

# East Asian Studies Seminar

## Lesson Plan #1: Japan (Zen)

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### “What Can the Study and Experiencing of Zen Buddhism Teach Us About Japanese Culture and Society?”

**Purpose:** To give the students the opportunity to get inside the minds and culture of the Japanese. To explore the basics of Zen and to allow the students to have Zen experiences with a philosophy that has had a dramatic impact on Japanese worldview.

**Rationale:** To allow students to go beyond a textbook/lecture approach to a culture's worldview.

**Materials:** Handouts, overheads, pictures, incense, drums.

**Activities:**

- lectures/discussing using overheads & handouts.
- creative workshops
- Zazen sessions (sitting Zen meditations)
- Kinhin sessions (walking Zen meditations)
- Student presentations of their workshop products

**Assessment:**

- student debriefings of the meditations
- student evaluation of the unit materials
- testing on the history and basics of Zen
- student application to Japanese literature discussions

**Grade Adaptation:** High School 10<sup>th</sup>- 12<sup>th</sup> Grade. This material as well as the meditations could be adapted to the Middle School level easily, with some changes in timing and emphasis.

\* A more detailed 5-day lesson plan is included with this material.

## ZEN LESSONS

- Day 1:
- Define Zen (overheads – definitions & quotes)
  - Zen term sheet distributed
  - Intro to Buddhism
  - Synopsis of life & quest of Siddhartha (overhead)
    - topic of suffering and its elimination
  - “The Great Enlightenment” & Dharma
    - 4 Noble Truths (overhead)
    - 8 Fold Path
- Day 2:
- Zen travels to Chins, historical overview (overhead)
  - Zen travels to Japan, historical overview (overhead)
  - Posture of Zezen “sitting” & its purpose discussed
  - Students will assume Zazen “sitting” position, incense will be lit, breathing will be counted and a 5 minute Zezen exercise will follow
  - Zezen debriefed
- Day 3:
- Japanese Zen; unique aspects (discussion & examples)
    - tea ceremony
    - shoguns & Zen
    - Haiku poetry (handout)
    - Gardening
    - Zenga (Zen painting)
    - Zen conundrums, paradoxes (handouts)
  - Zezen exercise (7 minutes)
  - Zazen debriefed
- Day 4:
- Students will create either their own Haiku, Zenga or Zen conundrum
  - Zazen exercise (10 minutes)
  - Zazen debriefed

- Kinhin (Walking Zen) introduced

Day 5:

- Students present their Zen creations

- Final Zazen exercise (10 minutes)

- Followed by Kinhin (Walking Zen) exercise, accompanied by drumming

- Debriefing of Zazen and Kinhin exercises

## **ZEN:**

**School of Buddhism that asserts enlightenment can be attained through meditation, self-contemplation and intuition.**

**Is really all about experience: how you experience life, interpret and react to it.**

**Has been called “direct knowledge”, it cuts through the smokescreen of the everyday and straight to the heart of reality.**

**Thrives on paradox. The more you “think” about it, the less you will understand it.**

**Is not logical.**

**Is closely linked w/ Japanese culture.**

## **ZEN QUOTES**

**THE HUNTER WHO CHASES TWO  
RABBITS CATCHES NEITHER ONE**

**THE TEMPLE BELL STOPS BUT  
THE SOUND KEEPS COMING  
OUT OF THE FLOWERS**

**THE FINGER POINTING AT THE  
MOON IS NOT THE MOON**

**FROM THE PINE TREE LEARN  
OF THE PINE TREE AND THE  
BAMBOO OF THE BAMBOO**

**ZEN IS LIKE LOOKING FOR THE  
SPECTACLES THAT ARE SITTING  
ON YOUR NOSE**

**ZEN IS CHOPPING WOOD AND  
CARRYING WATER**

# **NATIVE AMERICAN ZEN**

**DREAMS ARE WISER THAN  
WAKING - Black Elk**

**TRYING CREATES  
IMPOSSIBILITIES, LETTING  
GO CREATES WHAT IS  
DESIRED - Stalking Wolf**

**TO CLOTHE A MAN  
FALSELY IS ONLY TO  
DISTRESS HIS SPIRIT  
- Luther Standing Bear**

**TRADITION IS THE ENEMY  
OF PROGRESS/PROGRESS  
IS THE ENEMY OF TRADITION  
- (Indian) Anonymous**

# SIDDHARTHA

Prince Siddhartha Gautama – b. 6<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.

Born of wealth in Indian kingdom of Kapilivastu

Father shields Siddhartha from knowledge of poverty, sadness, sickness, aging & death.

