

Teaching About Asia

Boyd Buchanan School

2008-2009 School Year

Debra Lusk, Second Grade Teacher

Boyd-Buchanan School is a private Christian school in Hamilton County, Tennessee serving students in the Chattanooga, Tennessee Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. The school's faculty of over sixty teachers administers to nearly 950 students in Pre-Kindergarten through grade twelve. Boyd-Buchanan School offers a loving, Christ-centered environment fully nurturing the spiritual, intellectual, social, and physical potential of each student. The school opened in the fall of 1952 with approximately 150 students in Kindergarten through sixth grade. Situated today on its fifty-acre campus on Bonnieway Drive in multiple buildings, the school is accredited as a unit school, Pre-Kindergarten through twelfth grade, by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The school is supported by a strong and active Parent Council which assists in the educational process of the students financially and physically. As an example, each year the parents of the second grade students take an active role in our Asian Studies Unit by making costumes, preparing food and bringing Asian artifacts gathered by family members on trips abroad.

Each year Boyd Buchanan second graders enjoy an Asian unit of study. We have three second grade classes and each second grade class studies a different Asian country. We study China, Japan and Korea. At the culmination of this study each class shares with the other classes they have learned about their particular country. Second graders seem to enjoy cooperative learning and pay a great deal of attention to their peers and what they have learned. We have a parade on the final day of this unit to share with our entire elementary school. We wear Asian costumes and share some of our projects with different classes.

Introduction to Japan:

The country we focus on in my class is Japan. We introduce the study of Japan using the books, Japan by Ann Heinrichs and Japan, A Picture Book To Remember Her By designed by

David Gibbon. These books help give a second grade reader an overall view of the history, geography, sociology, economy and recreation of Japan. For instance, the book, Japan by Ann Heinrichs gives a brief history lesson on the bombing of Pearl Harbor and our war with Japan. After sharing these books, the students will then choose a project to illustrate one of the facts they have learned about Japan from this introduction.

Japanese Inventions:

As we continue our study of Japan we will read the book, Look What Came from Japan by Miles Harvey. This book helps second graders understand the inventions, foods, toys, games, fashions, animals, instruments and sports that came from Japan. We will discuss many of the ideas that Japanese people contributed to our everyday lives. The second graders will illustrate some of the ways they have used items from Japan either by drawing them or writing about them.

Japanese Families:

The second graders will read the book, A Family In Japan, by Peter Otto Jacobsen and Preben Sejer Kristensen. We use this book to compare and contrast Japanese families and American families. We will explore Japanese homes, jobs and foods. The second graders will have a taste-testing of some Japanese foods. These foods are usually prepared by our room mothers. This allows the children an opportunity to taste a variety of foods that they may not have had a chance to experience.

Japanese Numbers:

During our study of Japan, we use the book, Counting Your Way Through Japan by Jim Haskins. We discuss how the Japanese number system is derived from the Chinese number system. This book gives us an idea of how different Japanese numbers look from our own. We practice writing from one to ten using Japanese symbols.

Japanese Poetry:

We spend time talking about Haiku, a Japanese poetry form that uses a specific number of syllables (three lines of five, seven and five syllables, respectively). The children each write a

brief poem. Because of the relative youth and inexperience of the students (second graders are typically about seven or eight years old), we do not worry so much about the exact number of syllables in each line. The point of this exercise is for them to gain exposure to a poetry style much different than they may have heard. We hang the poems on a paper “tree” that we place outside our room to share with the rest of our school.

Japanese Literature:

We read several Japanese stories. One of the children’s favorites is The Funny Little Woman, retold by Arlene Mosel. This story tells of a woman in Japan who lost her rice dumpling and what she goes through to get it back. Another favorite is Momotaro, the Peach Boy, retold by Betsy Franco. This story tells of an old man and woman who long for a child. One day the old woman finds a large peach and as they are about to cut it, it becomes a boy. This story introduces us to some Japanese words such as “Ohayo” which may be translated as “good morning.” Stories like these also help the students to get a sense of the historical and cultural background of Japan.

Japanese Tea Ceremony:

We have a Japanese tea ceremony in our classroom. We discuss with the students the fact that the Japanese tea ceremony is a traditional activity that provides a way to display the emblems of the tea service and a means to demonstrate service to others. After serving the children tea we talk about how important proper conduct is for the participants in this ceremony. We discuss the themes of hospitality, respect and service to others and the important role each plays in the Japanese culture.

Lessons Learned:

At the close of our Asian unit, I hope that my students have gained a better knowledge of Asian culture, including history, people, food, literature, poetry and customs. While our study is certainly not exhaustive, I feel that as second graders they are given a glimpse into a world dramatically different than their own, while at the same time realizing that there are many similarities in all peoples. Second graders are at an age where they are beginning to look outside themselves to see others. This helps them come to sense of their own place in the world. This

seems to be a wonderful time to begin to introduce them to different ideas and cultures. I hope this study expands their knowledge and love of the ever-shrinking global village. I feel that my students need knowledge of other cultures today more than ever before to function as responsible citizens in the world. I pray that the more they learn about other cultures and beliefs the more they can appreciate their own and the more respect they can have for the uniqueness of every individual.