



## Two Homes: Living in Two Cultures

**By:** Kathy Keidel and Stacey Mandel with  
Christine Cervera and Catherine Ishida

**Featured Children's Literature:** *The Wakame Gatherers*, by Holly Thompson

### **Objectives:**

1. Students will understand some similarities and differences between communities and lifestyles in Japan and the United States.
2. Students will understand some advantages and challenges of being a bicultural child.

### **National Content Standards:**

#### **Geography**

*Geography Standard 1:* Students know how to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

*Geography Standard 10:* The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics.

#### **Reading and Writing**

*Reading Standard 2:* Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

*Reading Standard 7:* Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

*Writing Standard 2:* Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

*Language Standard 1:* Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

**Plan for Assessment:**

1. Students will actively participate in small-group work and whole-class reading and discussions, constructing categories and making comparisons.
2. Students will demonstrate ability to identify central ideas or themes of a text and to develop text-to-self connections. Students will communicate these ideas, themes, and text-to-self connections in visual and written formats. A checklist for assessing students' work is provided.

**Notes:**

This lesson is written for the early elementary grades but is easily adaptable for older students. The focus on biculturalism is especially suitable for transnational student populations. The suggested time frame is four class sessions of 40 to 60 minutes.

The lesson develops students' comparison skills, focusing on cultural aspects of Japan and the United States highlighted in the featured children's literature, *The Wakame Gatherers*. In the picture sorting activity, students are asked to categorize images from Japan and the United States. The suggested categories are: food and meals, home, and transportation. The number of photographs has been kept small to make the task manageable for early elementary students; of course, a small number of photographs will necessarily represent only a small slice of any aspect of a country's culture. As students identify similarities and differences in the pictures, guard against overgeneralization based on this small amount of data.

A focus of *The Wakame Gatherers* is cultivation and harvesting of a form of seaweed called *wakame*. Uses of other types of seaweed are also mentioned. If you suspect that your students are not familiar with seaweed, you may wish to see whether you can find *wakame* at an Asian market or natural foods store in your community. It is usually sold dried. It is then soaked in water for a few minutes before use. It quickly regains its original size and leafy appearance. One package of dried wakame is probably plenty for one class, since it expands to about eight times the original size when rehydrated. Author Holly Thompson provides a few recipes using *wakame* at the end of *The Wakame Gatherers*; additional recipes are available on her website (see **Resources and References**).

*Wakame* grows naturally on rocks. It requires cold water and the changing tides to grow well. Natural *wakame* is harvested in the early spring. Since the 1940-1950s, Japanese have also cultivated *wakame*. Cultivated *wakame* is planted in the end of November or early December. Spores are attached to a string, and the strings are attached to floats. Cultivated *wakame* is harvested in the late winter or early spring. Because the water temperature is rising, *wakame* has to be harvested earlier and the harvest is not as plentiful. The harvested *wakame* is boiled, hung to dry in the sun, and packaged in 150g quantities in long, plastic bags.

Note that the book alludes to World War II (although it does not mention it by name). Young students may need some background information about the war in order to understand the allusion. The practice of gathering *wakame* was affected by the war.

During World War II, the people of Koshigoe (the town that served as the model setting for *The Wakame Gatherers*) continued to collect *wakame*. As the war went on and the men were away fighting, community elders took over the harvesting. *Wakame* served as a source of calcium to keep the villagers' bones strong.

### **Materials:**

1. *The Wakame Gatherers*, by Holly Thompson
2. One set of **Picture Sorting Cards** (provided) per small group of three to four students (note that the letters are for your reference only; you may cut off the letters when you cut the cards apart to create the student sets)
3. Three enlarged copies of the **Venn Diagram Worksheet** (provided) per group of three to four students
4. **Living in Two Cultures Worksheet** (provided), four enlarged copies for board, two copies per student
5. Copies of **Making Connections Worksheet** and **Making Connections Checklist** (provided) for all students
6. Wall map of world
7. Chart paper
8. Blank index card or piece of paper for each student
9. Tape or paste
10. Clipboard and pencil for each student (Optional)
11. Large piece of construction paper per student

### **Implementation:**

#### **Introduction**

1. Build background knowledge with students by asking: How many of you have family members who live in other countries? How many have family members who live in other parts of the United States? List these places on chart paper or the board.
2. Gather students by a world map. On the map, point out the general location of the community in which your school is located. Then help students find some of the other places they listed on the map. For a few minutes, allow students to share stories and experiences.
3. While at the map, point out Maine and Japan. Talk briefly about the story you will read. Explain that Nanami, a character in the story, has a grandmother in Maine and a grandmother in Japan. Students will learn what she does with them separately in the two places and what she does when they meet at her home in Japan.

