

Carol Roger
Tuslaw Middle School, Massillon, Ohio
Seminar on Teaching about East Asia, Spring, 2007

Title: Japanese Tall Tales

Grade 6-8, Language Arts and Social Studies
Time period: approximately two class sessions

Essential Question: Is it possible to accurately represent the Japanese culture through the study of tall tales?

Rationale: The young American student may be familiar with exaggerated tales of strength such as Paul Bunyan, but much less familiar with tales from other cultures. Throughout Japanese history one will find appreciation for physical strength and military might. The samurai of feudal Japan were in the upper level of the social pyramid and considered respected figures. This 'combat tradition' continues in modern kendo, kyudo, jujitsu, aikido, karate and sumo wrestling, and respect for physical accomplishments can be found in Japanese tall tales.

Standards: Students collect, organize, evaluate and synthesize information from multiple sources to draw logical conclusions. Students communicate this information using appropriate social studies terminology in oral, written or multimedia form and apply what they have learned to societal issues in simulated or real-world settings.

Students use knowledge of perspectives, practices and products of cultural, ethnic and social groups to analyze the impact of their commonality and diversity within local, national, regional and global settings.

Lesson: Remind students of the exaggerated nature of tall tales before beginning the initial oral reading of Three Strong Women by Claus Stamm. If students appear unfamiliar with tall tales, time will need to be spent reading an example of an American tall tale.

Small groups of students reread the tale of Three Strong Women, looking for facets of culture that create a 'face' of the Japanese people. These are written on individual student Venn Diagrams comparing Japanese tall tales with factual research about Japanese culture. One side of the diagram should be labeled: Japanese tall tales, and the other: research information. Using their diagrams, students study available resources; books, encyclopedias and internet sites, in order to add to the Venn in support or disagreement of the validity of Sumo wrestling, religious rituals, proper ways of behavior, etc as accurate representations of Japanese culture.

The Venn diagram offers a skeleton for the student's comparative writing. It will be up to the student to defend the use of a tall tale as a vehicle of cultural representation or to

argue against it because it does not accurately represent Japanese culture. In order to make their point, students must cite sources of information within their written work.

Reflection: Students will have a broader understanding of Japanese and American tall tales. Along with this understanding of these two cultures, students will see the commonality of storytelling as a vehicle to develop a deeper appreciation of world cultures.

Extension: Students create a modern day tall tale following the format of Three Strong Women.

Resources:

Stamm, Claus. Three Strong Women. New York, Viking, 1962.

O'Donnell, James. Japanese Folk Tales. Idaho, Caxton Publishing, 1958.

Ozaki, Tei Theodora. Japanese Fairy Book. Elibron Classics, 1908.

Heinrichs, Ann. Japan. New York, Children's Press, 2006.

Sumo: sumo.goo.ne.jp/eng/ozumo_joho_kyoku/shiru/kisu_chishuki/beginners/guide

Religion: www.1000questions.net/en/religion/shinto

Bravery: askasia.org