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Tune in Japan

Approaching Culture Through Television

Tune in Japan

Global Connections

DISTRIBUTED BY THE ASIA SOCIETY
725 PARK AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-5088
212-288-6400
1997. 45 MINUTES. COLOR

Whenever visiting a new place, whether in the United States or abroad, we want to learn as much as possible about its important places, artifacts, and cultural traditions. After spending a day touring sights and enjoying local cuisine, I must admit that just before going to bed, I like to turn on the hotel room television to view popular programs. I realize it is only one window, but it does provide another way to gain a "sense of place" through the eyes of a powerful medium.

Tune in Japan: Approaching Culture Through Television provides the equivalent "sense of place" by mixing existing television footage from Japan with digital graphics. With an appealing multimedia format, the target audience is middle school students. Produced by the Asia Society, the film and its accompanying Teacher's Guide, edited by Linda Wojtan, represent quality resources rich in teaching and learning activities.

The forty-five-minute-long program is divided into three segments that can be appropriately woven into classroom instructional time. It is immediately apparent that the recommendations of middle school educators and students were applied from field-testing as each film segment closes by asking students to count down from ten to one in Japanese. The interactive dimension of the film encourages students to discuss

ideas fully before learning new ideas in the next segment.

The first segment answers the question, How does geography shape culture? The images present the unique physical characteristics of Japan, contrasting the images of snow in Hokkaidō with the subtropical climate of Okinawa. Comparative projections relating Japan's population density and land area to other countries are effective. The viewer learns of Japan's proximity with the Asian mainland and its role in the emerging Pacific Rim region. In addition, the discussion of earthquakes and volcanoes is expertly presented using video clips such as showing school children participating in an earthquake drill.

How did Japan's cultural identity evolve? How is that identity reinforced? The second segment explores answers to these questions by revealing images of festival activities and secular civic holidays, and offering historical and/or religious backgrounds to their development. The Japanese character of local festivals, as well as images of Girls' Day and Children's Day, demonstrate to the viewer how holidays are celebrated very differently. Yet, the viewer can ascertain that in the unfamiliar images of these celebrations, there exist the similar themes of celebrating family, friends, communities, and a nation.

The final segment explores cultural continuity and visually

shows how the Japanese integrate change and reinvent their own traditions. The viewer learns about haiku, sumō, *yūzen*, and Kabuki, and sees how traditions are preserved and passed along from one generation to the next. At the same time, advances in technology and global communications, especially television, demonstrate how new ideas are adopted. I highly recommend this film for use in middle school Global Studies and Geography classes and also for cross-disciplinary courses on cultural identity. The accompanying Teacher's Guide contains exemplary lessons that will reinforce current best practices for classroom teaching. ■

As the high school companion piece to *Tune in Japan: Approaching Culture Through Television*, this film is unique in its frank portrayal of how the Japanese are attempting to solve contemporary social problems. Each problem is discussed openly,

and direct reactions from Japanese teens provide viewers with a unique, personal understanding of the effects of both the problems and solutions. The greatest strength of this film is its ability to evoke in the viewer a sense of how Japanese solutions draw from Japan's traditions and cultural experiences. In addition, viewers can assess how America's solutions to some of the same problems are based on our own traditions and cultural experiences.

The forty-five-minute program is divided into four segments that may be used separately or together. The segments include discussion about creating a personal identity while maintaining allegiance to a group, preserving community and national security, implementing recycling programs, and increasing global communications through such activities as exchange programs and the Internet. While the film could be used effectively in a Global Studies course, individual segments could easily be applied

in environmental studies, geography, sociology, political science, psychology, and a unit on post-World War II Japan in world history courses.

I would recommend the first two segments particularly for their candid portrayal of such problems as *ijime*, or bullying, and *murahachibu*, the practice of excluding people from the community so that they receive no help of any kind except in emergencies such as fire or death.

While these segments refer to the increase in petty crime, drug use, truancy, and drop-outs among Japanese teens, the film reflects the recent efforts of the Monbusho to reduce bullying in schools. Additional issues focus on the effect of immigration on a relatively homogeneous culture, Japan's rice importation policy, and the cautious reactions from Japan's neighbors as to the use of Japan's self-defense force.

The third segment investigates Japan's environmental efforts to improve recycling, land reclamation, and the use of alternative

energy sources. The final segment on global communications will be of interest to students and schools wishing to engage in dialogue with Japanese teachers and students using the Internet.

The Teacher's Guide contains several effective teaching/learning activities suitable for high school students, and the opportunities for independent work, such as using the Internet to exchange ideas, provide potential real-world applications for further research and study. The film *Tune in Japan: Global Connections* and its corresponding Teacher's Guide make excellent resources for inclusion into a high school curriculum. ■

Henry Kiernan

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From a Different Shore

The Japanese American Experience

FILMS FOR THE HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES
BOX 2053, PRINCETON, NJ 08543-2053
800-257-5126
1996. 50 MINUTES. COLOR

Some of the images are compelling: a sea of Japanese American faces pledging allegiance to the American flag; a small child sitting patiently on a pile of his family's belongings; a grocery store whose owner, going out of business, has posted a large sign in the window proclaiming "I AM AN AMERICAN."

Asian Americans in America are Americans, not Asians. That's one point of *From a Different Shore: The Japanese*

American Experience, a video in the series on *An American Identity* from Films for the Humanities. The other point is that this particular group of Americans had a particularly unjust experience during World War II, at least on the Western seaboard.

Poignantly, against archival photographs and current images of the stark American West, Japanese Americans tell the story of their current achievements while their parents tell the story of their internment at Manzanar

and other camps during World War II. Home movies of an earlier generation show American children with Japanese faces celebrating birthdays, eating ice cream cones, wearing Boy Scout uniforms. Videotape of a recent Japanese festival parade in Los Angeles, on the other hand, shows Japanese American children in traditional Japanese dress reenacting a culture they are trying to reclaim.

In these episodes from *The Japanese American Experience*, this video—made for The Open University of the British Broadcasting Company and directed by Jeremy Cooper—tells us little about Asia, little about Japan, but quite a lot about America. It tells us about the desire of the poor to make a good life in a new environment, of the urge to assimilate and

be accepted, of the inescapable barrier of ethnic appearances, of white Americans' perhaps unconscious tendency to think of non-Caucasian, non-African Americans as foreign.

Through the generations represented, we see pride in Japanese American family achievement and assimilation contrasted with the very different experiences of contemporary Japanese business people in the same area, Los Angeles. One group is American, speaks English as a primary language, prefers American food; the other is Japanese, speaks and reads Japanese, prefers Japanese food. Racial origin and culture are not the same, though typical American students may have more trouble seeing the distinction when the faces are Asian.

Of course, the video's most