

## Lesson Plan for China: Lu Xun's Preface and "Diary of a Madman"

**Purpose:** This lesson is intended to use two pieces by Lu Xun to show his importance as a revolutionary of 20th Century Chinese society and literature.

**Target Grade Level:** 12th grade

**Topics:** Lu Xun

Lu Xun's Preface and "Diary of a Madman" from Cheering from the Sidelines the political situation of China during the early 20th Century

**Concepts:** the continuous influence of Confucian ideals during early 20th Century China  
the vicissitudes of modernizing China  
the revolutionary aims of Lu Xun's writings and his place in Chinese history and literature

**Materials:** Preface and "Diary of a Madman" found in Lu Xun's "Diary of a Madman" and Other Stories. Translated by William A. Lyell. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.

Dr. Fidel Fajardo-Acosta's World Literature Website. "Diary of a Madman". 2001. <http://tajardo-acosta.com/worldlit/luxun/diary.htm>.

Stefan Landsberger's Chinese Propaganda Poster Pages--Lu Xun. accessed 3/2/04. <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/lx.html>

**Key Idea:** Lu Xun used his literature to, in his own words, "effect a spiritual transformation" of the Chinese people.

**Skills:** Knowledge--Students will be able to explain the aspects of Lu Xun's life, as he describes them in his Preface, which led him to write the short story "Diary of a Madman"

Analysis--Students will be able to summarize "Diary of a Madman".

Students will be able to analyze "Diary of a Madman" for form and content.

Synthesis--Students will be able to formulate a theme statement for "Diary of a Madman"

**Procedures:**

1. Discuss with students familiar literature which intended to change society, including Thoreau's Civil Disobedience, Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, and Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Have students describe their impressions of China in the early 20th Century. What might a writer have tried to change about that society?
2. Students read aloud in class Lu Xun's Preface. Discuss particularly the political and social realities of China under the Manchu government,

the abortive establishment of the new republic  
the development of the New Culture movement  
his epiphany resulting in his abandonment of medicine for literature,  
his metaphor of "an iron room" and  
his motivations for writing and publishing his stories, as he explains them.

3. Introduce "Diary of a Madman" by explaining the diary form, the two first person narrators, and the distinction between the classical Chinese of the introduction and the colloquial language of the diary.
4. Students read "Diary of a Madman".
5. In small groups, students answer the following study guide questions (the numbers refer to the diary's numbered sections):
  1. Explain how it is that the diarist has not seen the moonlight "in over thirty years." What is the connection between the moon and madness?
  2. What suggests he may be paranoid?
  3. What suggests to the diarist that people around him are cannibals? How does he interpret the Confucian words "benevolence, righteousness, and morality"? What does he claim is hiding under those words? How do such references address the problems of Confucianism?
  4. What new discovery does the diarist make?
  5. What actual examples of cannibalism does the diarist note?
  6. Lu Xun expresses a truth the diarist believes about his society in "Savage as a lion, timid as a rabbit, crafty as a fox." Think of Confucian hierarchy; which animal is at the top? How does it treat "lesser" animals? Which animal is at the bottom? How does it behave toward the top animal? Why must everyone be "crafty as a fox"?
  9. Why don't people "take that one little step"? What does Lu Xun want people to do? Why don't they?
  11. What is the significance of the concern with the diarist's younger sister?
  12. What does it mean to suggest she was eaten? In what way could the diarist himself be a cannibal?
  13. Who will "Save the children"? From what? What does it mean to be saved?

In the introduction, the elder brother said his younger brother "had long since become sound" and was in line for a "substantive official appointment". If that is the case, what does it say about the diarist? What else may have happened to him? Explain how he would "be eaten" either way.
6. Bringing the small groups together, the whole class discusses the previous questions they deem most significant. Other topics: Lu Xun's use of animals, relevance to Darwin's Origin of Species, change in diction from the introduction to the Diary, Lu Xun's rejection of the medical field, the historical situation of Lu Xun's time, application of the diarist's ideas to capitalism and communism.
7. Hand out copies of Stefan Landsberger's Chinese Propaganda Poster Pages. Read the prose and examine the pictures.

