

Ralph King  
Worthington Killbourne HS

## Japan

Purpose: Some Japanese people are uncomfortable with the uniformity of their society.

Essential questions:

- 1) Do all Japanese see conformity as positive trait?
- 2) What is a talisman?
- 3) What is irony?

Rationale: Exposure to Japanese literature and the concept of irony.  
All people in a society do not think alike.

Materials: "The Talisman" by Masao Yamakawa, translated by Edward Seidensticker, *Life*, 57:2-3 (Sept. 11, 1964), 94-97, reprinted in Minear, Richard H. Through Japanese Eyes, CITE. NY.1981

Chalkboard, poster paper, or white board, with chalk or markers.

Activities: Prior to this activity, lessons on Japanese cultural practices and expectations establishing that social conformity has traditionally been a highly valued trait.

- Write the terms "talisman" and "irony" on the board.
- Ask the group for definitions, descriptions and examples of each term until they understand.
- Distribute copies of "The Talisman". Explain that this is a story that describes a conversation between two men as one relates a series of recent events from his life to the other.
- Ask them to look for the talisman and irony of the story.
- Have students volunteer to read one paragraph at a time aloud as the rest of the class follows along.

Assessment: After completing the story, ask the following questions:

- 1) What was the talisman?
- 2) What is the irony found in the story?
- 3a) What is the author's attitude toward conformity?
- 3b) How can you tell?
- 4) Is this attitude the one promoted by mainstream Japanese society?

Grade Adaptation: Target group = Grades 10-12. Scale down by reading the story to the students yourself.  
Inappropriate subject matter for younger students.