

Art Analysis Assignment: Commodore Perry and the Black Ship Scrolls
Niskayuna High School, Niskayuna Central School District, Niskayuna, New York
World Connections: An Interdisciplinary 10th grade class
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Caitlin Horgan, 10th Grade Student

William Heine, "Passing the Rubicon"
(<http://dl.lib.brown.edu/repository/repoman.php?verb=render&id=1073494270546875>)

Anonymous Japanese Artist, "Map of Shimoda Harbor" presented on "Black Ships
Scrolls" website, part of Virtual Japan, Japan Society of Northern California
<http://www.us-japan.org/jsnc/virtualjapan/BSS/tour/tour4.htm>

Art has captured a realistic glimpse of historical events that no textbook can portray. Commodore Matthew Perry went on a pilgrimage by ship to Japan in 1853 to introduce the importance of trade to this isolated country of Japan. While Perry explored Japan, realistic paintings were fashioned on canvas showing the American point of view. During the same time period, an unknown Japanese artist sketched his ideas of the events that transpired while the U.S. Navy explored Edo and other sections of Japan. Two artists contributed to the understanding of the epic mission by the U.S. into Japan.

Primary documents have allowed historians to fit the pieces of the puzzle together correctly for thousands of years; without these records, information from the past would be lost forever. United States President Fillmore sent Perry and his naval squad in 1853 to insure that Japan would not be left behind while Europe and Asia were expanding scientifically and industrially. William Heine captured Perry's fleet by painting steam boats and vessels meeting Japanese ships in the Edo Bay. The meeting of these two diverse cultures allowed for the Japanese to advance their simple technology to more advanced thinking, as depicted in one of Heine's pieces. Years later, Southeast Asia would be controlled by Japan up until WWII. In 1867, Japan would excel to the Meiji Restoration to help eliminate the feudal society. Without Perry's

expedition, Japan would not have realized how far behind they were compared to the rest of the world.

Heine was well aware of how quickly technology was advancing across the globe because he had traveled the world before deciding to move to America. Heine was born in Germany and attended an art academy there. He was best known for his expertise in landscaping, battle scenes and genre paintings. Perry hired Heine to be his official artist on the voyage. Heine's interpretations of the events in Japan were positive glimpses of how the Americans helped the Japanese.

Imperial expansion had begun in Europe and in Asia for years and after the Opium War of 1840, China was swept into the maelstrom of imperialism. During this time, Great Britain controlled India and other territories. Moreover, France, Germany and the United States were interested in commercial expansion and moved into Asia.

The U.S. Congress, in 1852, appointed Perry to sail to Japan in hopes of establishing an open diplomatic trade relation with the territory. The following year, the experienced naval commander grasped the opportunity to travel to Japan. It was important that Perry established three key agreements with the Japanese. First, Perry wanted the Japanese to ensure that American castaways would no longer be tarred and feathered, boiled or skinned alive, but that they would be treated fairly. Also, he wanted secure ports so U.S. vessels would be allowed to be refueled and able to gather supplies. Lastly, Perry insisted that two ports remained open for trade. America's treaty was signed by the Japanese, but the Japanese were embarrassed by what the U.S. had gained. The painting that Heine created shows a glimpse of the relationship between the foreigners and Japanese and how Perry wanted to establish agreements amongst the Japanese people.

Heine used several elements of a good composition in "Passing the Rubicon" (Link to <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/repository/repoman.php?verb=render&id=1073494270546875>) to paint glimpses of Perry's expedition. The light values and darker shades create a dynamic view of images representing the foreigners and the natives. A precious glow of peach emerges behind the large ship implying that the U.S. involvement will help Japan grow. Americans were painted in

white attire which symbolizes purity, in contrast, the Japanese officials were costumed in darker colors. A Caucasian man carries a white flag on the bow to promote peace, while the Japanese man holds out his hand to the Americans to stop or advance. The Japanese vessel has two white and black flags on the stern which were the imperialistic colors of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Both sides hold bayonets for protection. The American ships were presented as safer and less congested than the Japanese boats.

While the changes by Perry and the U.S. Navy were negotiated, an unknown Japanese artist was busy painting his point of view of the new conditions established between the two country. Through this man's sketches, historians have been able to gather a sense of what type of feelings arose from the U.S. Navy's presence in Edo. The "Map of Shimoda Harbor" (LINK <http://www.usjapan.org/jsnc/virtualjapan/BSS/tour/tour4dv.htm>) painted by this unknown artist, demonstrates principles of design and composition. Shades of periwinkle, blues, and greens create a scene of the harbor. The artist used texture to show the rocky coast and shades of dark blue to show depth in the harbor. A total of six ships are anchored along the coast. The artist uses positive space in this two-dimensional sketch to create a balance of objects. Movement was important to the artist because it allowed him to follow the shape of the coast line against the shore. It is important that the viewer focuses their eye to the arrangement of these ships in the harbor because they move the human eye around the plane to the focal point. Placements of the boats are important to this piece. They create a rhythm on the paper. Blue waves connect the boats to the coast line to tie the image together. Off to the lower right lies the city of Shimoda, which in the seventeenth century had 7,000 citizens.

I conclude from the painting that the unknown artist had a feeling of mixed emotions because of the few colors he chose. The U.S. Navy invaded Japan with technology Japanese citizens had never seen before. The simple row boats were no match for the steam boat and guns could kill faster than a bayonet. The artist paints these ships concluding that the U.S. Navy outnumbered the Japanese by far. Shimoda Harbor was given to the Americans because it was

isolated and the Japanese felt more protected with the foreigners at a distance. Unlike Heine's painting, this artist did not create a realistic piece. In the previous painting, Heine emphasized the people on the vessels rather than the entire harbor.

Both artists are unique, but Heine's painting is more appealing to the eye. The unknown artist paints an interpretation of the subdued Shimoda Harbor. If the spectator glances closely at the Shimoda Harbor, they realize that there is not a strong central image and it is hard to truly speculate what the author was imagining while painting this picture. American boats must be occupying Shimoda Harbor. The ships are anchored as if they were refueling and gathering needed supplies. Heine's canvas radiates the artistic ability to communicate with the viewer and show how the Japanese and Americans interacted. Moreover, Heine's piece clearly shows an event that occurred from the American point of view in the Edo Bay. The unknown artist illustrated a painting that does not clearly portray a specific event, rather, how the Americans continually crowded Japanese ports. Essentially, both artifacts are fundamental works that articulate a point of view of what transpired in the ports of Japan.