

Lesson Plan on China
The Cultural Practice of Foot Binding

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1. Opportunities to teach about East Asia:

As a teacher in an alternative placement program, I teach students in grades 8-12, all subjects in an inclusive setting. Because of this diversity, I have various opportunities to incorporate Asia into my lessons. Language arts is an area where I have the discretion to choose the fictional and non-fictional stories of any subject matter for my students to read, from simple Cinderella stories to novels. My students are at many intelligence levels; from low IQ of 60, to very bright students who need challenged, so teaching about Asia affords me the opportunity to differentiate the instruction in unique ways. This program also provides research opportunities at different levels. In depth studies will give my class opportunities to make displays, do research, and have a culture day, where we can invite other classes and colleagues to see what has been learned.

2. How will I apply the seminar to my teaching:

The seminar has given me an exciting approach to sharing Asia. Using the basic information gotten through the presentation on foot binding presented by Dr. Oum, I was inspired to pursue further research on the topic. This led to the conclusion that this would be a fascinating subject for my teenage students to study in the context of their language arts/reading curriculum. Learning specific things about the culture and history of China will make my teaching more “authentic”. When I teach, I will now be doing so from an experience, rather than just from knowledge gotten through readings.

Foot Binding



3. Purpose:

To read for comprehension while understanding that all cultures have unhealthy, painful or bizarre beauty practices, and how these practices relating to beauty and social responsibility affect one's role in society.

Ohio Content Standards in Language Arts:

e.8-e.12 Reading Applications: Literary Text Standard: Literary texts that represent a variety of authors, cultures and eras help students to understand the human story. Students learn to apply the reading process to the various genres of literature, including fables, folk tales, short stories, novels, poetry and drama. They demonstrate their comprehension by describing and discussing the elements of literature (e.g., setting, character and plot), analyzing the author's use of language (e.g., word choice and figurative language), comparing and contrasting texts, inferring theme and meaning and responding to text in critical and creative ways. Strategic readers learn to explain, analyze and critique literary text to achieve deep understanding.

Rationale:

Students will understand how this custom fits in historically during the period of the Ming Dynasty, and what was the role of women in society during this time. They will analyze how the treatment of women in the world has or has not changed in general from that time to the present.

4. Essential Questions:

1. What is foot binding?
2. How did this start?
3. Why was this painful practice tolerated for 1000 years?
4. What practices exist in our society that promote beauty at the expense of pain?
5. What other practices exist in other cultures worldwide that are imposed on women for the sake of beauty or social acceptance? Name specific countries.
6. How does the media (TV, movies, videos, magazines) perpetuate this oppression of women by creating false and unrealistic images of beauty?
7. How can women defy these practices and still be accepted in their society?
8. What possible role can men play in stopping these harmful practices?

The lessons will cover the 29 chapters of the book, Bound. It is anticipated that this will take 4-5 weeks, for reading, comprehension homework questions, vocabulary, and discussion on each chapter, as well as dealing with the essential questions.

Materials:

Text: Bound

Packet of information on foot binding located at:

www.ccds.charlotte.nc.us/History/China/04/hutchins/hutchins.htm

Photos of bound feet, including x-rays of a normal foot and one that has been bound

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foot_binding

<http://acc6.its.brooklyn.cuny.edu/~phalsall/images/bndfeet2.gif>

Comprehension questions (by chapter). Vocabulary lists.

Access to internet to research unhealthy beauty practices in modern societies and throughout history.

Background Information:

Many women have endured pain and suffering throughout the ages, all in the name of beauty. One that is very difficult for western cultures to understand is the custom of foot binding. It is a procedure done in order to stop the growth of the feet. The actual process began at an early age, usually around 4-6 years. First the foot was soaked in a special potion to allow dead skin to fall off. The big toe was left intact, but the others were broken and folded under against the sole of the foot. It was then bound tightly with cotton bandages, stunting the proper formation of the arch. Bandages were changed periodically, and the dead flesh was washed away, and the foot rebound. This process continued for many years. The result was a foot, not more than 3-4 inches in length.

Legend is that a prince of the Sung Dynasty (AD 960- 1280), admired the small feet of one of the dancers in his court, who wrapped her feet in colored ribbons to allow her feet to point in order to do a form of ballet. The foot had the appearance of a lotus flower, and soon the custom spread throughout northern China. After the Mongol invasion, it spread across all of China due to the encouragement of the Mongols, mainly as a form to oppress women.

The practice started with the royalty and moved to the wealthy, and then to the commoners. It was perpetuated as society began to accept it as a status symbol; only those women who could afford to be waited on by servants, could spend their time sitting around sewing, or composing poetry. Mothers saw this painful ritual as a necessity in order for their daughters to find a husband. No decent man would marry a woman who had not had her feet bound. This kept women in a subservient position, never being able to have any power, and always relying on their husband. Culturally, it was believed that women had no value, and existed only for the pleasure of their husband.

In the 1000 years of foot binding, it is estimated that over one billion women were subjected to this ordeal. In the middle 1600's , the Qing Empire prohibited this practice, and still it continued in many areas until after the revolution in 1911.

Daily Classwork and Assignments:

*Read assigned chapters of Bound, and do assigned comprehension questions, character sketches, or summaries as listed in the overall lesson plan.

*Daily class discussion and clarification of customs, beliefs, vocabulary, and pronunciation of Chinese words, italicized in the text.

Activity #1:

Students bring in magazines/newspaper photos and articles depicting women “bound” to a cultural perception of beauty; tattoos, piercing, mannequinism, wearing stiletto heels, etc. Enrichment: bring in the above relating to women of other cultures, example: African tribal women with stretched necks, body carvings, elongated earlobes, etc. Each student designs a poster of cultural practices throughout the world that promote beauty over health

Activity #1 Materials:

Poster weight board
Paint
Markers
Glitter
Sequins, beads, trims
Glue
Glamour magazines

Assessment:

Periodic quizzes on comprehension and vocabulary.

Adaptation to lower grade levels:

This set of lessons could be adapted by the teacher explaining in simplistic terms that small feet were considered beautiful, and in order to keep the feet from growing, they were kept wrapped. The story could be a read aloud, with role playing as an additional activity. Children could wrap their feet tightly with toes bent, and see how uncomfortable that would be to walk. Discussion would center around unhealthy things people do to be beautiful or feel accepted. Focus on we are all unique and should accept ourselves as we are, and not try to look like others in magazines, on TV, etc.

Comparison would be made to the classic American Cinderella story, or any other Cinderella stories the class may have read, pointing out that the unique customs and beliefs of that country are what make it different.

5. Resources

Hutchins, Candice. Charlotte Country Day School. Chinese Footbinding. 27 November 2000. www.ccds.charlotte.nc.us/History/China/04/hutchins/hutchins.htm

“Foot binding”. Wikipedia Encyclopedia Online. 19 February 2007.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foot_binding

Napoli, Donna Jo. Bound. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004.

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Jackson, Beverly. Splendid Slippers. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1997.