three

Students will be able to describe how the arrangement of objects within a composition impacts its story.

Recommended Readings for Teachers

1. [“The Basics: Background and Essence of Japanese Ink Painting” from *Japanese Ink Painting: The Art of Sumi-e* by Naomi Okamoto](#)
2. [Introduction to *Tarashikomi*](#)

LESSON PLAN

Objective One

Students will be able to explain the challenges of painting with the *tarashikomi* method.

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Image	Dragons and Clouds by Tawaraya Sōtatsu
Videos	Handcrafting Washi Paper Tarashikomi: Dragons and Clouds
Assigned Reading	Introduction to Tarashikomi

Introduce the technique of *tarashikomi*, watching the video *Tarashikomi: Dragons and Clouds* and noting the descriptions included in the lesson’s Introduction. Discuss several of the concepts presented by the video narrators: Why do they say “you can’t make mistakes” using this technique? In what ways does the artist show “careful composition” and “exacting execution” in this work?

Challenge the students to hypothesize whether the artist painted the clouds or the dragons first. Why? Ask students to explain why creating art like this screen would be even more challenging in the Edo period when making paper was much more labor intensive. Show students the video *Handcrafting Washi Paper*.

Objective Two

Students will be able to compare the techniques, formats, images, and text used in several works.

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Images	Peonies and Butterfly by Sakai Hōitsu Moon and Autumn Plants by Sakai Hōitsu The Ivy Way through Mt. Utsu by Sakai Hōitsu
Assigned Reading	“Formats and Techniques: How did Edo Period Japanese Live with Art?” by Brenda Jordan

Examine other examples of *tarashikomi* in *Peonies and Butterfly*, *Moon and Autumn Plants*, and *The Ivy Way through Mt. Utsu* by Hōitsu. Discuss the similarities and differences among these works, also highlighting the different formats, images, color, and the calligraphy. Using information from the “Formats and Techniques” reading, discuss how the format of these works

impacted their function. Ask students to identify which of these three works is most similar to Sōtatsu's *Dragons and Clouds* and describe the characteristics they share.

Return to the *Dragons and Clouds* screen in the first objective, noting that Sōtatsu did not inscribe any poetry. Ask students to imagine that if this work included a written text about the dragons, what might that story tell? Challenge students to be creative and write a series of text bubbles for the dragons, write a poem about the work, or create a story for this screen.

Objective Three

Students will be able to describe how the arrangement of objects within a composition impacts its story.

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Image	Dragons and Clouds by Tawaraya Sōtatsu
Assigned Readings	"The Basics: Background and Essence of Japanese Ink Painting" from Japanese Ink Painting: The Art of Sumi-e by Naomi Okamoto
Worksheets	Dragons and Clouds 1 Dragons and Clouds 2 Peonies and Butterfly and Moon and Autumn Plants The Ivy Way through Mt. Utsu

Read the excerpt from *Japanese Ink Painting* and help students focus on how the use of space, shades, and tone used in a work of art are vital to understanding the work. Provide each student with a sheet of white paper. Have students wet the paper with a paintbrush and then apply either one color of ink, watercolor, or water-soluble marker to the paper to redefine the space and create a variety of tones to create their version of *tarashikomi*. This creation will serve as a background for cutouts from the art in the Worksheets.

While their background pieces are drying, provide students with a worksheet copy of one of the four artworks to cut into independent objects, such as dragons, flowers, or characters. Ask students to imagine rearranging their cutouts into a new composition on their *tarashikomi* backgrounds to depict movement and define the space in a new way. When the backgrounds are dry, ask them to glue the cut-outs onto their *tarashikomi* background, or draw the objects onto the background paper if they chose not to print out the worksheets. Group students who chose cutouts from the same artwork and ask them to discuss how they reworked the art and how their interpretation changes the story of the artwork.