

Teaching About Asia
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2008-2009 School Year

Glenclyff High School is located in Nashville, Tennessee. The school is at the center of a very diverse community. Our school is the most culturally diverse high school in the Metro Nashville Public School System. Because of our diversity, we have a large presence of English Language Learners who, in many cases, are new arrivals to the country. Because of our unique population, it is essential that our students be exposed to learning about cultures different from their own. It is our goal at Glenclyff High School to provide our students with an education that will encourage cultural sensitivity and appreciation for diversity. Our school has a history of gang violence and racial tension. Because of this history, it is the hope of the administration and teachers to provide students with a multicultural education that will encourage acceptance and tolerance rather than violence and prejudice. It is important, therefore, that our curriculum be as diverse as possible. It is for this reason that I have sought out information and education about East Asia.

I teach World History as part of the Freshman Academy. My students are, for the most part, 9th graders. I will be teaching 5 sections of World History, which should include 130-150 students. These students are new to the high school setting, and in most cases are taking classes in World History for the first time. The course I teach is a survey of World History from the beginning of civilization to the present day. To say the least, this is a daunting task. This course is designed to encompass, not only western civilizations, but also eastern civilizations. As is the case with most westerners, however,

my experience with eastern civilizations has been limited. I find that, in the past, I have been able to give much more thorough content coverage to western civilizations than to eastern civilizations. Because of this, I sought out the East Asia program to help me find better ideas and more thorough content to present to my students in an effort to give them a better rounded introduction to World History.

The first introduction my students have to East Asia comes with a study of Ancient Chinese Civilization (1500 BCE- 589 CE). This study begins with an overview of the geography of China, including its regions, physical settings, and cultural influences. The focus of this section is based on China's rivers, particularly the Huang He River. This course focuses on the characteristics of early civilization, one of which is being located near a river. Therefore, great emphasis is placed upon China's location on the river, the river's importance, and China's isolation from other civilizations that were developing at the time.

The first dynasty covered in our curriculum is the Shang Dynasty. This study is focused upon ancient legends, government organization and bureaucracy, religion, and language and writing systems. It is my hope, in this study, to use Schirokauer's book *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations*. Part one of this book focuses upon three important topics that are essential to the curriculum; The Shang, Oracle Bones, and The Origins of Chinese Writing. During this study, students will be given short segments from this book to read and discuss in groups. It is also my practice during this section to have my students design their own oracle bones. Students are allowed to place their own modern interpretation on this concept, and it allows them to creatively apply a historical concept to something they can understand and use in their own lives. Finally, at this point

in our study, it is also my practice to allow students to practice Chinese calligraphy by writing their names in Chinese characters. By doing this, students gain an appreciation for how difficult the language is to master, how intricate the calligraphy process is, and to become familiar with the Chinese characters.

In more succinct coverage, the curriculum also dictates that we cover the Zhou, Qin, and Han dynasties. This study includes the Great Wall of China, the civil service system, and the Silk Road. In this section, I plan to have my students divide into groups to complete a project concerning the Great Wall of China. In this project, students will be divided into groups based upon Chinese dynasties. In their groups, students will research the history of sections of the wall built during the time of their dynasty, legends associated with the Great Wall, cultural influences of the wall, and the design of the wall. Groups will design a replica of their particular section of the wall.

It is also my plan in this section to obtain portions of the civil service examinations to allow students to review primary source documents concerning the time period. I would also like to compare these civil service examinations with current events. Our school has historically sent principals to China every year in an exchange program. As a result, we are often visited by delegations of educators from China. These educators often share with our students how the education and examination system works in China today. I would like to take this opportunity to have my students read modern articles and information on the Chinese school system and present them as current events reports to the class.

In this study of ancient China, students are also exposed to philosophies and religions of ancient China. Students are exposed to the yin and yang, Confucianism,

Daoism, Legalism, and Buddhism. At this point in our study I plan to use information in my notes from Dr. Littlejohn's presentation on Chinese religions. He provided us with valuable information I would like to share with my students. I would also like to use Ivanhoe and Van Norden's book *Readings In Classical Chinese Philosophy*. I customarily have my students read portions of the Analects and Confucian sayings, but this book will make it easier for me to give my students concise portions of multiple Chinese philosophies. During this portion of our study I customarily have students incorporate the concept of yin and yang in their own art, because it is historically used in art and literature. Students usually enjoy this activity, as it allows them to be creative in their expression of the concept. In this portion of our study, we will also watch a video about the origins of Buddhism and how it spread to China. Students are often times unaware that Buddhism did not originate in China, so this is a good opportunity to teach students about its origins and the many areas today that practice the religion.

Finally, in this study of ancient China, students are introduced to Chinese culture and daily life. Students are introduced to the importance of family, genealogy, the Five Classics, and practices like acupuncture. In this section, I often have my students read and discuss portions of the Five Classics to expose them to primary sources. I also take this opportunity to allow my students to complete a genealogy of their own family. This is usually an in class project in which my students use computer technology to research and place their family into a graph. Through this project, it often times becomes apparent to students that the family is much more important in eastern cultures than it is in our own. It is my hope in this section of study to include portions of Peletz's book *Gender*,

Sexuality, and Body Politics in Modern Asia to discuss the changing role of the family and gender roles in modern China.

