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Not everyone can visit Japan, but a selection of carefully chosen books can immerse readers in a virtual experience that offers insight into this country's fascinating culture. The following titles, which represent both contemporary and historical settings, include picture books, novels, and nonfiction that have been recognized as high-quality literature by their selection for numerous awards and notable-book lists. Focused on the lives of Japanese and Japanese American individuals, these standout titles offer readers diverse perspectives that can be incorporated across the curriculum.

Picture Books

Baseball Saved Us. By Ken Mochizuki. Illus. by Dom Lee. 1993. 32p. Lee & Low, \$17.95 (978188000014); paper, \$8.95 (9781880000199). Gr. 2–4.

After a boy and his family are sent to an internment camp in 1942, baseball becomes a unifying, sustaining activity: Dad organizes the team, Mom sews the uniforms, and everyone enjoys watching the games. Lee's moving illustrations evoke the dry, dusty, bleak setting. Selected as a Cooperative Children's Book Center Choices pick, among many other honors.

Grandfather's Journey. By Allen Say. Illus. by the author. 1993. 32p. Houghton, \$17.99 (9780544050501); paper, \$7.99 (9780547076805); e-book, \$7.99 (9780547350530). K–Gr. 3.

Say based this Caldecott Medal winner on the experiences of his own grandfather, who left Japan as a young man to explore North America. He loved what he saw, but eventually, he yearned for Japan and returned home. He missed the U.S., though, and finally settled in San Francisco, where he raised his daughter. Say's art conveys the feel of a cherished photo album in its beautiful portrayal of family history.

Hachiko: The True Story of a Loyal Dog. By Pamela S. Turner. Illus. by Yan Nascimbene. 2004. 32p. Houghton, paper, \$6.99 (9780547237558); e-book, \$6.99 (9780547530963). 636.7. Gr. 1–3.

This small, square picture book, a *Booklist* Editors' Choice selection, pays tribute to one of the world's lesser-known

animal heroes: Hachiko, a dog that kept vigil for nearly 10 years at a Tokyo train station, waiting for his deceased master to return from work. Unobtrusive details evoke a sense of place, as does Nascimbene's spare line-and-watercolor artwork, which is reminiscent of Japanese woodblock prints.

Hiromi's Hands. By Lynne Barasch. 2007. 32p. illus. Lee & Low, \$17.95 (9781584302759). 641.5092. K–Gr. 3.

Part upbeat, contemporary immigration story, this biography, an Asian Pacific American Award for Literature (APALA) Honor Book, introduces Hiromi Suzuki, one of the first female sushi chefs in New York City. The first-person narrative, accompanied by ink-and-watercolor art, begins with Suzuki's father's life in Japan, including his long training as a sushi chef, before further exploring Suzuki's Japanese American roots and her achievements in the U.S.

Kamishibai Man. By Allen Say. Illus. by the author. 2005. 32p. Houghton/Walter Lorraine, \$17.99 (9780618479542); e-book, \$17 (9780547345949). Gr. 1–3.

In a foreword to this ALA Notable Book, Say explains that *kamishibai* means "paper theater" and that years ago, *kamishibai* men were itinerant storytellers who traveled around Japan on bicycles with a wooden box mounted on the backseat. The box contained a miniature theater as well as drawers of candy that the performer sold to eke out a living. A quietly dramatic, beautifully evocative tale.

Tanuki's Gift: A Japanese Tale. By Tim Myers. Illus. by R. G. Roth. 2002. 32p. Amazon/Two Lions, \$16.95 (9780761451013). 398.2. K–Gr. 3.

After an old Buddhist priest allows a tanuki, or raccoon-dog, to warm himself by the fire every night, the tanuki wants to repay the priest for his kindness with a gift. The priest asks for gold, but he finally realizes that the most precious gift is friendship. The minimalist, almost abstract mixed-media illustrations are rendered in gouache, watercolor, oil pastel, and ink. An APALA Honor Book.

Wabi Sabi. By Mark Reibstein. Illus. by Ed Young. 2008. 40p. Little, Brown, \$16.99 (9780316118255). K–Gr. 3.

