

Voices of Modern Japanese Literature

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Introduction

Modern writers like Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and John Steinbeck are well known in American literary circles. These writers are often included in high school English and social studies curricula because of their artistic commentary on the way in which people viewed themselves and the world during the American modern period (1915-1945). Through these authors' voices, readers are able, for example, to consider how World War I challenged American optimism, explore how the Great Depression left many with a feeling of uncertainty, and contemplate how World War II furthered feelings of disjointedness and disillusionment in 20th-century life. Through their varied approaches, techniques, and styles, modern American writers echoed the strong sense of isolation, alienation, and uncertainty felt by many Americans of the modern period.

The modernist movement was not exclusive to the United States; this literary movement extended around the world, including Japan. “*Modanizumu*, as the term “modernism” was rendered into Japanese in the late 1920s, was a powerful intellectual idea, mode of artistic expression, and source of popular fashion in Japan from approximately 1910-1940,” explains William J. Tyler (2009) in his book *Modanizumu: Modernist Fiction from Japan, 1913-1938*. Similar to American writers, Japanese writers and artists of the Modern period also broke from the authority and traditions of the past by attempting new styles, subjects, and themes. Rapid industrialization, women's and men's suffrage movements, education reforms, Taishō democracy, and nationalism provided rich topics for late Meiji and Taishō writers. Japanese Modern writers artistically commented upon the lifestyle, political, and socioeconomic changes of the early 20th century. Thus, their works provide rich sources for American high school curricula on Asian and world history and literature.

The Modern period in Japan overlaps the reigns of three Emperors: Meiji (1868-1912), Taishō (1912-1926), and early Shōwa (1926-1945). Throughout this lesson, “Modern Japan,” “Japan's Modern Period,” and “Modern Literature” refer to this period of rapid modernization from the late 1800s through the late 1920s.

In this lesson, students read Meiji-Taishō literary works in their historical, cultural, biographical, and literary contexts, considering how individuals reacted to the process of modernization in Japan during the 20th century. During the lesson's first day, students identify some basic characteristics of modernization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Japan, based on prior study and reading. Then, they make observations and inferences about this period, drawing on visual images from the late 1800s to the early 20th century, as well as Kambara Ariake's poem “The Oyster Shell.” Through discussion, they define the characteristics of modern Japanese literature and the proletarian movement of the early 20th century in Japanese literature.

On Day 2, the class reads and discusses Mori Ogai's “The Dancing Girl” (1890). They use the “Shared Inquiry” discussion format to explore the purpose and message of Ogai's work and complete a reflective writing assignment considering what the short story reflects about modernization at the turn of the 20th century in Japan. On Days 3 and 4, students read Shimizu Shikin's “The Broken Ring” (1891) and Kuroshima Denji's “The Telegram” (1923), engaging in discussion and reflective writing using the strategies employed on Day 2.

Grade Level/Subject Area: Secondary/Asian Literature, World Literature, World History

Time Required: 4-5 class periods plus optional homework

Materials:

For Students:

Meiji-Taishō Background Essay; this essay can be copied or students can access it online.

Handout 1: Background Essay Reading Guide

Handout 2: Visual Analysis Worksheet (you will need four copies for each student or student pair unless you plan to have students record their answers on separate sheets of paper)

Handout 3: The Oyster Shell

Handout 4: Characteristics of Modern Japanese Literature

Handout 5: Reading for Tone and Mood

Handout 6: Post-Reading Worksheet for “The Dancing Girl”

Handout 7: Post-Reading Worksheet for “The Broken Ring”

Handout 8: Post-Reading Worksheet for “The Telegram”

For Teachers:

Computer and projector for showing the following images to students for analysis:

- Tokyo 1934: <http://www.oldphotosjapan.com/en/photos/440/asakusa-nakamise#.VGOzIocVnFQ>
- September and October 1931 NAPF (Nippona Artista Proleta Federacio) magazine covers: http://www.grambarcelona.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/modern_graphic_10.jpg and http://www.grambarcelona.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/modern_graphic_11.jpg
- Tokyo Construction Fair 1935: http://www.grambarcelona.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/modern_graphic_34.jpg
- Women in the 1920s: <http://www.oldphotosjapan.com/en/photos/269/woman-curling-hair#.VSHunvnF98F> and <http://www.oldphotosjapan.com/en/photos/650/ainu-woman-carrying-wood#.VSHuxPnF98F>

Handouts 1-3 and 6-8 Answer Keys

Copies of the three stories used in the lesson:

- Mori Ogai. “The Dancing Girl.” *Youth and Other Stories*. Ed. & trans. J. Thomas Rimer. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994. 6-24. Downloadable full text is available at: https://www.goodreads.com/ebooks/download/14030.The_Dancing_Girl_of_Izu_and_Other_Stories
- Shimizu Shikin. “The Broken Ring.” Trans. Rebecca Jennison. *The Modern Murasaki: Writing by Women of Meiji Japan*. Eds. Rebecca L. Copeland and Melek Ortabasi. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. 232-239.
- Kuroshima Denji. “The Telegram.” *A Flock of Swirling Crows and Other Proletarian Writings*. Trans. Zeljko Cipris. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005. 17-24.

Objectives: At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be better able to:

1. Identify and discuss characteristics of modern Japanese literature, drawing from selected examples of Meiji and Taishō era poetry and short stories.
2. Identify and compare multiple perspectives on modernization as reflected in modern literature of the Meiji-Taishō literature.

Essential Questions

- In what ways did the events of modern Japan influence writers of that period?
- What perspectives on modernization are reflected in literature produced during the Meiji and Taishō periods?

Teacher Background

For an overview of the Meiji-Taishō period, please see the Meiji-Taishō Background Essay for this curriculum project by Ethan Segal, Michigan State University.

A note on name order and special naming of Japanese authors: In Japanese, the family name comes first and given name last. In the short biographies below, family names appear first and in capital letters. However, when referring to Japanese authors and poets, the Japanese follow special rules based on the writer's time period, his or her use of a pen name, or genre of literature. So, for the four writers below, the Japanese often refer to Mori Ogai, Kambara Ariake, and Shimizu Shikin by just their given names or pen names. Kuroshima Denji, as a proletarian writer, is referred to by his family name, Kuroshima. This lesson follows the Japanese convention for these writers.

KAMBARA Ariake (1876-1952). Kambara Ariake is actually a pen name for a writer known for his poetry, biographical novel, and narratives. Ariake, as the poet is known, was born into an elite family, well-educated and well-travelled. His poetry earned him early success. In writing sonnets, a form rarely used at the time in Japan, he acquired a reputation as a symbolist poet. Failing to respond to new trends (e.g., embracing free verse) marked the end of Ariake's writing career in 1947.

MORI Ogai (1862-1922). Mori Ogai had a rich career beginning as a Japanese army surgeon, then as a translator, and later as a novelist and poet. He was born into an elite Japanese family and was therefore afforded a strong education. He was well trained in Confucian classics, Chinese poetry, Western thought and medicine, and the German and Dutch languages. While in the army, he spent time living in Germany, where he developed an interest in European literature. His writings can be divided into four phases. First, Mori translated European poetry and plays into Japanese; next, he spent a period writing about his personal experiences. Later in life, from 1912-1916, he wrote historical stories. His final writing period, from 1916 until his death, was characterized by biographies of late Edo period doctors. Mori is considered one of the great writers of modern Japan.

SHIMIZU Shikin (1868-1933). Raised in Kyoto, Shimizu Shikin was highly educated. She was active in the women's rights movement in Japan and frequently published in magazines. Scholars credit Shimizu Shikin as one of the first writers to adopt a new narrative style of Japanese writing in the early 20th century—the I Novel, a confessional genre in which the literary events reflect the writer's life, all written from a first-person point of view. This writing style was popularized by Natsume Sōseki. A pioneering woman in many respects, Shikin married for love. She travelled with her husband to Europe, later ending her writing career to be a wife and mother.