Our next study of East Asia covers the Civilizations of East Asia (552 CE- 1573 CE). This portion of our curriculum includes China under the Sui, Tang, and Sung Dynasties; The Mongol Empire; and Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia. This study includes literature from the Tang period. Among this literature, are the poems of Li Po and Du Fu. I would like to use Dr. Littlejohn's excerpts of Li Bai's poetry and his video clip about Classical Chinese Poetry with my students for this portion of the lesson. This section also introduces the concept of Zen Buddhism in the Tang dynasty, as well as its connections to Japan. I would like to use Dr. Ellington's book *Japan: A Global Studies Handbook* to introduce students to modern Zen Buddhism and its place in Asian culture today. I would also like to show my students images of Zen gardens and the entire art form that has centered on this sect of Buddhism.

This section of study is also devoted to the Mongol empire and the writings of Marco Polo. I would like to use Spence's account of Marco Polo in his book *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* to give my students a different perspective on Marco Polo than they would ordinarily get. Finally, this section of study focuses on Feudal Japan. I plan to include several excerpts from Dr. Ellington and Schirokauer's books in this study. I also plan to use my notes from Dr. Rice's presentation to us about the Real Samurai. During this study, I usually have my students create a chart of the Japanese feudal system, including the emperor, shogun, daimyo, samurai, and peasants. I would also like to take this opportunity to study the importance of ceremony and dress,

not only in ancient Japan, but also in modern Japan. Students are typically fascinated with the Samurai, particularly the rituals of Seppuku or hara-kiri.

Finally, our curriculum briefly covers the origins of other East Asian societies, including Korea, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. We will briefly discuss these origins, particularly how they relate to China and Japan. I will use many of my notes from Dr. Ellington and Dr. Littlejohn, including how Buddhism spread, and how Korea was influenced by China and Japan. Finally, students will discuss the unification of Korea after the attempts to conquer made by China and Japan. This will be another good opportunity to use excerpts from Schirokauer's book, as it provides excellent summaries of this history.

The next time our curriculum turns towards East Asia is during World War II. Japanese imperialism, unrest in China, and Japan's involvement in World War II play important roles in this period of World History. It is my hope to give much more time to the study of Japan and China's political problems and goals before World War II. I would like to use the Consular Office of Japan's video about the opening of Japan, including the American perspective of Commodore Matthew Perry. I would also like to use some of Dr. Ellington's notes and portions of his book to introduce students to Japan's Imperial Period. I would also be very interested in using Dr. Littlejohn's notes about the rise of the Chinese Communist Party. It is very hard for students to understand that, although Mao Ze Tung was a hero to the Chinese people, not everything was wonderful under his rule. I would like to give students excerpts from Chang's book *Wild Swans* to demonstrate this to my students. I would also like to show video clips from Nanking like Dr. Littlejohn showed us. I believe these images would be very powerful for my students.

It is also my hope that I can present the Japanese perspective in World War II to my students. I believe that we often only give students the western perspective on Pearl Harbor. It is my hope that I can find materials that will help present both sides of the issue to my students. I would like to use this as an opportunity for students to read about both perspectives and research both parties' reasons for entering the conflict. I believe this would be an excellent topic for students to research and debate in class.

The final portion of my curriculum on East Asia concerns Asia in the modern times. This section includes Asia from 1945 to the present, and includes such topics as Communist China, the Japanese Miracle, and Asian prosperity. At this point in our study, I would like to present students with information about China and Japan in the modern day. I would like to use Dr. Ellington's book to introduce students to Japanese culture and the Japanese family in the modern day, as well as the boom in the Japanese economy. I think this is an easy read for students that explain these concepts to them in terms that are clear and understandable. At this point, I would like to allow students to bring in Japanese animation and comics to share with the class. Students are extremely into this culture right now, and it would be a shame not to allow them to share something that captures their interest so much. I believe it might be fun to have an entire day devoted to Japanese culture, allowing students to bring food, games, animation, and other articles of Japanese culture.

Finally, I would also like to expose my students to the changes in the Chinese economy and the changes it has sparked in the American economy. I would like to show my students the chart Dr. Littlejohn shared with us about outsourcing in China and the labor conditions in sweat shops. I want students to be aware of these situations and the

controversy that has occurred as a result. I would also like students to research how many products purchased in America are made in China and Tibet. I think it would be a good idea to send students on a scavenger hunt through Walmart or any other popular store to find items not made in China. I think this would be a good way to end our study of East Asia and for students to realize the incredible connection that now exists between east and west.

I look forward to incorporating these ideas, the notes and readings shared with me during the seminar, video clips, and other information gathered during this seminar with my students. I believe I have a much firmer grasp of these topics now that I have been through the program, and I feel much more confident to share this curriculum. I believe I have benefited greatly from this program, and I believe my students will also benefit from the materials gathered and the information I have learned. This program was a great asset to me and I believe it will be a great asset to my students and my school.