

Lesson Plan on Japan
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Purpose:

Students will learn about the basic beliefs and practices of Shinto in Japan by performing a series of short activities that will help students experience “the four affirmations” of Shinto.

Essential Questions:

1. What are the basic beliefs of Shinto?
2. What are the four affirmations of Shinto?
3. How do certain practices help to emphasize Shinto beliefs?

Rationale:

Students often remember the things that they experience directly. Students will perform a few short activities to help them experience “the four affirmations.”

Materials:

- Copies of the Basics of Shinto questions.
- Soap, papertowels, mouthwash and small cups set up in a specific bathroom
- Trash can to use outside
- How to fold a crane directions and origami paper (or thick paper cut into squares)

Activities:

1. Take students to computer lab and have them bring up the website: religioustolerance.org. Students should receive questions entitled The Basics of Shinto to answer using the website. Ask students to work in pairs to for about 15 minutes to use the website and answer all questions.
2. As a class, discuss the questions and answers.
3. Tell students that they will perform several tasks as a way to experience “the four affirmations” of Shinto.
4. Take class to the bathroom and tell them to line up at one sink to wash their hands with water and soap. Then to go to the other sink to use the cups and mouthwash provided. As students cleanse themselves, explain that followers of Shinto often practice “misogi” and cleanse themselves near a shrine and the ritual is directed toward the kami.
5. Take class outside to an area of the school that could be cleaned up. Ask students to spend 5 minutes walking around and picking up any trash. Tell students that they should silent through this activity and simply listen to the sounds of nature around them (helps if the area is away from a street). Explain that Shinto followers believe that you must be in nature to be close to the kami. Also, picking up trash symbolizes their respect for nature which is so important to Shinto.

6. Take class back into the classroom and explain that Shinto followers often use origami to create shapes and leave them around Shinto shrines. Explain that origami paper is never cut out of respect for the tree spirit that gave its life to make the paper. Hand out origami paper and the How to fold a crane directions. Students should have the rest of the period to complete their cranes.
7. As a homework assignment, explain to students that family, and specifically birth and marriage, is considered to be sacred to Shinto followers. Ask students to write a paragraph about a family tradition that has passed down through at least 2 generations. Tell students to call older family members if they need help. Students should be prepared to share their traditions the next day in class and turn in their paragraphs.

Assessment

- Student's questions on Shinto will be graded for accuracy
- Student's paragraphs on their family traditions will be graded for completion and thoroughness
- Students will be formally assessed on unit quizzes/tests on their knowledge of Shinto basics beliefs and specifically, the four affirmations

Grade Adaptation:

The target grade of this lesson is the 7th grade.

Scaling Up: Instead of creating the Shinto experiential activities for them, I would assign small groups to research Shinto practices and have the students create the experiential activities for their classmates. I would use the activities listed above as suggestions or help.

Scaling Down: I would give easier guided notes to younger students and have them write the paragraph about their family in class.

The Basics of Shinto Questions

Answer the following questions using the website: www.religioustolerance.org/shinto.htm

1. In your own words, how would you describe Shinto when it first began in 500 BCE?

Possible Answers: focus of followers was on nature, having children, fortune-telling, heroes, medicinal practices

2. What significant event happened to the religion around 700 CE?

Answer: The ruling family said they came from a heavenly place and Shinto became one of two official religions in Japan.

3. What makes Shinto unique from other religions?

Answer: no founder, written scriptures, religious law, organized priesthood

4. What is a kami and how is it different from something like a Christian god?

Answer: kami represents a god and can take the form of a natural object, an exceptional person or something that can't even be explained

5. What are the similarities between Shinto and Buddhism?

Answer: general optimism for the world and humankind, many Buddhists have Shinto weddings

6. Describe 3 general beliefs of Shinto followers:

Possible Answer: code of Confucianism, respect for ancestors, human life and nature is sacred, desire for sincerity or true heart, morality, desire for peace

7. Summarize the 4 Affirmations:

- 1) **Tradition and the family:** traditions passed down through marriage, birth
- 2) **Love of nature:** it is sacred and the way to be close to god
- 3) **Physical cleanliness:** baths, wash hands and mouth
- 4) **Matsuri:** worship and honor of kami, ancestral spirits

The Basics of Shinto

What students will find on www.religioustolerance.org/shinto.htm

Brief history of Shinto:

Shinto is an ancient Japanese religion. Starting about 500 BCE (or earlier) it was originally "an amorphous mix of nature worship, fertility cults, divination techniques, hero worship, and shamanism." Its name was derived from the Chinese words "shin tao" ("The Way of the Gods") in the 8th Century CE. At that time:

- The Yamato dynasty consolidated its rule over most of Japan.
- Divine origins were ascribed to the imperial family.
- Shinto established itself as an official religion of Japan, along with Buddhism.

The complete separation of Japanese religion from politics did not occur until just after World War II. The Emperor was forced by the American army to renounce his divinity at that time.

Unlike most other religions, Shinto has no real founder, no written scriptures, no body of religious law, and only a very loosely-organized priesthood.

Shinto beliefs:

Shinto creation stories tell of the history and lives of the "Kami" (deities). Among them was a divine couple, Izanagi-no-mikoto and Izanami-no-mikoto, who gave birth to the Japanese islands. Their children became the deities of the various Japanese clans. Amaterasu Omikami (Sun Goddess) was one of their daughters. She is the ancestress of the Imperial Family and is regarded as the chief deity. Her shrine is at Ise. Her descendants unified the country. Her brother, Susano came down from heaven and roamed throughout the earth. He is famous for killing a great evil serpent.