KUROSHIMA Denji (1898-1943). Kuroshima Denji was born into a poor farming family on Shodo Island in the Inland Sea. He later headed to Tokyo to work and study. In 1919 he was conscripted into the Japanese army and sent to fight in an Allied forces anti-revolutionary war against the new Soviet Union. His military service and war experiences were to influence much of Kuroshima’s writing. After the war, Kuroshima began writing and joined the emerging proletarian literature movement. This early 20th-century movement, in Japan and internationally, produced literature that focused on the harsh lives of peasants, workers, and other groups adversely affected by modernization or political repression and called attention to the need for social, economic, and political change. Kuroshima’s writing included stories of the experiences of Japanese soldiers who had served in the anti-Soviet war in Siberia as well as stories that focused on the struggles of Japanese peasants and workers. His collected works are a major contribution to the Japanese and international proletarian literature movement.

Preparing to Teach the Lesson

1. This lesson uses several pedagogical techniques. Day 1 uses visual literacy questioning techniques to guide students in thoughtful and thorough analysis of visual source materials. Days 2 through 5 employ “Great Books’ Shared Inquiry” methods for analyzing and discussing print sources. If you are not familiar with these techniques, you may wish to learn more by exploring the above links, which are also listed in the **References** section at the end of the lesson.
2. Prior to the lesson, review the **Teacher Background**, the Historical Background Essay by Ethan Segal, the images to be examined on Day 1, student materials, and answer keys. Preparation time will vary according to teacher familiarity with the characteristics of Modern Literature and with the Meiji and Taishō periods in Japanese history.
3. Obtain master copies of and read in advance the three short stories used in the lesson.
4. Duplicate copies of visuals, stories, and handouts for student use.

Lesson Plan: Step-by-Step Procedure

Prior to Beginning the Lesson

This lesson assumes students have studied modernization in Meiji and 20th-century Japan. If not, assign the Historical Background Essay and Handout 1, Background Essay Reading Guide, provided with this lesson, or assign students the appropriate chapter in their history text.

Day 1

1. Begin by establishing some basic facts about Japan’s rapid modernization in the late Meiji and Taishō periods, roughly 1880-1930. What do students know about this period, either from previous study or from reading the homework essay? Students should be able to cite:
 - Japan’s rapid modernization when faced with challenges from Western countries after Commodore Perry “opened” Japan to Western trade in the 1850s.
 - The Meiji (1868-1911) government’s goals of industrializing and modernizing Japan.
 - Rapid industrialization, the growth of critical industries upon which Japan’s modern economy was built.

- Rapid social changes that accompanied political reform as well as economic change and industrialization, such as changes in family structure, rise of a working industrial class, rejection of some traditions, and so on. (Refer to the Historical Background Essay for more details.)

Ask students how these changes compare to changes in U.S. society around the same period. What do they know about the positive and negative aspects of the many changes that came with modernization in societies in the early 20th century?

2. Next, introduce students to the Essential Questions provided at the beginning of this lesson plan. In what ways did the rapid modernization that characterized Japan of the 1880s-1920s influence writers of that period? What perspectives on modernization are reflected in literature produced during the Meiji and Taishō periods? Explain to students that they will be exploring the link between modernization and literature as reflected in the “Modern Literature” movement of this period in Japan.
3. Distribute Handout 2, Visual Analysis Worksheet, to individual students or pairs; you will need four copies per student or pair or may direct students to write their answers on separate sheets of paper. Explain that the class is going to explore some images of early 20th-century Japanese society to form impressions of life and modernization in Japan at that time. Go over the Visual Analysis Worksheet so students understand the analysis process for each image they see.
4. Project the images below for one or two minutes each, providing narration as noted. An Answer Key is provided.

I am going to show you a series of images. For each image or pair of images, you should complete the Visual Analysis Worksheet.

The first image is a photograph taken in Tokyo in 1934.

