SCHOOL-MUSEUM

An instructional practice gaining increasing popularity in schools across the United States is that of uniting the forces of schools and museums to form school-museum collaborations. Schools at all levels have begun to link with cultural arts institutions to design and implement programs. These collaborations have long-term goals that include activity-based learning experiences, inquiry teaching and learning, hands-on learning, problem solving and enhancement of cultural intelligence. Because many museums and galleries in cities across the United States such as Boston, Washington, Seattle, Los Angeles, and San Francisco contain permanent and special temporary exhibitions on Pan-Asian art, the possibilities they present for introducing and enriching Asian study to students from elementary to senior high schools are powerful.

A major impetus to the development of these kinds of initiatives has been the national climate of school reform. As American educational enterprise continues to restructure, innovative approaches to teaching and learning have been generated to improve student achievement. With the drafting and connecting of standards in the arts to national goals, their inclusion in schools across the nation has become widespread. As professional institutions such as symphony orchestras, opera and theater companies, and museums have familiarized themselves with the needs of schools, projects that have broadened learning experiences of students are being developed. The unique domain knowledge and expert performance techniques that arts professionals bring to collaborative ventures can energize school curricula, enhance teacher professionalism, and engage students in imaginative hands-on learning, often changing the way in which instructional delivery has been conceptualized.

This article will describe how School District 24 in Queens, New York, a part of the New York City Public Schools, went about designing a school-museum collaboration for a thematic learning unit on Asian study, specifically Japan, which included, among other core competencies, social studies, science, and art history. The school district and its collaborator in this partnership, The Asia Society, had joined together on a number of educational projects over a period of several years and thus had a framework upon which to expand into this more structured, long-term school-museum collaboration.

Worlds Seen and Imagined: Japanese Screens from the Idemitsu Museum was on view at The Asia Society during the fall and winter of 1995–96. This gallery exhibition had as its focus a number of screens containing topics ranging from characters in Japanese literature, to the pictorial changing of the seasons, to images of foreigners in Japanese art. Because of the diverse disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning connections this specific exhibition presented, the Asia Society and District 24 embarked on a collaboration in which this gallery exhibition served as text and context for thematic units in Asian art and art history, world geography, and environmental science.

