



**Implementation Plan: Amy Looman**

“READING THE LANDSCAPES  
OF EAST ASIA”  
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

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6<sup>th</sup> Grade

Colrain, MA 01340

Feb. 2010



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### **Background**

Colrain Central School is a small, rural K-6 school located in Colrain, MA. There are currently approximately 120 students that attend the school in grades preK-6. The town is home to approximately 2,000 residents with a median household income of \$40,455. The school has Title 1 status as well as a 95% white population. Generally speaking, it is a middle-low income school comprised of almost exclusively white students. The minority students that are present are African-American, Hispanic, Native American, or Pacific Islander. Until this year, there were no Asian students. However, in September a girl moved in from the Philippines. She is the sole representation of Asia.

Students in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade are required to study World Geography and Cultures in order to meet the state social studies standards. The Asian section is broken down into Western Asia (the Middle East), Central and South Asia, Southeast Asia and Oceania, and North and East Asia. There is also a focus on how the following five factors have influenced settlement and the economies of the Asian countries: absolute and relative locations, climate, major physical characteristics, major natural resources, and population size.

### **Purpose**

My primary purpose in attending the “Reading the Landscapes of East Asia” seminar was to attain more knowledge of the region and how I could incorporate that knowledge into my classroom. While I initially approached this as a social studies endeavor, I quickly became aware of the clear benefits to my “book clubs” and reading curriculum. I also believed that it was important to have as many accurate resources as possible available to my students as their first-hand experience with Asian cultures was virtually non-existent. My hope in attending the series was to acquire resources through which I could make Asia come alive to my students in a genuine way, without reinforcing stereotypes or simplifying and generalizing some very rich, complex cultures. Also, I wanted to be able to have my students explore cultures very different from their own, and yet be able to see some of the similarities that all humans experience. Finally, I was hoping to find some ways to fit all that into a curriculum that is already bursting at the seams and for which I do not feel I have enough time to complete. This series more than fulfilled these purposes.

My own knowledge of this region of the world was greatly expanded through my attendance at these workshops. Not only did I gain valuable information about Korea and Japan, I got some wonderful ideas on how to incorporate the study of these two countries into my already too full curriculum. I feel like I came away with some very concrete ways to expose my students to Asia in a genuine, meaningful manner. I have already implemented some of these ideas into my curriculum for this year and will most definitely be incorporating many more next year.

### **Impact on Teaching**

#### **Immediate Impact**



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As a result of attending this series, I put into place a change in my students “book club” selections. As a way to expose them to the Asian culture immediately, I allowed them to choose the book they wanted to read for their “book club” from a selection of four books, all set in Asia: Homesick, Homeless Bird, The Kite Fighters, and When My Name Was Keoko. This technique, referred to by Marilyn Day as the “drop-in method” was the single most valuable method I learned throughout this course.

When I teach my poetry unit later this spring, I will definitely be able to utilize some of the information I learned about the Haiku and Tanka. I plan on having students not only compose their own haikus, but then create some group tankas, as we did in the seminar. I will be able to include a mini-unit on Basho, Ono no Komachi, and Izumi Shikibu which will give my students a context for the history of this poetry.

When we were in the midst of our Japan unit, I was able to point out to students some of the things I had learned as a result of this series. Specifically we discussed the human-environmental interaction, focusing on the shortage of farmland in Japan and how that creates a security issue with regards to food security as they are dependent upon so many imports for their food. This launched us into a great discussion about trade and the benefits and risks of being a global, interdependent society.

The other immediate impact that I am seeing is the incorporation of the Kamishibai as a teaching tool for teaching my students how to write incorporating the evidence of the pictures. This will open a new way for them to see how illustrations must be tied to a story and how to use supporting evidence. I am going to divide students into groups and give each group a picture and see if we can create a class story based on the pictures of the kamishibai, much like we did in the session.