Wabi Sabi, a cat in Kyoto, Japan, sets off to learn what her name means. She asks another cat, a dog, a bird, and a wise old monkey, each of whom answers in a haiku that suggests the meaning of *wabi sabi*. Striking, highly textured collage artwork captures the spirit of the concept. An APALA winner.

Novels

Beacon Hill Boys. By Ken Mochizuki. 2002. 208p. Scholastic, paper, \$5.99 (9780439249065). Gr. 9–12.

Dan Inagaki is a disgruntled high-school junior in Seattle

in 1972. His parents want him to cut his hair and be more like his smart, athletic older brother, Brad, who is headed to Stanford. Mochizuki accurately addresses typical teenage challenges through the perspective of a Japanese American who is also dealing with prejudice, stereotypes, and family history that his parents are reluctant to discuss. An APALA Honor Book, this will appeal to a wide range of readers.

A Boy of Heart Mountain. By Barbara Bazaldua. Illus. by Willie Ito. 2010. 145p. Yabitoon, \$19.95 (9780578053424). Gr. 5–8.

Shigeru Yabu is a fourth-grader in San Francisco when Pearl Harbor is attacked by the Japanese. His Japanese American family is forced to move to Heart Mountain Relocation Camp, in Wyoming. Although the black-and-white cartoons occasionally seem too lighthearted for the situations depicted, they portray the cramped and primitive conditions as well as Shigeru's agony when he hears, through a letter, of the death of his dog. True to the young boy's perspective, this internment story is compelling and memorable.

Brave Story. By Miyuki Miyabe. Illus. by the author. Tr. by Alexander O. Smith. 2007. 824p. VIZ, \$23.99 (9781421511962); paper, \$16.99 (9781421527734). Gr. 5–9.

When Wataru Mitani is in fifth grade, his father leaves the family for another woman, his mother tries to commit suicide, and his friend tells him that in order to change his fate, he must cross a portal into the land of Vision. Once there, his quest is to find the five gemstones: charity, bravery, faith, grace, and the power of darkness and light. A Batchelder Award winner.

The Friends. By Kazumi Yumoto. Tr. by Cathy Hirano. 1996. 176p. Farrar, paper, \$8.99 (9780374424619). Gr. 5–9.

After his grandmother dies, Yamashita and his friends Kiyama and Kawabe have many questions. Curious about the process of death, they decide to spy on an old man until he dies so that they can see a dead body. Their plan backfires, though, when the old man tricks them into helping him with chores. Eventually, he befriends the boys and tells them, reluctantly, about his firsthand knowledge of death from his experience during WWII. In this Batchelder Award winner, Yumoto addresses the topics of death and war with powerful directness without ever sensationalizing.

Heart of a Samurai. By Margi Preus. 2010. 320p. illus. Amulet, \$15.95 (9780810989818); paper, \$7.95 (9781419702006). Gr. 7–11.

In 1841, a sudden storm sends a small boat of Japanese fishermen out to sea. After drifting for eight days, the group lands on a rocky island, where they subsist on birds and rainwater until they are rescued by the *John Howland*, a

whaling ship from New Bedford, Massachusetts. Although some Japanese fishermen choose to disembark when the *John Howland* stops in Hawaii, Captain Whitfield convinces 14-year-old Manjiro, the youngest member, to come to America. Preus' well-researched Newbery Honor Book comes alive with illustrations by Manjiro himself. This heartwarming fictionalization of a true story explores themes of bridging cultural difference, trust, and common humanity.

Hiroshima Dreams. By Kelly Easton. 2007. 192p. Dutton, \$16.99 (9780525478218). Gr. 7–10.

Lin O'Neil's Japanese mom wants to be American, like her husband's family, in this APALA-winning novel. Then, Lin's grandmother arrives from Japan to join the O'Neils in Providence, Rhode Island. Five-year-old Lin bonds with her grandmother, who recognizes the child's spiritual inclinations and teaches her to meditate and follow Zen Buddhism.