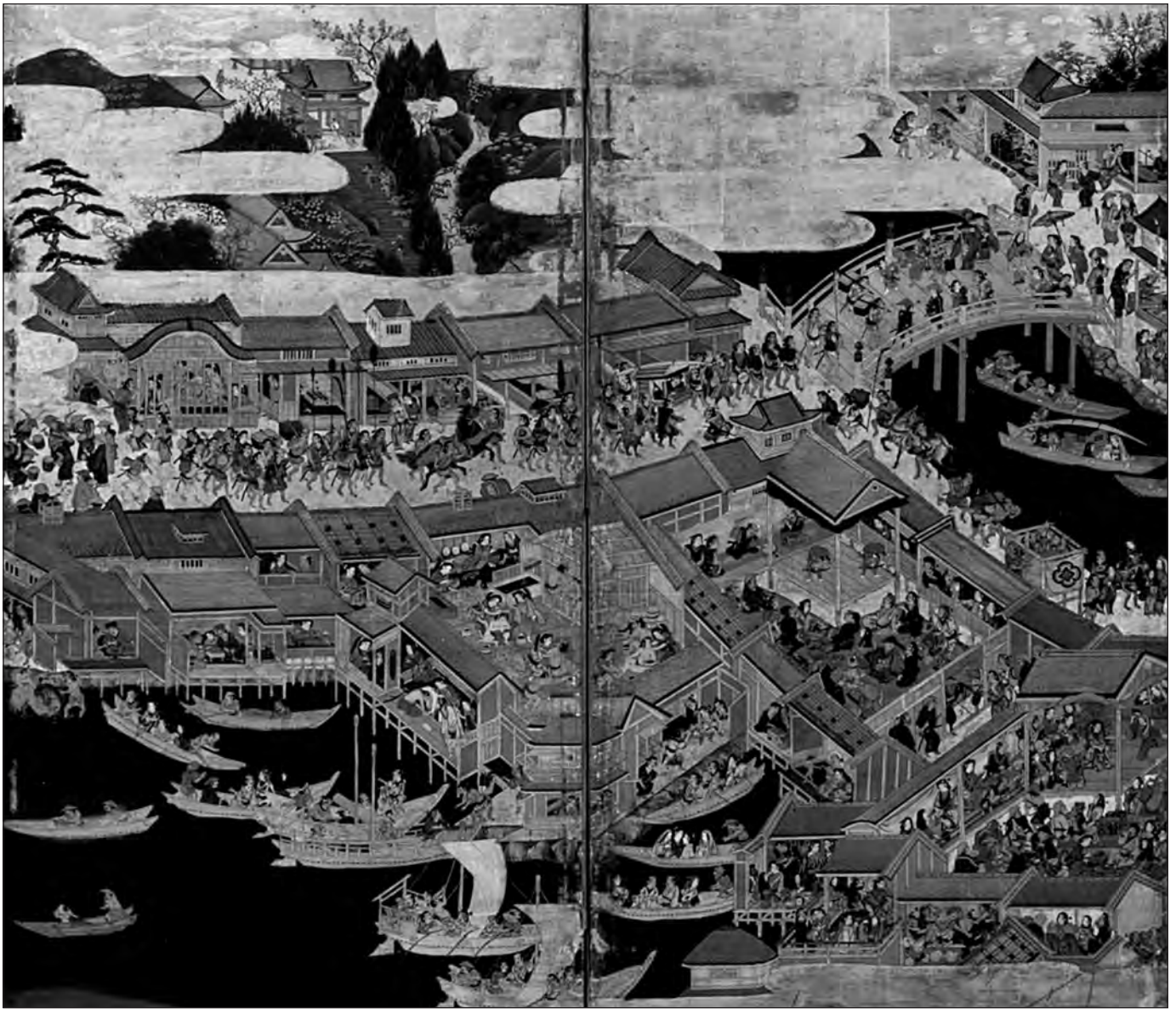
The first steps in school-museum collaborations such as this one are the initial planning sessions conducted between the school and museum. During this session, a planning team of representatives from both school and museum meet to discuss exactly what will take place, who would constitute the target population for the collaboration, and how a worthwhile learning experience could develop. Additionally, goals for the project are outlined, both long- and short-term. Included among these goals may be the following: (a) educating teachers on how to use a museum; (b) introducing the art and art history of the topic or culture under study; (c) integrating the exhibition into core areas of the curriculum for students; (d) designing appropriate assessment of the experience; and (e) encouraging parental involvement.

Devising strategies to involve individual district and school-based administrators and supervisors is the next major step in the collaboration. These specific individuals are encouraged to inform school faculties—both teaching and administrative—to join the collaboration. For the *Screen* project, District 24 arranged for the principals of its twenty-six schools to meet for their monthly administrative conference at The Asia Society. Here the overall project was delineated, with principals provided the opportunity to view the exhibition and volunteer any suggestions for implementation, in effect, "buying into" the project. They returned to their schools and encouraged teacher participation. It should be underscored that participation in a school-museum collaboration, while stimulating, can be intense and demanding. As incentives for individuals to participate, schools and school districts can try to arrange for more flexible scheduling or financial compensation for participants, teacher in-service, or college credit as a result of project participation.

