



## **Implementation Plan: Diana T. Mackiewicz**

### ***Reading the Landscapes of East Asia: An Exploration of the Geography of Japan and Korea as Viewed Through Literature***

Implementation Plan

Submitted by

Diana T. Mackiewicz

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It is with much gratitude that I thank the Teachers Center for Global Studies at Clark University and the Five College Center for East Asian Studies at Smith University for sponsoring: *Reading the Landscapes of East Asia: An Exploration of the Geography of Japan and Korea as Viewed Through Literature*. Further gratitude to the Massachusetts Geographic Alliance, the ongoing support to the Freeman Foundation and the U.S.-Japan Foundation. Through the combined efforts of all the above organizations listed and the dedication of the presenters and professionalism of our facilitator, Mimi Stephens, this has been a highly informative, understandable and engaging series of classes.

East Asia, China, Korea and Japan, not only comprises a wealth of literature centuries in the making but a far range of diverse geography affected by the movement of humans across the vast area. There is no singular geographic theme that dominates East Asia; all five themes of geography are well exposed in the area. Just as there is no one dominant genre of literature from the area. There may be haiku and tankas from Japan, sijo from Korea and China has its own literature and flowery poetry from any number of dynasties, like the Tang Dynasty. Overall, the geographic region of East Asia has assisted in the formation of ideas, principles, and values that burst forth from the myriad of literature presented.

#### **Why study Korean history, sijo and geography of this peninsula?**

The Korean peninsula, shaped almost like a small panhandle is surrounded by the Sea of Japan, Korean Straits, Yellow Sea, Korea Bay, China and Russia and faces Japan. This landform provides any instructor a worthy subject of examination. Korea is a bridge physically and a historical and modern bridge for ideas, philosophies and travelers.



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Educator, Young Un, from the Wheeler School, described his ancestral home with clarity and fluency. The documents he selected for the class were organized excellently. For example, a short lesson that included reading a short story (moral tale) from Korea provided me with an additional resource for my classes. The clever rabbit story was another reminder of how literature in the form of short stories, moral tales, folk tales, jatakas, panchatantras, Aesop's' fables, etc serve to better influence young readers and even older readers. Geography is apparent in these stories and when one makes large comparisons using these stories, the geographical identities are better explained.

Another lesson about Korean literature, the sijo, was provided by Professor David McCann. His lecture designed more for a college seminar class provided two valuable points of interest: the performance style of a sijo and the actual recording of a sijo while performed. The text, *The Bamboo Grove* provided for this subject area is a plethora of sijos, many of which are interesting for the high school student. Dr. McCann was quite friendly and accessible, open-minded to my own feeble attempts at sijo writing, to the point that he asked for copies of my poetry.

However, there are other forms of literature from Korea, exhilarating and enticing to cover with a class. *Lost Names* by Richard Kim is still a personal favorite and worth all of the efforts to present and then there is *Our Twisted Hero* by Yi Munyol. The presentation by Arlene Kowal also provided another way to have a class share a novel, the whole divided into parts, the novel read in parts by the class. The book, set in a small-town outside of Seoul, Korea in an elementary school, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, described high functioning, manipulating, ambitious students and a less than mediocre teacher existing in an academic environment that functioned on strength, charisma and deception. Yet the novel was the author's attempt to bring awareness to the abuse of political power and its overall affect on the morality and consciousness of the Korean people. The story of Korea of the study of the whole, then divided into parts and the apparent struggle of North Korea versus the struggle of modernization and affluence of South Korea. Students like black and white differences and the Koreas provide comparisons



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of how the modern Koreas have grown up since their separation in 1950. One may assume that Korean history, rich in technology, literature, religion and the confluence of trade between China and Japan will provide a large focal point for any class on global studies, economy, and East Asian literature.

### **Japan: Basho, Haiku, Tanka and Grass Sandals**

Japan's physical geographical description: a spine of mountains forested with cypress and pine trees, deep ravines and hills surrounding verdant villages juxtaposed to the forever modern chaos and lights of Tokyo and Yokohama were all richly explained in the classes regarding Japan.

The lectures given by Professor Piper Gaubatz provided the needed pieces of information about Japan's culture and overall geography. The slide presentation had some images and explanation that are worth splicing together with information about the literature from this area. Noticeable piece of information that Gaubatz parleyed was about land usage in Japan and how much land is protected from development and the abundant resources of energy are the right components for discussion about balanced land use and production of materials.

