

Curriculum Project: The Japanese Tea House

Introduction: This is a three-unit lesson plan that invites students to fully explore the physical elements and underlying aesthetics of a Japanese tea house. This can be introduced at different points in different courses.

- In a Japanese history course or Asian studies course, it can follow study of the Azuchi-Momoyama Period of Japanese history, as the style of Japanese tea house as studied here reached fruition during this time period.
- In a Japanese or Asian culture course, or a religious studies course, it can follow study of Zen Buddhism, as many of the concepts that underlie Zen are coded in the Japanese tea ceremony.

Guiding Question: *How does the design of our structures and spaces affect what we do and how we feel?*

DAY 1

Objectives: Students will be able to identify and explain the elements of a Japanese tea house.

Standards:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Key Terms:

- *chashitsu* – the tea house
- *daijime* – a partial straw mat
- *furo* – portable brazier
- *mizuya* – room for preparing tea and sweets for guests
- *nijiriguchi* – small doorway
- *ro* – sunken hearth
- *shoji* – sliding door or window made of paper
- *tatami* – straw mat
- *tokonoma* – alcove in which a scroll and/or floral display is placed

Warm-up/Activator: *Think of a room in a house. Besides walls, what other elements does this room have? Are any of those elements common to other rooms in the house? Are any of those elements unique to this particular room?*

Activity 1: Students will watch the video “Sen no Rikyu” (5:40) [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpE-XL0u5yl>]. (N.B.: Sen no Rikyu [1522-1591] is considered the father of classical Japanese tea ceremony. He advocated an aesthetic that deliberately avoided ostentatiousness in setting and materials; instead, he preferred the simple surrounding of a small hut and the use of flawed, imperfect materials to serve tea.)

Activity 2: Students will read pp. 62 and 63 of *Introduction to Japanese Architecture*. (See Attachment A.)

Task: Students will prepare a Google slide presentation illustrating a Japanese tea house. The presentation should comprise at least eleven slides and include a title slide, a bibliographic slide, and individual slides that both define and illustrate with images the following terms:

- *chashitsu*
- *daijime*
- *furo*
- *mizuya*
- *nijiriguchi*
- *ro*
- *shoji*
- *tatami*
- *tokonoma*

Further Resources:

- More information regarding elements of a Japanese tea house: <https://terebess.hu/tea/teakunyho.html>
- A tea house designed by Sen no Rikyu: <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/ealac/V3613/taian/index.html>

DAY 2

Objectives: Students will be able to identify and explain the elements of a Japanese tea house garden.

Standards:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Key Terms:

- *chumon* – gate that divides the outer garden from the inner garden
- *machiai* – waiting place
- *roji* – (lit. “dewy ground”) the garden outside the tea house
- *tsukubai* – rock basin

Warm-up/Activator: *Think of a yard you know well, or a park. What are the elements of this space? How is this space used? If you could add (or subtract) one element to make it better, what would it be?*

Activity 1: Students will watch the video “Tranquil Tea Garden, Kyoto, Japan” (5:52) [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEC49OihQ1E>] (N.B.: Video with French voiceover and English subtitles)

Activity 2: Students will read pp. 64 and 65 of *Introduction to Japanese Architecture*. (See Attachment B.)

Task: Using a large sheet of paper, either blank or graph paper, students will conceive and draw a floor plan of a Japanese tea house and its surrounding garden.

Further Resources: For suggestions on what a final product might look like, see Attachment C.

DAY 3

Objective: Students will be able to identify and explain the form and function of a Japanese tea house and garden.

Standards:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Key Terms:

- *chanoyu* – tea ceremony
- *matcha* – thick green tea
- *sabi* – in Japanese aesthetics, anything that connotes the beauty of age
- *sadō* – the preferred term for tea ceremony
- *sencha* – thin green tea used in daily life
- *wabi* – in Japanese aesthetics, anything that connotes rustic simplicity

Warm-up/Activator: *Think of two or three things you like to do at home. In which room do you most enjoy doing those activities? Could you do any of them just as well in another room, or are they specifically made for that one room?*

Activity 1: Students will watch “Japanese Tea House (Architectural Cinematography)” (3:30) [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0w2skH07oRw>]. Afterward, discuss reactions to the video. Some questions the teacher may want to ask the class:

- *What elements of a Japanese tea house and garden did you see?*
- *Was there anything in this video about a Japanese tea house that you hadn't considered previously?*
- *What was the overall feeling that the video of the tea house gave you?*

Activity 2: Students will read an extract from *The Book of Tea* (1906) by Okakura Kakuzo. The entire text, which is in the public domain, can be found here: <https://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/tea.htm>. (For the extract, see Attachment D.)

Task: Write a paragraph to answer the following prompt. Be sure to include a thesis statement.

- ***How does a Japanese tea house reflect certain aesthetics found in Japanese culture?***

Extension: Encourage students to organize their own tea ceremony. This could be as simple as trying green tea and Japanese snacks to a more elaborate affair in which students could plan a menu and demonstrate making tea.

Bibliography

Young, David, and Michiko Young. *Introduction to Japanese Architecture*. Hong Kong: Periplus, 2004.