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Japanese Floating Lanterns

Genres: Art
Social Studies

Grade Level: Second Grade

Time Period: One to two 50-60 minute class periods

Narrative: *Obon* is a Japanese Buddhist custom in which people honor the spirits of their deceased ancestors. It has evolved over the last 500 years in Japan, and is also known as the Feast of Lanterns, or *Toro Nagashi*. Based on the solar calendar, mid August is the most commonly celebrated time of year in which different regions of Japan pay homage to this custom. During this festival, one might hear the taiko drums and rhythmic instrumentation next to traditional dance routines. According to Buddhist tradition and Japanese folk belief, the souls of the dead may interact with the living. At the time of Obon, ancestral spirits are said to revisit their families for three days. Families pay their respects by offering food and drink on a tray before the altar. Finally, at the close of the ceremonies, those involved inscribe names, messages, and drawings on paper lanterns, set a candle inside, and set it afloat in a body of water. In comparison to Western art, traditional Japanese art is very much apart of the everyday way of life. Lanterns are adorned by the beauty found in simple, humble things.

Objectives: Students will learn about a traditional Japanese custom, *Toro Nagashi*. Students will have the opportunity to observe Japanese style paintings, and learn about the high reverence held for the preparation of the Feast of Lanterns. Students will create their own three-dimensional, free-standing paper lanterns, enhancing them by drawing subject matter that relates to Japanese culture.

Procedure: During the first class period, students will become familiarized with the Japanese Buddhist custom, *Toro Nagashi*, or Feast of Lanterns. Students will have the opportunity to view some examples of lanterns made by participants of the festival via “you-tube” and the internet. Students may brainstorm images on plain copy paper, before transferring them to their final lantern draft. Students will be using vellum paper instead of the suggested YUPO translucent paper. Our lanterns will be more for aesthetics, rather than function. Final lantern drawings and the assembly of them, will be completed during the next class period.

Assessment: Students will be able to discuss the traditional custom of *Toro Nagashi*, and its importance to the Japanese people. Students will also be assessed by the content they chose to inscribe on their lanterns in keeping with the simplistic nature of Japanese artworks.

Materials:

White copy paper
Pencils
9 x 12 vellum paper
Watercolor paints
Paintbrushes
Water containers
Pictures of Floating Japanese Lanterns
World map
Stapler

Reference: Dick Blick Art Materials and Lesson Plans