8. Discuss the following issues: How is Lu Xun being used in each poster? How is that effect achieved? How might "Diary of a Madman" be used by a Communist government? How might it be used by Deng Xiaoping during the Cultural Revolution?

**Evaluation:** Students write a theme statement for "Diary of a Madman", explaining how that theme emerges.

**Relationship to English Language Arts Standards:**

Acquisition of Vocabulary

5. Determine the meanings and pronunciations of unknown words by using dictionaries, thesauruses, glossaries, and technology and textual features, such as definitional footnotes or sidebars.

Reading Applications: Literary Text

3. Explain how voice and narrator affect the characterization, plot, and credibility.

8. Evaluate ways authors develop point of view and style to achieve specific rhetorical and aesthetic purposes, citing specific examples from text to support analysis.

**Grade Adaptation:** I do not advocate using the short story "Diary of a Madman" with students in grades lower than 11th. The literal subject matter of cannibalism is too mature and the figurative meaning too intricately tied to unfamiliar and complex historical realities of China. Other stories by Lu Xun, including "An Unimportant Affair" and the charming "Village Opera", could be used profitably with any high school students.

# Lu Xun

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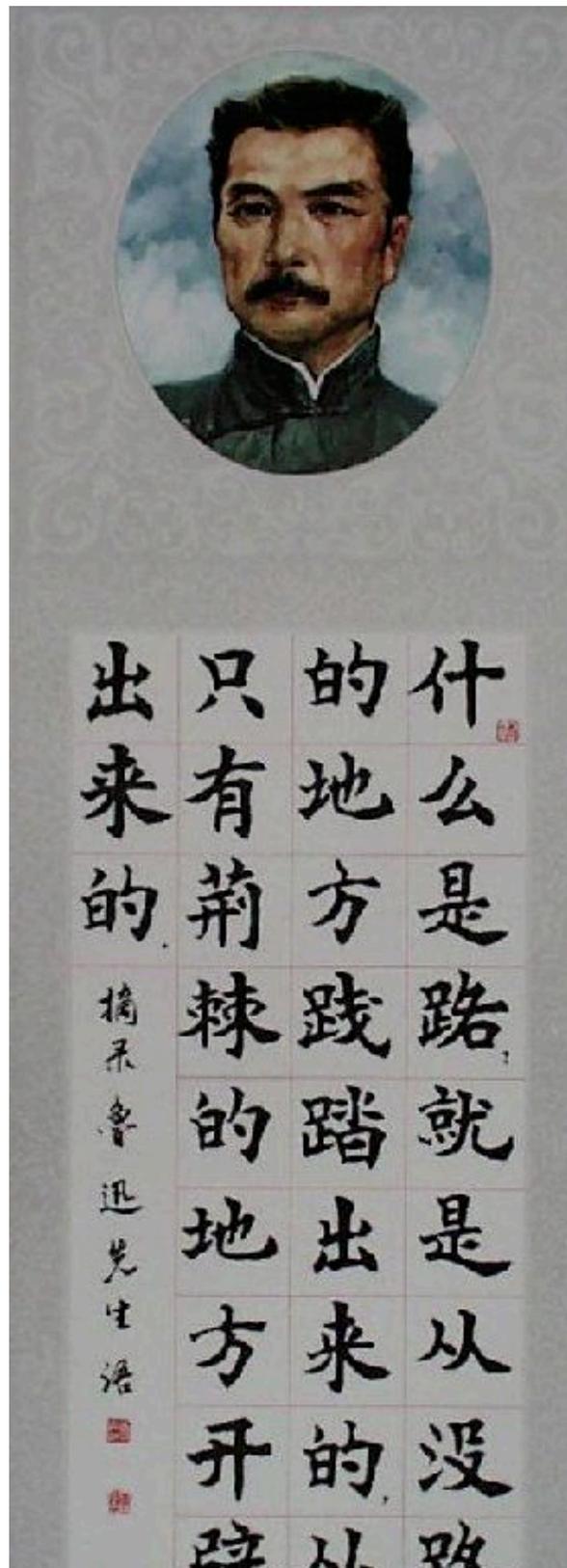


