

The Sound of One Hand: Paintings and Calligraphy by Zen Master Hakuin **Introduction for Educators**

Words in bold can be found in the Glossary

The Sound of One Hand: Paintings and Calligraphy by Zen Master Hakuin features 69 scroll paintings by Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768) and nine by his major pupils.

The exhibition explores biographical influences in Hakuin’s painting and calligraphy and the dominant themes and subjects he chose. The range of work on display traces Hakuin’s stylistic development from the delicate linear works of his early period to more vigorous examples from the final two decades of his life.

Most of the paintings on view in this exhibition were given to lay followers as gestures of encouragement or to fellow practitioners in recognition of spiritual advancement. Others works were probably given to monks from other temples who admired Hakuin’s Zen teachings.

Highly effective as teaching tools, Hakuin’s paintings often helped guide and instruct monks and lay followers in their pursuit of understanding Zen Buddhist teachings. Like Christian parables, or collected folk wisdom like *Aesop’s Fables*, these narrative paintings with inscriptions were meant to prompt viewers to contemplate the meanings therein and provide insights into their own spiritual lives.

Themes in *The Sound of One Hand* include: **Zen Buddhism**, Japanese religion, art history, Chinese history, folklore, calligraphy and human values—compassion, friendship, tolerance and kindness.

Use the image gallery and suggested questions to prepare your students for a visit to *The Sound of One Hand* or as post-visit follow-up.

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HAKUIN

Hakuin Ekaku was one of the greatest Zen Buddhist teachers of all time. A revered figure in Buddhist history, Hakuin nearly singlehandedly revitalized the tradition of Japanese **Rinzai Zen** Buddhism in his own lifetime. Surprisingly, he accomplished this amazing feat while serving as an abbot of a modest, rural monastery. A staunch critic of many of his contemporaries’ methods, particularly those who supported “silent meditation” or *nembutsu* (recita-

tion of the Buddha’s name), Hakuin advocated a return to Zen training methods practiced in China during the Sung Dynasty (960–1279). He promoted rigorous **koan** practice as the path to true enlightenment. The legacy of Hakuin’s teachings continues to the present day with his monastic lineages representing the Rinzai Zen practiced in Japan since the mid-18th century.

A native of a small farming village near the base of Mount Fuji, Hakuin spent the majority of his life in his hometown. His interest in spiritual matters began in early childhood and by age 15 he had begun formal training at the local Zen temple, Shōin-ji. Not long after, he began a pilgrimage seeking the teachings of Zen masters around the country. During a brief period of disillusionment with religious life at age 24, he put aside his Zen studies and took up composing poems in Chinese, calligraphy and painting. His knowledge of the arts and facility with a brush later proved to enrich his pedagogy and enabled him to explicate Zen concepts for a broad range of people from all walks of life and social strata, including the illiterate.

In middle age, Hakuin’s reputation as a sage attracted followers from far and wide who flocked to hear his teachings. Overwhelming the resources of his small temple, the pilgrims settled locally in small enclaves surrounding the temple, creating a de facto grassroots Zen community.

Truly a man of the people and a skillful speaker, Hakuin adapted his talks to meet the needs of his audiences. When attending to lay people, Hakuin introduced popular and folk themes in his paintings and used colloquial language in the inscriptions. He also often used humor and local references to make Zen messages accessible to them. With monks he recounted lessons learned from his own experiences and those of other Zen masters.

His insistence on “post-enlightenment” training (continued in-depth *koan* work and intense meditation following **kenshō**—a first breakthrough experience) demonstrated his belief in the obligation to use one’s own enlightenment to guide future students.

BOOKS FOR STUDENTS

Demi. *Buddha*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1996.

A book for upper-elementary-age children with lush illustrations and clear language covering the major events in the life of Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 BCE), the man who would become the Buddha.

Hewitt, Catherine. *Buddhism*. New York: Raintree Steck-Vaughn, 1995.

An engaging survey of Buddhism including clearly organized topical discussions and relevant photographs. Suggested for upper elementary, middle and younger high school students.

BOOKS FOR EDUCATORS

Seo, Audrey Yoshiko and Addiss, Stephen. *The Sound of One Hand: Paintings and Calligraphy by Zen Master Hakuin*. Boston: Shambala, 2010.

Catalogue of the Japan Society exhibition; an in-depth examination of the biographical influences in Hakuin's painting and calligraphy and the themes of his life's work.

Brinker, Helmut. *Zen in the Art of Painting*. New York: Penguin, 1988.

Discussion by one of the foremost Western scholars on the topic of the relationship between painting in China and Japan within the context of Zen Buddhism.

deBary, William Theodore. *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China & Japan*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

A comprehensive discussion by a revered American scholar of the intercultural traditions of Buddhism and its transmission across Asia.