

Theme: Understanding the Other: reading and listening to poetry and literature from Southeast Asia. (Please note: I attempted the scan all supporting material including short stories listed in this unit, however, the IRIS system would not accept the scan because of it's size. If Fulbright would like a copy of all supporting materials, I'm happy to snail mail them.)

There are two units included in this curriculum project. The first includes two poems and three short stories written by Thai writers. This unit is included inside a larger semester long world literature and poetry course. The second is part of a larger unit on religious beliefs held in Vietnam during the United States involvement in the Vietnam War. This unit endeavors to give students an understanding of Buddhism from the point of view of Vietnamese poet and Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh.

My school district's English as a Second Language population is growing rapidly. Our second language learners are often isolated within the school because their world view is different: they are in the process of learning English, their customs, values and beliefs are often not shared by their peers. The goal of the Southeast Asian writers unit is for students to glean perspective from writers from different regions of the world, their hopes and dreams, their voices and realities and to engage all students in discussion of poetry and literature from cultures other than their own.

Massachusetts Standards for Reading and Writing:

Key Ideas and Details

*Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

*Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

*Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure

*Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

*Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

*analyze the meaning of literary texts by drawing on knowledge of literary concepts and genres.

*Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Writing

*Demonstrate understanding of the concept of theme by writing short narratives, poems, essays or reflections that respond to universal themes.

*Write routinely over extended time frames (reflection journals) and shorter time frames for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Essential Questions

Whose reality counts?

From whose viewpoint are we reading and hearing in poetry?

How are events and people connected to each other?

How do we know what we know?

How does cultural perception and cultural value define writing?

Does poetry reflect culture or shape it?

How do effective writers captivate and hold on to their readers?

Must a poem or story have a beginning, middle and end?

What makes countries unique and different?

Does it matter? What does it mean?

Poetry Unit

This poetry reflects two critical events in Thailand's history: the first one concerns the student movement which led to the demise of the 1973 military government and the other was the reactionary killing "leftists", particularly university students which led to the 1976 coup and the movement of activists and intellectuals from Bangkok and other cities to the jungles of Thailand.

Naowarat Pongpaiboon, reflects the turmoil in his poem, "Mere Movement"

A mere flutter of an eagle's wings
Tempers the heat of the sun.
A mere trembling of a single leaf
Announces the coming of the wind.

A mere glint in reflecting ripples
To proclaim clear water; no, not glass.
A mere little pain shining in the eyes
To declare the existence of the heart.

The clanking chains at the locked gate
Make great the moaning of misery
While a pale light flickering yonder
Whispers: "There's a way, There's a way."
The first long-waiting, sweaty, heated,
Strikes at last—what bliss!—strikes and falls,

Heaves the falls again, each time knowing
What it is to taste of bliss.

The stricken fingers, feebly clinging, move
Strong enough to impart strength
Like the slim weed blades that sway
Their honored heads above the rocky cracks.

An emptiness of four-zero years.
A stillness from four zero million.
Soil turned into sand, wood into stone.
Wholly still, unseeing, heedless.

As the bird heedless of heaven,
The fist unaware of water,
Or the earthworm wrapped in earth
Or the maggot blind to the filth.

Decay over the quiet bog does creep;
Yet out of the rot there arise
The first faint stirrings—the merest move
And a fine field of lotus awaits.

A promise astir, of nothing evil,
But of grace, and beauty, taking shape.
There amid the murky stillness,
The beginning is begun.

Listen to the temple drums.
Observe another Holy Day.
Hear the booming of the guns
Mark the people's battle-cry.

Students will:

Imagine two or more sides of yourself as distinct characters, each with reasons to be angry at and to love or need the other part(s). Write a poem in sections where each speaks or writes a letter to the other, letting tension (anger or bewilderment, perhaps) and resolution (reconciliation, appreciation, full-blown affection) provide direction and a sense of discovery. (Page 78, *The practice of Poetry*, Behn and Twichell.)

Chiranan Pitprecha's poem, "The Defiance of a Flower" serves as a women's declaration of independence. "Women should be respected for their worth and dignity. They are like flowers with sharp thorns and are meant for higher things than "catering" to men. She became a leader of the women's liberation movement. In her poem "Life" is about her experience of giving birth to her first child. The poem speaks of hope for the future.

