

## **Creating Pillow Books for Artistic Inspiration**

Based on the original pillow book “Makura no sōshi” The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon  
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**Grade Level:** I will be using this lesson in grades 9 and 11, but it would be appropriate for grades 5 and up.

### **Objective and scope:**

Students will learn an appreciation of “Makura no sōshi” The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon through the creation of their own highly personal pillow book. Students will use the Pillow Book they create to generate ideas for art and writing. Students will ultimately chose a theme from the Pillow Book to create an original artwork which they may choose to also annotate with writing. Ultimately, students will reflect on how the Pillow Book activities helped them to create an original work of art, and they will discuss the role of listening to the original Pillow Book entries, and the act of creating their own, and what kind of contribution that made to their creative process.

### **Duration:** 18 weeks

Week 1: Introduction to the original Pillow Book, issue Compositions Books, make first entries.

- Introduction of the idea “*Mono no aware* – Considered a central aesthetic ideal of the Heian period. It reflected an awareness of the passing of beauty, conjoined with a deep sadness for the passing of natural human affairs, and represented an understanding of the mutability of all things.” Lynne Miyake

Weeks 2-10 Teacher will read and project examples from the Pillow Book. Students will make 2 entries per week. The activity will start the class for the first 15 minutes twice a week for nine weeks. The goal will be to make 20 total entries in class with 10 homework assignments for a total of 30 entries.

Week 11- Mine the student created Pillow Books for the most inspiring images- these discussions will go along with choosing a “Concentration Topic” for the AP Studio Art Portfolio. The students will each select an image that they want to work on as an original artwork.

Week 12-16 Create Artwork- Student’s propose ideas and work with teacher for an agreed upon concept, media and deadline.

Week 17/18 Student Group Critique, and Student’s will write a reflection on their incorporation of the Pillow Book into their artistic practice.

Week 18: Enter artworks into Scholastic Art competition.

### **Assessment:**

Students will submit the entries in the Pillow Book to the teacher at weeks 4, 9, and 17. Teacher will work with students in an ongoing basis to help them generate entries and grow in their capacity for list making and generating images. Students will be assessed on their full participation in the activities based on their individual capacity. Completion of the tasks, in the spirit of the directions, is the most important factor for the assessment.

Artwork. Common rubric for assessment of artwork as posted in art classrooms- We generally grade on completion, use of materials, technique, ambition, and overall quality. Our students have the opportunity to continue working on an artwork until they are satisfied with the score.

Self Reflection Activity: TBA

*I am currently waiting for my own copy of The Pillow Book to arrive in the mail, so I will be working with the text samples provided by Professor Lynne Miyake of Pomona College here in this lesson.*

**Narrative:**

The Pillow Book is a poet's store of imagery that might later be used in spontaneous poetry as needed socially. The book seems to be a holding place for the artist to gather and consider images. The author is thoughtful in teasing out the universal, and as you read the entries, you have a sense of knowing this kind of moment or image.

In order to enhance my students observations on the poetic features of their lives, I will have them create a pillow book as a resource for artistic or literary creativity. Each student will be issued a composition book, and the sole focus of that book will be list making and short writing.

We will begin the Pillow Book with the study of the writings of Shonagon- I will use the title of each of her chapters as the prompt for the daily entry. I will initially give the students copies of her writing, but as time progresses, I will project the writing and read it aloud to them as the prompt for their own daily entry.

Some of the Categories from The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon

Adorable Things

Hateful Things

Elegant Things

Seasons (In Spring it is the dawn)

I will be interspersing the original Pillow Book themes with some that I have used over time to spur the creation of original images.

Samples from the Pillow Book follow:

## 148. *Adorable Things*

(711) The face of a child drawn on a melon.

(712) A baby sparrow that comes hopping up when one imitates the squeak of a mouse; or again, when one has tied it with a thread round its leg and its parents bring insects or worms and pop them in its mouth—delightful!

(713) A baby of two or so is crawling rapidly along the ground. With his sharp eyes he catches sight of a tiny object and, picking it up with his pretty little fingers, takes it to show to a grown-up person.

A child, whose hair has been cut like a nun's, is examining something; the hair falls over his eyes, but instead of brushing it away he holds his head to the side. The pretty white cords of his trouser-skirt are tied round his shoulders, and this too is most adorable. (714)

A young Palace page, who is still quite small, walks by in ceremonial costume.

One picks up a pretty baby and holds him for a while in one's arms; while one is fondling him, he clings to one's neck and then falls asleep.

The objects used during the Display of Dolls. (715)

One picks up a tiny lotus leaf that is floating on a pond and examines it. Not only lotus leaves, but little hollyhock flowers, and indeed all small things, are most adorable.

An extremely plump baby, who is about a year old and has a lovely white skin, comes crawling towards one, dressed in a long gauze robe of violet with the sleeves tucked up.

A little boy of about eight who reads aloud from a book in his childish voice.

Pretty, white chicks who are still not fully fledged and look as if their clothes are too short for them; cheeping loudly, they follow one on their long legs, or walk close to the mother hen. (716)

Duck eggs. (717)

An urn containing the relics of some holy person.

Wild pinks.