

# Activity Plan

<i>Title</i>	<b>Noh Theatre: Exploring a Japanese Art Form</b>
<i>Subject</i>	Theatre: Responding
<i>Author</i>	ArtsEdge: <b>Nancy Jean Traubitz</b> <i>Original Writer</i> <b>Daniella Garran</b> <i>Original Writer</i>
<i>Grade level</i>	Grades 9-12
<i>Time duration</i>	60-120 mins
<i>Overview</i>	<b>In this lesson, students study the art of the Japanese Noh theater and act out a Noh play. In learning about the history, theatrical elements, music and dance, and costuming, they are also comparing and contrasting these to the other theater elements they have studied involving Greek, Elizabethan and Modern Theater. Students will be assigned or allowed to choose essay questions that they will need to research and answer. They will prepare a handout for the class on the topic, and present their findings topic to the class</b>
<i>Objective</i>	Students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Define Noh drama.</li><li>• Place Noh drama in its historical context.</li><li>• Investigate the conventions of Noh drama.</li><li>• Compare Noh drama with western drama.</li><li>• Investigate Noh drama as presented today.</li><li>• Trace the influence of Japanese theater on modern western drama, specifically William Butler Yeats and Thornton Wilder.</li></ul>
<i>Materials</i>	<b>Materials</b> <b>Resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Printable</b></li><li>• <b><a href="#">Research Topics - Noh Project Topics</a></b></li></ul>

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*Activities and procedures*

- Slideshow
- [Noh Theater](#)

Required Technology

- 1 Computer per Learner
- Projector

Technology Notes

Internet Access is needed

**ENGAGE**

1. Begin by having students brainstorm the essential elements of Greek, Elizabethan and Modern drama. The [Collection of Ancient Greek Theater](#) is very informative. If students have not studied Greek Theater this Web site will give them an overall perspective and then they can begin the lesson by brainstorming the essential elements. The same with the elements for Elizabethan and Modern drama.

Brainstorming the elements of the three types of theater mentioned above is basically a refresher activity.

2. Keep notes on chart paper, and keep charts up for future reference with the lesson.

**BUILD KNOWLEDGE**

1. Have students look at the [picture gallery](#) of a traditional Noh stage and theater in Japan located within the Resource Carousel. Students should be aware of the following terms related to seating: Shoumen (front seat), Waki-Shoumen (side seat), and Nak-Shoumen (diagonal seat).

2. Have students create a list of similar and different elements of stages for Greek, Elizabethan and Modern theater. Review the various historical points related to Noh theater. Noh is thought to have started in small villages during Medieval times. Kan'ami (1333-1384) and his son Zeami (1363-1443) are considered the fathers of this art form. It has evolved through the years but still remains true to its connection with Shinto rituals, oral storytelling, and combining a Kyogen play in the middle of the Noh play for some comic relief.

3. Discuss various other aspects of the Noh production that are extremely important. [Masks](#) and music are important elements of a Noh drama.

**APPLY**

1. After watching and discussing the examples, have students choose parts from the play *Black Tomb (Kurozuka)*. The complete libretto is available at Emory University's [Noh Theater](#) Web site. Complete a group reading before having students go on to their individual

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assignments. Stop at various points during the read-through to discuss how the play might be presented on a Noh stage.

2. Have students carefully review the topics below and jot down ideas or information they feel they could use as a starting point. This will help them narrow down their choices. In preparing the project, students may work alone or with up to three other members of the class. If they find other subject areas that they want to write on, tell them to formulate their topic idea/question and submit it to you.

#### Project Topics

*Note: Distribute the [Research Guide](#) handout located within the Resource Carousel, listing the following project topics.*

1. Noh drama grew out of religious rituals, achieving its distinctive form about the fourteenth century. Explore the historical and political reasons why and when it developed when it did. Relate Noh drama to any parallel developments you note in European medieval drama.
2. Noh was performed outside by all-male acting companies. Relate the performance of Noh to what you know about the Greek and Elizabethan theaters.
3. Noh is poetic drama. The lines are chanted, sometimes by a chorus when the protagonist is dancing. Musicians are an essential part of the performance. Compare Noh theatre with opera.
4. Noh is performed in elaborate traditional costumes. Most of the roles require the main character to wear a mask. Study the use of masks in drama. Why are masks used? Relate Noh to Greek drama and to the court masques of Europe. Give some thought to the use of heavy makeup as a substitute for masks in Kabuki and in ballet. Finally, consider the use of hand props, especially the fan, in Noh.
5. Ritual movement is very important in Noh. Compare the dance movements in Noh to those in ballet. Examine the movements of the musicians in relation to their actual playing. Also, consider the movements of the other helpers on stage.
6. The set for a Noh play is always the same. Describe this set as it is still used today. What reasons — historical, religious, symbolic, theatrical — can you identify for such a set?
7. Noh plays have only two major characters, the shite and the waki. Describe their roles. Investigate why the number of characters is so limited. Try to place this convention in the aesthetic of haiku, ikebana, sumi-e painting.
8. Noh dramas are divided into five categories based on their subject matter. In performance they are always presented with