House of the Red Fish. By Graham Salisbury. 2006. 160p. Random/Wendy Lamb, paper, \$6.50 (9780440238386); e-book, \$5.99 (9780307530981). Gr. 5–8.

After his father is deported to an internment camp following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Tomi Nakaji, 14, determines to raise Papa's sunken fishing boat. Tomi's best friend, Billy, who is *haole* (white), helps him, as do the boys' Hawaiian friends and their family members—even Tomi's grouchy grandfather, who has returned from the camps. Readers who usually don't enjoy historical fiction may find the details of the work and the male camaraderie compelling in this ALA Notable Children's Book.

Ichiro. By Ryan Inzana. Illus. by the author. 2012. 288p. Houghton, \$19.99 (9780547252698); e-book, \$19.99 (9780547822723). 741.5. Gr. 7–10.

Brooklyn-raised, Fox News-watching, *Soldier's Handbook*-reading Ichiro idolizes his soldier father, who was killed in an unspecified conflict (possibly Iraq). He is apprehensive about joining his mother on a business trip to Japan, especially when she leaves him in the care of his grandfather. There, Ichiro's pro-war ways evaporate after visits to Hiroshima Castle and Peace Park open his eyes to human cruelty and suffering. This title was named a Young Adult Library Service Association (YALSA) Great Graphic Novels for Teens.

Kira-Kira. By Cynthia Kadohata. 2004. 256p. Atheneum, \$16.95 (9780689856396); paper, \$6.99 (9780689856402); e-book, \$6.99 (9781439106600). Gr. 6–10.

Katie adores her sister, Lynn, who teaches her *kira-kira*, the Japanese word that means something close to "glitteringly beautiful." Lynn's philosophy of life is to look for the *kira-kira* moments. This is not always easy, since their parents work long hours at the poultry plant for little pay and often suffer

humiliation because of racial prejudice. After tragedy strikes the family, they are determined to find the beautiful in every day. This sad but uplifting Newbery Medal winner contains a strong message of dignity, hope, and perseverance.

Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit. By Nahoko Uehashi. Tr. by Cathy Hirano. 2008. 248p. Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine, \$17.99 (9780545005425); paper, \$8.99 (9780545005432); e-book, \$8.99 (9780545586887). Gr. 6–9.

This Japanese graphic novel, an ALA Notable Children's Book and a Batchelder Award winner, features many familiar martial-arts fantasy elements: magic, nonstop action, sword-play, a puzzling myth, dangerous plot twists, and a strong-willed yet flawed hero on a quest. What's surprising is that the hero is a slightly wrinkled, weather-beaten, 30-year-old heroine: Balsa Spear-wielder, an itinerant bodyguard. The story continues with *Moribito: Guardian of the Darkness* (2009).

Orchards. By Holly Thompson. Illus. by Grady McFerrin. 2011. 336p. Random, paper, \$9.99 (9780385739788). Gr. 7–10.

After Ruth, a New York middle-school student, commits suicide, several eighth-grade girls who had mistreated her spend the summer with either a relative or at a special camp. One girl, Kana, is sent to her mother's relatives' home in Japan, where she finds comfort in the support of her family and the work in their orchards. Not all the girls, however, deal successfully with their guilt. Sparse verse moves this story along quickly, revealing the details that lead up to the tragic event in this APALA winner—an important read for students, teachers, and parents.

Sumo. By Thien Pham. Illus. by the author. 2012. 106p. First Second, paper, \$14.99 (9781596435810). 741.5. Gr. 9–12.

Reeling from both a bad breakup and the failure to make it in the NFL, Scott heads to Japan to begin a career as a *rikishi* (sumo wrestler). Now an outsider struggling to master the art and culture of sumo, he finds himself struggling with universal coming-of-age challenges, though help comes from a growing friendship with his coach's daughter. A YALSA Great Graphic Novels for Teens selection.

The Thing about Luck. By Cynthia Kadohata. Illus. by Julia Kuo. 2013. 288p. Atheneum, \$16.99 (9781416918820); e-book, \$9.99 (9781442474673). Gr. 4–8.

