

# Asian Odyssey

A National K-12 Interdisciplinary Curriculum Model

The  
Cleveland  
Museum  
of Art

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art for everyone

## JAPANESE FOLKTALES

### Grade Level

Grades 3-6

### Concepts

- Protagonist—leader of a cause
- Antagonist—the enemy or one who acts against the protagonist
- Moral—a lesson learned
- Custom—a usual practice or habit
- Folktale—a story that is retold through generations
- Moral—a principle or standard with regard to right and wrong conduct
- Tradition—a belief or custom handed down orally from generation to generation
- Crane—a large wading bird with very long legs and neck, believed to be the bearer of good luck
- Dragon—a mythical monster usually shown as a large, winged reptile, considered a symbol of power
- Demon—evil supernatural being
- 19<sup>th</sup> century ghost tales—Japanese (art) and American (written)
- Japanese hanging scrolls—*kakemono*; used to display calligraphy or ink paintings and are often hung in alcoves.
- *Oni*—Japanese goblin that eats humans; it has horns and fangs, and wears a loincloth
- Hannya—a Japanese warrior legend (folklore) that morphs and eats children. The story of Hannya is a legend told about the Rashomon Gate.
- Connect visual medium to written medium.

### Key Ideas

- Japan has a rich history of folktales. Many are told and retold to this day. Some Japanese art works include traditional folktale subjects in them.
- Japanese folktales help us learn about Japanese traditions, history, and customs, just as American folktales tell us about American history.
- Japanese and American folktales have many similar characters, such as dragons, ghosts, and trickster animals; plots with magical things; and themes such as the prevailing of kindness and the punishment of evil.

- Many cultures share the desire to entertain and teach moral lessons through folktales that have been passed down through the years.
- Many of the folktales feature an evil being, or demon, who tempts the main character or who is an impediment to success or happiness.
- Humility, being part of a family, and being satisfied with one's lot are common themes occurring in folktales.
- The tales support the Japanese ethic of serving the good of the group (not being self-serving).
- Evil forces are represented as goblins, demons, foxes, and other assorted animal combinations, and even beings that can change themselves into human forms.
- Similarly, other cultures have animal beings that represent evil and are often the antagonist in folktales (U.S.: wolves, foxes; Native Americans: crows or spirits).
- Ghost tales and horror stories play an important role in portraying the dark, morbid side of both Japanese and American cultures.
- Japanese culture often used artwork, such as hanging scrolls, as a medium for telling ghost stories, while American culture depicts ghost tales through the written word.
- Similarities and differences exist between the purpose of Japanese ghost tales and American ghost tales.
- The ability to analyze different mediums and work in both mediums creates different interpretations of art, literature and their themes, and ideas.
- Legend of Hannya—There was a dreaded demon that lived by the Rashomon Gate. This demon preyed on passers-by in the night. A member of the court was asked to rid the city of this scourge. While this poor courtier told his friends that he could accomplish this feat without any problem, he was in fact quite scared. He went down to the gate before nightfall. The courtier steeled up his courage and waited. Sure enough, when the sun finally disappeared, the demon came out. The courtier pounced, but managed only to get the demon's arm. With the arm in hand, he returned to the court to show that he had been victorious against the demon.

His lie would not come back to haunt him until later. He was at home, and there was a knock at the door. He looked out to find a very old woman. She said she was a traveler, and he invited her in. He offered her tea, and after much cajoling, she obliged. When he turned to boil the water, he heard a thud. Turning, he saw that the woman had grabbed his prized possession, the demon's arm. This image depicts that moment as the old lady runs away from his house: the little old lady was in fact a demon.

## Materials

### Geese

- *Geese, Reeds, and Water*, Yamamoto Baiitsu, 1800s, CMA 1997.109.1-2
- *Wild Geese*, Kano Sanraku, late 16<sup>th</sup> century-early 17<sup>th</sup> century, CMA 1987.9.1-2

- Johnson, Ryerson. *Kenji and the Magic Geese* (illustrated by Jean and Mou-sien Tseng). New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992.

### **Dragons**

- *Dragon*, Nichokuan Soga, mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, CMA 1985.134.1
- *Tiger*, Nichokuan Soga, mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, CMA 1985.134.2
- Luenn, Nancy. *The Dragon Kite* (illustrated by Michael Hague). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982.
- Hamada, Hiroshige. *The Tears of the Dragon* (illustrated by Chihiro Hamada). New York: Parents' Magazine Press, 1967.

