



**TITLE:** *Scene From a Nō Play*  
(Death Rock)

**ARTIST:** Tsukioka Kōgyo

**DATE:** 1898

**SIZE:** 9 ¼ x 13 ¾ inches

**MEDIUM:** Ukiyo-e woodblock print

**ACQUISITION #:** 70.49

**ADDITIONAL WORKS BY ARTIST IN COLLECTION:** YES ☒ NO ☐



**MoFA**  
Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts

### Artist Biography

Tsukioka Kōgyo was born as Hanyu Sadanosuke on April 18th, 1869; he died February 25, 1927 at the age of 57. Kogyo was a well-known Japanese ukiyo-e artist of the Meiji Period (1868-1912). As a teenager, he became a student and adopted son of Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (his mother married Yoshitoshi) from whom he learned the fundamentals of painting. He took his stepfather's name Tsukioka. Later, Kogyo studied under Ogata Gekko, well known Japanese painter and printmaker; Gekko gave Tsukioka the name Kogyo. Kogyo became interested in nō theatre from his stepfather who was also fascinated with nō. In the 1890s Kogyo used his knowledge of print design to create three major series of prints related to the nō theatre. Over the span of his life Kogyo produced over a dozen nō paintings. He created five sets of prints inclusive of approximately 700 individual prints. He created other individual prints of nō and kyōgen subjects, as well as over one hundred illustrations of nō and kyōgen plays for Japan's first graphic magazine, *Fuzoku gaho*.

### Nō Plays and Kogyo's Nōgaku zue

Nō plays come in five categories concerned with gods, warriors, women, contemporary themes, and supernatural beings. Plays chosen by Kogyo often deal with the connections between spirits and humans. Originally, nō drama was a very stylized type of dance-drama that was performed before nobility and their families. However, by the late 19th century the Meiji Restoration (1868-1889) allowed for the drama to become more accessible. Due to nō being so closely associated with the overthrown shogunate (shogun, or warrior led government), the art form was almost lost forever.

Kogyo's five-volume print series, *Nōgaku zue* played a significant role in keeping the tradition of nō and kyōgen theater alive. Published between 1897 and 1903, the fourth volume contains the *Death Rock* print. The series was carefully designed and constructed using refined materials that appealed to nō collectors. Each print could be examined and read carefully as each print contains "poetic quotations" or text, intended to help the reader reexperience the performance.

### Death Rock

This print is a scene from the nō play *Sesshoseki*, *Death Rock*, in which the fox spirit emerges from the "translated death rock." Genno, a priest traveled to a place called Nasuno, the location of a large rock. He witnessed a bird falling dead when it flew over the rock. He was warned by a local woman about going near the rock, which she identified as the "death rock," because it contained the evil spirit of a golden-haired fox that killed any living thing that came near. The woman explained that the spirit was chased out of the palace for trying to kill the emperor, and hid itself in the "death rock." Genno prays for the spirit, the spirit exits the rock, confesses to all the killings, and promises to cease his murderous ways.

### Statement about the Artist: Kogyo's Daughter

Kogyo had a daughter named Fumio who became known as the artist Tsukioka Gyokusei (1908-1994). She took over the Tsukioka school after Kogyo's death in 1927. She describes her father's work habits:

*"I remember beginning at the age of fifteen going to the Kanze nō stage at Omigari in Tokyo with my father. Before the play began, father would sketch the stage, beginning with the hashigakari. People around him were amazed at the speed and facility with which he drew.... When father was absorbed with a painting, he worked with a fierce look on his face, and I knew not to enter his studio."*

### References:

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[www.myjapanesehanga.com/home/artists/tsukioka-kogyo-1869-1927](http://www.myjapanesehanga.com/home/artists/tsukioka-kogyo-1869-1927)  
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### Vocabulary

**Japanese nō:** perfected during the Muromachi period (1336-1568), the term means "skill" or "ability." It is a lyrical, traditional Japanese theater that draws its materials from many sources and its form from rituals and folk dances.