#### **Connections**

1. Organize the class into groups of three to four students. Explain that to prepare for reading Nanami's story, students are going to look at pictures of Japan and the United States. Pass out a set of the **Picture Sorting Cards** to each group.
2. Have the students look through the pictures and talk about what they notice. For your reference, the pictures show the following:
  - a. Seafood burger (Japan)
  - b. Ramen noodles (Japan)
  - c. *Wakame* Lunch [rice, soup, salads, braised chicken] (Japan)

- d. Pork chop dinner (United States)
  - e. Hamburger and fries (United States)
  - f. Fast-food chicken lunch (United States)
  - g. Bullet train (Japan)
  - h. Car (Japan)
  - i. Bus (Japan)
  - j. Scooter (Japan)
  - k. Truck (Japan)
  - l. SUV (United States) Truck (United States)
  - m. School buses (United States)
  - n. Truck (United States)
  - o. Home (Japan)
  - p. Guest room (Japan)
  - q. Bath room (Japan)
  - r. Toilet room (Japan)
  - s. Home (United States)
  - t. Bathroom (United States)
  - u. Child's bedroom (United States)
3. Next, explain to students that they are going to sort the pictures into categories. A category is a group of items that have something in common. For example, students in your class fit into the category of "first-graders" (or whatever the appropriate grade is). Some fit into the category "boys" while others fit into the category "girls." Some fit into the category of "good soccer players" while others fit into the category of "jump rope experts." Have the students sort through the pictures to find similarities and create categories. Have them label the groups of pictures with similarities. If students struggle, you may want to work through one category, such as "food" with the whole class. The suggested categories are food and meals, transportation, and home.
  4. When groups have completed the sorting, give each group one copy of the **Venn Diagram Worksheet** for each category they created. Explain that students are going to look carefully at the pictures in each of their categories. First they will decide whether each picture is from Japan or the United States. Then, if a picture shows something different about the two countries, they will attach it to the **Venn Diagram Worksheet** under the appropriate section of the diagram (in the circle marked "In Japan" or the one marked "In the United States"). If a picture shows something similar about the two countries, they will attach it in the center of the diagram, where the two circles overlap. If a picture shows both similarities and differences, they can place it so it fits over two sections. Allow time for groups to finish this task for each category they created.
  5. Finally, pass out a blank index card or piece of paper to each student. Have each student draw *another* picture to fit in one of the categories and add it to one Venn diagram. For instance, a student can draw pancakes for the food category or a scooter for the transportation category, etc.
  6. As a whole class, debrief the activity. Ask students: What did you discover about differences and similarities in transportation, food, and homes in Japan and the

United States? What picture did you draw and where did you add it to the Venn diagram? Guide students to share both differences and similarities they analyzed.

7. Transition to the story by saying: As we visualize and then read *The Wakame Gatherers*, pay attention to cultural similarities and differences in the story.

### **Guided Reading**

1. Before starting the book, take the students on a “visualizing” trip through the story. The idea is for students to get a “movie” in their mind and use all five senses to imagine a story. Have students lie around the room, bodies still as statues, but brains on and buzzing. Turn the lights off and walk around the room as you talk them through the basic story elements—the characters, problem, solution, setting, feelings. Students can start to visualize and experience the story before hearing it.
2. Read *The Wakame Gatherers* aloud, checking for understanding along the way. Point out and discuss the characters, settings, and cultural similarities and differences. Review vocabulary with students as needed. If the content and vocabulary in the story are too difficult for your students, tell the story, rather than reading it, paraphrasing some of Nanami’s experiences and/or have students role-play parts of the story.

