



## **Implementation Plan: Diane Skawski-Pride**

### Reading the Landscapes of East Asia

As an English teacher, I felt like I was in heaven looking around at all of the teaching materials available for integration at my school. When time is limited in our daily lives, most teachers I know are more likely to integrate the materials when it requires a minimal amount of culling from sources. This is especially true where I work at Brattleboro Union High School, where over a hundred faculty members hardly have time to talk on any topic, never mind engage in discussion about incorporating new materials on a specific topic. It has taken years, and much hard work, for the Chinese exchange to take off. This past year I was lucky to be a part of a professional development group that formed to discuss implementing Asian cultural activities in our classrooms. Now that the foundation of interest has been built, the goal of this professional development group is to broaden our Asian curriculum to include more information about other Asian countries with the hope of expanding our existing exchange program.

In the English Department, I think there are several ways to include pieces of literature into our existing curriculum to incorporate more Asian literature. What needs to be considered is maintaining the balance between what is required and what we can use to enhance discussion or stimulate thought on topics related to those required materials. The first book I considered incorporating into the curriculum was *Our Twisted Hero* by Yi Munyol because there are several places this novella could be used in existing courses. The first is our English 2 course where students are required to read *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller which covers the common theme of bullying and “witch hunts”. For that same reason *Our Twisted Hero* would also compliment the teaching of *Lord of the Flies* as part of our Good vs. Evil unit in English 3. The other reason I am considering *Our Twisted Hero* is because it is a novella and could be a great addition for either of the courses. This book is also of interest because we have a burgeoning population of struggling readers entering the high school and this story is accessible to a



## **Implementation Plan: Diane Skawski-Pride**

diverse population. *Our Twisted Hero* could supplement either book in addition to replacing *Lord of the Flies* to meet the needs of this group because it provides the same message.

Another book I thought would be a wonderful addition to our curriculum is *The Girl with the White Flag* by Tomiko Higa. This story addresses World War II and would be a great compliment to my Holocaust unit which covers the European and Chinese Holocaust before moving on to discuss the impact of war on Korea and Japan. This unit examines the many faces of war by looking at all the opposing sides of World War II, asking students to examine each perspective of the war to understand that any one cultural group is not all good or all bad. By adding *The Girl with the White Flag* students will also consider the role of the Americans as aggressors during World War II and its impact on some of the families who were devastated by the U.S. bombings along with the subsequent invasion. This would be used with selected poems from *When We Say Hiroshima* by Kurihara Sadako which is already a part of the unit describing the aftermath of the bomb being dropped on Hiroshima.

To play upon the above theme, excerpts from *Still Life With Rice* by Helie Lee would be valuable in learning more about Korean culture during World War II. I had originally planned to use excerpts from *Lost Names* and Lee's book would provide another voice to the Korean perspective. There are several elements of this story that are culturally rich in addition to this being a great coming of age story. The first part of the book caught my attention because it is the story of a young American woman exploring her cultural roots. It would be an opportunity to discuss cultural roots with students. What are elements of their family history that students are most proud of? What are the parts that are hard to accept? What questions do they have about their heritage? What traditions might they like to pass on to their children? These would be great questions to have students explore.

*Still Life With Rice* also examines the concept of arranged marriages and I think several of the chapters about the arranged marriages stimulate a valuable discussion. The story is full of relationship



## **Implementation Plan: Diane Skawski-Pride**

surprises and a common stereotype many students have about culture, not just Asian culture, suggests people in the world who have arranged marriages are often unhappy because the couples did not fall in love first. This leads to the misconception that the relationships are not “happy” or even passionate because the couples did not choose to be together. This story examines several relationships with a wide range of success and failure resulting from the arranged marriages, which will give students much to think about. This story will generate discussion about relationships which usually begins with the teaching of *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. Another piece of *Still Life With Rice* I think would be important to high school students is looking at historical perspective the story provides about what happened during the Japanese invasion and consequently later on when the Korea was divided after the war. Although this information is covered briefly in a world history course during tenth grade, students know very little about Korean culture and what it was like to live during the war. *Still Life With Rice* would provide one perspective about Korean life during that time.

Other components of the seminar I found valuable to teaching literature were the segments on the geography. Looking at the geographical features of both Korea and Japan make it helpful for students to understand some of the challenges each country faces. The geography and topography identify the importance of farm land, water sources, and food supplies needed for survival. The activity we reviewed covering the geography of Korea entitled “Korean: It’s in the Bag” by Tom Barner and Robert Vacca would be useful to identify important landmarks and create understanding about the division of Korea’s land during the war. I have students who love learning through projects of this nature and creating a map with yarn would be a fun way to learn more about the geography. To accompany this activity “Korea: Home Sweet Home” caught my attention because to understand the experiences of characters in the story, the activity asks students to examine the geographic regions of Korea and resources that might be available to five different fictitious families living in that region.



## **Implementation Plan: Diane Skawski-Pride**

Through their own research, students would learn more about the culture and materials available to their region of their fictitious family. This is similar to the profile cards we covered entitled “Snapshots from Japan: The Lives of Seven Japanese High School Students” and “DEAI” where we tried to identify aspects of Japanese culture based on the profile cards. Students respond well to conducting research and this activity would be a great way to explore culture using the existing profiles.

The Sijo, Haiku, and Tanga workshops were also important aspects of this seminar which I feel could be added to almost any unit. For my own classroom, I thought writing poetry from each culture would be a great way to wrap up my Holocaust unit through celebration of what each culture has given the world as a gift. When Arlene Kowal provided pictures of nature and had us write a haiku to go with it, I decided this would be a wonderful idea for students as well. They could research a landscape scene from each country and write a poem in each style. Because the poetry was covered during several workshops, I feel like I am comfortable adding this as a classroom activity because the format is easy and it forces students to play with language through their writing to select the appropriate word to fit the pattern. Many teachers in the English Department would love to play with these styles of poetry as well. This celebration would bring together the geography and the literature of the unit.

I teach several writing courses and the one activity I enjoyed not only participating in, but want to implement right away as a creative writing activity is the Kamishibai cards. I absolutely loved the concept of playing with pictures to create a story because it does require students to pay attention to details while composing their stories. What makes the activity exciting is knowing the cards relate to a story on the back which is part of the Japanese culture. Students would have fun composing the stories before finding out how close they were to the original. I ended up with two sets of cards entitled “The Story of Tanabata” and “Hats for the Jizos” which will work well with my ninth grade classes where the goal is to write a personal narrative. This could become a great warm-up activity.



## **Implementation Plan: Diane Skawski-Pride**

Overall, there wasn't one workshop I attended during this seminar that didn't make me feel like it was well worth the drive. I live in New Hampshire so attending many of the workshops meant at least an hour drive or more. Although I couldn't find a colleague willing to traverse the miles with me to the seminar, I feel as if I have so many rich activities to share with members of my department and the professional development group in my school as a result. Already my colleagues have been asking questions about what can be used in their classes and my department head suggested putting a binder of the materials in the library where teachers could check it out. Having it at the library would ensure one teacher wouldn't just take the whole binder and keep it.

In the future I hope to teach an Asian Literature course as a junior/senior elective. Many of the materials provided through the seminar would be used to teach that course since both the historical perspective of literature and poetry was explained in addition to the modern perspective—especially of Korea. I can't wait to share what I've learned! So far, students have found the information valuable because they don't know much about Asia. This has been evident during my Holocaust unit which includes the Asian perspective. I am sure they will be very excited about the information.