Once a group of participants has

Collaboration
A Passage to Asian Study

By Joseph Piro



Famous Views and Entertainment Centers in Edo
Edo period, Kan'ei era 1624–44
Pair of eight-panel screens

Photo by: Susumu Wakisaka
Courtesy of The Idemitsu Museum of Arts, Tokyo
Provided by The Asia Society

Flowers and Birds of the Four Seasons
Attributed to Sesshu Toyo
Muromachi period
Pair of six-panel screens (detail of right screen)

Photo by: Susumu Wakisaka
Courtesy of The Idemitsu Museum of Arts, Tokyo
Provided by The Asia Society

been decided upon, an effective way to introduce them to the overall collaboration model is to sponsor a day-long "Teaching Symposium" on-site in the galleries of the museum partner. This symposium would serve to familiarize teachers with objects contained in the exhibition in a scholarly yet enjoyable manner. At the Japanese *Screen* symposium, the participants met the exhibition's curator, who presented a slide lecture on the background of the exhibition, discussing aspects of Asian art history, sociology, and politics. Slides of the works were shown, and initial questions concerning the exhibition were discussed.

Most of the *Screen* collaboration's participants were generalists with little or no background in art or art history. To enlarge their initial knowledge base, they were provided with teaching packets that included slides viewed during the curator's presentation for use with their individual classes both before and after their scheduled museum visits. Participants also received a teaching guide customized especially for the collaboration, which, among other things, made specific mention of what aspects of curriculum in the New York City Public Schools could be interwoven into the exhibition to emphasize the project's interdisciplinary intent. The guide also referred to certain pieces appearing in the museum showing, providing data on such things as their provenance and artistic organization in the gallery.

Teacher training in an art gallery is an important component of any collaboration and has several advantages—it allows teachers to view the art firsthand; it provides opportunities to teach using original works of art and serves to model how this process could occur when the teachers return to the gallery with their classes, engaging them in gallery-based instruction. Most important, it helps in achieving a major objective of the project—enabling the teachers to expand their role of teacher into that of teacher-docent, serving as guide and explainer to their students during their gallery visits without overreliance upon a member of the gallery staff.

Another objective of this training is to demonstrate to teachers how to "use" a museum effectively, transforming it into an extension of their classrooms. Many teachers tend to fall back on the long-standing field trip model, viewing the museum as something corresponding to a culminating event. While this may appear to be an educationally worthwhile venture, one of the advantages of a long-term collaboration is initiating a multiple visit

