

JAPAN AS SEEN THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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In recent years, many elementary students in the United States are studying about Japan. Iowa, in particular, is focusing on building a closer relationship with Japan. There are increasingly larger numbers of Japanese companies opening offices and plants in Iowa, and the partnership established between the Japanese Ministry of Education and Iowa Department of Education is indicative of the growing bond. Currently, there are ten teachers from Japan who are teaching Japanese language and culture in high schools across Iowa. The University of Iowa offers summer workshops for teachers who want to build a better understanding of Japan, and focuses on the teaching of Japan in elementary classrooms. With all of this interest in Japan, it is hoped that an accurate view of Japan will be portrayed in elementary classrooms.

One way of helping children come to an understanding of another country is through good children's literature. Although there are numerous books about Japan available, many of the books have problems. Some of them are outdated, and some contain erroneous information. Other ones are problematic because they are not true to the Japanese culture. For instance, books such as The Funny Little Woman and The Badger and the Magic Fan are generally regarded as high quality books. However, there are some inconsistencies which indicate that such books are not completely true to the Japanese culture. Problems are varied, but one is the illustrations which depict characters wearing their kimonos in a way which only the dead people are dressed and others wearing their kimonos in a way that Japanese people would never wear theirs. Some characters are depicted with chopsticks in their hair. Some illustrations look more Chinese than Japanese. Other problems are with the text. Some have characters saying and doing things that are uncharacteristic of the Japanese. When the incongruities are minor in nature, the books could be used, but with an explanation. Books which contain major inaccuracies throughout should not be considered. What follows is an annotated bibliography of books which are recommended for use by elementary school teachers and students.

Makino Y. (1985). Japan Through Children's Literature: An Annotated Bibliography (2nd ed.). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

A comprehensive annotated bibliography of books which accurately portray Japan, its culture and people. Referenced by curriculum areas and subjects, grade levels are suggested for each title. An interesting section at the end of each chapter is the list entitled, "Books Having Little or Nothing to do with Japan," which contain titles often mistakenly attributed as being Japanese.

Richie, D. (1978). Introducing Japan. Foreword by E. Reischauer. Tokyo: Kodansha International.

Major cities and regions of Japan are introduced through numerous color photographs and concise text. The latter part of the book has brief essays on Japan and its culture.

Japan Culture Institute. A Hundred Things Japanese. Tokyo: The Japan Culture Institute. 1975.

Murakami, H. and Richie, D. (Eds.) (1980). A Hundred More Things Japanese. Tokyo: The Japan Culture Institute.

These two books take 200 topics describing aspects of Japanese society which help provide foreigners with an understanding of Japan today. The brief essays have been contributed by foreigners currently residing in, or have previously resided in Japan.

101 Favorite Songs Taught in Japanese Schools. (1983). Essays and Translations by I. Nakano. Illustrations by S. Higuchi. Tokyo: The Japan Times.

An extensive collection of Japanese children's songs presented with English and Japanese text, piano accompaniment, and notes about the translation of each song. Includes an essay on the development of music education in Japan.

Children's Books

Coerr, E. (1977). Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes. New York: Putnam.

The story of Sadako, who died at age twelve of delayed radiation reaction from the atom bomb, is memorialized in the Hiroshima Peace Park. The statue commissioned by her classmates depicts Sadako on a granite mountain with a golden crane in her outstretched hands, symbolizing a desire for world peace.

Green, C. (1983). Japan. (Enchantment of the World Series). Chicago: Childrens Press.

An introductory book describing the geography, history, and culture of Japan. Numerous color photographs, maps, and a mini-facts section add to the informative text.

Ishii, M. (1987). The Tongue-Cut Sparrow. Translated by K. Paterson. Illustrated by S. Akaba. New York: Dutton.

A folktale of a kind old man and his greedy wife who each get their just reward from a little sparrow. The translation includes Japanese onomatopoeic words which retains the first language flavor.

Maruki, T. (1980). Hiroshima no Pika. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.

The story of a young girl and her family in the days following the bomb is told, in hopes that there will someday be nuclear disarmament and world peace.

McDermott, G. (1975). The Stonecutter. New York: Viking.

Tasaku, a lowly stonecutter, wishes for increasingly powerful status, until a humble realization befalls him about the power he thinks he has attained.

Sakade, F. (Ed.). (1958). Japanese Children's Favorite Stories. Illustrated by Y. Kurosaki. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, Co.

A collection of twenty classic folktales of Japan, illustrated to reflect a true feeling of the culture. A classic collection, this book has recently been brought back in print.

Sarasas, C. (1964). The ABC's of Origami: Paper Folding for Children. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co.

This alphabet book of origami is characterized by clear, easy-to-follow steps for folding paper.

Takeshita, F. & Suzuki, M. (1988). The Park Bench. Brooklyn: Kane/Miller.

A bilingual book with the entire text in both Japanese and English, it tells the story of a park bench which provides a restful spot to the variety of people who come to the park each day.

Yagawa, S. (1981). The Crane Wife. Translated by K. Paterson. Illustrated by S. Akaba. New York: Morrow.

A peasant's kind deed to a crane leads to a series of events in which a beautiful woman asks to become his wife, and weaves exquisite cloth to support them. Eventually, his curiosity about the weaving causes a change he did not anticipate.

U.S. Sources for Obtaining Books From and About Japan

Kinokuniya Book and Gallery

Fashion Island

401 Newport Center Drive

Suite 315, Atrium Court

Newport Beach, CA 92660

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(800) 423-7927

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