

Biographical Treasures

Objectives

Students are read to or read biographical stories about Asian cultures.

Students interview friends or family to gather information with which to write biographical or autobiographical paragraphs that reflect family anecdotes.

Students (grades 5-6) write autobiographies on the back of a paper kimono model.

Students (grades K-4) design and construct a sagemono or intro, with netsuke and ojimi beads.

Multiple Intelligences

Interpersonal

Intrapersonal

Linguistic

What Does It Mean?

Anecdote: short account of an event of an interesting or amusing nature, often biographical

Character sketch: short description of a person

Vessel: a container, usually for holding liquids

National Standards

Visual Arts Standard #4

Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

English Language Arts Standard #1

Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

English Language Arts Standard #4

Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

Background Information

Japanese kimonos traditionally had no pockets. People who wore kimonos carried their money and personal belongings in a small pouch called a sagemono (pronounced sah geh mo no) or intro (pronounced ee n ro). The sagemono was suspended by a cord from the obi (sash) of the kimono. At the top of the cord was a netsuke (pronounced neh ts keh), which looped over the obi to keep the sagemono in place.

Netsuke beads were sometimes carved from ivory and were used to close and lock the sagemono, helping to keep contents inside the sagemono. Smaller beads called ojimo (pronounced o gee meh) were slid up and down a cord connecting the netsuke to the sagemono to regulate the opening and closing of the sagemono. Netsuke and ojimo beads are often created to reflect animals and things from nature.

Biographies and autobiographies are an important form of literature. Both forms of writing often include anecdotes. An anecdote is a short, written piece that tells the story of one incident in a person's life. Anecdotes are often humorous. They are the "remember when" type of stories that are often told and retold at family gatherings.

Artwork by students from Mt. Prospect Elementary School, Basking Ridge, New Jersey. Teacher: Susan Bivona



Resources

Grandfather's Journey by Allen Say
Recounts the emigration of the author's grandfather from Japan to the United States. Picture book won the 1994 Caldecott Award for illustrations. Evocative of a family album.

Hands on Asia: Art Activities for All Ages
by Yvonne Y. Merrill

Rich resource of cultural information. Clear folk craft instructions for every age. Illustrated with line drawings and brilliant photographs.

Red Scarf Girl by Ji Li Jiang
Autobiography of a 12-year-old Chinese girl caught up in the throes of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Gives older elementary students insight into the life of a child in another culture.

Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes by Eleanor Coerr
Inspiring true story of a Japanese girl affected by the bombing of Hiroshima. An excellent introduction to biographical writing for ages 8 to 10.

Vocabulary List

Use this list to explore new vocabulary, create idea webs, or brainstorm related subjects.

| | |
|------------------|---------------|
| Anecdote | Nonfiction |
| Authentic | Obi |
| Autobiography | Ojime |
| Bead | Passport |
| Biography | Replica |
| Birthplace | Sagemono |
| Character sketch | Self-portrait |
| Culture | Texture |
| Incident | Toggle |
| Japanese | Tradition |
| Kimono | Vessel |
| Narrative | |
| Netsuke | |

Artwork by students from
Mountainside Elementary School,
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Teacher: Ramona Lapsley



Artwork by students from
St. Theresa School,
Hellertown, Pennsylvania.