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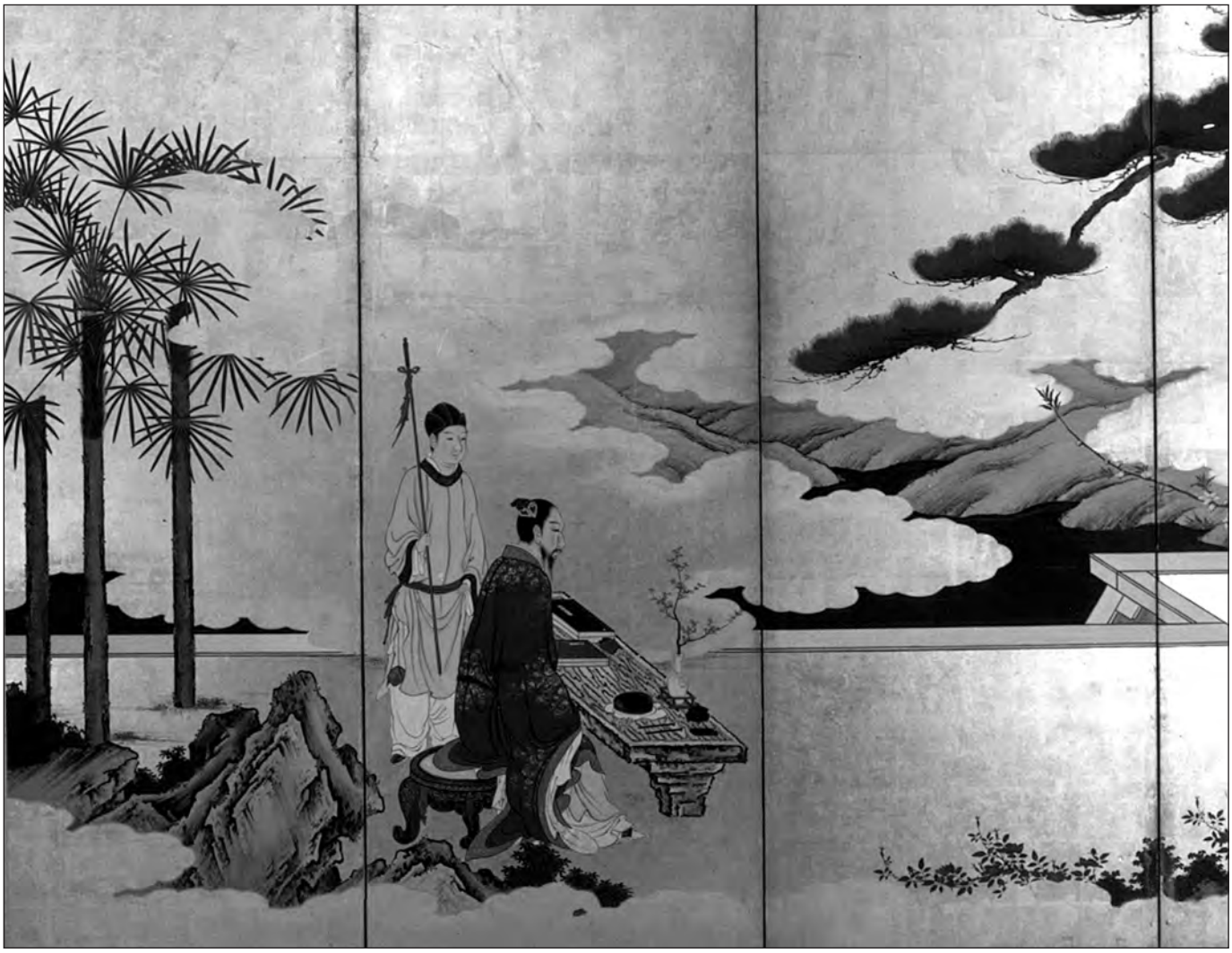
paradigm where students are able to develop in-depth familiarity with the museum collection, coming away from these experiences with richer, more resonant understandings as opposed to the limited effect of just one basic "walk-through" in the gallery. To prepare for these multiple visits, a museum-educator makes previsits to each participating teacher. During these visits, discussions between teacher and museum-educator occur, centering on how the exhibition could be fused to learning experiences while also allowing social interaction between museum-educator and students. This is followed by the actual class visits to the museum, now just one more component in the project's continuum.

What occurs during each class journey to the museum is critical, and teachers are trained to insure that these journeys are beneficial. Usually, when students first enter a museum, they are impressed, perhaps awed, by its size and expanse. It is a building ripe for discovery. For these visits to have optimum impact, both at the museum and inside the classroom, this sense of discovery must be capitalized upon. Therefore, a five-step model whose aim is to insure suitable outcomes has been designed for this kind of collaboration. Firstly, students are encouraged *to explore* the exhibition, sometimes—but not necessarily—with a set of prearranged "discovery" questions and map of object placement in the exhibition. During all their debriefings, either at school or in the museum, they are encouraged *to reflect* on their visit and discuss their impressions of this exploration throughout the course of the project.

Once the initial exposure activity occurs, teachers begin *to integrate* the exhibition into core content areas of the grade curriculum. This integration can progress as students and teachers make multiple visits to the exhibition. For example, during the first visit to the *Screen* exhibition, one group of students first investigated each screen by "global looking." In class during subsequent slide presentations, students were encouraged to attend more deeply to events depicted in the screens, in effect visually analyzing components, determining how these come together to produce a whole thought. Because a major thematic element in a number of the screens was the idea of seasonal change and its importance as a repeating concept in Japanese art, students were asked to search for clues about this concept and explain how the theme of change was illustrated by images on the screens. Thus, while students engaged, at first, in "global looking," their sense of observation and probing for artistic detail was successively honed at the gallery as their visual objectives became more focal. This developing of a sense of visual literacy for Asian art, as well as decoding a set of symbol systems, helped to sharpen critical thinking skills in an innovative and instructive manner.

