

Wayang
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Grade Level: Freshman
Subject: World Cultures-Southeast Asia Unit
Topic: The Oral Traditions of Southeast Asia
with a focus on Wayang

General Objectives:

Students will be able to answer the following questions:
What are the universal cultural institutions?
How and why do cultures develop institutions?

Specific Objectives:

Students will learn about the importance of the arts in Southeast Asia
Students will be able to create and perform their own Shadow Play
Students will work collaboratively to relate the information to their own lives/culture

Materials:

Visual aids: shadow puppets, on-line sources
Background readings on Wayang
Art supplies: scissors, poster board or cardboard, markers, straws or chop sticks, glue
Screening material, flashlight, CD player

Opening:

Begin by asking the students the following brainstorming activity discussion questions:

(The 1st two questions may serve as a review from previous units)

What are the universal cultural institutions?
How and why do cultures develop institutions?
How do we express traditions in our culture?
How are traditions expressed in your own culture?

Explain and state the specific objectives to the students. Be sure to emphasize that Wayang grew out of an oral tradition of passing culture and tradition from one generation to the next. You might want to ask the students: How and why do you think oral traditions developed? What other cultures have oral traditions?

Outline the basic components of Wayang:

Dalang: the puppeteer and his/her duties

Themes: conflict between good and evil, Hindu epics, adventures of heroes

Music: gamelan music to accompany the performance

As a class read aloud the abbreviated version of the *Ramayana* (which can be obtained from the *Seasite*) or another epic like the *Mahabharata*. If possible, assign parts, so students get involved in the process themselves. Take the time to discuss the characters, the conflict/themes, and make predictions of outcomes.

After the reading and discussion, ask your students if they think they can make their own shadow play or Wayang. Be sure to provide visual examples, either through the on-line sources, a video clip, and if possible, actual shadow puppets.

Preparing for the play:

Divide the students into small groups of 4-5. Students should work together to create their own Wayang illustrating a story from their own lives. Each student should have their own part and thus create their own puppet. (This is where examples of shadow puppets would be helpful). Each group should chose a dalang to be the narrator, but all students should take part with the puppeteering.

Each story should be about 5 minutes in length and contain parts for all the characters. Be sure to include themes common to Wayang: good and evil and other conflicts. Feel free to choose music to accompany your performance; to set the mood if you will. And, don't forget a title!

After the students are divided into groups and the instructions for the assignment have been given, provide the time for writing and research as necessary. In addition to the writing portion, the students will make their own shadow puppets. Again, examples of shadow puppets are great to illustrate the construction you want them to follow in terms of materials, however, it's important to emphasize that their puppets may take whatever form/shape they wish as necessary for their story/part. You can choose to provide some in class time to get the students started on their puppets as you wish. I would suggest they start in class and might finish them for homework.

After the plays are written and the puppets are constructed I would allow the groups some time to practice their performances.

On the day of the play:

Be sure the stage is set up and the equipment (CD player, flashlight, etc.) is in working order. Have each group give a brief summary of the theme and the characters in their play. After each performance allow for Q & A as necessary.

Closure:

Discuss the following questions:

What are the basic concepts in Wayang?

Why was Wayang created?

How do we pass oral traditions from one generation to the next?

What traditions do you do in your own family?

What traditions would you like to begin in your family?

Evaluation:

Journal responses to the following questions:

What are the universal cultural institutions?

How and why do cultures develop institutions?

What did you like the best about this activity? Explain your answer.

What do you think could be improved upon with this activity? Explain your answer.

Resources:

Neher, Clark D. *Southeast Asia: Crossroads of the World*. DeKalb Illinois: Southeast Asia Publications, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, 2000.

Provides a comprehensive look at Southeast Asian cultures. Contains some basic information on the arts in Indonesia.

World Cultures: A Global Mosaic. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1996.

Textbook with a good introduction to Wayang for students (and teachers).

www.seasite.niu.edu

Website that provides a wide array of arts and music information about Indonesia, as well as other countries in Southeast Asia

www.indo.com

Tourist oriented website that gives basic information on Indonesia (including the arts).

www.shadowlight.com

Website with basic information on Wayang.

www.gamelan.org

Website that is sponsored by the International Gamelan Society. Lists clubs and performances around the world. Listen to a wide variety of gamelan music while on-line.