Finally, the two largest ‘take home’ ideas that have definitely influenced my teaching this year are the ideas put forth by Ted Mitchell of developing “essential questions” and by Marilyn Day of using the “drop-in” method. Ted Mitchell stressed the idea of developing a few essential questions that can be the framework for whatever country is being studied, thereby helping to focus the areas of study. As I have often felt overwhelmed by the idea of studying the entire world in one year, this was extremely valuable to me. I have begun to do this by focusing on the idea of how geography impacts daily life, and how utilizing one’s natural resources benefits a nation.

Marilyn Day spoke of the “drop-in” method as a way to expose students to different cultures when there is not enough time to spend studying each one in depth. This idea is very beneficial because it will allow me to expose them to stories and cultures from around the world, even while I am focusing on ELA components such as foreshadowing and personification. By simply taking the time to find writing pieces from other traditions, students can be studying the structure of a story while simultaneously engaging their minds with a culture different than their own. This opened my mind to the possibility of a more integrated curriculum, where students could be exploring civilizations from around the world at times other than just the “social studies” block.

Next Year:



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As a result of this series on East Asia, I have a much better understanding of some changes I can make to my curriculum for next year. I will be developing a unit on Korea, which I did not specifically cover this year. I came into this series with very little knowledge of Korea and have found myself intrigued and wanting to learn more. In addition to the geography of the nation and how that has been a factor in its history, I will also spend some time with my students exploring how Korea has been caught between China and Japan and how that has helped to shape the Korean identity.

During our study on Japan, I plan to invest in some of the Deai Kits as a method of showcasing the diverse geography of Japan. I will also use it to compare how a child's life in Japan is similar to a child's life in the United States. It is my hope that this will give students a more tolerant view of those that may have different backgrounds than their own.

There were several resources that I found helpful that I will be using to supplement my lesson plans. As I mentioned earlier, the kamishibai has so many uses. I will be using it in the future to review paragraph structure, to help students with the creation of dialogue, and to explore different points of view. I will use the book In the Grove, to help students examine the element of perception. I will also be adding the book Joyful Noise: Poems in two voices by Paul Fleischmann to my curriculum to help students again examine the idea of differing points of view and one way in which they can effectively write from two points of view.

I can say without reservation that this series was invaluable to me. I came away with such a deeper understanding of Korean and Japanese cultures, as well as ways to incorporate that knowledge into my classroom. I look forward to being able to put some of these ideas into practice in order to provide my students with a richer awareness of the world to which they belong.



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### **Resources**

#### **Books**

Hass, Robert (1994) *The Essential Haiku, Versions of Basho, Buson, and Issa, Poetry*

Higa, Tomiko (1989) *The Girl with the White Flag: A Spellbinding Account of Love and Courage in Wartime Okinawa, Education about Japan*

Kawabata, Yasunari (1988) *Palm-of-the-Hand Stories, Short Stories*

Kim, Richard E. (1970) *Lost Names, Education about Korea*

Lee, Helie (1996) *Still Life With Rice, Education about Korea*

Mori, Kyoko (1993) *Shizuko's Daughter, Character Sketch, Figurative Language, Art Connections*

Munyol, Yi (2001) *Our Twisted Hero, Bully Prevention*

Nakazawa, Keiji (2004) *Barefoot Gen: The Day After, Education about Japan, Hiroshima*

Newman, Leslea (2004) *Hachiko Waits, Education about Japan*

Say, Allen (2005) *Kamishibai Man, Education about Japan, Art Connections*

Yoshimura, Akira (1982) *Shipwrecks, Education about Medieval Japan*

#### **Articles**

Bernson, Mary Hammond (1997) "Stories are Not Frills: Literature About Asia in the Elementary Classroom" *Education about Asia*

Gluck, Carol (2008) "Top Ten Things to Know About Japan in the Early Twenty-First Century" *Education about Japan*

Grant, Patrick "Geography's Importance to Japan's History" *Education about Japan*

O'Brien, Anne Sibley "A Guide for Educators and Readers: The Legend of Hong Kil Dong: The Robin Hood of Korea" *Education and lesson plans about Korea*

Petry, Anne (2003) "Geography of Japan" *Education about Japan*

#### **Other**

The Story of Tanabata: A Kamishibai Play from Japan, adapted by Kitada, Shin, *Perspective, Supporting Evidence*