

Selections from NDL collections

***Yodo sekigaki kai* (School children at calligraphy performance)**

Artist: Ichiyusai Kuniyoshi

Publisher: Izumiya Ichibe

Published in: early 19th century

Set of three large-size (36.2 × 24.3 cm) color woodblock sheets

Owned by the National Diet Library, Japan

\* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

At the time this work was designed in the late Edo period, Japanese commoners' children learned reading, writing and arithmetic in small elementary schools called *terakoya*. The *sekigaki kai* was an event at such a school when the children demonstrated their skill at calligraphy.

Hung over the doorway as examples are sheets of paper bearing auspicious phrases, ancient Japanese poems and edifying mottoes, all written in a fair hand.

In the alcove on the left, there is a portrait of Sugawara no Michizane (845-903) with offerings of sacred *sake* and rice cakes in front of it. He has been revered as the god of learning since ancient times.

The boys are in formal attire of *haori* and *hakama*. The girls are dressed up in beautiful *kimono*. The little child led by the hand in the middle looks happy. The children staring at the tips of their writing brushes are in good earnest. The scene is filled with joyful and cheerful atmosphere.

Ichiyusai Kuniyoshi (1797-1861) was an *ukiyo-e* artist who was active in the late Edo period. Though famous for heroic *musha-e* works (prints of warriors), he also excelled at depicting the charming gestures and expressions of children and left outstanding *kodomo-e* works (prints of children).