	<p>a second type of play called Kyogen. Explain how Noh and Kyogen are both alike and different. Discuss how a Noh performance is structured, giving examples of the categories of Noh and the specific Kyogen performed.</p> <p>3. Inform students that after researching their subjects they are responsible for writing information sheets for distribution to classmates. They are responsible for five-minute presentations on their topics as well. They may create anything that showcases the material included in the information sheets.</p>
<p><i>Conclusions</i></p>	<p><b>REFLECT</b></p> <p>Students present their research to the class. Other class members should think of questions and feedback for the presenting group.</p> <p><b>ASSESSMENT</b></p> <p>Have students submit the research summary for a composition grade. They should receive a letter grade on both the information sheet and five-minute presentation.</p>
<p><i>Adaptations</i></p>	<p><b>Extend the Learning</b></p> <p>Students may attempt to stage <i>Black Tomb (Kurozuka)</i>, the Noh play that they read at the beginning of the lesson. The complete libretto is at the <a href="#">Emory University's Noh Theater</a> Web site for your use.</p> <p>You may wish to have students conduct further study of other forms of Japanese theater, especially Bunraku and Kabuki. The EdSITEment lesson <a href="#">Hamlet Meets Chushingura: Traditions of the Revenge Tragedy</a> explores similarities and differences between cultures by comparing Shakespearean and Bunraku/Kabuki dramas.</p>
<p><i>Links and Websites</i></p>	<p><b>Teacher Background</b></p> <p>Teachers should familiarize themselves with the Japanese tradition of Noh theater by using the following sources:</p> <p><b>Print:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chiba, Reiko, Ed. <i>Painted Fans of Japan: 15 Noh Dramas</i> Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1962.</li> <li>• Keene, Donald, Ed. <i>Noh, The Classical Theater of Japan</i>. New York, NY: Harper &amp; Row, 1973.</li> <li>• Keene, Donald, Ed. <i>Twenty Plays of the Noh Theater</i>. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.</li> <li>• Komparu, Nobutaka. <i>Takigi Noh</i>. Tokyo Graphic-sha Publishing, 1987.</li> </ul>

- "Kabuki-The Classic Theater of Japan/Noh Drama/Bunraku-Puppet Theater of Japan," videotape no. 22 available from the Japan Information and Culture Center, 917 19th Street, N.W., Washington D.C.
- Maruoka, Daiji and Tatsuo Yoshikosh. *Noh*. Japan: Hoikusha Color Books Series, No. 15, 1969.
- Rimer, J. Thomas. "Japanese drama offers Westerners new visions'," *MARJIS Update* (fall 1987) 1-2.
- Rimer, J. Thomas and Yamazaki Masakasu. *On the Art of the Noh Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Waley, Arthur. *The Noh Plays of Japan*. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1921.
- Yoshikami, M. K. *Noh and Kyogen*(program for Japan Festival, April 1987).
- *"Theatre East and West" 1989-1992, A Comparative Drama Program*, edited by Adele Seeff, Center for Renaissance and Baroque Studies, University of Maryland.

This Noh drama lesson may be used alone or with parallel investigations of Bunraku (puppet theater) and Kabuki theater. Noh drama is the oldest of the three forms, and as such, provides a good starting point for a study of Japanese theater. For an overview of the theatrical form visit the [Traditional Performing Arts of Ishikawa Japan](#) site.

#### Prior Student Knowledge

Students should be familiar with the location of Japan. This lesson assumes that students have already studied various theatrical forms in class. Students should be familiar with the conventions of the Greek, Elizabethan, and Modern Theater. They will bring this background to the study of Noh. Students should also read one or more of the following in preparation for this lesson: Thornton Wilder's essay "A Platform and a Passion or Two," *Our Town*, and a Noh play by Yeats, such as *At the Hawk's Well*. Portions from these plays and readings will prove valuable for comparison and discussion.