

Two Homes Living in Two Cultures

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Featured Children's Literature: The Wakame Gatherers, by Holly Thompson

Objectives:

1. Students will understand some similarities and differences between communities

Plan for Assessment:

1. Students will actively participate in small-group work and whole-class reading and discussions, constructing categories and making comparisons.
2. Students will demonstrate ability to identify central ideas or themes of a text and to develop text-to-self connections. Students will communicate these ideas, themes, and text-to-self connections in visual and written formats. A checklist for assessing students' work is provided.

Notes:

This lesson is written for the early elementary grades but is easily adaptable for older students. The focus on biculturalism is especially suitable for transnational student populations. The suggested time frame is four class sessions of 40 to 60 minutes.

The lesson develops students' comparison skills, focusing on cultural aspects of Japan and the United States highlighted in the featured children's literature, *The Wakame Gatherers*. In the picture sorting activity, students are asked to categorize images from Japan and the United States. The suggested categories are: food and meals, home, and transportation. The number of photographs has been kept small to make the task manageable for early elementary students; of course, a small number of photographs will necessarily represent only a small slice of any aspect of a country's culture. As students identify similarities and differences in the pictures, guard against overgeneralization based on this small amount of data.

A focus of *The Wakame Gatherers* is cultivation and harvesting of a form of seaweed called wakame. Uses of other types of seaweed are also mentioned. If you suspect that your students are not familiar with seaweed, you may wish to see whether you can find wakame at an Asian market or natural foods store in your community. It is usually sold dried. It is then soaked in water for a few minutes before use. It quickly regains its original size and leafy appearance. One package of dried wakame is probably plenty for one class, since it expands to about eight times the original size when rehydrated. Author Holly Thompson provides a few recipes using wakame at the end of *The Wakame Gatherers*; additional recipes are available on her website (see Resources and References).

Wakame grows naturally on rocks. It requires cold water and the changing tides to grow well. Natural wakame is harvested in the early spring. Since the 1940-1950s, Japanese have also cultivated wakame. Cultivated wakame is planted in the end of November or early December. Spores are attached to a string, and the strings are attached to floats. Cultivated wakame is harvested in the late winter or early spring. Because the water temperature is rising, wakame has to be harvested earlier and the harvest is not as plentiful. The harvested wakame is boiled, hung to dry in the sun, and packaged in 150g quantities in long, plastic bags.

Note that the book alludes to World War II (although it does not mention it by name). Young students may need some background information about the war in order to understand the allusion. The practice of gathering wakame was affected by the war.

During World War II, the people of Koshigoe (the town that served as the model setting for *The Wakame Gatherers*) continued to collect wakame. As the war went on and the men were away fighting, community elders took over the harvesting. Wakame served as a source of calcium to keep the villagers' bones strong.

Materials:

1. *The Wakame Gatherers*, by Holly Thompson
2. One set of Picture Sorting Cards (provided) per small group of three to four students (note that the letters are for your reference only; you may cut off the letters when you cut the cards apart to create the student sets)
3. Three enlarged copies of the Venn Diagram Worksheet (provided) per group of three to four students
4. *Living in Two Cultures Worksheet* (provided), four enlarged copies for board, two copies per student
5. Copies of *Making Connections Worksheet* and *Making Connections Checklist* (provided) for all students
6. Wall map of world
7. Chart paper
8. Blank index card or piece of paper for each student
9. Tape or paste
10. Clipboard and pencil for each student (Optional)
11. Large piece of construction paper per student

Implementation:

Introduction

1. Build background knowledge

- d. Pork chop dinner (United States)
 - e. Hamburger and fries (United States)
 - f. Fast-food chicken lunch (United States)
 - g. Bullet train (Japan)
 - h. Car (Japan)
 - i. Bus (Japan)
 - j. Scooter (Japan)
 - k. Truck (Japan)
 - l. SUV (United States) Truck (United States)
 - m. School buses (United States)
 - n. Truck (United States)
 - o. Home (Japan)
 - p. Guest room (Japan)
 - q. Bath room (Japan)
 - r. Toilet room (Japan)
 - s. Home (United States)
 - t. Bathroom (United States)
 - u. Child's bedroom (United States)
3. Next, explain to students that they are going to sort the pictures into categories. A category is a group of items that have something in common. For example, students in your class fit into the category of "first-graders" (or whatever the appropriate grade is). Some fit into the category "boys" while others fit into the category "girls." Some fit into the category of "good soccer players" while others fit into the category of "jump rope experts." Have the students sort through the pictures to find similarities and create categories. Have them label the groups of pictures with similarities. If students struggle, you may want to work through one category, such as "food" with the whole class. The suggested categories are food and meals, transportation, and home.
 4. When groups have completed the sorting, give each group one copy of the Venn Diagram Worksheet for each category they created. Explain that students are going to look carefully at the pictures in each of their categories. First they will decide whether each picture is from Japan or the United States. Then, if a picture shows something different about the two countries, they will attach it to the Venn Diagram Worksheet under the appropriate section of the diagram (in the circle marked "In Japan" or the one marked "In the United States"). If a picture shows something similar about the two countries, they will attach it in the center of the diagram, where the two circles overlap. If a picture shows both similarities and differences, they can place it so it fits over two sections. Allow time for groups to finish this task for each category they created.
 5. Finally, pass out a blank index card or piece of paper to each student. Have each student draw another picture to fit in one of the categories and add it to one Venn diagram. For instance, a student can draw pancakes for the food category or a scooter for the transportation category, etc.
 6. As a whole class, debrief the activity. Ask students: What did you discover about differences and similarities in transportation, food, and homes in Japan and the

United States? What picture did you draw and where did you add it to the Venn diagram? Guide students to share both differences and similarities they analyzed.

7. Transition to the story by saying: As we visualize and then read *The Wakame Gatherers*, pay attention to cultural similarities and differences in the story.

Guided Reading

2. Have the students work individually. When finished, the students can color their pictures and glue the two worksheets onto a large piece of construction paper.
3. Debrief the activity. Point out the title of the worksheet and ask: What does culture

Resources for Use in Extensions or Cross-Curricular Ideas

Iijima, Geneva Cobb. *The Way We Do it in Japan*. Paige Billin-Fyre, illustrator. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Company, 2002.

Friedman, Ina R. *How My Parents Learned to Eat*. Allen Say, illustrator. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984.

Little, Mimi Otey. *Yoshiko and the Foreigner*. New York: Frances Foster Books, 1996.

Say, Allen. *Tea with Milk*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999.

References for Teacher Background

Holly Thompson: *The Wakame Gatherers*.

http://www.hatbooks.com/the_wakame_gatherers_63661.htm

Kosaka, Kristy. "Half, Bi or Double? One Family's Trouble." *The Japan Times*, 2009.

<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/fl20090127zg.html>

Zitlow, Connie S., and Lois Stover. "Japanese and Japanese American Youth in Literature." *The ALAN Review*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1998.

<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/spring98/zitlow.html>