- Tokyo 1934: <http://www.oldphotosjapan.com/en/photos/440/asakusa-nakamise#.VGOzIocVnFQ>

Next will be two magazine covers from September and October 1931 that you can analyze together. Both are from the Nippona Artista Proleta Federacio—a magazine that published proletarian literature, writing that focused on the problems of working-class people.

- September and October 1931 NAPF (Nippona Artista Proleta Federacio) magazine covers: http://www.grambarcelona.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/modern_graphic_10.jpg and http://www.grambarcelona.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/modern_graphic_11.jpg

The next image is a poster advertising a construction fair held in Tokyo in 1935. Note the comparison between man and industry. Does the man seem stable?

- Tokyo Construction Fair 1935: http://www.grambarcelona.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/modern_graphic_34.jpg

Finally, you will look at two pictures of women in the 1920s. The first shows a young Japanese woman with a bobbed hairstyle. Modern young women from the United States to Japan adopted the bob because it was easy to take care of and liberating. The second photo is a postcard of an Ainu woman carrying wood.

- Women in the 1920s: <http://www.oldphotosjapan.com/en/photos/269/woman-curling-hair#.VSHunvnF98F> and <http://www.oldphotosjapan.com/en/photos/650/ainu-woman-carrying-wood#.VSHuxPnF98F>

5. Once students have completed their analyses, discuss their findings as a class. The following questions may help guide discussion.
 - Who was this image intended for? What do you see that makes you think this?
 - Why do you think the artist or photographer chose to capture this event?
 - What is the tone of the photo or illustration? That is, what is the artist or photographer’s attitude about the subject? On what visual clues do you base your answer?
 - What is the mood of the photo or illustration? That is, what atmosphere does the image create for the viewer? What do you see that makes you know this?
 - Taken together, how did the images you viewed help you understand Japan during this period?
6. Next, distribute Handout 3, “The Oyster Shell.” Read the excerpt from Kambara Ariake’s poem aloud to the students. Then ask students to read the poem again silently—this time using active reading strategies (line-by-line analysis of diction, images, symbols, form, and syntax).
7. Lead students in a discussion of the poem using the questions on Handout 3. An Answer Key with additional background for teachers is provided.
8. To conclude Day 1, re-visit the images students viewed earlier in the class. Ask students to articulate characteristics the visuals of Modern Japan and Kambara’s poem share. Write these on the board.
9. Distribute Handout 4, Characteristics of Modern Japanese Literature. Review the handout. If time allows, conduct a class discussion comparing the list of characteristics students generated in Step 8 with the list on the handout. Otherwise, assign students to compare the two lists for homework.

Day 2

1. Tell students that today they will be reading a story titled “The Dancing Girl.” Published in 1890, “The Dancing Girl” came out at a time when Japan had been undergoing rapid industrialization, modernization, and social change for several decades during the late 1800s, the late Meiji period.
2. Alert students to the Japanese convention of author names as outlined in the **Teacher Background**. In Japan, family name comes first, and given name last. However, in Japanese literature, well-established writers are known by their given names. So, in the case of Mori Ogai, whose story the class will read today, the author’s family name is Mori, and his given name is Ogai, but he is referred to as Ogai. Remind students of this convention as they move on to other stories in this unit.
3. Remind students of the two Essential Questions for this lesson: In what ways did the events of modern Japan influence writers of that period? What perspectives on modernization are reflected in literature produced during the Meiji and Taishō periods? Ask students to keep these questions in mind as they read and discuss this story.
4. Begin with a Pre-Reading Question, selected from the suggestions below, or use one of your own devising. Ask students to respond to the question in their journals or in small or large group discussion before beginning the short story reading.
 - How do you or those you know deal with adversity? Do you agree/disagree with these reactions? Why or why not?

