

Cherry Blossoms 101

An activity of "Japan's Cherished Cherry Blossoms..."

Read "Japan's cherished cherry blossoms have a long and colourful history" (page 20–21, *What's Up* May 2023).

1) Complete the following passage with a suitable word for each blank.

Japan's cherry blossom season is a highly (a) _____ event every year. Many people look forward to the beautiful sight of these sakura flowers blooming all together. It is a big business, coinciding with peak travel season and (b) _____ millions of visitors to Japan. Over the centuries, different (c) _____ of cherry blossom trees have been cross-bred to produce new types with (d) _____ that people liked, such as large petals, fragrance, and fast growth. The cherry blossom that draws (e) _____ of admirers today is known as the "somei-yoshino". It makes up 90 per cent of all the sakura trees (f) _____ in Japan. There is a darker side to the cherry blossoms. During World War 2, the Japanese government used the symbolic power of the sakura to (g) _____ young men to sign up as kamikaze pilots. Their units were often named after or (h) _____ with cherry blossoms. The sakura became a (i) _____ of death on the battlefield, with soldiers' deaths being likened to the falling of cherry blossom petals. On the other hand, cherry blossoms are also offered as symbols of peace and international cooperation, as demonstrated by Japan's (j) _____ of 3,000 cherry blossom trees to the United States in 1912.

2) Challenge: paint a cherry blossom in 5 minutes! You will need straws and paint for this activity. (You can use the natural paints you collected from plants earlier.) Watch the following video to learn how.

Special straw painting technique / How to paint a cherry blossom tree easy

➤ <https://youtu.be/LZStGG-Rdkc> (Jay Lee Painting, 10 September 2019)


3) Here are some other ways artists have depicted cherry blossoms. However, these techniques take a great deal more time.

Ukiyo-e (or Japanese woodblock printing) is a technique used to create prints and paintings. It was popular in the 17th to 19th centuries. It involves drawing a design on washi, a thin durable type of paper, gluing it to a block of wood, carving it using the design as a guide, inking the carved block, and then pressing paper on it to create a print. This process involves applying paint to multiple blocks, which are aligned and printed on top of each other to create a final image. The process of Japanese woodblock printing takes time and skill. Depending on the number of colours used and complexity of the design, it can take weeks or even months to create one single print.

a) Let's look at some cherry blossom prints, in the style of ukiyo-e.

	
<p>Cherry Blossoms, by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858) ➤ sc141923.jpg (2000×1300) (ukiyo-e.org)</p>	<p>Bullfinch and Weeping Cherry, by Hokusai (1760-1849) ➤ 044r81f.jpg (513×700) (fujiarts.com)</p>

b) Now, let's look at the painting Almond Blossoms by Vincent Van Gogh.

	<p>You can learn more about it here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/art-and-stories/stories/all-stories/5-things-you-need-to-know-about-van-goghs-almond-blossom • What did Van Gogh learn from Japanese prints? ➤ https://youtu.be/boxylJrNxRg Van Gogh Museum, 30 March 2018)
---	--

3c) From your observations of the paintings and your reading, how do you think Van Gogh was influenced by Japanese prints? What are some similarities you can find in Van Gogh's painting and the ukiyo-e prints? Share your responses with a friend.