Beauties under the Cherry Blossoms
Edo period
Two-panel screen

Photo by: Susumu Wakisaka
Courtesy of The Idemitsu Museum of Arts, Tokyo
Provided by The Asia Society



The Queen Mother of the West and Dong Fangshuo
Attributed to Kano Mitsunobu
Momoyama period
Six-panel screen

Photo by: Susumu Wakisaka
Courtesy of The Idemitsu Museum of Arts, Tokyo
Provided by The Asia Society

These particular screens also served as works that were woven into units on science and ecology. The reverence for nature pervasive in Japanese culture is much present in Japanese art as a whole. One teacher used these screens not only to teach about art history, but also as a visual document about environmental issues and their impact on society. Students were encouraged to replicate this idea in sketches of their own screens, using the idea of change and linking it to an environmental theme. This led to discussions on Japanese topography and how this influences life in Japan, in effect, reasoning with art.

This leads into the next step of the paradigm, that of asking students *to produce* a particular learning product to demonstrate their own grasp of a concept. This could take the form of an individual, group, or class project that illustrates the students' perspectives on themes presented in the gallery exhibition. As an example, one teacher was particularly interested in the actual construction of Japanese screens and proceeded to design a final learning product in which collaborative learning groups were brought along the process of creating a screen, much like the artists who created the works on display. Using a screen entitled "Westerners in Japan," another teacher had his class interpret this as an original source document reflecting upon how stereotypes and manufactured images of foreigners permeate cultures. Talking about *namban-ga*, or "paintings of the southern barbarians," a term describing the southern port of arrival for Western ships, students were asked to parse these painted images, thinking in terms of messages communicated to viewers by the artists.

The final step of the paradigm

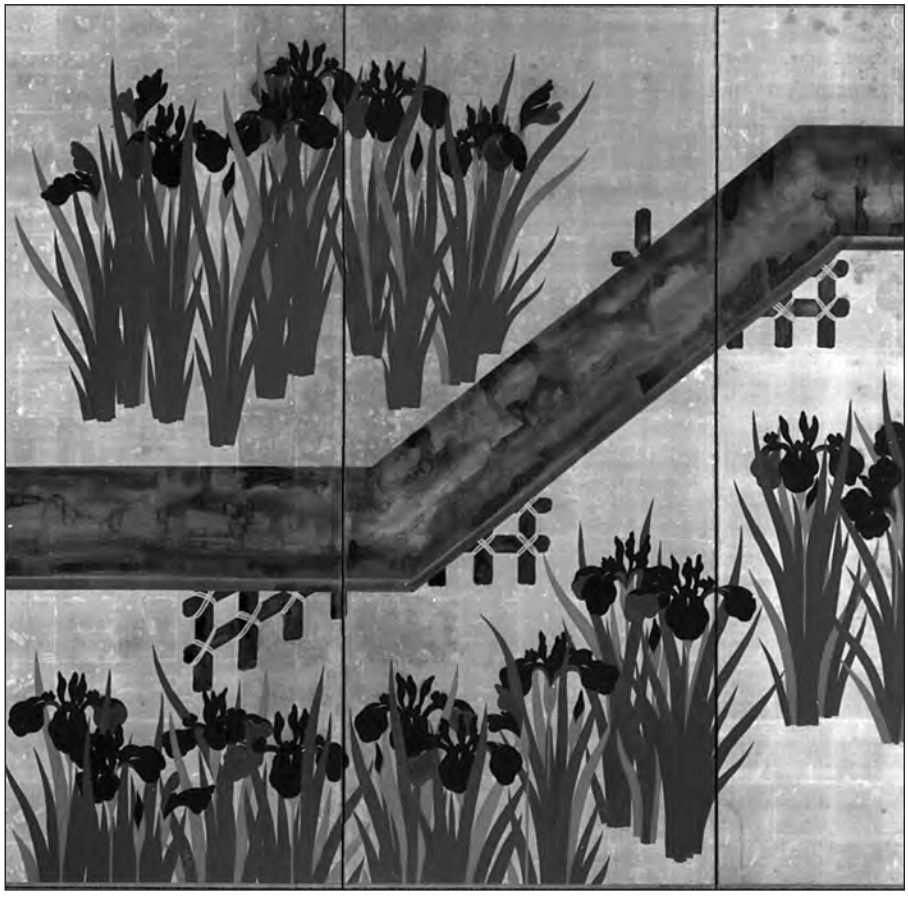
Among those most often mentioned [benefits of a project like this] are noticeable growth in children's vocabulary development, heightened aesthetic sensitivities, better questioning skills, more focused periods of intense concentration, and understanding that problems can have multiple answers.

