Integrating Japanese Folk Tales into the Classroom
Using Japanese Kamishibai

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Introduction

Course/Grade Level: Grades 2-6 social studies, language arts, and art

Context:

With the development of standards in all curriculum disciplines, creating meaningful curriculum that extends the students’ understanding of the world beyond the classroom is often a challenge. Through the integration of folk tales, students can increase skills in reading and writing and develop an understanding of the Japanese culture. By using a focus of the seven multiple intelligences—interpersonal, intrapersonal, visual-spatial, kinesthetic, musical, linguistic, and naturalist—I can assure students an avenue to express and extend their understanding. Integrating reading, writing, and social studies skills also allows the students the time for discussion, contemplation, and the creation of projects that are meaningful as well as beautiful works of art. Although this unit focuses on Japanese folk tales, I have also done the same activities using a variety of folk tales from various countries, comparing and contrasting values from around the world. This is a wonderful unit to start the year as you and your students discuss traditional values that are a part of our culture and compare them to traditional values that are a part of Japanese culture. This unit also integrates an informal look at Japanese art. What can we tell about a culture from its paintings, what is included as well as what is not included in the picture?

The concluding project for this unit is a student-created set of Kamishibai cards. Kamishibai are story-telling cards that were very popular in the 1950s and are experiencing renewed interest in Japan today. Originally they were an oral story-telling venue. The "kamishibai man" would travel from town to town on a bicycle. He would sell candy to the children and those who bought the candy would be able to sit up front, those who didn't would be in the back. On his bicycle was a wooden stage that held the cards. He would tell the story and move from card to card. To ensure the children's return next week, he would stop the story at the most exciting part, like the serial movies of the 1950s. Today there are very few "kamishibai men" alive, but the stories that excited the children remain alive in these beautifully illustrated cards. I started using this medium about five years ago and found it to be a magical tool in the classroom. I have used the cards in grades 2 through 6 and have friends that use them in junior high and high school. The students love to create the cards and write the stories on the back. They take great pride in their creations and love the chance to share them with others. I believe the reason that kamishibai so readily engage the interest of the students is their use of so many of the multiple intelligences: from linguistic, the use of language, to mathematical, the organization of the cards and writing. Of all of the projects I do in my class, the students always pick this one as their favorite and the one that I never get to keep.

Goal:

The goals of this unit are for students to read and discuss Japanese folk tales, discuss and compare values and themes, create a Kamishibai from a folk tale that is meaningful to them using illustrations that reflect the culture, and recognize elements of Japanese art.

Objectives: Students will be able to:
Read Japanese folk tales and discuss traditional values they find in the readings.
Discuss key elements in the stories.
Compare traditional Japanese values to their own values.
Look at Japanese art and discuss what they see.
Create a set of kamishibai by writing a summary of the story using 8 to 12 segments and creating illustrations using elements of Japanese art.
Share their kamishibai with others, young and old.

**Time Allotment:** Because I want the students’ completed projects to exemplify excellent work, masterpieces that they can use as a comparison for future projects, I allow them a lot of time to finish their projects. This unit has taken as long as a month to complete, but the pride that the students have in their projects is well worth the time. The time required breaks down as follows:

- Reading and discussing of the folk tales - 5 days
- Creating a rough draft – 4 days
- Creating the final kamishibai - 2 weeks of two-hour work times each day.

**Materials**

**Folk Tales**

The following is a list of Japanese folk tales that I use in the classroom. I am very careful about selecting books about Japan. Some of the things I consider are: Does this book realistically depict Japan. Do the characters have eyes vs. slits? Is the information accurate as far as I know? If I have questions about a book, I tell my students so that they will become critical readers also. The following is a list of my favorites and is not meant to be a list of all available Japanese folk tales.


**Art Books:**

**Curriculum Materials**


**Internet Sites**

Kamishibai

[http://www.indiana.edu/~japan/kamishibai/teachkam.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~japan/kamishibai/teachkam.html)

This site contains background information on Kamishibai, a summary of one story, and discussion questions.

Japanese Art

[http://www.zzz.or.jp/Asataka/art.html](http://www.zzz.or.jp/Asataka/art.html)

An online gallery.

Kyoto National Museum


Kyoto National Museum, images, articles for children, and online exhibitions.

Kids Web Japan

[http://www.jinjapan.org/kidsweb/lint.html](http://www.jinjapan.org/kidsweb/lint.html)

Wonderful resource for modern, general Japan, and good links to other sites.

**Kamishibai Ordering Information**

Kamishibai For Kids, P.O. Box 20069, Park West Station, New York, NY 10025-1510. These are traditional kamishibai with beautiful illustrations with English translations on the back, cost around $35.00.

**Other Materials**

Butcher paper, tape, and markers
VCR and monitor
Slides, overhead transparencies, or books showing examples of Japanese art
Drawing paper (1 sheet of 18 x 24 paper for each student for rough drafts and 8 sheets of 18 x 24 or 9 x 12 paper for each student for final copies), markers, colored pencils, and crayons
**Procedure**

Note: I have presented a plan of reading folk tales over four days; this time can be shortened or lengthened depending upon the available resources and your time frame, but students need to read or be read at least three folk tales.