- If you know something that might make a person unhappy, should you tell them anyway?
 - Should we only tell happy stories? Why or why not?
5. Read Ogai's "Dancing Girl" aloud to students or have students read independently. When the reading is complete, distribute Handout 5, Reading for Tone and Mood; review the handout with students and ask them to complete the chart as they actively reread the story.
 6. In preparation for a class discussion of the story, pose one of the questions listed below. Allow students time to copy the question onto a sheet of paper, think about it, and compose a response. After students have had a chance to respond in writing, begin a class discussion. In theory, students' responses will vary and a good discussion will evolve. If an idea runs its course, pose another question. As always, encourage students to support their responses with textual examples.
 - At the end of the story, we are told that "friends like Aizawa Kenkichi are rare indeed, and yet to this very day there remains a part of me that curses him" (24). What did the narrator mean by this?
 - Why were his countrymen so critical of his decision? If Elise's madness had not removed the choice, how do you think the narrator would have resolved his dilemma?
 - Who/what might Elise symbolize?
 - Do you find the narrator's confusion to be sincere? Why or why not?
 7. To conclude Day 2, have students complete Handout 6, Post-Reading Worksheet for "The Broken Ring." An Answer Key is provided.
 8. Imagine that you are one of the characters from "The Dancing Girl." What would your feelings be after the incident? Compose a letter adopting the persona of one of the main characters and expressing your reactions to the incident.

Day 3

1. Ask student volunteers to restate the Essential Questions for this lesson. Ask additional volunteers to review how the first story the class read, "The Dancing Girl," addressed these essential questions.
2. Set the stage for today's story—"The Broken Ring," by Shimizu Shikin—by alerting students that this story, written about the same time (late Meiji, 1891) as "The Dancing Girl," explores another dimension of the changes of modernization, focusing on relationships, marriage, and expectations in modern society.
3. Begin with a Pre-Reading Question, preferably one not used on Day 1. Ask students to respond to the question in their journals or in small or large group discussion before beginning the short story reading.
 - How do you or those you know deal with adversity? Do you agree/disagree with these reactions? Why or why not?
 - If you know something that might make a person unhappy, should you tell them anyway?
 - Should we only tell happy stories? Why or why not?
4. Read "The Broken Ring" aloud to students or have students read independently.
5. Ask students to actively reread the story. As students read the text for the second time, ask them to mark their copy of the text as follows: Mark places in the story "☺" when the main character is happy. Mark places in the story "☹" when the main character is unhappy.

6. In preparation for a class discussion of the story, pose one of the questions listed below. Allow students time to copy the question onto a sheet of paper, think about it, and compose a response. After students have had a chance to respond in writing, begin a class discussion. In theory, students' responses will vary and a good discussion will evolve. If an idea runs its course, pose another question. Encourage students to support their responses with textual examples.
 - What does the story seem to reveal about female identity and female duty?
 - At the end of the story, we are told that “my only remaining hope is that this broken ring may somehow be restored to its perfect form by the hand that gave it to me. But I know, of course, that such a thing is not yet...”(239). What did the narrator mean by this? Why end the statement with an ellipsis? What is the effect of this punctuation?
 - The narrator reported that her father “has now come to have great sympathy for my long years of suffering” (239). How might the father’s change of heart serve as a symbol? What might this reveal about social attitudes in Japan at the turn of the 20th century?
 - What do you think this story says about women in modern Japan at the turn of the century?
 - The narrator asked, “Ah, will it take a hundred years before even a few will come to understand the precious value of this ring?” (232). Do you find the narrator’s confusion to be sincere? Why or why not? What do you think she hoped people would realize?
 - Why did the narrator never tell us her name? What was achieved in her anonymity?
7. To conclude Day 3, have students complete Handout 7, Post-Reading Worksheet for “The Broken Ring.” An Answer Key is provided.
8. As an optional extension, assign the following personal reflection writing assignment: Imagine that you are one of the characters from “The Broken Ring.” What would your feelings be after the incident? Compose a letter adopting the persona of one of these main characters and expressing your reactions to the incident.