### **Ghosts**

- *Ghost and Oil Lamp*, Bunichi Tani, early 19<sup>th</sup> century, CMA 1992.71
- *The One-Legged Ghost*, a legend retold by Betty Jean Lifton (illustrated by Fuku Akino). New York: Atheneum, 1968.
- *Hannya Retrieving Her Arm*, Shibata Zeshin, c. 1840, CMA 1990.6
- *Demon (in Pilgrim's Clothing) Playing: Oni Nembutsu*, Edo Period (1615-1868), CMA 1982.26

### **Cranes**

- *Birds, Trees, and Flowers*, attributed to Kano Shoen, late 1500s, CMA 1948.128.1-2
- Bartoli, Jennifer. *The Story of the Grateful Crane* (illustrated by Kozo Shimizu). Chicago: Albert Whitman, 1972.
- Bodkin, Odds. *The Crane Wife* (illustrated by Gennady Spirin). San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1998.

### **Samurai Warriors**

- *Portrait of Ozora Buzaemon*, Kazan Watanabe, 1827, CMA 1980.177
- Ralph F. McCarthy. *The Inch-High Samurai* (illustrated by Shiro Kasamatsu). Tokyo: Kodansha International, Ltd., 1993.
- Morimoto, Junko. *The Inch Boy*. New York: Viking Kestrel, 1984.
- French, Fiona. *Little Inchkin*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1994.
- *Scenes from 'Essays in Idleness'*, Matsumura Goshun, late 1700s- early 1800s, CMA 1971.43.1-2
- *Lions*, Sekkei Yamaguchi, 1668, CMA 1972.10.1
- *Tiger and Leopard*, Sekkei Yamaguchi, 1668, CMA 1972.10.2

### **Other Folktales**

- Kudler, David. *The Seven Gods of Luck* (illustrated by Linda Finch). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

- *The Stonecutter, a Japanese Folktale* (adapted and illustrated by Gerald McDermott). New York: Viking Press, 1975.
- Ishii, Momoko. *The Tongue-Cut Sparrow*. New York: Lodestar Books, 1987.
- McCarthy, Ralph F. *The Adventure of Momotaro, the Peach Boy*. New York: Kodansha International, 2000.
- Sakade, Florence, ed. *Japanese Children's Favorite Stories*. Rutland, VT: C.E. Tuttle, 1958.
- Yagawa Sumiko (Paterson, Katherine, trans.) *The Crane Wife*. New York: William Morrow, 1981.
- Websites for Japanese folktales: <http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/folk/>  
<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/sparrow.html>
- Bernhard, Emery, and Durga. *How a Snowshoe Hare Rescued the Sun*. New York: Holiday House, 1993.
- Goble, Paul. *Crow Chief*. New York: Orchard Books, 1992.
- Goldin, Barbara D. and Hillenbrand, Will (illustrator). *Coyote and the Firestick: A Pacific Northwest Indian Tale*. Orlando, FL: Gulliver Books, 1996.
- McDermott, Gerald, *Coyote*, San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1994.
- "The Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allan Poe (including audio version) *Heath Middle Level Literature – Purple Level*. Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1995. pp. 808-15.
- Poster board, paint, crayons, markers, colored pencils, paper

## Procedure

### Day 1

1. Present one or two American folktales such as the story of Paul Bunyan or Rumpelstiltsken to the students. What do the stories teach us about morals and/or kind acts? Discuss American folktales and read one if there is time.
2. Read one of the folktales listed below. Follow the story with a discussion of the Cleveland Museum of Art's Japanese work of art relating to the story. (I have listed several possibilities, which can be used in a single lesson or in a unit on Japanese folktales.):
  - a. *Kenji and the Magic Geese*, followed by *Geese, Reeds, and Water*, and *Wild Geese*. Does it seem like these could be the same geese as the ones in the folktale?
  - b. *The Dragon Kite* and/or *The Tears of the Dragon*, followed by the artwork, *Dragon*, and *Tiger*, and/or *Lions*, and *Tiger and Leopard*. (Does the tiger look like a dragon?) Discuss how dragons are used in modern Japanese celebrations such as New Year's parades.
  - c. *The Inch-High Samurai*, *Little Inchkin*, and/or *The Inch Boy* followed by *Portrait of Ozora Buzaemon*. Does Ozora Buzaemon look like an ancient

samurai warrior? (He was poor and powerless). Compare the inch-high warrior to the American character, Tom Thumb.

- d. *The One-Legged Ghost* followed by *Ghost and Oil Lamp*. What was the one-legged ghost? Tell a story about the ghost and the oil lamp.
  - e. *The Story of the Grateful Crane* and/or *The Crane Wife* followed by *Birds, Trees, and Flowers*. The crane has been a very important animal in Japanese art and storytelling for generations. What American folktale features a character that spins something special on the spinning wheel?
3. Ask children to draw scenes from the folktale they have chosen. Assemble the drawings and their accompanying story portions into a class book or mural. Retell the folktale.
  4. Or have the children act out a Japanese folktale for creative dramatics.

