

THE TRANSMISSION OF CULTURE

Organizing Questions

- What is cultural transmission?
- What are some ways that culture is transmitted?
- What is cultural continuity?
- What is cultural discontinuity?
- What challenges did Japanese war brides face in terms of transmitting Japanese culture (including food) in the United States?

Introduction

In this lesson, students explore the concept of cultural transmission and the notions of cultural continuity and cultural discontinuity. They will consider how they are important in their lives. Students then consider the challenges that Japanese war brides faced in terms of transmitting Japanese culture in the United States. A particular focus is placed upon the cultural transmission of Japanese food.

Connections to Standards

United States History (from National Center for History in the Schools)

This lesson has been designed to meet certain national U.S. history standards. They are:

Era 4, Standard 2C, Grades 7–12: Explain how immigration intensified ethnic and cultural conflict and complicated the forging of a national identity. [Interrogate historical data]

Era 6, Standard 2A, Grades 7–12: Distinguish between the “old” and “new” immigration in terms of its volume and the immigrants’ ethnicity, religion, language, place of origin, and motives for emigrating from their homelands. [Analyze multiple causation]

Era 6, Standard 2A, Grades 5–12: Assess the challenges, opportunities, and contributions of different immigrant groups. [Examine historical perspectives]

Era 6, Standard 3A, Grades 9–12: Account for employment in different regions of the country as affected by gender, race, ethnicity, and skill. [Formulate historical questions]

Era 10, Standard 2B, Grades 9–12: Identify the major issues that affected immigrants and explain the conflicts these issues engendered. [Identify issues and problems in the past]

Objectives

In this lesson, students will:

- learn about the concept of cultural transmission and the notions of cultural continuity and cultural discontinuity;
- consider the challenges that immigrants face when they try to transmit cultural traditions in the absence of a supportive community;

- observe and analyze oral histories of Japanese war brides to learn about the challenges they faced in terms of transmitting Japanese culture in U.S. society; and
- empathize with the culture shock encountered by Japanese war brides when they were faced with unfamiliar cultural practices in the United States.

Materials	Handout 1, <i>Cultural Transmission and Japanese War Brides</i> , 15 copies Handout 2, <i>Examination of Oral Histories</i> , 30 copies Japanese War Brides: An Oral History Archive
Equipment	Laptops with Internet access
Teacher Preparation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Instructions and materials are based on a class size of 30 students. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes.2. Make the appropriate number of copies of handouts.3. Become familiar with the content of the handouts.4. Become familiar with the following oral histories of Japanese war brides that are available on “Japanese War Brides: An Oral History Archive.” These oral histories reference Japanese food.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Glorified Rice”• “Finding Home in Big Sky Country”• “Smitty and Mugsy”• “Keeping the Ties”5. Make sure that there are enough laptops for small groups of students.
Time	Two class periods
Procedures Part One	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Inform students that they will explore the concept of cultural transmission and the notions of cultural continuity and cultural discontinuity. They will consider how they are important in their lives. Students then consider the challenges that Japanese war brides faced in terms of transmitting Japanese culture in the United States. A particular focus is placed upon the cultural transmission of Japanese food.2. Present the following definition of cultural transmission to the students. Cultural transmission is defined as “the process of learning through which the values, standards, norms, etc. of a culture are passed on to succeeding generations” (Reber, A. (1995). <i>Dictionary of psychology</i>. England: Penguin Group, p. 177). Ask students for examples of values, standards, norms, etc. of culture that have been passed on to them by their parents, grandparents, and previous generations. Encourage students to share examples that were transmitted by their ancestors who immigrated to the United States.

Some examples might include language, sport, food, holidays, clothing, and religion.

- Note that the definition of “cultural continuity” is “the transmission of the meanings and values characteristic of a culture down through time and generation” (Oxford Reference; <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095652809>). Ask students for examples of this in their lives or in the lives of others they know. An example might be the religious background of an immigrant to the United States that has been transmitted over one or more succeeding generations.