"Life"

The pains burst, probe and pierce.
The nerves throb and twist.
The sweat streams hot and fierce,
Blinding the eyes in blurring mist.
Shadows change, trembling, shift;
Moving lines flee, then meet.
Faint dreams of old days drift
Past the present, winging, fleet,

To the first sweet phrase...
...From the first teetering
To the brazen preening.
Twenty-five years living!

Through joy and misery
To be taught by mother.
To be loved by mother.
Blessed more than words can measure.

The pains jerk and shake.
The limbs write and flail.
The pangs of birth awake;
The noises wax and wail.

The tiny life from within me
Stirs my life with ecstasy.
Fills me with happy hope,
With daring delight
And dreams of valour...
I who am a mother...

Students will:

- A. Describe an object or scene that particularly interest you without making any comparisons of one thing to another. Rewrite it, if necessary, until it is as free of comparisons as possible.
- B. Take the same object or scene and use it to describe one of your parents.
- C. Write a poem which, though it is a description of the object or scene above, is really about your parent. (Page 46, *The Practice of Poetry*, Behn and Twichell.)

Short Stories from Thailand
(all short stories are attached.)

“On the Route of a Rabid Dog” by Ussiri Thammachot

“A Beggar’s Chant” by Anchan

“The Prophecy” by Phaithun Thanya

Background reading (attached):

“Pop Quiz—How Much Do You Know About the World in Which You Live”? data collected from the World Fact Book, World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF.

“A Thai Buddhist Viet of Nature” by Yenchai laohavanich

“First Thai Female Monk Ordained” by The Associated Press, February 11, 2002

“Buddhist Traditions” (Thai Ties)

“Influence of Cultural Dimensions on Classroom Interaction and Practices” Hofstede, G. (1986). Cultural differences in teaching and learning, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10, 301-319.

Brief synopsis of the short stories:

In the short story “On the Route of a Rabid Dog” two characters lose their humanism and take on the characteristics of rabid dogs. An old abuses his wife and an alcoholic father robs his son while characters lose themselves and all the individuals who share their lives.

Female writer Anchan portrays two beggars, Grandpa Stump and Grandma Cross-eyed, in her story “A Beggar’s Chant.” The beggars become the givers in the story, restoring Nirvana to a monk and inspiring an artist and a writer who have lost meaning in life.

The last short story is “The Prophecy” by Phaithun Thanya”. The writer describes the conflict between a religion and superstitious belief in creating a conflict between a Buddhist temple and a banyan tree. As can be seen in some Thai temples as well as many Cambodian Buddhist temples, the banyan tree can destroy and/or preserve these ancient buildings. The temple or the tree is the conflict in this story.

Students will: keep writer’s journals, create essential questions related to the short stories, depict the short stories in a poem, write the short story into a play, create a piece of art, or compose a piece of music that is representative of one of the short stories.

Social Studies

Standards

- *Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text relate to each other and the whole.
- *Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- *Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development.
- *Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently

Background reading (attached):

Theravada-Mahayana Buddhism, Dr. W. Rahula

<http://www.urbandharma.org>

Text: *Being Peace*, by Thich Nhat Hanh, 1997

Chapter 2: “The Three Gems”

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and human rights activist. In the chapter, “The Three Gems” he reflects on the history and practice of Buddhism.

Students will: identify religious similarities and differences by: comparing, classifying, creating metaphors and creating analogies using graphic organizers, comparison matrix, and metaphors; create “Mindfulness Mind Maps: (www.mindfulteacher.com) in which students will reflect on what mindfulness is, why individuals would seek to become mindful and how to be mindful. Students will participate in mindful eating exercises (Center for Mindfulness, UMass Medical Center, Worcester, MA) and lastly, students will have the opportunity to participate in a meditation retreat specifically for teens at the Insight Meditation Center, Barre, MA.

Bibliography

Behn, Robin and Twichell, Chase (2005). *The Practice of Poetry, Writing Exercises from Poets Who Teach*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Masavisut, Nitaya and Grose, Matthew (1996). *Thai Short Stories and Poems*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books.

Nhat Hanh, Thich (1987), *Being Peace*, Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press

Senawong, Pronpimol, (2007). *Thai Ties: Social customs and cultural traits that tie all Thais together*. Bangkok, Thailand: Samaphan Publishing Co.