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Biographical Treasures

| | K-2 | 3-4 | 5-6 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Suggested Preparation and Discussion | <p>Post photographs and pictures that illustrate a Japanese kimono, inro, and a sagemono. Show reproductions of examples of netsuke and ojime beads. Discuss these objects.</p> <p>What is a biography? What is an autobiography? Read at least one biographical story, either together or independently. Integrate the material with social studies or history content when possible.</p> <p>Display biographies and autobiographies as well as books about Japanese culture.</p> <p>Discuss and talk about anecdotes and how they are important to biographical or autobiographical literature.</p> | | |
| Crayola® Supplies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colored Pencils • Gel Markers • Paint Brushes • Scissors • School Glue • Watercolors | | |
| Other Materials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model Magic® | | |
| Set-up/Tips | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Index cards • Recycled newspaper • Ribbon, yarn, or jute • Water containers • White paper | | |
| Process Session 1 20-30 min. | <p>Research biographies and autobiographies</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Talk about and discuss the term biography and autobiography. Discuss the similarities and differences. Students interview friends or family about the memories they have of the students. 2. Ask students to make a series of index cards titled “Things that happened to me!” that list events in at least one day in their lives. Younger students may need assistance with writing. Older students include anecdotes. | | |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Decorate the borders of the index cards. Arrange in sequence. Punch holes in the top corners. Tie with ribbon. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Interview friends or family about one person. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Conduct autobiographical research through interviews with family and friends. Take notes. |
| Process: Session 2 30-45 min. | <p>Prepare autobiography</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Fold paper to form a booklet. Using cards and interview information, write an autobiographical paragraph. 5. Add a title and illustrate the cover. Decorate booklet with patterns and designs. | <p>Write a biographical sketch</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Fold paper to form a booklet. Write a biographical paragraph about the person. 5. Add a title and illustrate the front cover. Decorate booklet with patterns and designs. | <p>Decorate kimono</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Students fold brown craft paper in half to equal one half of their bodies. 5. Draw a kimono on the face of the folded paper. 6. Paint authentic Asian shapes and patterns on one side of the kimono. Air-dry the painting. |
| Process: Session 3 30-45 min. | <p>Create a sagemono with netsuke and ojime beads</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Form two Ping-Pong ball-sized amounts of Model Magic compound around a straw to create two beads. Cut away excess straw. 7. Use fingers and/or modeling tools to add texture to the beads. The netsuke usually was a character such as a face, mask, animal, or object. Choose something important to the person in the writing. The ojime, for sliding on a cord, was often plain. Air-dry beads for 24 hours. | | <p>Write an autobiographical sketch</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Draw a large rectangle on the back of the kimono. Write the autobiography in this space. |

This photograph illustrates the actual size of a typical netsuke bead. Ojime beads were similar in size.



| | K-2 | 3-4 | 5-6 |
|---|--|---|---|
| Process: Session 4 20-30 min. | Decorate beads 8. Paint the beads to enrich them with color. 9. Cover beads with a glaze made from equal parts glue and water. Air-dry the glaze. | | |
| Process: Session 5 30-45 min. | Make sagemono bag 10. Fill the front and back of a brown paper lunch bag with shapes, patterns, and colors using Gel markers. 11. Cut a 24" cord and fold in half. Thread it through the netsuke bead. Tie ends so bead is locked into position at one end of the cord. 12. Thread remaining cord through ojime bead so it can slide freely along the length of the cord. 13. Cut two strips of 1- x 4 1/2-inch corrugated cardboard. Glue one end of cord under a cardboard piece on each side of the sagemono bag. 14. Put biographical material into sagemono bag. Close and seal with ojime bead. Students who wish may attach netsuke bead to the top of their belts, so the sagemono bag hangs at their sides. | | |
| Assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do the biographical or autobiographical facts accurately reflect the lives of the writers or their families? Are projects constructed according to directions? Are they aesthetically pleasing and functional? Ask students to reflect on this lesson and write a DREAM statement to summarize the most important things they learned. | | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do the index cards record a correct sequence of events? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the biography written in good paragraph form? Is it rich in details? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the autobiographical sketch tell a story with a clear beginning, middle, and end? Does it demonstrate good writing conventions? |
| Extensions | Provide a computer or a scribe for students whose special needs make writing difficult or for emerging writers. | | |
| | <p>Invite students to tell their stories to others. Where were they born? How were their names chosen? Be aware that some children may not be comfortable discussing this personal information.</p> <p>Encourage students who are gifted writers to write about themselves or about a recent event in their lives.</p> | <p>Interview an interesting member of the school community. Write an article for the school paper.</p> <p>Read biographies about inventors, peacemakers, and other leaders. List questions to ask the person. Reenact what a dinner conversation might be like with these historic figures as guests.</p> | <p>Interview relatives to learn more interesting family anecdotes. Make an illustrated scrapbook of memories and give it as a gift to a family member.</p> <p>Hold a storytelling festival with interesting family anecdotes.</p> |
| | Encourage advanced students to research and share with the class the history of Japanese kimonos, netsuke, ojime, and sagemono. | | Research and design kimonos for various occasions. |



Old Turtle Netsuke
 Circa 18th century
 Artist unknown
 Carved ivory
 Kyoto, Japan
 Private Collection.



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