encourages both teachers and students *to assess* what has been learned. One especially effective assessment activity is that of a student-generated art exhibition. The museum-educators and classroom teachers serve as facilitators to this process, helping to organize the student "installation" and assisting in the technical details such as framing the works, deciding specific object placement, and creating an exhibition brochure. What happens here is that, in effect, following the museum visits, the classroom is transformed into a studio. Students are encouraged to create their own differential process portfolios—using either drawn or written work examples—incorporating first drafts and sketches, works-in-progress, and finished products. From these, students begin to engage in decision-making processes in which they develop a central focus for their own exhibition, deciding which works created by each student should be included. These works serve to document the entire aesthetic journey of each student and include not only the visual art product, but any reflections that accompanied the process of creation. This holistic portrait of the "student-as-artist" helps them to frame the entire experience from an aesthetic perspective.

If there is a space at the museum, the exhibition sometimes can be placed on view there. A formal opening to which parents and local community members are invited can be scheduled. Children can then serve as the docents to the exhibition, bringing visitors around and explaining each work. Other students from the school can be invited to write reviews of the exhibition, providing another assessment instrument to the project.

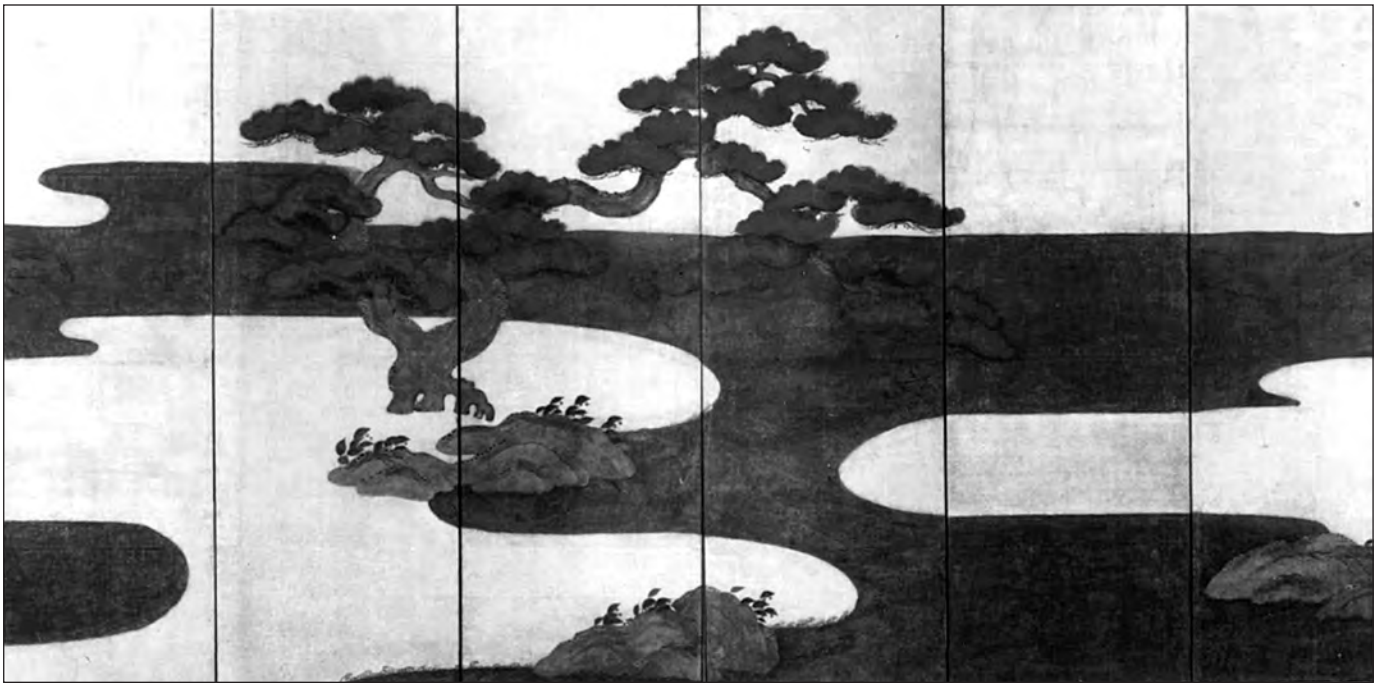
There are other components to a school-museum collaboration. For example, the museum, itself, serves as a continuum of professional development throughout the school year. In the case of The Asia Society, teachers were offered the opportunity to attend lectures, concerts, and films, and take part in other special events sponsored throughout the year. Those teachers unable to visit in person were encouraged to make "virtual visits," accessing the museum's site on the World Wide Web, downloading any materials for use in their classrooms. Additionally, to address issues concerning the collaboration's dissemination and sustainability, teachers involved in the project can be asked to contribute a lesson plan on any aspects of the project they found particularly intriguing. These lesson plans can be easily compiled into a teaching guide that can be shared with other educators in future professional development ventures.

