

*EXPLORING CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH CHILDHOOD PASTIMES*

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| **Introduction** | |
| Children often develop close emotional ties and develop strong bonds with family members through games, toys, and childhood pastimes. These are often our first introductions into our culture and heritage. By thinking more deeply about childhood pastimes from around the world and focusing on a short story that delves into one boy’s struggle to reconcile with his family’s Chinese heritage and cultural traditions, students can better understand the role heritage and culture have played in shaping their own lives and the lives of others. | |
| **Indiana Standards Connections:**  9-10.RL.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.    9-10.RL.2.1: Analyze what the text says explicitly as well as inferences and interpretations drawn from the text.    9-10.RL.2.2: Analyze the development of two or more themes or central ideas over the course of a text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account.    9-10.RL.3.1: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.    9-10.RL.4.1: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.    9-10.W.3.1: Write arguments in a variety of forms that…support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.    9-10.W.6.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. | **Compelling Question(s):**   * How do our cultural pastimes influence our identity?      * How do games and toys help us explore the theme of family and the parent-child relationship?      * In what ways can objects symbolize our connection to or relationship with our culture and heritage? |
| **Lesson Objectives:**   * Students will explore the significance of cultural pastimes and objects in shaping identity. * Students will analyze the themes of cultural identity and family relationships in "The Paper Menagerie." * Students will reflect on the roles of culture and heritage in their own childhood pastimes. | |
| **Materials** | |
| 1. Window to the World Digital Artifact [“Tangram Puzzle Book”](https://w2w.indiana.edu/explore-collections/tangram-book.html) 2. Optional: Tangram puzzles 3. Origami paper or squares of paper 4. Copies of [“The Paper Menagerie” by Ken Liu](https://gizmodo.com/read-ken-lius-amazing-story-that-swept-the-hugo-nebula-5958919) 5. [Levar Burton Reads “The Paper Menagerie” by Ken Liu](https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-paper-menagerie-by-ken-liu/id1244649384?i=1000391583681) 6. Highlighters for annotating 7. Chart paper and markers or digital document for group notes | |
| **Learning Plan** | |
| **Activities (approximately 2-3 class periods)**  Hook: Childhood Pastimes   1. Start by asking students to pair up and share with each other: What was your favorite childhood item/toy? Who gave it to you? What memories or emotions do you associate with it? 2. Call on or ask for volunteers to share their memories with the class. You might start my modeling your own response to the class. 3. Ask the class to discuss in small groups: What childhood pastimes such as games and toys have a connect to a specific culture? Students may cite examples like the dreidel with Judaism, origami from Japan, baseball with American culture, nesting dolls from Russia, boomerangs from Australia, or chess from India or Europe. If working with a younger grade-level you might show pictures of these objects and ask students to identify them and what culture they are from. 4. Show a picture of the “Tangram Puzzle Book” and ask students what they know about tangrams, or puzzle games that originated in China. They may remember them from elementary school or high school Geometry classes. Some may remember playing with toy versions of them at home. Ask them what emotional associations or words come to mind when they think of tangrams. 5. Go over brief history of tangrams as a Chinese pastime based on language from Window to the [World Digital Artifact “Tangram Puzzle Book”](https://w2w.indiana.edu/explore-collections/tangram-book.html). Be sure to highlight the tangram as a creative, fun challenge and source of entertainment for children.     Pre-Reading Activity   1. Share with students that another popular Chinese pastime is paper folding. They may know it as origami and associate it with Japan, but it also has roots in China and is called zhezi. 2. The short story that is the focus of this lesson is “The Paper Menagerie” by Ken Liu. Spend time introducing the author who was born in Lanzhou, China in the 1970s and immigrated to the U.S. when he was 11. He won the Hugo and Nebula awards for his short story collection “The Paper Menagerie” which focuses on the fictional character of Jack as he attempts to reconcile both his Chinese and American identities and familial connections.     Reading & Annotating   1. Give each student a copy of “The Paper Menagerie” and instruct them to use highlighters and pencils to annotate while reading. 2. Instruct students to annotate by highlighting evidence of Jack’s treatment towards and opinion of his childhood toys (the paper animals and Star Wars figurines) over the course of the short story. 3. Give students time to read the story or listen to the audio version. 4. Pause periodically to discuss and ensure comprehension and engagement:  * What might Laohu and the other paper animals represent? * What is the connection between the paper animals and the relationship between Jack and his mother? * What might the Star Wars figurines represent? * How does Jack’s attitude about the paper animals and his mother change over the course of the story? * Where do you see examples of conflict between American and Chinese culture with Jack’s family? * How do you see Jack struggling with his cultural identity? * What symbolism do you see in this story? * Where do you see binaries in this story (storebought vs. homemade, Chinese vs. American, young Jack vs. teen/adult Jack, etc.)? * Why do you think it’s important for the mother to connect with Jack using paper folding and through other parts of his Chinese heritage (language, food)?     Formative Assessment: Group Analysis Presentation   1. Divide students into small groups and provide each group with chart paper and markers or similar digital space to take notes. 2. Assign each group a theme to explore. Some options include:  * The symbolism of the paper animals * The relationship between Jack and his mother * The role of cultural assimilation in the story * Jack’s internal conflict around his cultural identity  1. Give each group time to write down ideas and direct evidence from the story story on their paper. 2. Each group should present their analysis to the class. 3. Facilitate a class discussion on how these elements contribute to the overall themes of cultural identity and family relationships in the story. What life lesson can be learned from this story?     Formative Assessment: Reflective Journal Entry   1. Ask students to write a reflective journal entry on how cultural pastimes and artifacts from their own lives shape their identities. Note: This is meant to be an individual assessment for students to demonstrate their own thinking on the idea of objects and their relationship to cultural identity. | |
| **Assessment Suggestions**  Group Analysis Presentation: Assess the clarity and depth of analysis presented.  Reflective Journal Entry: Evaluate for thoughtfulness and connection to personal experiences. | |
| **Extensions**   * Creative Expression: Bring in tangrams or have students search on YouTube for easy paperfolding (origami) tutorials and provide square paper to allow students to try simple origami. Decorate your room with their origami or tangram creations. * Analysis Essay: Write an analytical essay examining how "The Paper Menagerie" uses a childhood pastime to explore the idea of cultural identity. * Cultural Artifact Project: Students create a visual or digital presentation about a cultural artifact from their heritage, explaining its significance and how it relates to their identity. * Comparative Literature: Read and compare another short story or poem that deals with themes of cultural identity, such as “Everyday Use” by Alice Walker. | |