

Editor's Letter

Thoughts of all things Japanese occupy my mind ever since I returned from three weeks in Japan this past summer as a participant in the Japan Fulbright Memorial Fund Teacher Program. Everything reminds me of Japan: my current student-teacher went to Japan last summer; I have students who are of Japanese heritage who also visited Japan during the summer; and I am in the midst of planning a Japanese festival for my school in early spring.

Since I am also developing and teaching lessons based on Japanese art and culture, I have been reflecting on the similarities and differences between Japanese and Western aesthetics. Aesthetics is one of eight universal cultural concepts called human commonalities by educator Ernest Boyer, who stated that we all “respond to the aesthetic”—to that which we find “beautiful.”

Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with concepts of value and beauty as they relate to the arts. Alexander Baumgarten, a German philosopher, first used the word aesthetics in 1744 to mean the “science of the beautiful.” Today, aesthetics is generally approached more comprehensively. In addition to “big” ideas about the nature of beauty, art philosophers attempt to understand the nature of art in a broader context.

Bringing aesthetic issues into the classroom helps students think critically, express opinions through reasoned judgments, and understand art better. Aesthetics can add a valuable dimension to the learning that occurs in the classrooms of teachers confident in their abilities to lead meaningful discussions.

In this issue of *SchoolArts*, we offer a number of articles based on Japanese and other Asian arts from cultures that offer expressions of beauty that differ from Western culture. For example, Japan aesthetics find expression through the simple beauty and harmony of nature, from the careful design of gardens, to the proportions of a scroll painting, to the measured movements of the tea ceremony, and even to the presentation of food.

Our hope is that you will enjoy and be inspired by this month's ideas and lessons. You, too, may soon find all things Japanese on your mind.

Nancy Walkup

Two of Nancy's students, Lilia and Karissa, posed in traditional kimono on a visit back to Tokyo.



At a celebratory meal near the end of our JFMF experience, we were dressed by our Japanese hosts in traditional Japanese kimono.