### Day 2

1. Any part of this lesson can be used to compare folktales and relate them to art. Use one or two folktales, or perhaps several over an extended period.
2. Discuss how many stories in our culture have evil represented in them. Help students think of animals or beings that represent “the bad guy,” or antagonist, in our culture (stories with a fox, witch, the color black).
3. Look at the CMA images. Predict whether the animals or beings pictured are representations of evil. Point out the *oni*. Is there any message the viewer gets while studying the image?
4. Look for the same animals or beings to appear in the tales. Do the animals match earlier student predictions?
5. Read the story *The Adventure of Momotaro, the Peach Boy*. Ask how good (the protagonist) and evil are represented. What lessons are being taught in the story and how is the lesson supportive of Japanese values? Are there any familiar beings seen first in the artwork?

### Day 3

1. Read *The Tongue-Cut Sparrow*. Who is the protagonist? The antagonist? What does the sparrow represent? What is the moral or lesson?
2. Read *The Crane Wife*. What is the moral or lesson of the story? Compare the animals in the story to animals depicted in the CMA images.

### Day 4

1. Read *Crow Chief* or one of the two Native American “coyote” stories. Analyze these ways of looking for the antagonist/protagonist.
2. Make a storyboard to retell a story using only pictures. Make a screen with the pictures to retell the story.

## Day 5

1. Students will be introduced to the technique of a Japanese hanging scroll and discuss the different purposes for which it was employed—teaching, story-telling, portraying folklore.
2. Students will be introduced to the legend of Hannya in Japanese folklore, including the role, abilities, and importance of Hannya in ghost tales.
3. Students will view the two CMA hanging scroll images –*Hannya Retrieving Her Arm* and *Ghost and Oil Lamp*.
4. Students will take notes regarding the pictures, including characters, colors, imagery, and themes.
5. Homework: Students will draw on their observations from class to create individual written stories to accompany one of the two CMA pictures. The stories must be relevant to the picture that is selected and must include reference to the different objects and imagery found in the picture itself. Student stories may include reference to cultural notes on Hannya and hanging scrolls. Stories must be completed by Day 5 of mini project.

## Day 6

1. Distribute copies of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart.”
2. Students will read the story and then listen to an audio version that includes sound effects, voice resonations, and other additional effects to enhance the story and its themes and imagery. Marginal notes will be taken during the reading concerning questions, important words that the students come across during the reading.
3. After reading the story, students will discuss the story’s characters, themes, imagery, tone, events, etc. Students will analyze the relationship between the caretaker and the old man, what really happened in the story, madness, insanity, and other relevant themes. Students will take notes during this portion of class.

## Day 7

1. Have students review their notes about “The Tell-Tale Heart.”
2. Students will be given poster board, coloring utensils, and floor space to create a hanging-scroll artwork visually portraying “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Simply, students will capture Poe’s story in a typically Japanese art form.
  - a. Hanging Scroll must capture themes, colors, images, etc. relevant to Poe’s story.
  - b. Artwork must follow guidelines of hanging scroll technique as established in Day 5.
3. Hanging scrolls must be completed for homework.

## Day 8

1. Teacher will create an atmosphere conducive to ghost tales, including dimmed lighting, candy, candles, pumpkins, and eerie music.
2. Students will read and show their ghost tale interpretations.

### **Enrichment**

- A. Folktales such as *The Inch-High Samurai* have several different versions, each a little different. Read other versions of one of the folktales. Compare the stories and discuss why they change just a little each time they are retold.
- B. Make origami paper cranes.
- C. Read other Japanese folktales such as *The Stonecutter*, or *The Seven Gods of Luck*. Discuss the moral of each folktale you read.
- D. Develop a collection of American and Japanese folktale characters such as the dragon, the crane, the goose, the ghost, the turtle, or the carp. How are illustrations in Japanese folktales different from those in American folktales? Have children write stories to accompany their drawings of folktale characters. Compare and contrast the stories from the different cultures.
- E. Adapt a Japanese folktale to a puppet show or a play.
- F. Write a class story, focusing on the beginning, middle, and end. Use CMA images, such as *Tiger and Leopard*, as a story starter.
- G. Students will research and study the similarities and differences between Japanese and American holidays or festivals. Students will analyze and discuss ways that the different cultures celebrate, decorate for, and commemorate different holidays, events, and time periods in their respective cultures and history. Some areas of concentration for the students' research include decorations of self and home, traditional activities, and history of the holiday (what is being celebrated and why).

Some holidays to research and use in comparing/contrasting include the following:

American	Japanese
Hanukkah	Nenmatsu (Year-end holiday)
Halloween	Toji
Christmas	Seibo
Easter	7-5-3
New Year	Tsukimi

### **Evaluation**

1. Students will discuss, compare, contrast, debate the different interpretations of “Hannya Retrieving Her Arm,” “Ghost and Oil Lamp,” and “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Students will discuss feasibility of multiple interpretations of the same text, how these interpretations differ, and what factors may lead to different versions of the same story or work of art.