When her parents have to fly to Japan to take care of elderly relatives, Summer and her emotionally challenging younger brother join their grandmother (*obaa-chan*) and grandfather (*jii-chan*) through a season of work for a custom harvesting company. Winner of the National Book Award for Young People and named both a *Booklist* Editors' Choice selection and *Book Links* Lasting Connections title, this is another standout novel from the Newbery Medal-winning Kadohata.

Warriors in the Crossfire. By Nancy Bo Flood. 2010. 144p. Boyds Mill, \$17.95 (9781590786611); paper, \$7.95 (9781620910269). Gr. 6–9.

Set on the island of Saipan at the end of WWII, this gripping novel tells the story of locals who are caught between the ruthlessness of the Japanese and American armies. Joseph is the son of a chief, while Kento's father is one of the occupying Japanese. A *Booklist* Editors' Choice selection.

Weedflower. By Cynthia Kadohata. 2006. 260p. Atheneum, \$19.99 (9780689865749); paper, \$6.99 (9781416975663); e-book, \$5.99 (9781439132104). Gr. 5–8.

In a quiet, stirring narrative, award-winning author Kadohata once again explores a little-known part of American history through the eyes of a child. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Sumiko, 12, is moved with her Japanese American extended family from their Southern California flower farm to a desert internment camp on an Indian reservation in Poston, Arizona. A *Booklist* Editors' Choice selection.

Nonfiction

Dear Miss Breed: True Stories of the Japanese American Incarceration during World War II and a Librarian Who Made a Difference. By Joanne Oppenheim. 2006. 288p. illus. Scholastic, \$22.99 (9780439569927). 940.53. Gr. 7–10.

This affecting title bears witness to the WWII injustices endured by Japanese Americans. In the poignant introduction, seasoned children's writer Oppenheim explains how her hunt for a former classmate, a Japanese American, led her serendipitously to an Internet profile of San Diego children's librarian Clara Breed and to a collection of letters written to Breed by her incarcerated Japanese patrons. A Carter G. Woodson Award winner.

Drawing from Memory. By Allen Say. Illus. by the author. 2011. 64p. Scholastic, \$17.99 (9780545176866). 741.6. Gr. 4–7.

In this astonishing, large-format autobiography, the celebrated children's book creator uses both words and pictures to tell the story of how he became an artist. From his first year of independent living, at age 12, his fascinating narrative tracks his development from an apprenticeship with his favorite cartoonist, Noro Shinpei, through formative early teen experiences in Japan as he honed his skills and opened his eyes to the greater world around him. This was named a Sibert Honor Book, among its many accolades.

I Am an American: A True Story of Japanese Internment. By Jerry Stanley. 1994. 102p. illus. Knopf, o.p. 940.53. Gr. 5–10.

February 19, 1942, changed the life of Shiro Nomura forever. On that day, President Roosevelt ordered the internment

of all Japanese and Japanese Americans living on the West Coast. Nomura, who was born in the U.S., was sent as a high-school senior to Manzanar, a site in Southern California. Black-and-white photographs document this painful time in American history. An ALA Notable Children's Book.

Imprisoned: The Betrayal of Japanese Americans during World War II. By Martin W. Sandler. 2013. 176p. illus. Bloomsbury, \$22.99 (9780802722775). 940.53. Gr. 6–10.

Beautifully illustrated with well-chosen photographs and other documents, this handsome book offers a clear view of an episode in American history that still receives too little focus: the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII. Sandler uses apt quotes to introduce readers to individual evacuees and their families, who lost their belongings yet maintained their dignity during their sometimes humiliating ordeals. The book also documents the loyal service of Japanese Americans in the U.S. military as translators and fighting forces. Named both a 2013 *Booklist* Editors' Choice title and a 2013 *Book Links* Lasting Connections title.

In Search of the Spirit: The Living National Treasures of Japan. By Sheila Hamanaka. 1999. 48p. illus. HarperCollins, o.p. 700. Gr. 3–6.