**Ukiyo-e:** the term means "pictures of the floating world." It is a genre of art in Japan that focused on momentary pleasures and flourished from the 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**Hashigakari:** a bridgeway that connects the main stage to the mirror room.

**Meiji Restoration:** an event of change that restored practical imperial rule to Japan in 1868 under Emperor Meiji.

## NŌ PLAY PICTURE BOOK

### ACTIVITY LESSON PLAN: K-5

**Session Activity:** Tsukioka Kogyo did many nō play woodblock prints. Kogyo drew certain scenes from each play that he observed, bringing them to life in his prints. He gave little visual descriptions of what was taking place in the scenes, and when several scenes of one play came together they created a picture book of a play. Students will be told a nō play story and create illustrations for their own picture book of the play.

**Materials:** paper (8x10in), pencils, color pencils, markers, staples,

link to nō stories <http://www.the-noh.com/en/plays/index.html>,

link to nō performances <http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/unesco/noh/en/>,

link to prints of nō plays by Tsukioka Kogyo <https://www.artelino.com/articles/noh-plays.asp>

**Activity Procedure:** Explain to students what a nō play is and show them images of Kogyo's prints. Students will then listen to a summary of a nō play chosen by the teacher (2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> graders will receive their own copies in a format suitable for their grade levels). Students will then choose several scenes to illustrate. They will staple the papers together to create picture books. The teacher can then decide to scan the images produced by the students (or photograph them), and put them into a powerpoint to retell the story using their images.

**Objective:** Students will understand that stories come to life by transitioning them from the mind to paper through illustration.

#### Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: K-5

Strand: Skills, Techniques, and Processes

Enduring Understanding: Through purposeful practice, artists learn to manage, master, and refine simple, then complex, skills and techniques.

Standard 3 #1: Use materials, tools, and processes to achieve an intended result in two- and/or three-dimensional artworks.

(VA.3.S.3.1)

#### Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: 9-12

Strand: Historical and Global Connections

Enduring Understanding: Through study in the arts, we learn about and honor others and the worlds in which they live(d).

Standard 1 #4: Apply background knowledge and personal interpretation to discuss cross-cultural connections among various artworks and the individuals, groups, cultures, events, and or traditions they reflect. (VA.912. H.1.4)

## Connecting Cultures

### ACTIVITY LESSON PLAN 6-12

**Session Activity:** Nō theater and literature is a big part of Japanese history and gives foreign audiences glimpses of Japanese culture and thought through actual performance as well as through woodblock prints. In the US, there are varieties of artworks and theatrical performances that give foreign audiences a glimpse of North American culture and thought. Students will research and create power-point presentations that compare and contrast Japanese culture with US culture, to show differences and similarities between the cultures and their thinking as well as the way they may have influenced each other.

**Materials:** Computer, power-point program,

link to Nō Traditional Theater <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2091.html>

link to history of American Theater <http://www.stagebeauty.net/th-frames.html?http&&www.stagebeauty.net/th-ushist.html>

**Activity Procedure:** The teacher will give students brief information about Japanese nō plays and Japanese woodblock prints with nō subject matter and the role of these artforms in society during the Meiji Period. To guide students in their explorations, questions will be given that will further facilitate them in their power-point presentations. The presentations should focus on comparing and contrasting one Japanese play to one American production. Students will see the values taught and the ideas conveyed through the theatrical performances in both Japanese and American culture. Students will differentiate American and Japanese theater to see what draws tourists and viewers in general into their productions. Students will also see the way Japanese culture has affected American society and has become a big part of American entertainment. Example questions for the power-point might be:

- During what time period did the play debut? What was happening in society at that time?
- *The Teahouse of the August Moon* was an American production influenced by Japanese culture. Though today an analysis of the play shows the flaws in its depiction of Japanese culture.

**Objectives:**

- Students will analyze the way art can reflect and influence the structure or understanding of a society.
- Students will discover and discuss the way cultures are being represented through plays.



Nō performance at the Sado Nō Village