

“Origami” By: Susan K. Ito
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Indiana Academic Standard:

8.3.7 Analyze a work of literature, showing how it reflects the heritage, traditions, attitudes, and beliefs of its author.

Objectives:

As a class, students will read Susan K. Ito’s essay “Origami” and discuss what it means to be authentic with 100% participation.

To experience another culture’s traditions, students will create a flapping bird out of folded paper with 100% participation.

Assessment:

Students will participate in a “popcorn” reading of the text to involve as many students as possible. Students’ understanding of the text will be assessed based on discussion. Students will create their flapping bird to be hung from the ceiling.

Introduction: As part of our immigration unit with the Social Studies bloc, we are going to read an essay today that examines what it means to be authentic. Remember, the United States is made up of many different people from many different backgrounds and places—“authentic” Americans, if there is such a thing, may look, act, believe, dress, eat, and speak differently from one another. The same is true of other cultures. Before we begin I want you to answer the following questions by raising your hand yes or no:

- If I cannot shoot a hoop to save my life, am I still an authentic Hoosier?
- If I can do a world-class jig, does that make me authentically Irish?
- If I can make a perfect hot tamale, am I authentically Hispanic?
- If I can polka the night away, am I authentically Polish?

Do a “popcorn” reading of the essay. Ask questions intermittently.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is making a crane so important to Susan? (Bloom: Comprehension) A: She thinks that it will prove that she is really Japanese, not an imposter.
2. How does wearing the authentic Japanese outfit and working at the authentic Japanese restaurant make her feel? Why? (Bloom: Knowledge and Analysis) A: She said it made her feel proud. She struggles with her identity because she is only half Japanese—being a part of the “authentic” restaurant’s staff and wearing the “authentic” outfit made her feel proud of her heritage. It also made her feel like she belonged. She finally fit in somewhere.
3. How did she describe her blood? (Bloom: Knowledge) A: half-authentic, tainted.
4. How did the customer treat her? Why? (Bloom: Comprehension) A: He treated her with disrespect and discrimination because she wasn’t “authentic.” He said if he wanted to be served by someone like her, he would “have gone to McDonalds” (7).

5. How did this make Susan feel? (Bloom: Analysis) A: She was embarrassed and hurt. It made her feel like a fake and despise her European genes.
6. What lesson did Susan learn about being “authentic” from the old Japanese woman (the *oba-san*)? (Bloom: Analysis) A: She learned that authenticity isn’t measured by what you can do. The little old woman couldn’t fold a paper crane either.
7. In terms of culture or heritage, how do you define “authenticity”? (Bloom: Synthesis) A: Answers will vary. Examples: by your genes, by your attitude, by which culture you relate to the most, etc.
8. By your definition, is Susan an “authentic” Japanese woman? Why or why not? (Bloom: Evaluation) A: Answers will vary. If necessary, guide them towards the response that she is authentic because her ancestors are Japanese and she relates to that culture and is proud of her heritage regardless of what she looks like or what she can or cannot do.

Pass out origami paper. Show the flapping bird directions clip on the white board. Have students follow along. Repeat steps as necessary.

<http://www.origami.org.uk/bos>

Hang flapping birds from the ceiling.

Self-Reflection:

Students responded well to the essay. They were upset that the man in the restaurant would treat Susan that way. It is hard to break some of their notions of what an “authentic” American is, but in a round-about way they were able to determine that being authentic is more about what culture you relate to and take pride in than how you look or what you can do. They really enjoyed the flapping bird activity. This lesson was a great way to integrate social studies, English, and art into one lesson. It was also a good way to integrate technology into the classroom. The video was a much better way to demonstrate how to do the bird than the black and white pictures and directions. The bird was difficult, but I only had three students the entire day that did not have a bird to show for their efforts. It was great to watch the students help each other when they understood a step and the person next to them didn’t. I also had some surprising stars today who were really good at the task. This was a good verbal/linguistic, intrapersonal, visual/spatial, and bodily kinesthetic lesson, and the classroom looks beautiful with all of their birds hanging from the ceiling.