Also note that “cultural discontinuity” refers to “the lack of cohesion between two or more cultures.” (“Cultural Discontinuity between Home and School Language Socialization Patterns: Implications for Teachers”; <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ765830>). Ask students for examples of this in their lives or in the lives of others they know. An example in a school setting might be immigrants who enter U.S. schools without knowledge of or with limited knowledge of English.

In addition, ask students for examples of culture that illustrate elements of both cultural continuity and cultural discontinuity. An example is Japanese sushi, which was introduced to the United States by Japanese immigrants in the early 20th century. Sushi has been transmitted over the generations illustrating cultural continuity. Sushi has also evolved in the United States as local ingredients were used. An example is the California roll that was invented in Los Angeles in the 1960s. It included locally grown avocados with crab meat. This illustrates some discontinuity with traditional Japanese sushi culture.

- Divide the class into 15 groups (two students per group) and distribute Handout 1, *Cultural Transmission and Japanese War Brides*, to each group. There are five sets of activities at the end of the handout. Assign one set to each group. Allow the remainder of the class period for student work.

Procedures Part Two

- Ask a student from each of the 15 groups to share a summary of its activity. After each group presentation, allow other student groups to share reactions or questions.
- After this discussion, assign one of the following oral histories to each group. In addition, distribute one copy of Handout 2, *Examination of Oral Histories*, to each group. Suggested homework assignments are included at the end of the handout.
 - “Glorified Rice”
 - “Finding Home in Big Sky Country”
 - “Smitty and Mugsy”
 - “Keeping the Ties”
- Debrief this lesson with the following questions.
 - What employment opportunities did Japanese women seek in postwar Japan?

- How did the Allied Occupation address Japan's postwar food scarcity?
- How did U.S. perceptions of Japanese war brides shift from being former enemies to dependents who were in need of guidance and benevolence?
- How did the immigration of Japanese war brides to the United States in the 1950s prompt a gradual transformation of food culture in the United States?
- In what ways did the traditional Japanese diet differ from the modern American diet of the 1950s?

CULTURAL TRANSMISSION AND THE JAPANESE WAR BRIDE EXPERIENCE

Directions: Keep the following definitions in mind as you read the handout. Your teacher will assign one of the five activities at the end of the handout to your group.

Cultural transmission is defined as “the process of learning through which the values, standards, norms, etc. of a culture are passed on to succeeding generations.”¹ Some examples might include language, sport, food, holidays, clothing, and religion.

Cultural continuity is “the transmission of the meanings and values characteristic of a culture down through time and generations.”² An example might be the religious background of an immigrant to the United States that has been transmitted over one or more succeeding generations.

Cultural discontinuity refers to “the lack of cohesion between two or more cultures.”³ An example in a school setting might be immigrants who enter U.S. schools without knowledge of or with limited knowledge of English.

In Japan during the years immediately after World War II, there were many examples of cultural continuity and cultural discontinuity. There were political, economic, and social changes in Japan that were influenced by the United States, including the drafting of the post-war constitution by American civilian officers working under the Allied Occupation of Japan, 1945–1952. Japanese quickly adopted American culture, from Hollywood movies and comic strips like “Blondie,” to square dancing and Coca-Cola, while Americans were introduced to Japanese cuisine and entertainment.

Japanese war brides, who immigrated to the United States with their GI husbands, transmitted Japanese culture to the United States. Because of the fact that they were immigrants in the United States, the war bride experience includes numerous examples of Japanese cultural continuity and discontinuity. For example, some were discouraged from teaching Japanese to their children (cultural discontinuity) while others tried to hold onto their cultural ties to Japan through food and religion as they adapted to their new lives in small towns and cities across the United States (cultural continuity).

The return of U.S. soldiers from overseas at the end of World War II, the immigration of Japanese war brides to the United States in the 1950s, and the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, collectively and gradually transformed U.S. culture in areas such as food. Soldiers wanted a taste for something that reminded them of their stay in Japan while the Japanese war brides longed for the taste of something familiar and when they could get ingredients, prepared Japanese dishes for their American families or demonstrated Japanese cooking in their communities. The increasing demand for foreign food introduced “ethnic food” to the food landscape of the United States. Food is a reflection of the Japanese war brides’ immigration history, cultural heritage, and family traditions.

