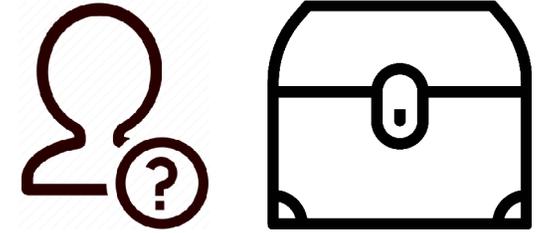


Curriculum Project - Objects and Ritual in Japanese History (USC seminar, summer 2021)

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Living National Treasures of Japan

Inquiry questions: What is a “Living National Treasure” and how does someone become one?



Rationale:

This unit would be a part of my third year Japanese language and culture course (but could easily be adapted to work with any students, Japanese language or not). Students in this course are going above and beyond the state language requirement of two years of study. Many of these students have a serious interest in Japan and Japanese and are preparing for assessments like the Advanced Placement and/or International Baccalaureate test. This unit would likely fall in the second semester.

Students will be at an intermediate level of language ability, though most of this unit would be conducted in English (at this point). Students would have a basic understanding of major points in Japanese history and very well-known art works.

This unit would ask students to investigate lesser-known art forms in Japan and their artisans. Up until now, we would have done mostly “surface level” study of the arts of Japan. For this unit, students would need to dig deeper into the significance and history of the art forms to understand the importance they have and why these artisans were chosen to be Living National Treasures. They will examine the criteria (from Japan and five other countries) and compare it to the USA’s National Heritage Fellowship (and similar awards in other countries if the students wish), and consider which American they would nominate for Living National Treasure status. Students will need to create a “campaign” (individually or in groups) and we will have a class vote to culminate the lesson.

Standards:

[Michigan Merit Curriculum: World Language Standards and Benchmarks](#)

- [2.2.M.C.a](#) Describe the significance of current cultural icons (arts, architecture music, literature, film, media, TV, newspapers, and the creators of these products)
- [2.2.M.C.b](#) Describe the significance of historic cultural icons (arts, architecture music, literature, film, media, TV, newspapers, and the creators of these products)
- [4.2.M.a](#) Identify the significance of the cultural practices within the target culture(s) and compare them to one’s own
- [4.2.M.b](#) Identify the significance of the cultural products within the target culture(s) and compare them to one’s own

Lesson plans:

Day one:

Begin with a discussion of major art forms and items that students are familiar with, then ask who the artist is, or if they know any artists from Japan. Compare this to their knowledge of other countries’ artworks and artists. Introduce the “Living National Treasure” certification and its history. Have students research Living National Treasures in Japan.

Find out: How many Living National Treasures are there? Why were they selected/What are the criteria? (these will be addressed as a class; each student does NOT need to include this information in their presentation)

Short presentation from research: Pick one or two of the Living National Treasures from Japan and identify a few facts (see “[Assessments](#)” below) and share findings with the class in a short presentation the next day. (Could be done in Japanese)

Day two:

Short discussion: How many Living National Treasures are there? Why were they selected/What are the criteria?

Presentations: Have students share their Living National Treasure presentations.

Afterward, *class discussion:* Does the USA have a similar certification? (Or do other countries?) -- This would be homework to prepare for the next day’s class discussion:

- If so: Describe it and who has been selected. Do you agree with the selections? What would you change?
- If not: Is there something similar? Should we have a similar certification? What would some need to do/have done to qualify?

Day three:

Discussion: Does the USA have a certification similar to the Living National Treasure in Japan? What did you find out from your research homework? (Try to address the questions above)

Class activity: We are in charge of determining the criteria for the new “USA Living National Treasure” certification. Decide what criteria we think are important for a person to be eligible. Come up with some ideas for candidates for our new certification.

Project: Select one American (alive or dead) to nominate for certification and prepare a “campaign presentation” to convince your classmates of your choice. (See “[Assessments](#)” below for details on grading.) We will have a class vote and certify a few people for the inaugural group. (I think about 10-15% of our class size; i.e. if I have 30 students, we would elect 3-4 people.) Students will have class time to work on their presentations and may work in groups or individually.

Day four:

Students will work on their presentations and prepare for presenting the following day.

Day five:

Students will give their presentations and then we will vote and “initiate” our new Living National Treasures with a short ceremony.

Assessments:

First presentation: Based on research on Living National Treasures discussion on Day One.

Students should address the following in a short presentation (could be in English or Japanese):

Pick one or two of the Living National Treasures from Japan and identify:

- Their name and age (date of birth; date of death if applicable)
- What they do/did to earn them the certification
- Find a few examples of their work
- Any other pertinent or unique info they might want to include (where they were born or lived; important influences; family history in this art?; etc.)

Second presentation: Individual or group project; present an American artist you want to nominate for the inaugural class of US Living National Treasures. Persuade your classmates to vote for your candidate in a short presentation.

Students should:

- Create a slideshow presentation (Google Slides, PowerPoint, etc.) and share it with the teacher
- Present an American artist for their classmates to vote on; include:
 - Name
 - Age, date of birth (death, if applicable)
 - Rationale for candidacy (Why do you think this person is a good candidate for a Living National Treasure?)
 - Examples of their work
 - Any additional information you deem pertinent to their nomination
- Be sure to address the criteria we discussed as a class to ensure your candidate meets all the requirements

Resources:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living_National_Treasure_\(Japan\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living_National_Treasure_(Japan))

<https://www.bunka.go.jp/english/index.html>

<https://www.sainsbury-institute.org/info/what-is-a-japanese-living-national-treasure>

https://www.bunka.go.jp/tokei_hakusho_shuppan/shuppanbutsu/bunkazai_pamphlet/pdf/pamphlet_ja_07.pdf

<https://www.bunka.go.jp/seisaku/bunkazai/shokai/shitei.html>

More kid-friendly Japanese language sites:

<https://kids.gakken.co.jp/jiten/dictionary06300738/>

https://www.mext.go.jp/kids/learn/quiz/property/mext_0002.html