In terms of cost effectiveness, these kinds of collaborations are relatively modest enterprises. Other than nominal admission cost agreements (depending on number of visits agreed upon) that can easily be arranged with the museum along with transportation expenses, there are few other ongoing expenditures. A school district may wish to arrange a staff development symposium and have the museum develop a learning resource package, as well as assign a museum-



Irises and Eight-Fold Bridge
By Sakai Hoitsu
Edo period
Pair of six-panel screens

Photo by: Susumu Wakisaka
Courtesy of The Idemitsu Museum of Arts, Tokyo
Provided by The Asia Society



Pine Tree
Muromachi period
Six-panel screen

Photo by: Susumu Wakisaka
Courtesy of The Idemitsu Museum of Arts, Tokyo
Provided by The Asia Society

educator to the school, which may increase project expenses. Also, depending upon the scope of the project, access to art and writing supplies in the classroom are important and may need to be purchased to insure adequate learning activities. However, given the advantages of this kind of immersion project, their benefits justify their budgets.

Because this kind of project is so new, there is not an empirically-tested database as of yet. However, in anecdotal evaluations, many administrators, teachers, parents, and museum-educators have noted their benefits. Among those most often mentioned are noticeable growth in children's vocabulary development, heightened aesthetic sensitivities, better questioning skills, more focused periods of intense concentration, and understanding that problems can have multiple answers.

It is through this school-museum collaboration, then, that a purposeful passage to Asia can take place, with both teacher and student returning from this journey with more focused knowledge and deepened appreciation of Asian culture, history, and society. Taking students beyond the walls of their classroom and offering them a window into Asia encourages them to assume a more active role in their learning, experience creative and stimulating instructional methodology, and, finally, examine, and perhaps recast, their own cultural values and beliefs. ■

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NOTES

1. Special appreciation is extended to Nancy Blume, Coordinator of Gallery Education at The Asia Society, for her assistance on this manuscript, as well as in developing the overall model for school-museum collaborations.
2. An earlier version of this manuscript appeared in the publication *Association of Teachers of Social Studies* (New York), Spring, 1997.

Editor's note:
If you are an elementary or high school teacher and would like to contact museums for Asia-related materials, please see *Materials and Resources for Educators on Asia at Museums*, on page 45 of this issue's Resources Section.