Japanese woodblock prints are a striking example of early modern print culture, pointing at once to the visual conventions of a premodern manuscript-based past and to a future of mass literacy. How were woodblock prints made? Who bought and read them? How were they collected, stored, and circulated? How do woodblock prints fit within larger Japanese trends of art, literacy, and commerce?

This course incorporates materials from the USC Rare Books Collection into an exploration of how reading, writing, and archiving evolved in premodern Japan. Students will have the chance to inspect and analyze a broad range of premodern materials—woodblock prints and much more. We also will consider, from local and global perspectives, how Japanese manuscripts, archives, and books figure in the digital age. Guest speakers from USC and Japan will demonstrate calligraphy, explain how handwritten manuscripts can be used for research, and introduce the treasures of the more than one thousand-year-old personal collection of Emperor Naruhito of Japan. A tour of USC ONE Archives is planned in order to address the theme "Archives as a Tool for Social Justice." Japanese language skills are not required.