1 Reber, A. (1995). *Dictionary of psychology*. England: Penguin Group.

2 Oxford Reference; <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095652809>.

3 Cultural Discontinuity between Home and School Language Socialization Patterns: Implications for Teachers; <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ765830>.

introduction

This handout is divided into five sections: (1) Food scarcity and food aid; (2) Bride schools for Japanese war brides; and (3) Making do with what you have; (4) Food can alter a country's food culture; and (5) Cultural pluralism in popular media.

(1) Food scarcity and food aid

In the wake of World War II, food was scarce in Japan and many Japanese relied on rations. Firebombings of transportation routes to major cities like Tokyo and Yokohama made it impossible for people to obtain food from the countryside. Many Japanese resorted to eating the food discarded by military servicemen to stay alive. U.S. serviceman Angelo Amato commented,

At chow time, the metal plates with left over or uneaten food would be dumped into the swill cans and the Japanese people living outside that camp would fill their cans or containers with the leftovers of the uneaten military food... Some who didn't have cans or containers reached in the swill buckets with their bare hands and stuffed the swill into their hungry mouths to eat and survive.⁴

The U.S. government sent food aid to Japan to prevent the Japanese from starving. General Douglas MacArthur also wanted to prevent any civil unrest. These actions led many Japanese to perceive him as a generous provider and a democratic peacemaker.



Advertisement for Brides' School; National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)

⁴ Oral history, "With JFK's Help."

(2) Bride schools for Japanese war brides

Japanese war brides learned to prepare typical American meals while working as nannies and maids for the families of U.S. servicemen during the Allied Occupation. Bride schools were run in addition, bride schools run by the American Red Cross offered classes for Japanese wives of U.S. servicemen in Japan. About 4,000 women attended these classes during the 1950s.

A bilingual textbook titled, *The American Way of Housekeeping*, was used to train Japanese maids in Japan and was later used by Japanese wives in the United States. Instruction was offered on how to properly clean one's home, care for electric equipment, care for Western clothing, prepare Western meals, and care for one's own children. The instructors were often the wives of U.S. officers and were tasked with teaching Japanese war brides about U.S. culture and etiquette. Japanese women described the classes as fun, although some found their instruction to be patronizing. After all, they were already aware of how to cook, clean, and take care of children in Japan. In their new lives in the United States, however, they were introduced to the "American way."

(3) Making do with what you have

Food from ancestral homelands is particularly important for immigrants who want to share their cultural heritage with their family or children. This was no different for Japanese war brides who tried to recreate Japanese meals despite the lack of necessary ingredients. They struggled to find ingredients to prepare Japanese food and made do with what was available. They used spaghetti for *soba* (buckwheat) noodles. They grew vegetables widely used in Japan such as burdock root, white radish, and Japanese eggplants in their backyards. Some even constructed special wooden containers to make blocks of tofu out of soy beans.

Japanese war brides who lived outside of large cities went to great lengths to find Japanese food. In the oral history, "Finding a Home in Big Sky Country," Wakako (Katie) Kondoh's daughter recounts,

When they received care packages from Japan or drove all day to Seattle to buy Japanese ingredients, they cooked the foods they grew up with. Kathleen said the smell of bonito stock boiling announced that the Japanese women were coming over.⁵

(4) Food can alter a country's food culture

Many of the more than 45,000 Japanese war brides were known to have packed large tins of Kikkoman soy sauce into their luggage. Soy sauce imports into the U.S. increased by 33 percent from 1949 to 1954, mostly from Kikkoman. The popularization of soy sauce in subsequent years prompted Kikkoman to open a factory in Walworth, Wisconsin in 1973.⁶ That year, Kikkoman published a cookbook called, *The Kikkoman Way of Fine Eating: Discover a New World of Flavor with Brewed Soy Sauce*.⁷ The cover showed a white father, a Japanese mother, and their children, enjoying an all-American barbeque in their backyard.

⁵ Oral history, "Finding a Home in Big Sky Country."

