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IMPLEMENTATION OF EAST ASIA TO SIXTH GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES

I am a teacher at Oliver Middle School, in Nashville, Tennessee. The school is rather small in size as compared to other local middle schools, having approximately 550 students enrolled in grades five through eight. I am currently a 6th grade math, science, and social studies teacher. This will be my ninth year as a teacher in the Metro- Nashville Public School System. We have a very diverse population of students, and we are dedicated to being the best middle school we can be. We have a lot of parental support to help better our school, as well as a terrific administrative office.

As a sixth grade Social Studies and Science teacher, I am on a special rotation that consists of one week on each subject. For example, I will teach Social Studies one period a day for one week, and then switch to Science the next week. Luckily, there is some flexibility in this for me as a teacher. If I am in the midst of a great lesson, and I need to carry over an extra day it is okay. I am looking forward to integrating my new found knowledge of East Asia into my curriculum this school year. I also hope to make numerous connections to all of the subject areas during the approximate eight weeks that I plan to spend on Chinese and Japanese Civilizations this school year.

At the very start of our studies on Eastern Asia, students will create a notebook. This notebook will be used to keep track of all the important information that students will acquire during their studies. We will begin by giving it the title, "East Asia." Later, we will decorate the cover in a way that demonstrates some examples of East Asian art that we will learn about. I will store the students' notebooks in my classroom. This will allow us to use them constantly, without missing out on any information because of lost notebooks. The purpose of the student notebooks is to collect notes, maps, religions, significant figures, and any other resources that we mention. We will use the notebooks as study guides to remind the students of key locations, and any accomplishments of the Chinese and Japanese. These notebooks will be a great learning tool throughout this entire unit of study. They will also be very useful when working on projects, or when studying for tests.

I am also planning to create a combined study with the art teacher this year to help bring some of China and Japan's beautiful artistry into the classroom. She and I will work together to coordinate lessons that will tie together information that will enhance our students learning. This will allow us to come up with a working schedule that will allow students to become more enriched in Asian art. As mentioned earlier, we have a great deal of parental support, and we plan to get parents involved in coming into the classroom to help assist us with several bigger projects, as well as to help with supplies. We also would like to have an art show at the conclusion of our East Asian studies to share with parents all of artwork. Hopefully, this will strike interest in others to become more knowledgeable about East Asia.

For the 2008-2009 school year, I want to begin my course of study covering the Qin Dynasty through the Ming Dynasty. These are the periods most relevant to the sixth grade social studies curriculum. During the Qin Dynasty, two major monuments were made famous. These two events are the terra-cotta soldiers that are located in Xi'an, and The Great Wall of China. These will be the two major topics that I will cover with students at this point in the study. We will view a video of Shi Huangdi's tomb after reading and researching about it. The video will be used to bring some reality to such an unbelievable event in history. Following the research and the video, we will hold a discussion seminar. During the seminar we will discuss the use of power during these times and the amount of intense labor that went into creating such an elaborate tomb. The Great Wall of China will be introduced as the best public work of China. We will discuss its purpose for being built, and its effects on the surrounding people. We will use this opportunity to use a math connection, as to convert the distance of the wall using measurement skills. Students will also work together to construct a mural of the Great Wall of China. They will have to do research both in and out of class to find out information about the walls specific traits. They will then come together and compare notes and begin designing a class mural of The Great Wall of China on poster paper. This mural will be displayed down the entire sixth grade hallway. This will allow the other students to view their work, thus striking up conversations about what they have learned. I believe that this is a great way for students to learn and obtain information.

Sixth grade social studies specifically focuses in on three major religions; Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. We will spend time focusing in how each religion contributed to the history of East Asia. Students will record this information into their notebooks. We will use

Venn diagrams to compare and contrast the religions as they are introduced. We will focus in the major beliefs of each religion, its founder, and the holy books connected with each religion. These are very important skills that are always tested on state assessments for sixth graders. During this point in our studies it becomes increasingly important to focus in on several significant individuals, especially Confucius. Confucius is often referred to as the best-known Chinese thinker. We will also briefly discuss the Analects. Students will be shown a large picture of Confucius as a discussion starter to this lesson. I feel that when learning about the significance of an individual it often helps to have a visual picture in your mind. I hope to be able to produce visuals of all of the individuals that we address in this study.

