Katsukawa Shunko, Japanese (1743–1812)  The Actor Ichikawa Danjûrô V as Kazusa no Gorobei Tadamitsu, Edo period, 1780  Color woodblock print; 12.58 in. x 8.79 in. (32.2 x 22.5 cm)  Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1925.2369

Katsukawa Shunko's print captures the Kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjûrô V (ee-chee-kah-wah dahn-joo-row) (1741/8–1806/10/30) in his role as Kazusa no Gorobei Tadamitsu (kah-zu-sah no go-oro-bay tah-dah-mee-tsoo) in a play called "Returning Home in Splendor." The image is an example of ukiyo-e (oo-kee-yo-eh)—a picture of the floating world. In works such as this one, the worlds of popular art, Kabuki theater, economic status, and politics of Edo Period (see Japanese Entertainment sidebar, page 30) in Japan come together in boldly designed and brightly colored portraits of famous historical actors.

The artist shows the actor frozen during a moment of heightened action in the play. With one hand, the actor supports his chin; with the other he holds a beautifully striped umbrella. He stares forward with a fierce look, and a frightening expression shapes his face, which is decorated with bright red and white makeup. The bold lines of the makeup are accentuated by the style of his wig, which takes the form of wings attached to the sides of his head. The top of the actor's head remains shaved, as was the custom for Japanese men of this period. His purple kimono, or robe, is decorated with a wave pattern and, on his sleeve, with three nested squares that are the trademark of this actor's family. The scene from which this image is taken precedes one in which the character Kazusa struggles with another character for the possession of a sacred object. Although he appears frozen in action here, the actor seems ready to explode with energy in the next moment.
ACTORS AND THEIR COSTUMES

Numerous ukiyo-e prints in the Edo Period depicted Kabuki actors, a fact that illustrates the general popularity of this type of theater. (See figure 8 for a print of an Edo period theater.) Kabuki was particularly popular among the middle class because, in form, it was just the opposite of traditional Japanese theater, called Noh, which was solemn, highly intellectual, and closely associated with the ruling classes. By contrast, Kabuki combined elements of opera, dance, and popular music in action-based dramas. Plays were often narrated or told in pantomime with accompanying music that followed the movements of the actors. While plots typically revolved around traditional values of honor and loyalty, Kabuki’s popularity stemmed from its inclusion of bright costumes and action-filled stories told with exaggerated theatrical performing.

The primary focus of the Kabuki performance was the actors themselves. Adhering to strict social regulations, male actors played all of the roles. They put themselves into character—male, female, young, and old—with extravagant robes and bold, stylized makeup. In everyday life, the shape, color, and decoration of robes related to the class, marital status, and family history of the wearer. In theater, costumes also established a character’s gender, profession, personality, and social status, although robes used in performances tended to include excessive patterns and intense, sometimes shocking color combinations. Actors wore colorful makeup, as Danjūrō V does in Shunkô’s print, to further express the status and nature of their characters on stage. Exaggerated acting was also part of the actor’s performance. At climactic points, for example, the actor froze to draw out the tension of the drama. These moments also provided the audience with a chance to show their appreciation and enjoyment through applause. It is this moment that Shunkô captured in his print, as did many other ukiyo-e artists.

Even when they disguised themselves with costume and makeup, actors always wore their own family crest on their robes so that their audiences could easily recognize them. Danjūrō V appears with a geometric design upon the sleeve of his robe. This design is his family’s trademark. It symbolizes a triple measure of rice (the common currency in Japan at this time). It is also a visual pun on the symbol for prosperity, which is why his family adopted the design as their own. Danjūrō V was the fifth actor in long family dynasty of actors that has spanned 12 generations, and all of them have worn this symbol on their costumes to identify them—

**FIGURE 8**
Print showing a traditional Kabuki theater. Okumura Masanobu (Japanese, 1686–1764). *Interior View of the Nakamura Theater in Edo, Edo period, 1740.* Hand-colored woodblock print; 18 1/4 in. x 26 3/4 in. (46.4 x 68 cm) Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1925.2285
selves as part of this line. The first actor in the line, Ichikawa Danjūrō I, debuted onstage in 1673, and the most recent actor, Ichikawa Danjūrō XII, was given the title in 1985.

One of Danjūrō V's specialties was playing female roles. In fact, many male actors specialized in playing women on stage because real women had been banned from performing in 1629. In ukiyo-e prints, female characters can be identified by the purple handkerchief worn on the top of the head, which covered the shaved patch that men were required to sport. Utagawa Toyokuni's *Iwai Hanshiro IV: Full Length Figure of the Actor in a Female Role* (figure 9) shows the male actor Hanshiro IV standing in a graceful posture and wearing a beautifully patterned purple robe over layers of green and pink robes. The outer robe matches perfectly the purple handkerchief that covers the actor's hairline.

