

Creating a Legend: Using a historical source as a stimulus

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As part of the Warrington Grid for Learning Project, Warrington Museum allowed a team of consultants and teachers to borrow and subsequently photograph a range of materials that were not usually on display. Part of this collection included a range of original Japanese prints dating from the 17th century onwards. These were obviously far too delicate for the children to handle but the use of digital photographs enabled a variety to be selected and projects developed using these printed images back at school. The children of Glazebury CE Aided Primary studied the prints and chose one as a stimulus for a literacy and arts project. This is their story as written by the Year 5/6 children and read at their performance of 'The Legend'.

Introduction

The stimulus for our performance came from an unexpected source. A set of very old Japanese prints had been discovered in a dusty drawer in Warrington Museum. It seemed a pity that no-one had seen how beautiful they were for so long.

The print we chose to use shows a man standing as if he has a message to share. We looked closely at the print, the figure, the background and especially the images on the kimono, to see if we could find clues that would help us to create and perform our own story. We decided that this figure was Ghenkho, a powerful but wicked sorcerer. This is our story:—

The Legend

Once in a land, a land where life was calm and peaceful, a land where superstition ruled, there lived a beautiful young princess called Anukay. She lived happily in a remote village with her mother Yoko and her father Takesu. Every day she walked along the riverbank of the surrounding river.

Anukay was peaceful, helpful and intelligent. Yoko, her mother, was caring, helped people who needed her and was a very loving mother.

The leader, Takesu was wise, strong and everyone preferred him to Ghenkho. All the villagers took a vote and they voted for Takesu because they trusted him.

His face like thunder, the sorcerer had lots of evil thoughts in his head and started to feel very annoyed with the people and their village. As his powers were getting even more commanding, thoughts of death came into his mind. With all the thoughts and rage going through his head he began to combine a venomous potion. Ghenkho gathered together masses of deadly poisons and mixed them in a gigantic pot. He had been given a necklace earlier on in his life. It had a white dove at the centre of the oval. This necklace represented his extraordinary powers. The necklace was very unusual, the dove's eyes were diamonds which

had been embedded into the necklace when it was made and the dove was flying upwards into the sky.

Ghenkho was getting very jealous now and decided on a murderous plan. Summoning up a huge flock of vultures he sent them towards the village. They swarmed in their thousands, their screeches stabbing the silence. The killers tore the clouds apart, turning the sky charcoal grey.

“The evil One has sent his servants to our beautiful village,” screamed a terrified villager as the vultures swooped viciously towards them. Everyone felt fearful. Surely this meant that something terrible was going to happen.

A sound like a stampede of cattle echoed through the village. The noise grew louder and louder till the people ran into the village square and started to panic. They saw a wall of water heading their way . . . a wall as high as a tower. The omen had come true!

Above them the sound of the vultures high-pitched screams could still be heard. On the mountainside, high above the village Takesu and a few of the other villagers watched in horror. They could not believe the scene of destruction that they could see far below them.

“How fortunate we were that we were visiting friends. This could have been us,” exclaimed Yoko to her daughter. Takesu could not help wondering what had happened to Ghengho. Had he been drowned with the rest of them?

A giant ray of light shone down on Ghenkho as he realised what damage he had caused.

“How could I be so selfish? How can I make things better?” As he touched his magic pendent he felt himself changing.

“What magic is this?”

“Come my people come,” uttered Takesu as they climbed up into the foggy mist of the mountains. The people felt exhausted and worried but confident in their leader.

They had no idea where to go, what could they do? They decided to rest for the night.

“Look the fog has gone,” one of the people shouted. They all woke up to the beautiful scene of the mountains. Above them flew a beautiful white dove, it seemed to be beckoning the little party. It led them to a lush valley which lay near a river.

“A perfect place to enjoy the rest of our lives,” decided Takesu.

“New beginnings!” they all shouted. Just then, the white dove disappeared into the distance. A golden pendant fell to the ground.

“Surely, isn’t this the chain that belonged to Ghengho?”

Our performance

Once we had written our story we investigated the concept behind Japanese theatre. We decided to give the four main characters masks but no voices. These masks were made out of papier mache and we tried to imagine the expression on the faces of the characters. We looked at the digital photographs of the other Japanese prints from the museum to help us design and make our own kimonos.

Most of us had never used a sewing machine before but managed to keep the sewing straight!

Next we needed a back-drop. We looked at sections of the original print and transferred the design onto calico, using fabric crayon and different dyes. We hung the banners on a cane.

Our performance needed music. We researched this on the internet, particularly the use of the Japanese instrument the koto. We listened to some Japanese extracts and discovered that Japanese music is based on the Pentatonic scale, using a series of five notes. We composed and recorded some of our own music using this style. We also had great fun making up sound effects during certain parts of the play. During music lessons we have discovered that music can be used to evoke different atmospheres. We chose some music based on Debussy but played by a Japanese musician called Isao Tomita, to try and show the different moods of the play.

Our primary school is a small rural school catering for children with a whole variety of needs and abilities. We saw this project as a wonderful way to celebrate cultural diversity in a way that offered a curriculum of opportunity through a combination of literacy and the arts. We wanted to accommodate and integrate all learning styles and so the children were encouraged to select and develop different aspects from creating kimonos to producing scripts enabling each child to contribute to the project's success by working collaboratively. Their commitment and involvement was infectious! Publication for a wide audience – our own school, a neighbouring school and all visitors to Warrington's website gave us an added sense of motivation and purpose, as well as a permanent record of our work. We are now looking forward to working with a Teaching Assistant from Japan who is coming to spend a three month residency working with us to share aspects of her culture.

Joan O'Rourke, Headteacher Glazebury CE Aided Primary

ICT opportunities

- Use of a word processor to produce the story, playscript, programme and posters for the performance;
- Use of a scanner, digital camera and video to record and publish reports of the performance;
- Use of the internet for research on Japanese music, costume and alphabet.

Further information about this project, some of the lesson ideas and picture resources may be found on Warrington's National Grid for Learning Website. The address is www.wgfl.org.uk. Look under **teacher resources**, then select **primary**, then **art** for the work by the children at Glazebury and **teacher resources**, then **secondary** and then **art** for further examples of the Japanese prints.

Examples of koto music can be found on the following website: Click on '**search**' and type in **Yasue Horiuchi**. This will take you to a website with information about how to play the koto as well as two examples of the music.

Further information about the koto can be found at www.Larkinam.com/MenComNet/Business/Retail/Larknet/japan
On our Storyteller CD is a Japanese version of Cinderella – The Flowerpot Princess, which is read both in English and Japanese. The recording of koto music is *AKI NO SHIRABE Autumn Tune* (Miyagi Michio) – Music for koto from Japan. Performed by Rie Yanagisawa. We would like to thank SAYDISC Records for kindly allowed us to use this recording which was taken from their “Listen to This’ series, (Key Stage Three CD) by Christine Richards.

Editor’s note

The images have been removed from this article to reduce its size.