At 29, Siddhartha looks down from castle and sees an aged man, sickness & a corpse.

He realizes that suffering is the lot of most

Siddhartha sets out on spiritual journey

Quest focuses on suffering: what causes it?  
Why does it exist? Can it be overcome?

Fruitless journey ends w/ Siddhartha sitting under a bodhi tree for 6 yrs.

Great Enlightenment or satori (Awakening)

Siddhartha becomes the Buddha

He spends 45 yrs. Traveling India to share the dharma (truth)

# **THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS**

**Life is Suffering.**

**The origin of suffering is egoistic  
craving and attachment.**

**There is a way to the cessation  
of suffering.**

**This way is the  
Eightfold path**



# **EIGHTFOLD PATH**

**RIGHT UNDERSTANDING**

**RIGHT THINKING**

**RIGHT SPEECH**

**RIGHT ATTITUDE**

**RIGHT LIVELIHOOD**

**RIGHT EFFORT**

**RIGHT MINDFULNESS**

**RIGHT CONCENTRATION**

# **ZEN BUDDHISM TO CHINA**

**Bodhidharma travels to China  
to share the dharma – 520 C.E.**

**Patriarch Bodhidharma  
achieves Enlightenment after  
9 yrs. In N. China**

**His disciple, Hui Ke becomes  
the first Chinese patriarch**

**To show his seriousness of  
intent, Hui Ke cuts of his arm**

**Daoism & Confucianism  
influence Buddhism**

**Last Chinese patriarch –  
Huineng (638-713 C.E.)  
practices Zen outside of  
Indian culture**

# ZEN TO JAPAN

8<sup>th</sup> Century C.E. Kobo-daishi  
returns from China with written  
Japanese script & Buddhism

12<sup>th</sup> Century C.E. Eisai Myo-an  
returns from China with Zen  
& first tea seeds

Tea & tea ceremony intertwined  
with Japanese Zen

Japan establishes own Zen  
tradition separate from China

Shoguns support Zen during  
Kamakura Period (1189-1375)

Zen bushido (warrior code)  
adopted by samurai under  
shogun patronage

Great Japanese Zen masters  
Dogen & Bassui produce  
noted spiritual texts

Zen poetry – Haiku, gardening,  
zenga – Zen painting, emerge

## *TERMS OF ZEN*

Bodhisattva – wisdom being, or one on the way to enlightenment

Buddha – Guatama Siddhartha, the founder of Buddhism

Confucianism – school of moral, religious philosophy, f. Confucius

Conundrum – a riddle

Daoism – meaning “The Way”, religious philosophy based on writing of Laozi

Dharma – element of existence; ultimate nature, reality, truth, existence

Haiku – Japanese Zen poem, 17 syllables over three lines w/spiritual overtones

Karma – universal law of cause and effect

Kinhin – walking Zen meditation

Koan – “public case” a pure presentation of the nature of ultimate reality

Mandala – circular symbol representing the universe, focal for meditation

Mantra- power-laden syllable or series of syllables that manifest certain cosmic forces or aspects of a Buddha

Nirvana – spiritual bliss

Paradox – seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true

Roshi – “old teacher”, Japanese, a Zen master

Samsara – endless cycle of death and rebirth until one reaches nirvana

Samurai – lord’s retainer in Feudal Japan, defends lord’s estate

Satori – the state of “awakening” or “enlightenment”

Shogun – commanders-in-chief who ruled Japan until the 19<sup>th</sup> century

Siddhartha – the Buddha as a young man

Zazen – sitting zen meditation

Zen – meditative absorption in which all dualistic distinctions are eliminated

Zenga – Zen Painting

## Haiku

Harvest moon:  
around the pond I wander  
and the night is gone

-Basho

At the over-matured sushi,  
The master  
Is full of regret

- Buson, Yosa

No sky  
no Earth – but still  
snowflakes fall

- Hoshie

Sick and feverish  
Glimpse of cherry blossoms  
Still shivering

- Akutugawa, Ryunosuku

An old pond!  
A frog jumps in –  
The sounds of water

- Basho

## Haiku

In the cicada's cry  
No sign can foretell  
How soon it must die

- Basho

Waterjar cracks:  
I lie awake  
This icy night

- Basho

Lightning:  
Heron's cry  
Stabs the darkness

- Basho

Sick on a journey:  
Over parched fields  
Dreams wander on

- Basho

## Empty-Cup Mind

**A** wise old monk once lived in an ancient temple in Japan. One day the monk heard an impatient pounding on the temple door. He opened it and greeted a young student, who said, "I have studied with great and wise masters. I consider myself quite accomplished in Zen philosophy. However just in case there is anything more I need to know, I have come to see if you can add to my knowledge.

