

“Snowy Scene” Lesson: Hiroshige Created by Art in Action



Meguro Drum Bridge and Sunset Hill, Hiroshige, 1857

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Artist Background: Ando Hiroshige



Ando Hiroshige (1797-1858)

- Ando Hiroshige was born in Edo, Japan (now Tokyo) under the name Ando Tokutaro. His father was a fire chief, and Hiroshige was also a fireman before becoming a professional artist. As a child, he liked to sketch.
- After his parents died when he was twelve, Hiroshige joined the painting school of Toyohiro Utagawa, a famous Japanese artist at the time. It was there that he adopted his artist name, Utagawa Hiroshige, after receiving a school license.
- Hiroshige was a painter and printmaker of the Ukiyo-e genre of art. These artists made woodblock prints of women, actors, and landscapes. The art of Ukiyo-e printmakers inspired many Western impressionists and post-impressionists, such as Monet and Van Gogh.
- At first, Hiroshige mainly designed prints of actors, beautiful women, and samurais. He then went on to create landscape prints, which are what he became famous for. He is best known for his series of prints depicting different areas of Japan, such as *Fifty-three Stages of the Tokaido*, *Famous Places in Kyoto*, and *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*.
- Hiroshige's style is minimalistic; he was fond of using simple lines and calm compositions to depict landscapes and everyday life in Japan. His prints often include misty skies, snow-covered mountains, fishing boats on the sea, and tranquil forests.
- Although Hiroshige loved to travel, he lived in Edo for his entire life. He died of cholera at the age of 62. During his lifetime, Hiroshige produced over 5,000 prints.

Art Discussion: *Meguro Drum Bridge and Sunset Hill*



Meguro Drum Bridge and Sunset Hill, Hiroshige, 1857

How did Hiroshige make this piece of art?

This is a woodblock print, which is made like a stamp. First, the artist draws a scene he would like to make into a print. Next, this design is carved into a block of wood. Colored ink is then painted onto the carving, and the wood is pressed onto paper to make a print. The carving can be reused over and over again; so one design can make many prints. Woodblock prints were a very popular type of Japanese art during Hiroshige's time.

What colors make this wintry scene feel cold?

Hiroshige used cool colors to give us the feeling of a chilly winter night. An icy blue is used to color the river, while a deep, dark blue fills the starry sky. Blue-grey shadows

are painted under the bridge and on the hillside. Frosty white is used to fill most of the snowy scene. Even the green and purple of the villagers' clothing are cool colors.

Where do repeating shapes and lines make patterns in this print?

Vertical lines make patterns throughout this scene. The fence posts, bridge railings, tiny blades of grass, and trees in the distance are all made with repeated vertical lines. The pattern of the tiny stars repeats in the texture on the bridge. These repeated patterns connect the different parts of the scene together.

Where did Hiroshige use curved lines in this print?

Curving lines move our eyes around the scene. The sloping hillside draws our attention from the top to the bottom of the picture, and the curve of the bridge moves us across the scene as our eyes follow the people. The curving line of the river pulls our attention into the snow-covered background.

What are the people doing in this scene?

Five villagers wearing hats and carrying umbrellas walk across the bridge towards the houses on the side of the scene. What could they be going to do? Their colored clothing against the white snow makes us notice them, but they are small in comparison to the nature that surrounds them. In this print, the people are not as important as the beautiful trees, snowy fields, and starlit sky.

Art Project: Snowy Watercolor Scene (30 minutes)

Materials:

- White watercolor paper
- Paintbrush
- Watercolor paint
- Water container
- White crayons or oil pastels



Instructions:

1. With the white crayon or oil pastel, draw a simple landscape on the white paper. Include hills, mountains, trees, rivers, or paths.
2. Add stars or snowflakes to your scene by drawing dots with your white crayon/pastel.
3. Use a dark watercolor wash to paint the sky and landscape. Use cool colors, such as blue, grey, and purple. Any areas with crayon or pastel will remain white.
4. Wait for the paint to dry, and then add additional layers of wash for more intense color.