In this lesson, students will be introduced to Japanese aesthetics by critically analyzing examples provided in the webinar as well as in supplemental materials. Teachers are encouraged to use components of the lesson that would best fit their classroom needs.

**Lesson Objectives:** Students will be able to:

- Define the Japanese concepts of aesthetics (i.e. ma, kata, shibui, wabi, sabi, etc.)
- Compare and draw-conclusions about beauty from various cultural perspectives

**Targeted Age Group:** Students in grades 9-12, with guidance grades 6-8

**Materials:**

Webinar: *Japanese Aesthetics, from Ma to Kata and Beyond*
Article: *Japanese Beauty (attached)*
Webinar Guide (attached)
Photos of beautiful things (optional)

**Lesson Plan**

1. **Entrance Task (Hook):** Have students brainstorm three things that are beautiful and define what makes those items beautiful. Alternatively, assign students to bring in photographs of beautiful things. Student responses on beauty should be collected and formulated to create a class definition of beauty. Inform students that they will be watching a webinar on the Japanese perspective of beauty.

2. **Webinar:** Watch webinar on *Japanese Aesthetics from Ma to Kata. While watching*, students should complete the second column on the webinar guide. Multiple examples are given for each concept. After the webinar, the class should complete the third column on the guide that requests them to find examples of each of the concepts in the classroom. For example, ma may be seen on a blank blackboard or smartboard.

*Lesson Continued on the Following Page...*
(3) Defining Shuibui: Multiple Draft Reading Strategy (Step 1) Have students read the article, *Japanese Beauty*, to gain an understanding on the concept. (Step 2) Have the students read the article again for a second time. To demonstrate their understanding students should write a 3-4 sentence summary defining shibui. *The teacher may wish to also address the fact that their understanding of the article increases with each reading to help students with their literacy skills.* (Step 3) Students should discuss their summary with a partner or small group. The group should agree upon a definition of shibui. (Step 4) Whole class discussion on the definition of shibui. Groups should share out their definitions and with collaboration, develop a class definition. Another alternative would be to create a t-chart listing the differences between Japanese definitions of beauty vs. American definitions of beauty.

Possible follow-up questions could be:

*Which example of the things that you thought were beautiful at the beginning of class, would best fit the definition of shibui? Explain why.*

*Do you like the concept of Japanese beauty? Why or why?*

*How a culture defines beauty, is a reflection of its cultural values? What does shibui, ma, kata or etc., say about Japanese culture?*

*Which one of the Japanese concepts (iki, wabi, sabi, shibui, kawai, ma, kata or yugen) do we find most in our American culture? Explain why.*

(4) Exit Task: (a) You may ask to students to reflect on any of the questions above in their journal or (b) choose a picture that the class thought was beautiful and ask how they would aesthetically make it more Japanese.

Optional Extensions and Follow-Up Activities:

- Students could write a short research paper on many of the cultural elements listed in the webinar, such as noh theatre or ikebana, and describe the components of Japanese aesthetics that they contain.
- Students could find (or create) a song or musical melody that exemplifies one of the Japanese concepts of beauty.
- Students and teachers could simulate a Japanese tea ceremony and note the cultural elements.
- Students could be asked to critically analyze photos of shrines and temples in Japan for their aesthetics.

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Japanese Aesthetics
From Ma to Kata and Beyond
Webinar Guide

Directions: During the webinar, examples of each of the concepts will be given. Write down at least one example given for each of the concepts in the webinar. After the webinar, the third column will be completed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Example in Webinar (during webinar)</th>
<th>Example in Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iki</td>
<td>chic, elegant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wabi</td>
<td>rustic, simplicity, quietness, the way things are in nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabi</td>
<td>beauty that comes with age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shibui</strong></td>
<td>simple, subtle details, unobtrusive beauty</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yugen</strong></td>
<td>whole is greater than the sum of its parts, power to evoke an idea rather than state it directly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kawai</strong></td>
<td>cute, sweet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ma</strong></td>
<td>empty space set off by something</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kata</strong></td>
<td>how you do something is as important as what you do</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Japanese Beauty

Too many people, a sunset, fireworks, a dress, a mountain scene, or even a well-made hamburger might be called beautiful. To the Japanese, each of these things would be beautiful in a different way. And they would use a different word to describe each kind of beauty.

To say that a thing is shibui is to praise its beauty in the highest terms. But the world can be used only for things that have more than beauty. It is a word that may have to do with shape or sound or color. The way a person speaks or moves, the way food looks or tastes, may be shibui. So might the feel of wood or stone beneath the fingers. Following are some of the tests that must be passed if something is to be called shibui.

(1) The thing in question must be simple. It must never be what some people call “busy.”
(2) It must have deep inner meaning. A great Chinese writer, Lao-tzu called this “the beauty of blackness.” He found it even in such things as the space within a teacup. Others might hear it in the after-sound of a drum or bell. A painter might sense it in the blank spaces of his painting. The part of a rock the artist has not carved might have shibui.
(3) It must be humble. That is, it should give no sense of pushing forward, of fighting for attention. The beauty is there, but it must be looked for. People who are not truly interested may never find it.
(4) It must have a kind of peace, or silence. Nothing loud or hurrying could ever be shibui.
(5) It must be natural. In a sense, it must seem to have been born, not made. It should just happen. The Japanese feel deeply about this. That is why the wood in their houses is often unfinished lumber. They don’t mind rust, if the rust just happens. Even rust might be shibui. But a coat of paint to keep the rust away would never be.
(6) It may be very commonplace. A tool or a teapot, if it passes the other tests, could certainly be shibui. Even the glow of health may be shibui.
(7) It should be not quite perfect, no quite square, or not quite straight. The Japanese like many things in a rough, coarse state. Dishes must be glazed to make them last longer and be more useful. But a place at the bottom of each dish may be left without glaze. That small rough place makes the dish much more to be admired. The most admired colors are not quite pure. They tend to run together, or be shaded. Even new things should not look new. New things are seldom shibui. Nothing slick or shiny could ever be shibui. There may be one bright spot against a dark background, however, just for contrast.
(8) One test is part of all the others. Does the thing in question have freedom? Does it have the freedom to leave something not quite said? To the Japanese, it is insulting to leave nothing to the imagination.

All of these things are part of what the Japanese mean when they say shibui.


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