

Exploring Aesthetics of Tea

Lesson Plan: Exploring the Aesthetics of Tea

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Exploring the Aesthetics of Tea: Exploring Tea Concepts and Discovering Them in Everyday Life

Target Audience:

Undergraduate students (but could easily be adjusted for junior/senior high school)

Duration:

Three 30- or 45-minute blocks over the course of three separate 50-60 minute lessons.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand one (or more) aesthetic concept(s) connected to the Way of Tea.
- Recognize the aesthetic in the course of everyday life.
- Explain the connection between the abstract concept and the everyday example.

**This lesson plan uses the idea of "restraint" as an example. Lesson plans on other aesthetic concepts (such as "rusticity," "silence," or "cold and withered") could be developed in a similar way.*

Potential Courses to Include this Lesson in:

- Art History & Aesthetics courses
- Japanese Culture courses
- Modern Life and Living courses

Assigned Materials:

- Reading material which articulates a particular aesthetic concept.

Example: Sen Sōshitsu XV. "Restraint." In *Tea Life, Tea Mind*, 78–79. New York: Weatherhill, 1979.

- Examples (visual, audio, tactile, taste) of that aesthetic concept.

Example: Examples stated in the "Restraint" essay:

- Images of Ise Shrine, Taian teahouse, Hasegawa Tōhaku's pine screen, Ikkyū Sōjun's calligraphy, simple tea flowers in the alcove
- Videos of Noh drama
- Audio of shakuhachi or biwa music
- Text of a haiku
- The famous anecdote of Sen no Rikyū's morning glory event for Toyotomi Hideyoshi

Activity/Procedure and Discussion Questions:

Class One: In a darkened room, with little or no preface, the instructor exposes students to 3–5 examples of the aesthetic (audio, visual, readings, etc.). The examples may be gathered by the instructor or come from the reading assignment. The instructor asks students to express and record the thoughts or feelings, if any, the examples evoke.

Homework: Students are assigned reading material which presents (or explains or analyzes) the aesthetic concept.

1. Read the material.
2. Write a 2–3 sentence explanation of the essence of the aesthetic. This should be in the students' own words, using only the examples and the provided reading material. Students should not google the concept.

Discussion Questions:

1. What thoughts come to mind or what feelings arise when you are exposed to each example?
2. Can you articulate why?
 1. How do reactions to these many examples differ among peers?
 2. Can you articulate why you think reactions may differ?

Class Two: The teacher asks students to share their explanations of the concept; the explanations could be shared on a monitor or in a shared document (Google document). The instructor re-shares the previous 3–5 examples of the aesthetic, giving students context for each example as necessary or helpful. Then, the instructor gives 2–3 additional examples. Students are asked to make connections between the examples shown, the reading, or their explanations of the essence of the aesthetic. Students should have time to re-evaluate their explanations of the concept or the class can create one, general explanation together.

Homework:

1. Search for a single, powerful example of the aesthetic in everyday life. It could be an object, image, audio/video file, etc.
2. Prepare a short presentation file of it to share with classmates.
3. Write a short explanation of how the example satisfies the explanation of the concept.

Optional: Look for examples which they consider to be the polar opposite of the aesthetic.

Discussion Questions:

Consider the reading, the examples given by the instructor, and the 2–3 sentence explanations from students.

1. Is it possible to create one, relatively complete expression (in language or otherwise) of the essence of the aesthetic concept for the class? If so, what would it be? If not, why not?

Class Three: Students present their examples in class to garner reactions from peers. Each student writes a short explanation of which two examples brought to class (not including their own example) seem to best fit the essence of the concept for them.

Optional: Students could anonymously rank the top 3–5 examples which they feel best suit the aesthetic.

Discussion Questions:

(Questions regarding examples students found.)

1. What thoughts come to mind or what feelings arise when you are exposed to each example?
 1. Can you articulate why?
2. How do reactions to these many examples differ among peers?
 1. Can you articulate why you think reactions may differ?

General, Closing Questions:

1. How do you personally respond to this aesthetic? Does it appeal to you or not? Elaborate.

2. Considering what you know about Chanoyu, why do you suppose this aesthetic is considered a fitting aesthetic for Chanoyu?

Optional: Each aesthetic concept (and its associated reading) will have its own interesting questions. For example, in the essay on "restraint," the author says that there is expression in what is not being expressed. It could be interesting to ask, "What do you think is being expressed through the restraint of expression or the non-expression of Hasegawa Tōhaku's pines/the silences in the shakuhachi music, etc?"

Evaluation:

- Evaluate the degree of thoughtful participation in discussions.
- Evaluate whether the students have made a careful completion of most or all steps.
- Evaluate the single example and thoughtfulness and clarity of the explanation provided by each student in Class Three.

Background Information for Lesson/Historical Context for Instructors:

"Hasegawa Tōhaku." *Britannica Online*. Last Update: January 1, 2025.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hasegawa-Tohaku>

Ise Jingu website (in Japanese, with many images).

<https://www.isejingu.or.jp/>

"Ikkyū Sōjun." *ZEN MESTEREK ZEN MASTERS*.

<https://terebess.hu/zen/mesterek/ikkyu.html>

Other Sources/References:

For Biwa/Shakuhachi music: "Traditional Music Digital Library." *Senzoku Online School, Senzoku Gakuen College of Music*:

<https://www.senzoku-online.jp/TMDL/e/index.html>

For Noh video: "Noh performance 'TOMOE' by Mikata Shizuka with English Subtitles." Posted November 21, 2021, by NOH SOCIETY. YouTube, 56 min., 46 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVARAMARvk8>