

**Cunningham Creek Elementary**  
**Meet the Artist**

**Friedrich, Casper - Tree with Crows & Shoson, Ohara - Birds in Bamboo Tree**



**ARTIST:** **Friedrich, Caspar David (1774-1840)**

**PRINT: Tree with Crows**

Date: 1822

Size: 28.74 inch wide x 23.23 inch high

Medium: Oil Painting

Musee Du Louvre, Paris, France

**ARTIST:** Born in Greifswald, a port of the Baltic Sea, Gothic Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) puts anti-Classical emphasis on experience. Combining the Germanic influences of literature, music and nature as well as politics and religion he presents them allegorically as a force for cultural change. Born in Swedish Pomerania, Friedrich's darkly enchanting, mystical work was viewed as a shocking breakthrough, bordering on expressionistic confrontation that remains strikingly relevant now. Prussian and Russian royalty often purchased his art, loving its strong, wistful appeal for escape, adventure, and possibility.

Friedrich frequently travelled through Germany, studying the landscape of the mountains and the Baltic coast. These travels provided ample material for his

paintings, but he concentrated on the general aspect of nature rather than on a specific and identifiable scene.

**PRINT:** *The Tree of Crows* (also known as *Raven Tree*) has been called one of Friedrich's "most compelling paintings. The painting depicts a twisted oak tree, bare but for a few dead leaves, seen against an evening sky. An inscription on the back of the canvas refers to the hill at the painting's center as a *Hünengrab*, or dolmen, a prehistoric burial ground. In the distance can be seen the ocean, and Cape Arkona's chalk cliffs, a favorite subject of Friedrich's. Two crows are perched on the oak, while a flock descends toward it. In the darkened foreground are a hacked trunk and the upright stump of another oak.

The oak is based on a drawing dated 3 May 1809, to which Friedrich added branches at the left and elongated others so as to stretch its forms across the picture plane; the tree in the painting has the overall shape of a rhombus, its web of contorted branches taking on a dramatic presence. Contrasted with the serene layers of chromatic clouds, the tree's forms have been likened to "many flailing arms. The subject of this work is, not a picture-postcard view, but a contemplative analysis of the greater cycle of nature. The living branches of the tree are contrasted with the dead limbs, which surround it. This theme of decay and regeneration echoes Friedrich's own view of landscape takes on a mystic power, becoming emblematic of Friedrich's meditative romantic vision.

**ARTIST:** Ohara Koson (小原 古邨<sup>?</sup>, Kanazawa 1877 - Tokyo 1945) In this Japanese name, the family name is Ohara.

**PRINT:** *Birds in the Bamboo Tree*

Date: 1822

Size: 26 X 13 in. / 66 x 33 cm

Medium: Wood block print on paper

Musee Du Louvre, Paris, France

**ARTIST:** "Bird-and-flower painting" is a genre of Japanese prints with images of birds and flowers. Ohara Koson (1878-1845) is one of the most famous artists in the genre of "Bird-and-flower painting" of the twentieth century.

Koson was born in Kanazawa in Ishikawa Prefecture in northern Japan. His real name Ohara Mata. During his career he changed his name several times: Koson, Shoson, Hosono - They are all the names of the same artist.

Originally Koson worked in the genre of "Ukiyo-e". He has produced many engravings on the theme of Russian-Japanese War (1904-1905). This was not unusual, whereas almost all the artists of the genre Ukiyo-e illustrate the Sino-Japanese and Russian-Japanese war. But soon this art became out of fashion. It was replaced by the photography and became the main way to illustrate the events.

Ohara Koson's work practically ceased to be sold, he gave up painting and his only source of income was teaching at the School of Fine Arts in Tokyo. In 1926, a colleague of Koson, American Fenellos Ernest, a big fan of traditional Japanese painting, who was then curator of Japanese art at the Boston Museum, convinced him to return to work.

Koson returned to painting, but now he only worked in the genre of "Bird-and-flower painting". While the Japanese were little interested in the traditional painting and almost all the work of Koson were sold in the United States. Over a lifetime, the master has created about 450 prints. Ohara Koson died in 1945 at the age of sixty-eight.

**PRINT:** 'Birds in the Bamboo Tree'. In this work the composition is formed by vertical movement of the bamboo, cut off by the top and bottom of the picture frame, thereby hinting at rather than indicating the height of these slender trees. The leaves (each leaf created by one firm brush stroke) are contrapuntal in their horizontal movement across the middle of the painting. The plump little thrushes blend with the foliage, heads cocked slightly in perfect realism.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the subject of these paintings?
2. How are they similar/different?
3. How have the artists used color?
4. Are their brush strokes similar or different?
5. How do you feel looking at each painting?
6. Do the paintings look realistic or not? Why?
7. Do the paintings look/feel different if you stand close or stand far away?

## **RELATED ACTIVITIES**

1. Draw/Paint your own picture of a tree with birds. Think carefully about the atmosphere you want to portray. You could go outside and draw some trees from observation.
2. Make a collage of a tree, this could be a paired or group activity.
3. Use very watered down paint and blow paint on paper with a straw to get an interesting branch effect. (You will need poster paints for this activity). Also, please ask the teacher first, as this will be a messy activity.
4. Print leaves and sticks onto paper (You will need poster paints for this activity)
5. Collect leaves and sticks from outside, use them to create your own picture.