

Bushido: Way of the Samurai

Golden Screens



Chokuo TAMURA
Hawks with pine and plum blossom
163.6 x 376.0 cm each

金屏風

Kin Byōbu Golden Screen – teacher's notes

Decorative folding screens known as *byōbu* (meaning 'protection from wind') developed from simple functionality into exquisitely decorative and artistically expressive objects of art that have become synonymous with Japanese culture and interior decor.

Historically, screens have been an integral part of Japanese architecture and daily life. Traditional buildings consisted of multipurpose interior spaces that increased or decreased in size with the use of flat sliding screens (*fusuma* or *shōji*) or free standing folding screens (*byōbu*). This provided ideal ventilation that could be regulated to suit the season and also allowed interior spaces to open onto adjoining gardens and integrate nature into daily life.

Byōbu are comprised of several individual panels made of layers of paper pasted on a wooden framework. The panels are joined together by paper hinges to make a concertina-style, freestanding screen. Light in weight, the folding screen is convenient to use since it is quick to set up and easy to fold to a portable size and store away when not in use.

The first recorded screens in Japan were gifts from the Korean kingdom of Silla in the seventh century. However, the distinctive Japanese style of screen we are familiar with today did not develop until much later during the Muromachi (1392– 1573) and Momoyama periods (1573–1600). This was a time when the power and wealth of ruling warrior classes grew and many lavish castles and villas were built throughout their feudal domains.

The interiors of these ostentatious residences were decorated to display the flamboyant life styles of the lords and nothing could better impress visitors and illuminate dark interiors than large screens painted in bright pigments and precious metal gildings of gold and silver leafing. These became known as *Kin byōbu* (golden screens).

Screens became essential furnishings in the residences of the rich and powerful. They could be arranged on special occasions behind an imperial dignitary, a religious priest, a birthday celebrant or other guests of honour to demarcate his or her status. They could be set up for ladies in waiting to sleep behind or for giving courtiers a measure of solitude during the night and then folded away along with bedding to make way for the next day's events. Screens would often be positioned at a person's deathbed with the painted sides turned outwards or the screen displayed upside down at the head of the deceased. Screens were often used to furnish the room where a birth was taking place. These would usually be decorated with special celebratory subject matter of pines, bamboo, cranes and tortoise, all symbols of long life. Screens were favoured gifts among the elite as well as premier items in a woman's dowry, along with lacquered vanity sets, writing sets, kimono and other items of daily use.

The painted styles of screens can be divided into two general categories: *Yamato-e*, Japanese style painting; *Kara-e*, referring to a style influenced by Chinese-style painting, the themes of which were commonly birds and flowers in a landscape of changing seasons.

The pair of screens *Hawks in a landscape with pine and plum blossom*, painted by Tamura Chokuo (active 1688-1704) depicts hawks the favourite birds of the military class with pine trees and blossoming plum tree. Symbolism is used to suggest meaning: the hawk symbolizes courage, power and strength; the ever-green pine, longevity; and the plum blossoms, the coming of spring and regeneration. Chinese influence is transformed into distinctly Japanese style with an emphasis on rich gold and flat surface decoration. The rich gold surface represents the mist and clouds which conceal the waterfall and river in indigo blue.

Middle years activity

きん

金びょうぶ Golden Folding Screens

1 Find the following information about this artwork.



1 だれ¹が かきました²か。

2 なに³で できています³か。

2 The following sentences are about the golden folding screen. Match the Japanese explanation to the English.

1 これは ^{きん}金びょうぶです。金いろの びょうぶです。

2 この 金びょうぶは ^{ろく}六まいの パネルで できています。

3 ^{じゅうなな}十七 せいきに つくられました。

4 この とりは ^{たか}タカです。タカは つよいです。

5 この ^き木は まつです。まつは ながく いきます。

- a) This bird is a hawk. Hawks are strong.
- b) This is a golden folding screen. A golden coloured folding screen.
- c) This tree is a pine. Pine trees live for a long time.
- d) This golden folding screen has six panels.
- e) This golden folding screen was made in the 17th century.

3 Label the name of the tree and the bird, in Japanese, on the picture of the screen above.

1 who
2 painted
3 is made of

Middle years activity



4 Complete the following sentences based on the above screen.

_____ が います。でも _____ が いません。

_____ や _____ が あります。でも _____
が ありません。

5 Imagine you are inside of the artwork. Circle the adjectives to describe how you would feel.

きれい さむい あつい しずか うるさい ひろい せまい

6 Match the following with its English word and what it symbolises.

たか タカ	plum	courage, power, strength
うめ	pine	longevity
まつ	hawk	the coming of spring and regeneration

7 Practise writing the following words. Are they written in *hiragana*, *katakana* or *kanji*?

タカ	タカ	タカ		<i>hiragana</i> <i>katakana</i> <i>kanji</i>
まつ	まつ	まつ		<i>hiragana</i> <i>katakana</i> <i>kanji</i>
金	金	金		<i>hiragana</i> <i>katakana</i> <i>kanji</i>

Junior years activity

きん 金びょうぶ Golden Folding Screens

1 Find the following information about this artwork.



1 だれ (name of the artist)

2 なに (what is made of)

2 What colours can you see on the screens? Colour the following boxes in the colour labelled.

Colour in	Colour in	Colour in	Colour in
みどり	ちゃいろ	くろ	きいろ

3 Practise writing the following words in Japanese. Can you spot them on the screen? Label them in Japanese.

	read	trace	write
hawk	た か	た か	
water	み ず	み ず	
tree	木	木	

4 Look at the title of this sheet, 金^{きん}びょうぶ. What does 金^{きん} mean? _____