⁶ SoyInfo Center https://www.soyinfocenter.com/HSS/soy_sauce8.php

⁷ *The Kikkoman Way of Fine Eating, Discover a New World of Flavor with Brewed Soy Sauce*, Japan Publications, Inc., Japan, 1973.

(5) Cultural pluralism in popular media

During the 1950s, Japanese war brides and their families were portrayed as the model of racial integration and cultural pluralism in the United States. Media representations showed mixed-race couples and their children as hardworking people who were not too different from the average American family. Unfortunately, media representations did not always reflect reality.

Questions and activities

Your teacher will assign one of the five sections below to your group. You will be responsible for providing summaries for the rest of the class.

1. *Food and food aid*: Research the firebombings of Japan. How is the topic covered in your U.S. history textbooks? Research General Douglas MacArthur and his role in the Allied Occupation of Japan. How is he described in your U.S. history textbooks? Write a short summary of these.
2. *Bride schools for Japanese war brides*: Research bride schools of Japanese war brides. Write an op-ed on the bride schools.
3. *Making do with what you have*: Research the food culture of another immigrant group to the United States. How did the immigrants make do with the food ingredients that were available to them? How did this lead to changes in traditional food culture from their ancestral homelands?
4. *Food can alter a country's food culture*: Soy sauce can now be found throughout the United States and is made in states like Hawaii and Wisconsin. It was popularized by early Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrants to the United States. Research the history of another condiment with origins in another country that has become popular in the United States. Write a short summary of this.
5. *Cultural pluralism in popular media*: Research anti-miscegenation laws in U.S. history. How does your textbook on U.S. history describe the laws?

EXAMINATION OF ORAL HISTORIES

Discussion: Your teacher will assign one of the following oral histories to your group. With the members of your group, discuss the questions below.

- Glorified Rice
 - Finding Home in Big Sky Country
 - Smitty and Mugsy
 - Keeping the Ties
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- What are some examples of Japanese culture that the Japanese war brides brought to the United States?
 - What are some examples of cultural continuity?
 - What are some examples of cultural discontinuity?
 - What were some of the challenges Japanese war brides faced when they tried to transmit cultural traditions in the absence of a supportive community?
 - What are some examples of culture shock that Japanese war brides encountered in the United States?
 - What is the significance of Japanese food culture in the lives of the Japanese war bride(s)?

Homework: Choose one of the following activities:

1. Develop multiple scenes in graphic novel-type form that captures some of the cultural continuity or cultural discontinuity that the Japanese war bride(s) faced.
2. Use art to symbolize the essence of some of the statements made in the oral history.
3. Develop several haiku (5-7-5 syllable pattern) based on the experiences of Japanese war bride(s).
4. Develop tanka (5-7-5-7-7 pattern) that captures the differences in culture between the U.S.-born children and their Japan-born mothers.
5. Write a 250–300-word essay that focuses on one of the following questions: How did the Japanese war bride(s) in the oral history help to pave the way for future generations?
6. Write a 250–300-word review of the oral history.
7. Research an ethnic food that is popular in the United States. How has it stayed the same or changed after it was introduced to the United States? Are there regional differences in the food?
8. Develop lyrics for a song about the culture shock that the Japanese war bride(s) experienced.
9. Write a short story about a Japanese war bride and how she tried to hold onto her cultural ties to Japan as she adapted to her new life in a small town in the United States. Include topics such as how she felt conflicted; how she shouldered the responsibility of serving as a representative of Japan for Americans who had no other point of reference; how she wanted to pass on Japanese cultural traditions to her children who had no other connection to Japan; and how she did the best that she could with the resources that were available.
10. The photo below was taken on April 11, 1951 at the General Headquarters (GHQ) Chapel Center, Tokyo. The Supreme Commander for the Allied Forces (SCAP) was the designation for the chief executive of the Allied Occupation of Japan. SCAP referred to both the chief

handout 2

executive and to his General Headquarters (GHQ) in Tokyo. General Douglas MacArthur and his successor, General Matthew B. Ridgway, both served as supreme commanders. Imagine that you are one of the people in the photo. Write a diary entry based on your reflections of the brides' school.



April 11, 1951; Brides' school at GHQ Chapel Center; photo courtesy of Michael Cantineri.