

Japanese Literature

Prior to class: Homework readings include background handouts on Zen Buddhism and Zen Parables. The students will also read three parables.

In-class Procedure: may take 3-4 days

1. At the beginning of class, students will copy two definitions in their notes. The first concept is parable, and the second is paradox. Once I clarify and exemplify these concepts, I will ask students to copy from the board a list of traits defining Zen Buddhism.
2. Since the parables have dramatic potential, I will group the kids into 3's or 4's and assign each team a different parable. Their assignment is to plan a skit with narration and present it to the class.
 - a. All students in each group must take a part—no one is a director or bystander. To get them started, I will give each student a handout with a sample script that I create to show them how to incorporate dialogue, narration, paradoxes, and philosophical lessons.
 - b. For the performance, they may either pantomime with a narrator, have actors with lines, or a combination of both.
 - c. Each performance must open with a brief introduction of the scene—perhaps brief background, setting, or context.
 - d. All performances will end with a closing passage.
 - e. All performances must incorporate at least one paradox, one principle of Zen Buddhism, and/or a moral lesson, although this can be implied rather than directly stated.
3. In class, the teams will need to create their scripts, practice performances, and possibly rehearse with other groups before presenting to the entire class.
4. During the presentations, I will videotape each group.
5. Following the presentations, we will watch the videos, critique good and bad scenes, and identify the paradoxes, Buddhist principle, and moral lesson for each parable performance. This critique could easily translate into a written reflection if the teacher prefers. Aside from a future test on the content presented, another assessment option is to give the kids a parable not discussed in class and have them identify paradox, discuss the effect, and determine the importance or philosophical underpinnings of the moral lesson.