In addition, Chris Walsh gave an ambitious lesson with the DEAI-Kit, a product of the Japan Foundation. The large photos and stories one each photo are suitable for class discussions and provided memorable views of Japan but not so much of the geography but more of the lifestyle.

Finally, there is Basho. The incorporation of the book into my library, *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson and Issa* will soon become dog-eared. Reading so many poems from the above authors is a treasure and will be used steadily for research. Furthermore, I have always been fascinated by the road trips of Basho and delighted in his description of the Japanese countryside when he took these trips. The merger of



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geography and its themes and Basho's journeys is a future project of my own. something I plan to build on Google Earth and use as a means to explain the geography and travel and poetry innate to Japan. A lesson plan was presented about the book, *Grass Sandals*. The book is beautifully illustrated and displays one of the Basho's journeys, and further explains some Japanese cultural terms. Students have learned that the basic haiku formula is 5-7-5 phrases, but have they really learned the meaning of a haiku. Poetry is firmly integrated in Japanese culture; it is a facet of their lifestyle, ancient and modern. One encounters poetry in many places and one only has to see the unmistakable cherry blossoms surrounding Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto on a glorious spring day and know that this distinctly Japanese poetry in bloom.

In regards to Basho, the lesson with thirty one translations of Basho's famous haiku stands out as a stellar assignment in regard to how translation differences can affect meaning. After reading all the translations, it occurred to me that all students will equally make different assessments about the same photo of a place, another powerful example of how opinions are unique and diverse.

The lessons on Haiku, Tanka and Renga by Karla Drake added information about the tanka and how this genre of Japanese poetry was important in the Heian period of Japan. The practice of the Renga writing with the class was productive event. All the poems were well constructed and clearly reflected the essence of the tanka as presented by the instructor , Karla Drake. Renga writing can be very entertaining, even now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century!

### ***Klack Klack: Kamishibai in a grove***

It is one thing to see the colorful and well illustrated story panels of a Kamishibai and another to perform! The whole form and function of the Kamishibai as presented by veteran educator, Jennifer Vacca, provided substantial lesson ideas. The lesson our group worked with was engaging and fun. We made up our own story lines for our set of panels. Eventually, Vacca gave the story written for the panels. It is a powerful medium, the Kamishibai for the expression of art, writing and performance. The



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function of the Kamishibai, to have panels illustrated with the words written on the back is a great idea for also sharing folk tales, proverbs, and other well written short stories useful for students.

Then there is “In a Grove”, my favorite story that we covered taken from *Rashomon and Other Stories*. “In a Grove” by Akutagawa, and its singular viewpoints of each member of the story provides a unique teaching experience. First, a student will be able to appreciate the whole story if all the parts are presented independently, almost in a mystery format. Second, students can piece together using certain facts presented what might have taken place and draw inferences. Finally, the whole story comes together in the final voice of the dead samurai. His telling of events through a medium brings to light a strong trait that most people share, the fear of humiliation and identification with honor. The video we saw by Kurosawa that was based on “In the Grove” was another mode for explaining this riveting story. Students may even be compelled to watch other movies by Kurosawa, for example, *The Seven Samurai* which influenced the screenplay for *The Magnificent Seven*. The above videos and others by Kurosawa are listed on Netflix which makes it much easier to access them for my students.

In conclusion, *Reading the Landscape of East Asia* has provided new resources and a fresh look at well-used resources for fusing geography and literature. Before the series began, I made major modifications to my Global Perspectives class in anticipation for the outcome of the new materials presented from this series. The Five Themes of Geography took center stage as the means for establishing all the setting and for why people live the way they do and the addition of literature from East Asia has been included easily into the lesson plans. In the process of participation for this series of classes, I have proposed to the English Department Head a whole new class for next year devoted to only East Asian literature. The whole series of classes have provided some of the best literature and lesson plans on East Asia to date. Therefore, I am very grateful and intend to use as much of the material as possible. For my own organization



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of the literature, I assembled an annotated bibliography for future reference, and anyone may use it if it meets his or her purposes.



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### **Annotated Bibliography**

#### ***Reading the Landscape of East Asia Series***

**Note: This bibliography forms the basis of a new East Asian Literature elective which was approved and will be offered in Fall 2010.**

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Akutagawa, Ryunosuke. *Rashomon and Other Stories*. Tokyo: Charles Tuttle, 1952. Print.

"In a Grove" is a story from this book of stories by Akutugawa. The story reflects a unique approach on perspectives and motives of witnesses and suspects involved in a rape and a murder. The point of view of each person carefully indicates his or her role in the story. The outcome of the story highlights the seriousness ascribed to one's own honor, especially in the Japanese culture.

