Branch Road at Motomachi, Totsuka*
from the series, Fifty-Three Stations on the Tokaido (Slide #7)

Hiroshige
Woodblock print on paper
Japan
1833
Clarence Buckingham Collection
1925.3504

The Tokaido, or Eastern Seaboard Highway, was the most popular road from the city of Edo to the city of Kyoto. This series of prints shows 53 different views of the Tokaido, which was a very busy road when Edo was the government capital, and Kyoto was the residence of the emperor. Government officials and messengers constantly traveled between the two cities.

These 53 stations were official stops on the highway, often situated around cities or important monuments. During the Edo period (1615-1868), a time of peace and prosperity, traveling was one of life's great pleasures. Business and religious pilgrimages offered occasion for a journey and adventure, as well as rest and relaxation. At every stop on the Tokaido there were shops, restaurants, inns, and entertainment.

Today the capital of Japan is still located at the same site, but the name has been changed from Edo to Tokyo. The Tokaido is still a well-traveled road with distinctive shops, restaurants, and entertainment, but modes of travel have changed. In the Edo period, people traveled by foot, piggy back, palanquin, and horse. Today people travel by the Shinkansen, or “bullet train,” which travels at an average speed of 220 km/hr (about 135 miles/hour).

Hiroshige

The Fifty-Three Stations on the Tokaido were made by the artist Hiroshige (hear-o-shay-gay). Hiroshige, the son of a firefighter, was born in Edo in 1797. His family lived in a fire station by the Yaesu River. As a young boy, Hiroshige spent much of his time painting. In Japan, even artists who were children took on fancy names (like nicknames). The child Hiroshige had three artist names: Tokutarō, Juemon, and Tokubei. When Hiroshige was 13 years old, both his parents died, leaving him with a deep sense of sadness.
By Japanese custom he was required to take over his father's job as firefighter even though he was very young, but he was eventually able to give the post to another family member. Throughout Hiroshige's life his real love was painting and drawing. When he was 15, he studied printmaking with Toyohiro, an important printmaker of the day, and mastered the art of wood-block design.

In 1832, Hiroshige, then a recognized artist, was invited to accompany the entourage of a shogun, or military leader, on his journey from Edo to Kyoto. On the first day of the eighth month of every year, shoguns from all over Japan were required to make a gift of horses to the emperor. On this special occasion, Hiroshige accompanied one shogun and made sketches for his series, *The Fifty-three Stations on the Tokaido*. Throughout the trip the artist kept a picture diary from which he worked when he got home. This was a magnificent journey with glorious views and scenery. The prints served as a reminder of favorite places along the road for other travelers and friends and were sold in shops along the Tokaido.

* The print on view in the exhibition will change every 6 weeks because of conservation requirements. Each subsequent print will be from the series, *Fifty-Three Stations on the Tokaido* by Hiroshige.
FIFTY-THREE STATIONS ON THE TOKAIDO
(Slide #7)

SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION
This narrative print documents the leisure travel along the Tokaido. Have students search for the details in the print that describe what is happening. What are the people doing? How is the feeling of travel expressed in the gestures of the people? What are they carrying? Why? Is the terrain difficult to walk on? What elements in this print give us clues about when this event took place? What do you see that makes you say that? Support your answer. How similar or different is our concept of travel from that expressed in the Tokaido print?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES
The artist who developed this print kept a pictorial diary throughout his travels. Using this as an example, ask students to develop (draw) a pictorial diary over a period of time. They could document places on their daily travels (from home to school) or special events (sports or concerts) or parties (celebrations or ceremonies). In the drawings, have students concentrate on details as they develop the whole picture. After developing this “book of recollections” have students draw one in a larger format and full color using the pictorial diary as a reference.

Have students read the poem written by Hiroshige below. How is it suggestive of a visit down the Tokaido?

I leave my brush in the east
And set forth on my journey
I shall see the famous places in Western Land
Have students write their own poem about a favorite place, real or imaginary, where they would like to go. Create a haiku as a group or divide into smaller groups, each creating a single haiku, or stanza. They can use the style of the Hiroshige poem or a haiku, a poem with the following structure:

First line—5 syllables  
Second line—7 syllables  
Third line—5 syllables  
Example

*The fragrant orchid*  
*Into a butterfly’s wings*  
*It breathe the incense*

—by Matsuo Basho, 17th-century Japanese poet

Using pictures from travel magazines, *National Geographic*, and postcards construct a visual haiku. Keep in mind the haiku form as you create your “picture poem.”