**IMAGES OF THE FLOATING WORLD**

The technique of woodblock printing came to Japan from the Asian mainland before the eighth century, although it was not widely used until the Edo period, when the taste for popular art among the merchant class increased demand. To create a printed image, the artist first made a design, which was transferred to a wood block. Specialized craftsmen who were assistants to the artist, carved the outline of the design into the block, creating a "key block," which was printed in black ink on paper. To add color to the image, the artist's craftsmen carved additional blocks, one for each color, that were printed in successive layers over the black outline. Shunko's *Danjūrō V* contains three colors—red, brown, and faded blue—beside black and white. Utagawa Toyokuni's *Iwai Hanshiro IV* (figure 9) required at least eight separate blocks to create its rich textures and colors. Some ukiyo-e prints may use as many as twenty blocks. (See Bibliographies for more information on the process of making woodblock prints.) The process of making ukiyo-e prints was labor intensive and would not have been profitable for the publisher, who put up money for the project, unless several hundred impressions were made. That just a few, or in some cases only one, known examples of particular designs exist suggests how little they were valued at the time. Like contemporary movie posters, ukiyo-e prints were intended to be sold to the public as cheap souvenirs of a particular performance or individual actor. Now they are highly valued for striking designs.

**FIGURE 9**

Utagawa Toyokuni (Japanese, 1769–1825).
*Iwai Hanshiro IV*, date unknown. Color print.
Clarence Buckingham Collection, 1926.1073
Japanese Entertainment and the Edo Period

In 1615, the Tokugawa (toe-ku-gah-wah) family came to power, marking the beginning of the Edo Period. The major task facing the new ruler was to restructure the system of government. Codes and laws were instituted to stabilize the nation. They established a ban on Western influences, such as Christianity and the presence of Dutch traders (see The Terrace, page 79), who had previously enjoyed freedom to travel within Japan. A hierarchy of power formed, and social classes were rigidly defined (figure 10). As the "city people" grew in size and affluence, middle-class entertainment such as Kabuki theater and popular images called ukiyo-e (oo-kee-yo-eh) flourished. Ukiyo-e images depicted realms of society that were free from the strict regulations of status, wealth, and traditional values. One of these realms was Kabuki theater, because it offered an escape from rigid society.

shogun (show-guhn) = ruler
daimyo (die-my-oh) = lords
samurai (sah-moo-rye) = administrative class
chonin (cho-nee) = "city people" (peasants, artisans, and merchants)

FIGURE 10
Edo Period Social Class System (highest to lowest)
**Classroom Applications**

**Transparency 3**

Katsukawa Shunko. *The Actor Ichikawa Danjûrô V as Kazusa no Gorobei Tadamitsu, Edo period, 1780*

1. **Make a Face**
   An actor uses a mask or makeup to transform himself into a character, who often looks very different from himself. Have students look around the classroom at their classmates’ faces and point out the differences they see. Take this discussion further by looking at pictures of children from other parts of the world or by reading the picture book *People* by Peter Spier (see Related Picture Books), which discusses the world’s cultural diversity. Assign students to a partner. Each pair should decide upon one feature of a face that they will both draw, such as lips, eyes, chin, etc. The students should take turns drawing this feature of their partner’s face. Once the drawings are complete, have students consider how their partner’s feature is different from and similar to their own. Have the class create a composite face made up of some of the features they have drawn.

   State Learning Standards: 18B, 26B

2. **The Face Tells All**
   Actors use their facial features to tell a story or show an emotion. They often apply makeup to accentuate their features so that they can be seen from the stage. Which features is this actor accentuating? What do those features tell about the character? Have students choose an emotion, action, or simple story to communicate to their classmates through facial gestures. Encourage them to determine which features will help express the information. Students may want to exaggerate their features with makeup. Have students communicate the emotion or story to the class without words.

   State Learning Standards: 25A, 26B

3. **Analyze the Character**
   Based on the visual information in this print, have students write a description of the character this actor is portraying. Encourage them to think about what the clothing, makeup, posture, and expression say about the character. How would the character walk? What kind of voice would the character have? What would the character say? Once they have determined what the character is like, have students write a script and prepare a backdrop or set for him. Have students perform this character for the class. Compare the character analyses as a class.

   State Learning Standards: 3B, 25A
4. Critique the Performance
Encourage students to imagine they are theater or film critics. Instruct them to write a critique of this actor’s performance based on what they see in this print. Is the character believable? What makes the portrayal successful? Collect and examine a selection of contemporary play or movie reviews from local newspapers or magazines to help students understand how to write a review.

State Learning Standards: 3C, 5A, 25B

5. Color Printing
This print was made by carving a wood block, applying ink or paint to the surface, and then printing it on white paper. This process was repeated for each new color in the design. As a class, determine how many color blocks were needed to make this print. Compare the print with other materials printed today, such as newspapers, books, or color copies. Discuss how technology has advanced the color printing process. What has been streamlined? How does this new technology take away from or add to the artist’s expression or authorship of the work?

State Learning Standards: 5A, 13A, 26A

6. Advertisements
Prints like this one were made to advertise a dramatic performance. Compare this print to a poster or television advertisement for a contemporary play or movie. How do each communicate a message? Discuss how the medium has changed over time. Is one more powerful or persuasive than the other? Why? Instruct students to select a favorite actor. Have them create a marketing poster for him/her using only images, not words, to give information about his/her role.

State Learning Standards: 25A, 26A