Hass, Robert. *Essential Haiku (Essential Poets)*. Hopewell: Ecco, 1995. Print. Basho, Buson and Issa are the featured haiku poets in this book. Short biographies of each author are included along with meanings of various terms and phrases employed in Japanese poetry. Comprehensive collection of haiku and tanka poetry written by each person are included.

Higa, Tomiko, and Dorothy Britton. *The Girl with the White Flag*. New York: Kodansha International, 2003. Print. Set in Okinawa, Japan during the last few months of WW II when the US marines were continuously attacking the island. The young



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girl is separated from her family and is presumed lost. She manages to find out what it is like to live in one of the many caves of the island during the lengthy siege. Story is based on true story of the author of the book. Written for young readers.

Kawabata, Yasunari. *Palm-of-the-Hand Stories*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006. Print. The title indicates that these are small stories, that one may carry in their hand. They are snapshots of life composed by the author. Kawabata reflects on the subjects of pain, love, loss, loneliness and some of the more dark aspects of humanity. The book is a compilation of his concise writing over a period beginning in 1923 and ending in 1972 with a shortened version of his novel Snow Country, called "Gleanings from Snow Country".

Lee, Helie. *Still Life With Rice*. New York: Scribner, 1997. Print. The novel is written in the voice of the Korean grandmother, Hongyong. Her formative years in 20th century Korea are described along with the political problems that Korea experienced in that time. Yet, the grandmother's formidable spirit helps her to succeed in all of her responsibilities. She eventually leaves Korea for California and brings her *ch' iryo* practice with her.

Mori, Kyoko. *Shizuko's Daughter*. Fawcett, 1994. Print. This book is considered for young adults. It is a sad story that explains how a young Japanese teenage girl deals with her family, school and overall environment after the inexplicable suicide of her mother. She still has her father's cold attitude to deal with and her stepmother's intrusive actions.





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Munyon, Yi. *Our Twisted Hero*. New York: Hyperion, 2001. Print. Somewhere in South Korea, boys were vying for control of their 6th grade classroom and they were fighting for this political clout amidst hypocrisy and mediocrity of leadership. Who is the hero? Many lessons are learned about the sharp pain of bullying and the ruthless tactics people will use to gain power.

Newman, Leslea. *Hachiko Waits*. New York: Square Fish, 2004. Print.

Hachiko is the faithful loving dog of Professor Ueno. The dog accompanies his master everyday to the train station and also waits for his master at the end of the day when he returns. One day Prof. Ueno does not return, yet the unflappable Hachiko waits for his master, a wait that spans ten long years. The novel is inspired by a true stor and also an ASPCA Henry Bergh Children's Honor Book.

Rutt, Richard. *Bamboo grove an introduction to sijo*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1998. Print. Collection of Korean sijo poetry and the information behind several of the nuanced meanings. Korean sijo authors are also described in this volume.

Say, Allen. *Kamishibai Man*. New York: Houghton Mifflin/Walter Lorraine, 2005. Print. *Kamishibai Man*, written and illustrated by Allen Say, beautifully conveys the history of Kamishibai, paper theater. The reader learns how children and adults of Japan participated and loved this form of street entertainment prior to the TV.

Spivak, Dawnine. *Grass sandals the travels of Basho*. New York: Atheneum for Young Readers, 1997. Print. Beautifully illustrated book for young readers and old about the journeys of Basho, Japan's favorite poet. Japanese terms are explained or illustrated in the book.



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Tamaki, Donna, Shin Kitada, and Mitami Yukihiro. *The Story of Tanabata*. New York:

Kamishibai for Kids. Print. A Kamishibai is a paper-theater for children. The story is about a princess who falls in love with a herdsman and they marry. Their marriage is not acceptable to the Heavenly Ruler because they are not working on their duties and must be separated as a result. However, the lovers do get to meet once a year. Complete script in Japanese and English on the back of each story panel along with additional lesson plans.

Yoshimura, Akira. *Shipwrecks*. San Diego: Harcourt, 2000. Print.

Isaku is a nine year old boy living in a remote fishing village on the coast of Japan. His people sell sea salt to neighboring villages. Shipwrecks are frequent on the rocky shores near the village and villagers often take the loot found aboard the ships. Yet one particular shipwreck carries a ship of dead people from a strange disease. Isaku and the other villagers must have to contend with the mystery ship.