The Japanese national treasures featured in this illustrated title are people who have “devoted their lives to traditional Japanese crafts and performing arts.” These individuals include a *yuzen* dyer of designs on silk kimonos, a bamboo weaver, a Bunraku puppet master, a sword maker, a Noh actor, and a potter. Each art form in this ALA Notable Children's Book is depicted in photographs, illustrated descriptions, and calligraphy. This stunning book demonstrates the value placed on art and artists in Japan.

Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story. By Ken Mochizuki. Illus. by Dom Lee. 2003. 32p. Lee & Low, \$15.95 (9781880000496); paper, \$6.95 (9781584301578). 940.53. Gr. 3–5.

In 1940, Chiune Sugihara was a courageous Japanese diplomat in Lithuania. Hundreds of refugees fleeing the Nazis gathered outside his home each day, requesting visas to travel to Japan. He repeatedly asked the Japanese government for permission to grant the visas, but he did not receive approval. Eventually, Sugihara decided to write the visas himself and issued as many as he could before he was required to leave the country. The beeswax, oil paint, and colored-pencil illustrations in this ALA Notable Children's Book resemble aged sepia photographs.

Remembering Manzanar: Life in a Japanese Relocation Camp. By Michael L. Cooper. 2002. 68p. illus. Clarion, o.p. 940.54. Gr. 4–8.

In this Carter G. Woodson Award winner, Cooper focuses on one California relocation camp to tell the story of Japanese American internment during WWII. On nearly every double-page spread are haunting photos by Dorothea Lange, Ansel Adams, and others who documented the upheaval, transport, resettlement, and personal anguish.

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Common Core Connections

Below are suggestions for implementing the Common Core State Standards with titles about Japan and Japanese Americans. You can find more information about the standards at www.corestandards.org.

In the Classroom: A text set is a group of books on the same topic. Although the entire bibliography in the adjacent article could be used as a text set on Japan, a more focused text set would be books relating to the Japanese relocation camps. Ken Mochizuki's *Baseball Saved Us*, Barbara Bazaldua's *A Boy of Heart Mountain*, Jerry Stanley's *I Am an American*, and Martin W. Sandler's *Imprisoned* offer different perspectives on the camps. A Venn diagram would be a helpful graphic to compare two or more of the books and demonstrate what information the books share and what each book contributes that is unique. Ask students to refer to specific areas in the text when offering examples during class discussion.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.9.** Integrate information from two texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.3.** Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

In the Classroom: Both Margi Preus' *Heart of a Samurai* and Allen Say's *Grandfather's Journey* feature characters who come from Japan to the U.S. Trace the characters' travels on a map and then discuss together, drawing examples from the texts, how the characters' situations were the same. How were they different?

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.3.** Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.7.** Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

In the Classroom: Kazumi Yumoto's *The Friends*, Cynthia Kadohata's *Kira-Kira*, and Holly Thompson's *Orchards* all touch on the topic of death, which can serve as one unifying theme in the following exercise. After students have read one of the books, ask them to pick a character, assume his or

her perspective, and write a letter to another character describing their chosen individual's thoughts, questions, and feelings—about death or another topic of their choosing. Collect the letters and redistribute them. When the students receive the letters, ask them to assume the persona of the character to whom the letter is addressed and write a reply. Finally, collect the letters again, and return them back to the original writers.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3d.** Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3b.** Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

In the Classroom: The arts offer an excellent opportunity to explore a culture. Sheila Hamanaka's *In Search of the Spirit* provides information about six important Japanese artists. Have students choose an artist featured in this volume and research that individual. Students can present their findings in oral, written, or multimedia reports that incorporate video footage.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.4.** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7.** Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

In the Classroom: Tim Myers' *Tanuki's Gift* and Mark Reibstein's *Wabi Sabi* lend themselves to the discussion of Japanese philosophy and culture. After a basic discussion of concepts in the books, ask students for examples of *wabi sabi* in their own lives. What would the old priest in *Tanuki's Gift* identify as *wabi sabi*? Why is it important to notice *wabi sabi* moments every day? Students can share thoughts in discussion or in writing.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.4.** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.7.** Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).