The Kami are the Shinto deities. The word "Kami" is generally translated "god" or "gods." However, the Kami bear little resemblance to the gods of monotheistic religions. There are no concepts which compare to the Christian beliefs in the wrath of God, his omnipotence and omnipresence, or the separation of God from humanity due to sin. There are numerous other deities who are conceptualized in many forms:

- Those related to natural objects and creatures, from "food to rivers to rocks."
- Guardian Kami of particular areas and clans
- Exceptional people, including all but the last of the emperors
- Abstract creative forces

They are seen as generally benign; they sustain and protect the people.

About 84% of the population of Japan follow two religions: both Shinto and Buddhism. (As in much of Asia, Christianity is quite rarely. Fewer than 1% of adults are Christians.) Buddhism first arrived in Japan from Korea and China during the 6th through 8th centuries CE. The two religions share a basic optimism about human nature, and for the world. Within Shinto, the Buddha was viewed as another "Kami". Meanwhile, Buddhism in Japan regarded the Kami as being manifestations of various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Most weddings are performed by Shinto priests; funerals are performed by Buddhist priests.

Shinto does not have as fully developed a theology as do most other religions. It does not have its own moral code. Shintoists generally follow the code of Confucianism.

Their religious texts discuss the "High Plain of Heaven" and the "Dark Land" which is an unclean land of the dead, but give few details of the afterlife.

Ancestors are deeply revered and worshipped.

All of humanity is regarded as "Kami's child." Thus all human life and human nature is sacred.

Believers revere "musuhi", the Kamis' creative and harmonizing powers. They aspire to have "makoto", sincerity or true heart. This is regarded as the way or will of Kami.

Morality is based upon that which is of benefit to the group. "Shinto emphasizes right practice, sensibility, and attitude."

The desire for peace, which was suppressed during World War II, has been restored.

There are "Four Affirmations" in Shinto:

- 1) Tradition and the family: The family is seen as the main mechanism by which traditions are preserved. Their main celebrations relate to birth and marriage.
- 2) Love of nature: Nature is sacred; to be in contact with nature is to be close to the Gods. Natural objects are worshipped as sacred spirits.
- 3) Physical cleanliness: Followers of Shinto take baths, wash their hands, and rinse out their mouth often.
- 4) "Matsuri": The worship and honor given to the Kami and ancestral spirits.

How to fold a crane

Get a square piece of paper (colored on one side.)

Fold it in half four different ways...

Now fold along all four creases at once.

Fold two edges in, to form a kite-shape (or ice cream cone shape) on top.

Do the same thing on the other side.

Pull the bottom corner (top layer only) up above the top corner.

Fold along the creases you made before.

Do the same thing on the other side. The top flaps are the wings and the bottom things are (no, not the legs) the neck and tail.

Fold two edges in. This makes the neck and tail thinner.

Do the same thing on the other side.

Now turn the page (so to speak)... do the same in back.

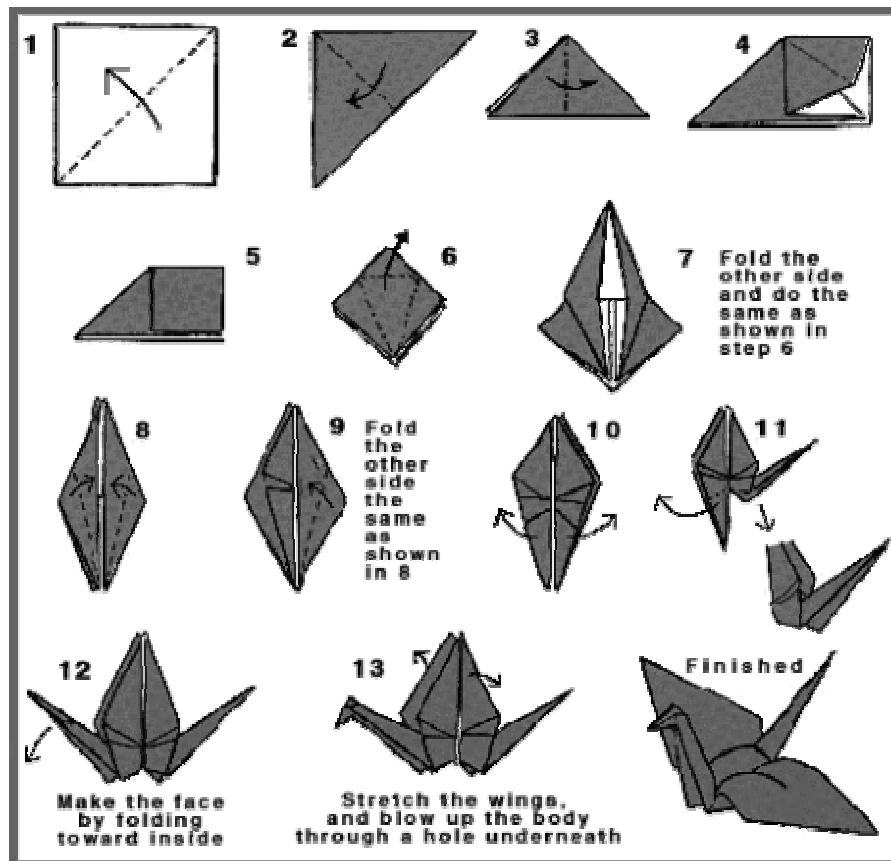
Fold up the neck and the tail as far as you can (without ripping the paper, please!)

Fold the head down.

Pull the neck and tail out/down a bit so they're not actually vertical.

Pull the head out/up somewhat so it's not parallel to the neck.

Pull the wings straight out from the body so that the body inflates. If that doesn't work, you can blow through a hole in the underside.



Sources Used

Website:

www.religioustolerance.org/shinto.htm

Cranes:

<http://www.origami-tsuru.com/crane2.htm> and

<http://www.sadako.org/foldingcranes.htm>