"Very well," said the wise old master. "Come and have tea with me, and we will discuss your studies." The two seated themselves opposite each other, and the old monk prepared tea. When it was ready, the old monk began to pour the tea carefully into the visitor's cup. When the cup was full, the old man continued pouring until the tea spilled over the side of the cup and onto the young man's lap. The startled visitor jumped back and indignantly shouted, "Some wise master you are! You are a fool who does not even know when a cup is full!"

The old man calmly replied, "Just like this cup, your mind is so full of ideas that there is no room for any more. Come to me with an empty-cup mind, and then you will learn something."

## A Monk with Heavy Thoughts

**A**s two Zen monks walked along a muddy, rain-drenched road, they came upon a lovely woman attempting to cross a large mud puddle. The elder monk stopped beside the woman, lifted his arms, and carried her across the puddle. He set her gently down on the dry ridge of the road as the younger monk discreetly admired her charms.

After bowing politely to the woman, the two monks continued down the muddy road. The younger monk was sullen and silent as they walked along. They traveled over the hills, down around the valleys, through a town, and under forest trees. At last, after many hours had passed, the younger monk scolded the elder, "You are aware that we monks do not touch women! Why did you carry that girl?"

The elder monk slowly turned and smiled. He said, "My dear young brother, you have such heavy thoughts! I left the woman alongside the road hours ago. Why are *you* still carrying her?"

## The Wild Strawberry

**A** man was running, stumbling, and gasping for breath as a ferocious tiger chased him. Dashing for the edge of a cliff, he saw a vine. He desperately reached for the vine and in one last, bold leap swung himself over the cliff's edge.

As he hung dangling down, he looked up and saw the growling tiger on the ledge above him. He felt a moment of relief as the tiger clawed the air but was unable to reach him. Then the man looked down. At the bottom of the cliff far below where he hung was *another* tiger! Tightening his hold on the vine, the man wondered what to do.

To his further dismay, he noticed two mice, one dark as night, one light as day, nibbling at the vine. He knew that it was only a matter of time before he would fall to the jaws of the tiger below. Just then, he noticed a wild strawberry growing on the face of the cliff.

Gripping the vine with one hand, he reached out with the other, plucked the strawberry from the cliff wall, and put it in his mouth. Never before had he realized how sweet a strawberry could taste.



## A Dispute in Sign Language

**A** Zen master and his one-eyed student lived together in a monastery. One day a wandering monk came to the Zen master and said, "If you will accept me, I wish to study with you."

The old monk replied, "Decide first if you belong here. Go into the garden and speak to my student. Converse with him in any way you wish. After that, come and tell me your decision."

The visiting monk nervously went out into the garden and saw the one-eyed monk meditating. "I will show him how profound I can be," thought the visitor. "I will converse with him in sign language."

Approaching quietly, the visiting monk tapped the one-eyed monk on the shoulder and held up one finger. The one-eyed monk held up two fingers. In response the visiting monk held up three fingers. The one-eyed monk held up his fist. When the visiting monk saw this, he dashed out of the garden to tell the old monk his decision.

He came upon the old monk at his shores and gasped, "I do not deserve to stay here! I am unworthy of being a fellow student with the enlightened young monk I met in the garden!"

The old monk paused in his work and asked incredulously, "Are you speaking of the young one-eyed monk in the garden?"

"Yes!" exclaimed the visitor. "His knowledge is far superior to mine. I will humbly leave."

"Please tell me what happened in the garden," said the old monk, wide-eyed with amazement.

The visitor explained, "I approached the venerable monk and decided to converse in sign language. I held up one finger to indicate the Buddha. Whereupon he held up two fingers to indicate the Buddha and his teaching, *the Dharma*. I persevered in the discussion, however, and held up three fingers to show the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha the community. Then he revealed the limitations of my understanding. He held up his fist to show me that they are all one. I immediately ran here to tell you I must leave." With a sigh, he turned and left the temple.

**A moment later the young one-eyed monk stumbled into the temple. He grumbled and shouted, "Where is that scoundrel? How dare he insult me!"**

**"Calm your temper," said the old monk. "Please tell me what happened in the garden."**

**The young monk explained, "I was peacefully meditating when that rude visitor interrupted my concentration. When I looked up at him, he held up one finger, indicating that I have only one eye. I held up two fingers, politely congratulating him that he has two eyes. Then he insulted me further! He held up three fingers, pointing out that there were only three eyes among us. I could bear it no longer. I raised my fist and punched him in the nose and he ran away!"**