Next, I would like to spend some time on Japanese art. I will start by introducing my class origami. We will use this type of art making to help students get in touch with the elements of Japanese culture. I will begin by sharing background information from “Exploring the Frontiers of Origami.” I will be able to connect this lesson to a particular unit covered in science. We always do a unit on the “Technology of Paper.” The student will make paper by hand. We will use these paper samples to practice making origami. We will also experiment with beautiful rice paper that can be purchased at any bookstores or global markets. I want the students to make mobiles to be hung from the ceiling in our classroom. The mobiles will have a theme related to Japanese art. During this assignment, I will also be able to relate this to another subject area that I teach. Origami has a great connection to Math. The use of symmetry and all types of geometry are very relevant to the topic. I feel like my students will greatly benefit from a wide range of opportunities to learn about Asian culture. We will conclude our work with origami with a class discussion on its importance to Japanese culture. We will also complete a reflection on what students have learned from these experiences.

The Japanese are also very well known for their tea ceremonies. I believe this to be a great learning tool for students to see the tranquility of Japan. This is a topic that I really enjoyed learning about, and I want to share it with my students. I want for them to see the significance that the ceremonies have for the people of Japan. I will start this by looking at a picture of the Sand and Stone Garden in Japan. I will also show a video of a tea ceremony to the class. We will discuss the importance of the movements, both in and out of the ceremony. I want students to observe how gracefully the ceremony is performed. We will also talk about the significance of the scroll and the flowers during a tea ceremony. I would like to conclude the study of the tea

ceremony by working with the art teacher. Students will make clay cups to drink from, and we will use them for our own “tea ceremony.” I will purchase the green tea from the Global Market. I will also use a scroll and flowers to create a refined experience for my students.

As a teacher, I am always looking to broaden my students’ knowledge on many levels. I found the haiku poetry to be a very symbolic part of Asian culture. Sixth graders typically do a unit on poetry in their reading and language classes. However, they do learn about the haiku and how to write one, but they learn very little about their significance to Asian culture. I will introduce my students to the greatest haiku master, Matsuo Basho. Matsuo Basho was a samurai who gave up his rank to become a poet. We will look at some of his works, as well as others. We will review the amount of syllables that are typically used, and we will study the content of the poems. We will learn how Basho was very heavily influenced by his many travels. Students will be asked to write their own haiku. These will be presented in class, and then displayed in the room.

The next topic of study that I feel is very important to cover is calligraphy. Calligraphy is typically given priority in visual arts for China. Calligraphy can be a great means of self expression and creativity. We will discuss how this is a skill practiced by Chinese people from early childhood. I will show my class many different forms of calligraphy. We will learn about Wang Xizhi, who was the greatest calligrapher of his age. I will explain to the class how his works of calligraphy helped him serve as a model for many generations. This will also be a good time to discuss how he was inspired by Daoism, emphasizing the natural. We will also use examples of the handmade paper from science to practice writing on. The students will display their examples of calligraphy in the classroom. We will take turns giving interpretations of each others work.

If time allows I also plan to implement a variety of games and projects to be used to further my students’ excitement of learning about East Asia. I plan to set up several learning centers throughout the classroom. Students will be able to visit these centers when they finish other assignments. Some ideas for this include: a small library of reading materials, a computer with links to many resourceful websites, including several national museums. Also, a calligraphy, origami, and haiku station will be used. These centers will provide students with further opportunities to continue their learning about Asian civilization. I will also assign a power point presentation to be done in small groups, after my students finish their computer class

rotation. Students will be given specific guidelines to follow, and will present on famous individuals that we have covered during our studies. I also plan to create several versions of Jeopardy to play with the class as a type of review game to study for final tests. Over the course of the year I hope to come up with other ideas to add to this curriculum.

As we conclude our study of Ancient Civilization students will be given a test over all of the material that we covered. The students' notebooks will be a very useful tool for the students to study with. I also have plans for a very special day at the conclusion of our unit. On this day, I will invite parents, teachers, and other students to view our many accomplishments. Some example of items to be displayed will be: class mural, calligraphy, haiku, and origami. I really look forward to implementing this action plan into my curriculum this year. I feel very fortunate to have been a part of this wonderful experience. I feel much more equipped to be a more effective teacher on East Asia. I hope to make a difference in my students' education on such an interesting place in this world.