**Day 1: Exploring Japanese Folk Tales (interpersonal, intrapersonal, and linguistic intelligences)**

1. Read a Japanese folk tale to the class. If you have a *kamishibai* set, read this to the students.
2. Discuss: Who were the characters? What was the setting? What was important in the story? What is the theme or lesson of the story?
3. Discuss folk tales that the students know, asking the same questions. What elements are the same? Different?
4. Have each child select a Japanese folk tale and read it silently.
5. Have each child find a partner and read their stories to each other. The partner groups will then discuss the questions that were discussed earlier.

**Day 2: Continuing the Exploration**

1. Conduct a group discussion of the stories students read yesterday.
2. Write on a chart (a large piece of butcher paper folded into sections) the characters found in the stories, separating real and mythical, the settings, the problems, the obstacles, the climaxes, and the solutions.
3. Have the students pick another book, read, find a different partner, and follow the same discussion procedure as on Day 1.

**Day 3: Continuing the Exploration**

1. Have the students fill out the chart without the discussion. (Use this as an assessment tool to determine which children are having difficulty finding the elements of the stories.) You might call on two or three students to share something interesting they discovered in their stories.
2. Repeat the reading and discussing process from the preceding day.

**Day 4: Making Connections (interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, and mathematical intelligences)**

1. Show the video "The Crane Who Returned the Favor."
2. Discuss the illustrations. What can you learn about traditional Japan from the illustrations (clothing, tools, housing, food, environment, etc.)?
3. Discuss the stories using the same format as before. Are there any themes that seem to repeat themselves? Are there any characters that seem to repeat? Are there any obstacles and/or solutions that repeat?
4. Ask: Do we find any of these themes, characters, etc. in folk tales that we know?
5. Repeat the reading process from the previous days.

**Day 5: Artistic Component**

1. Discuss and chart the information that students found in yesterday’s readings. Discuss again the illustration of the books and the information conveyed.
2. Using slides, color overhead transparencies, or books, show examples of Japanese art. Discuss what the students see in the pictures. How do they make you feel? What elements are important? How are they organized? What don't you see in the picture? What is not included in the picture? What do you think is important to the artist and the people viewing the picture? Who do you think these paintings were intended for? What connection can we make between these paintings and the folk tales?
3. Explain to the students that they are going to make a Kamishibai set of their favorite Japanese folk tale. They are to select one that they find meaningful.
4. Have the students reread the folk tale, pick a partner, and tell the story to their partner. Remind them to include setting, characters, plot, conflicts, resolution, and theme or values expressed in the tale.

**Days 6-10: Rough Draft of the Kamishibai**

Japanese Kamishibai come in a variety of sizes, so choose a size that is appropriate for your grade. I give my students a choice of either 18 x 24 or 9 x 12 construction paper. Have a variety of markers, colored pencils, and crayons available. For the rough draft, use 18 x 24 drawing paper.

These directions are for eight-card Kamishibai; you can use the same procedure for creating 12-card sets.

1. Have the students fold the drawing paper into four sections, and then fold this in half. The students should then number each section from 1-8, 1-4 on the front, 5-8 on the back. Section one is for the title, section 8 for the ending. On the top of the section, they are to write the title, on the bottom draw the picture (or visa versa). Students should retell the important events in the remaining sections of the paper following the procedure of writing on top and sketching on the bottom. The next sections are for the important parts of the story they want to tell.
2. After writing the rough drafts, have the students share the story with a partner, asking for suggestions.

**Day 11 to Completion: Final Kamishibai**

1. Have the students work in pairs to proofread their writing.
2. When their pieces have been proofread, have the students word process the writing or have them write it on lined paper that fits the Kamishibai size. I have the students go over their pencil writings with fine-tipped black markers to add a professional touch.
3. Students are ready to draw their final pictures. I ask the students to look carefully at the style of pictures used in the folk tale. Their pictures must reflect Japan and relate to the story. Remind the students of the earlier discussion of Japanese art. They can use elements from the books or Japanese art to illustrate their stories. I also have available a variety of Japanese design coloring books for them to use as references.
4. Have students number the cards on the front. On traditional Kamishibai, there is also a small version of the picture from the front drawn on the back in the upper righthand corner; some students may want to copy this technique.
5. In traditional Kamishibai cards, the summary of the picture is placed on the back of the next card. For example, the introduction for card 1 is placed on the back of the last card, the summary for card 2 is placed on the back of card 1, the summary for card 3 is on the back of card 2, etc. The cards are placed face down. One card is held up and the summary for that card is then read from the ones in the reader’s lap. You may either follow this procedure or, if this is too hard for your students, have them paste the writing on the back of the pictures. I use post-it glue sticks for this procedure and then regular glue only when everyone is sure they have the writing on the back of the appropriate picture.
6. Have the students retell the stories to a variety of audiences young and older.

**Variations:**

- Create classic Kamishibai by having the students just create the pictures and orally retell the story.
- Have the students add origami flowers and animals to their pictures, using cut paper techniques.
- Encourage the students to research the dress and scenery of Japan on the Internet and use this in their illustrations.

http://www.smith.edu/fcceas/curriculum/peet.htm