

David E. Huebner
Ravenwood High School
Brentwood TN 37027

Japan & the United States: Understanding & Enhancing Perspectives on Nature & the Environment

Lesson Plan

Perspectives on Nature

To even the casual observer of Japan and the United States, one can see that both nations view nature from different perspectives. These perspectives translate to uniquely different ways of perceiving and handling the environment.

It is the belief of this teacher that we have much to learn from Japan, especially with regards their perspective on nature. However, all is not well in Japan and some of the painful lessons learned in American land and space usage would do well in aiding Japan's future development.

In Japan only 16% of waste is sent to landfills, whereas in the U.S. 60-70% of waste is sent to landfills (Internet Source: "The Economics of Recycling", <http://www.econedlink.org/lessons/index.cfm?lesson=EM218>).

Why is Japan much more aggressive in recycling waste? How has Japan been able to save so much forested land in such a small space? Why does Japan regard a raked stone garden, for example, as an object of beauty?

What is the basis for this differing perspective on nature? Is it religious? Is it having different natural resources? Is it our long-established policies on landfill space? Or is it just a matter of functional sense?

To answer these questions-and thereby better understand Japan's unique perspective on nature and American viewpoints-requires a lesson plan that helps Ravenwood High School students understand the differences in these perspectives.

General Lesson Idea

Students will create blogs, with frequent (if not daily) entries, which answer a series of questions and challenges about their personal engagement and interaction with nature and the environment in their daily lives in America.

Human-environment interaction is one of the five themes in geography established by the National Geographic Society in 1984. Students will better understand this theme at the conclusion of the project.

Level of Class

9th grade World Geography students, including Standard and Honors classes.

Time Span
Three weeks

Lesson Objectives

- Students will develop an understanding of the differences between Japanese & American perspectives on nature and the environment.
- Students will make suggestions to appropriate U.S. and Japanese leaders and officials summarizing their findings and results, including legislative proposals to address problems areas and concerns.
- Students will make changes in their personal lives that better reflect more responsible behavior with regards to the environment, conservation, recycling, and nature.

Lesson Specifics

1) Students will create their own web log (blog).

2) These blogs will serve as a means to record daily experiences with nature and the environment. Students will record the following information (in chart & log format):

- How they handle and dispose of trash;
- How they recycle (or not) items they use;
- How often they use personal transit vs. mass transit;
- How they utilize space, personal & public, including how often they are outdoors, how often they use public parks, and how often they have been hiking or camping;
- How they regard nature in relationship to their religion (if any) or personal philosophy, including specific entries on how live out their religion or philosophy.

3) Students will summarize their findings in a written (computer text) format, based on the personal charts and logs maintained by the students. The quality and understanding of these findings will be assessed by the teacher.

4) Students will research Japanese perspectives and practices with regard to human-environment interaction:

- Several websites will be provided to demonstrate these perspectives and practices in Japan. Students will determine their findings from these websites, in written format:

-The World: Japan's Nature; A People Tremble in Harmony With the Land

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=990CE7DC113FF931A15752C0A963958260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=print>

-Human-Nature Relationships in Japanese Culture and Its Effects on Environmental Politicization in Japan

<http://www.hicsocial.org/Social2003Proceedings/Aysem%20Mert.pdf>

-Finding the Voice of Japanese Wilderness

<http://www.wilderness.net/library/documents/Hayashi1.pdf>

- DVD documentaries on the differing perspectives on nature and the environment in Japan & the U.S. will be shown to all students:

-Understanding Japan (2004)-Education Video Network, Inc.

-Japanese Behavior: Japanese Background Study Program (2008)-U.S. National Archives

-Environmental DVD Box Set: 11-Disc Collection of Nature Films, Conservation History, Dust Bowl Images, Pollution Footage, Forestry Videos & Sustainable Development of the Environment-Quality Information Publishers, Inc.

- The Japanese Consulate in Nashville will make information available.

Note: It is often claimed that the Japanese have a particular love for nature, a love often reflected in their art and material culture. But today equal notice is being given to the environmental degradation caused by the Japanese at home as well as abroad. How can these phenomena be reconciled? This issue is but one of several raised in this examination of the human-nature relationship in Japan. Through topics ranging from medieval literature and fine arts to modern vending machines and tourism, articles will be made available to demonstrate the great diversity in how people perceive their natural environment in Japan & the United States and how these two cultures come to terms with nature, be it through brute force, rituals or idealization.

6) Students will develop written documents that compare and contrast perspectives on nature and the environment between these two cultures. In groups of three, these documents will then be converted into pod casts or films that demonstrate these perspectives.

7) Students will write legislative proposals (in these same teams of three persons) concerning these issues with regards to U.S. and/or Tennessee policies and practices. These proposals will be transmitted to local, state, and national political and governmental representatives.