

4. Lesson Plan Number Two *Japan: Themes in Japanese Anime*

Purpose:

Identify recurring themes and symbolism in Japanese animation and literature in order to enrich eighth grade students' understanding of Asian culture while providing a rich source of writing materials.

Rationale:

The use of Japanese films with their advanced animation should relate well to middle school students' love of electronic games. Anime will provide the springboard to discuss and write about the universal themes in all literature, American and Asian, of good versus evil, nature and the environment, loyalty and honor, the value of family, and the role of fate in the hero/heroine's life.

Materials/Resources:

- Film selections may include: *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Princess Mononoke*, *Spirited Away*, *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*, *Porco Rosso*.
- www.japan-guide.com/e/e2035.html; <http://japanesefood.about.com/>

Activities:

Day one, review the elements of a story including setting, character, plot, conflict, and themes. Discuss "Does every story have a message?" Answers will vary depending on what students have read, but most will conclude that many authors have a reason (message) for writing a story. Investigate what students know about Anime. Introduce the movie and the students' objective to unravel the underlying themes and symbolism and their importance to the film. Advise students that they will critically view the film (or films depending on time frame). Afterwards they will write a paper in which they identify a significant theme. They must be able to support their choice with evidence from the film.

Days two, three, four, and five, show the film, stopping each day with time to discuss the plot and character development, the emerging themes and symbolism, and the apparent conflicts. Have students take notes in their writers' notebooks. Explore the questions, "How does the setting support the mood and tone of the story?" Stories are set in a futuristic setting to support the fantasy/adventure genre. "How does the filmmaker use character development to support a message or theme?" Heroes and heroines are brave, loyal, self-sacrificing. "Does the filmmaker use foreshadowing?" Certain language and movement as well as music indicates when danger approaches. Student answers will vary depending on which films are used, but universally, dark and light will represent evil and good respectively.

Week two, when the film (or films) has been completed along with class discussions concerning story elements, ask students to formulate a thesis statement about any theme they recognized and understood in the film and wish to explore further in a written essay. Teacher should check the thesis statements before students begin to draft essays supporting their opinions. Thesis statements should be written clearly. They should be

sufficiently narrowed to allow students to focus on a single theme. Students should web their ideas using their notes and any class discussions. Students then pair off with another student to discuss their ideas and get encouragement and feedback from peers. The remaining days of the week, students should maintain a writing workshop atmosphere of quiet reflective thinking and drafting. Teacher circulates checking progress. Individual conferences further explore how students are progressing.

Week three students will continue through the writing process from drafting, to revision, to final copy. Teacher schedules individual conferences to check progress and make recommendations.

Culminating Activity Students share essays during a Japanese celebration day with Japanese foods and selected scenes from other Anime. www.japan-guide.com/e/e2035.html; <http://japanesefood.about.com/>

Assessment:

Students will be given a rubric outlining the parameters of the written essay in which a clearly defined thesis statement is identified in the introduction with supporting opinions and data in the body of the paper. An effective conclusion will include a personal reflection exploring the impact of the film upon the student. Papers should be two to three typed, double spaced pages and will be graded holistically on a 6-1 rubric as outlined in state mandated writing proficiencies. (See Appendix B.)

Grade Adaptations:

The target grade for this activity is eighth grade. This TIP can easily be used with ninth and tenth grade with little change. Since the film *Princess Mononoke* is rated PG13, and contains some violence, it would not be advisable to use that particular film for grades lower than eighth where the students are all thirteen years or older. Choosing different Anime with a PG rating (*Howl's Moving Castle* or *Spirited Away*) would allow the TIP to be used with lower grades, sixth and seventh. At that point, the paper can be revised to an appropriate length for younger students.

B. Rubric for Interpretation of the Theme of *Princess Mononoke*

5 and 6 These papers will give a sound interpretation of the theme of *Princess Mononoke*. They will use adequate references from the film to support the writer's theory. Strong organization and good essay format will make it easy to follow the logic and reasoning. Good word choice will enhance the readability. Thesis statement will be clear, understandable, plausible, and convincing. MUGS are good.

4 and 3 These papers are missing conviction of the writer's interpretation either through a lack of clarity, a lack of supporting details from the film, or lack of logic and

reasoning. They fail to convince the reader that the writer's interpretation is valid. These papers show effort, but the outcome is lacking. With more attention to detail, these papers could be stronger. MUGS may need some strengthening, but are generally adequate.

1 and 2 These papers are clearly underdeveloped and demonstrate little success in finding meaning in *Princess Mononoke*. Their logic and reasoning is confusing or missing, there is no support from the film, and/or attention to MUGS is minimal. These papers look more like a rough draft or outline than final copy.