### **Ohio State Standards**

### *Social Studies*

Identify cultural practices of a culture on each continent through the study of the folktales, music, and art created by people living in that culture.

### *English Language Arts*

- Grade 2 Describe the characters and setting.  
Retell the plot of a story.  
Distinguish between stories, poems, plays, fairy tales, and fables.  
Identify the theme.
- Grade 3 Recognize similarities and differences of a plot across literary works.  
Describe the characters and setting.  
Retell the plot, sequence a story.  
Identify and explain the defining characteristics of literary forms and genres, including folktales.
- Grade 4 Describe the thoughts, words, and interactions of the characters.  
Identify main incidents of a plot sequence, identifying the major conflict and its resolution.  
Identify and explain the defining characteristics of literary forms and genres, including folktales.
- Grade 5 Identify main incidents of a plot sequence and explain how they influence future action.  
Identify and explain the defining characteristics of literary forms and genres, including folktales.  
Summarize states and implied themes.
- Grade 8 Apply reading comprehension strategies, including making predictions, comparing and contrasting, recalling and summarizing and making inferences and drawing conclusions.  
Monitor own comprehension by taking marginal notes during reading.  
Identify and explain various types of characters and how their interactions and conflicts affect the plot.  
Explain how authors pace action and use climax.  
Explain ways in which the author conveys mood and tone through word choice, figurative language and syntax.  
Examine symbols used in literary texts.  
Use precise language, action verbs, sensory detail, colorful modifiers and style as appropriate to audience and purpose (fictional writing).  
All writing conventions apply.  
Produce informal writings for various purposes.  
Prepare writing for publication (for display or sharing with others).  
Write narratives that:  
-sustain reader interest by pacing action and developing an engaging plot

- use literary devices to enhance style and tone
- create complex characters in a definite, believable setting
- generate writing ideas through discussions with others and from printed materials
- use organizational strategies to plan writing

Select an appropriate structure for organizing information in a systematic way (e.g. notes, outlines, charts, tables, and graphic organizers).

**This lesson plan was developed by Beth Dallin (Westerville School System, Westerville, Ohio), Barbara Landis (1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher, Beachwood City Schools, Beachwood, Ohio), and Michael Babinec (8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Shaker Heights City Schools, Shaker Heights, Ohio)**

## The Tongue-Cut Sparrow

Translated by Lafcadio Hearn

'Tis said that once upon a time a cross old woman laid some starch in a basin intending to put it in the clothes in her washtub; but a sparrow that a woman, her neighbor, kept as a pet ate it up. Seeing this, the cross old woman seized the sparrow and, saying, "You hateful thing!" cut its tongue and let it go.

When the neighbor woman heard that her pet sparrow had got its tongue cut for its offense, she was greatly grieved, and set out with her husband over mountains and plains to find where it had gone, crying, "Where does the tongue-cut sparrow stay? Where does the tongue-cut sparrow stay?"

At last they found its home. When the sparrow saw that its old master and mistress had come to see it, it rejoiced and brought them into its house and thanked them for their kindness in old times and spread a table for them, and loaded it with sake and fish till there was no more room, and made its wife and children and grandchildren all serve the table. At last, throwing away its drinking cup, it danced a jig called the "sparrow's dance." Thus they spent the day.

When it began to grow dark, and they began to talk of going home, the sparrow brought out two wicker baskets and said, "Will you take the heavy one, or shall I give you the light one?"

The old people replied, "We are old, so give us the light one. It will be easier to carry it."

The sparrow gave them the light basket and they returned with it to their home. "Let us open and see what is in it," they said. And when they had opened it and looked they found gold and silver and jewels and rolls of silk. They never expected anything like this. The more they took out the more they found inside. The supply was inexhaustible. So that house at once became rich and prosperous.

When the cross old woman who had cut the sparrow's tongue out saw this, she was filled with envy, and went and asked her neighbor where the sparrow lived, and all about the way.

"I will go too," she said, and at once set out on her search.

Again the sparrow brought out two wicker baskets and asked as before, "Will you take the heavy one, or shall I give you the light one?"

Thinking the treasure would be great in proportion to the weight of the basket, the old woman replied, "Let me have the heavy one."

Receiving this, she started home with it on her back; the sparrows laughing at her as she went. It was as heavy as a stone and hard to carry; but at last she got back with it to her house.

Then when she took off the lid and looked in, a whole troop of frightful devils came bouncing out from the inside and at once tore the old woman to pieces.

Lafcadio Hearn, *Japanese Fairy Tales* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1918), pp. 77-79.

<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/sparrow.html>