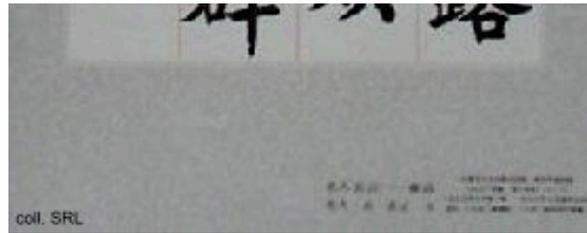
Lu Xun (pen name of Zhou Shuren, 1881-1936) played a seminal role in the world of Chinese literature and arts in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was trained in the Jiangnan Naval Academy, the School of Mining and Railways, the Kobun Gakuin and the Sendai Medical School (Japan). Upon his return to China in 1909, he taught science in school, and later served as a bureaucrat in the Chinese Ministry of Education under Cai Yuanpei.



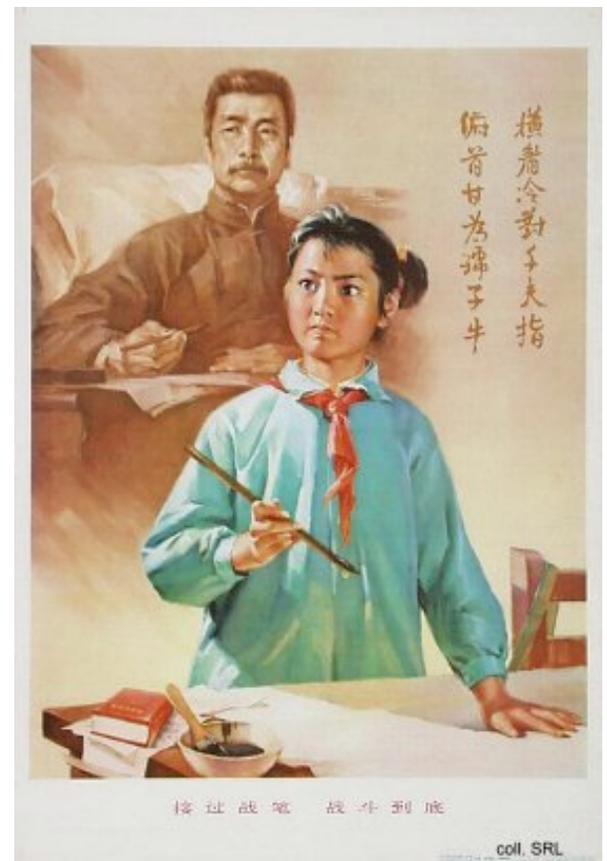
In 1918, he joined the New Culture Movement by having his "Diary of a Madman" (Kuangren riji) published

in *New Youth Magazine* (Xin qingnian). Both the style and the contents of this story had great influence on other May Fourth writers. Lu continued to publish short stories ("The True Story of Ah Q", the impressive "Medicine", "Kong Yiji"), prose poetry and *zawen* (miscellaneous essays). These earned him the reputation of being a shrewd and incisive observer and commentator of the times.





Lu's interests were not limited to creating literature that reflected his increasingly radical ideas about Chinese society. He played a major part in the popularization of non-Chinese art and the reappreciation of traditional Chinese art. Inspired by European woodcut artists like Frans Masereel and Käthe Kollwitz, he introduced both their techniques and choice of socially relevant subject matter to likeminded young artists in China. This in turn would have an important influence on the propaganda posters produced later under the Communist Party. In short, Lu Xun became a radical, while maintaining his independence from both the Nationalists (Guomindang) and the Communist Party.



Nonetheless, Mao Zedong canonized Lu Xun as the intellectual forefather of the Revolution, as a trailblazer in the early struggles of the Communist Party. Although not a Party member, he has been considered a true [Marxist-Leninist](#). Since 1949, Lu's name and his writings have been frequently used in the various struggles against enemies of various colors, and to justify the political positions of different, even opposing factions. The more pragmatic approach to politics that was inaugurated by [Deng Xiaoping](#) in 1978 has in no way tarnished Lu Xun's reputation.



External Link:

[The Lu Xun Memorial Hall](#) (in Chinese)

Source:

Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Voices from the Iron House—A Study of Lu Xun* (Bloomington, etc.: Indiana University Press 1987)

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