### **Guided Practice**

1. Recall the story and what was discussed previously. After students share their memories of the picture-sorting activity and the story, walk through the pictures of the book again to help students completely recall. Have students compare the pictures and point out some of the similarities and differences between Nanami’s home, town, and lifestyle in Japan to their home, community, and lifestyle. (*They may mention similarities or differences in language, foods, geographical features, transportation, street scenes, houses, and gardens.*)
2. Discuss how Nanami lives and interacts in two cultures. Ask: What does Nanami like to do with her grandmothers in both Japan and Maine? (*Go to the water and gather fish or seaweed, eat good meals*) What do you like to do with the people you love who live in other places?
3. On the board, tape up two copies of the **Living in Two Cultures Worksheet**. Talk about all the places where people whom students care about live, referring to the chart-paper list created previously and adding new places students mention. Model how to fill out the posted worksheets. First, model filling out a place name for each sheet. Then model drawing what you like to do in both places with people you care about. Then model writing a description to go along with each.
4. As a whole class, fill out another set of the enlarged **Living in Two Cultures Worksheet** for Nanami, writing about Maine and Japan.

### **Instruction**

1. Pass out two copies of the **Living in Two Cultures Worksheet** per student (and clipboards and pencils if necessary). Refer to the chart-paper list of places where students’ families live. If necessary, have a few students share what two places they will write in the blanks on the worksheets.

2. Have the students work individually. When finished, the students can color their pictures and glue the two worksheets onto a large piece of construction paper.
3. Debrief the activity. Point out the title of the worksheet and ask: What does *culture* mean to you? Record students' answers on chart paper and use them to develop a valid definition. (*Students may give answers such as a different place, a different country, another city, etc.; probe to help them reach a more conceptual definition—culture is a group's way of living—their language, food, beliefs, possessions, etc.*)

### **Conclusion**

1. Reread the story, focusing on conversations between Baachan, Gram, and Nanami as the translator. Discuss how Nanami lives and interacts in two cultures. What are her challenges? (*She has to figure out how to explain complicated information in another language in a way that can be understood. She gets the two languages confused.*) What advantages does she have over Baachan and Gram? (*She knows both languages and understands both cultures. She understands two ways of doing things.*) How do you live and interact in two cultures with your families and people you love? How is understanding two—or more—cultures an advantage? (*It allows you to interact easily with people in both cultures. You can be more flexible and open-minded. You can be more tolerant of difference. You have a personal reason for peace.*)
2. Review the student-developed definition of *culture*. Introduce the concept of bicultural. Refer to examples from the story, student work, and discussions to define *bicultural* with the students and discuss what it means to them.
3. Pass out the **Making Connections Worksheet** and the **Making Connections Checklist**. Explain the instructions and have students draw and write individually. Students can self-assess using the **Making Connections Checklist**. As an alternative, the worksheet can be used as a rubric. Instead of check marks, score 1-4 to grade effectiveness.
4. If time allows, have a few students share their completed worksheets with the class.

### **Extensions and Cross-Curricular Ideas:**

1. Have students read *The Way We Do it in Japan* by Geneva Cobb Iijima. Have students complete the activities and worksheets above for this book to broaden and deepen the extent of their comparisons and achievement of the lesson objectives.
2. Have students compare their findings by reading other stories featuring people negotiating between cultural aspects of Japan and the United States (see list in **Resources and References**).
3. *Science*: Engage students in studying the life cycle of *wakame* cultivation from seeding and planting to harvesting, as Nanami discusses on page 4.

### **Resources and References:**

#### **Resources for Use in Lesson**

Thompson, Holly. *The Wakame Gatherers*. Kazumi Wilds, illustrator. Walnut Creek, CA: Shen's Books, 2007.

**Resources for Use in Extensions or Cross-Curricular Ideas**

Iijima, Geneva Cobb. *The Way We Do it in Japan*. Paige Billin-Fyre, illustrator. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Company, 2002.

Friedman, Ina R. *How My Parents Learned to Eat*. Allen Say, illustrator. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984.

Little, Mimi Otey. *Yoshiko and the Foreigner*. New York: Frances Foster Books, 1996.

Say, Allen. *Tea with Milk*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999.

**References for Teacher Background**

Holly Thompson: *The Wakame Gatherers*.

[http://www.hatbooks.com/the\\_wakame\\_gatherers\\_63661.htm](http://www.hatbooks.com/the_wakame_gatherers_63661.htm)

Kosaka, Kristy. "Half, Bi or Double? One Family's Trouble." *The Japan Times*, 2009.

<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/fl20090127zg.html>

Zitlow, Connie S., and Lois Stover. "Japanese and Japanese American Youth in Literature." *The ALAN Review*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1998.

<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/spring98/zitlow.html>