Day 4

1. Ask students to volunteer ways in which the second story, “The Broken Ring,” addressed the Essential Questions.
2. Explain to students that the final example of Modernist literature from Japan was written somewhat later than the first two stories, in the early 1920s. By this time, Japan had experienced over four decades of rapid change and modernization and was a fully industrialized society very much like England or the United States, and with many of the same social issues. The story focuses on another dimension of this rapid change—poor rural Japanese who experienced the changes of modernization in a different way than the middle class people of the previous stories. Thus, this story, “The Telegram,” presents yet another dimension of modernization.
3. Provide students with a brief definition of proletarian literature of this time period, drawing from the paragraph about Kuroshima Denji in the **Teacher Background**. Ask what differences or new dimensions students might expect to see reflected in this story representing proletarian literature.
4. Read “The Telegram” aloud in class or have students complete the reading independently.
5. Ask students to actively reread the story. As students read the text for the second time, ask them to mark their copy of the text as follows: Mark places in the story “☺” when the main character is happy. Mark places in the story “☹” when the main character is unhappy.

6. In preparation for a class discussion of the story, pose one of the questions listed below. Allow students time to copy the question onto a sheet of paper, think about it, and compose a response. After students have had a chance to respond in writing, begin a class discussion. In theory, students' responses will vary and a good discussion will evolve. If an idea runs its course, pose another question. Encourage students to support their responses with textual examples.
 - Why didn't Gensaku allow his son to return to school? What statements or descriptions did you expect to hear but didn't? How do you account for these omissions?
 - What surprised you about the Kuroshimas' story?
 - How did the son react to his father's decision? Why do you think he reacted the way he did?
 - How did the choice of words affect you?
 - How did the son live his life after his father's decision? How do you think he felt about this?
 - Why do you think the author told this story?
 - Refer to Handout 4 and our discussion of the characteristics of modern Japanese literature from yesterday. What characteristics of modern Japanese literature are reflected in this story?
 - What perspectives on modernization does this story illuminate?
7. Revisit the initial pre-reading questions:
 - How do you or those you know deal with adversity? Do you agree/disagree with these reactions? Why or why not?
 - If you know something that might make a person unhappy, should you tell them anyway?
 - Should we only tell happy stories? Why or why not?
8. To conclude the day, have students complete Handout 8, the Post-Reading Worksheet for "The Telegram."
9. As an optional extension, assign the following personal reflection writing assignment: Imagine that you are one of the characters from "The Telegram." What would your feelings be after the incident? Compose a letter adopting the persona of one of these main characters and expressing your reactions to the incident.

Assessment

As an optional assessment, students may be assigned the following essay:

How do you or those you know deal with adversity? How did Japanese people react to the challenges in their lives as a result of the demands of modernization? Do you agree/disagree with these reactions and/or the method in which they voiced their sentiments? Why or why not? Write a five-paragraph essay in which you articulate your understanding of the social landscape in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Japan's Modern Period in literature.

Standards Alignment

Common Core (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>):

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6: Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2*: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7*: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words in order to address or solve a problem.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.7*: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

References

- Great Books Foundation. <http://www.greatbooks.org/?id=1264>.
- Keene, Donald. *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Tyler, William J. *Modanizumu: Modernist Fiction from Japan, 1913-1938*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008.
- Baker, Frank W. "Visual Literacy." *Media Literacy in the K-12 Classroom*. International Society for Technology in Education. <http://www.iste.org/docs/excerpts/medlit-excerpt.pdf>.

Additional Resources

Japanese Authors and Literature of the Modern Period

- "A Short History of Japanese Literature: Part 5" and "Part 6." Japan Kaleidoskop. July 5, 2013. <http://japankaleidoskop.wordpress.com/2013/07/05/a-short-history-of-japanese-literature-part-5/>.

Meiji-Taishō History

- Christensen, Maria. "The Meiji Era and the Modernization of Japan." The Samurai Archives Japanese History Page. <http://www.samurai-archives.com/tme.html>
- Cunningham, Mark E., and Lawrence J. Zwier. *The End of the Shoguns and the Birth of Modern Japan*. *Pivotal Moments in History* series. Minneapolis, MN: Twenty-First Century Books, 2009.