
THE PAPER CRANE

Author: Molly Bang

Publisher: Greenwillow

THEME:

A story about a paper crane and an exploration of Japanese folk art give us a chance to experience a sample of Japanese culture.

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

A mysterious man enters a restaurant and pays for his dinner with a paper crane that magically comes alive and dances. Surrounded by lush gardens of Gasho of Japan in Central Valley, New York, LeVar dons a kimono and steps into the enchanting world of Japan, exploring the artistry of a Japanese vegetable carver and the art of origami. He takes a side trip to see how paper can be made out of old blue jeans, then joins Soh Daiko, an energetic and colorful group of Japanese drummers and dancers, as they perform the celebratory “festival of the drums.”

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Invite students to share times in which they felt “lucky.” What caused them to feel that way? Discuss good luck symbols (e.g., a four-leaf clover, rabbit’s foot, etc.). Ask students if they have any personal good luck charms.

One of the themes of the story, *The Paper Crane*, is that kindness is rewarded. Ask students if there have been instances in their lives in which they have been rewarded for showing kindness. Discuss types of rewards other than tangible ones.

Before viewing the program, locate Japan on a map of the world and discuss with students what they know about the country.

CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Increase appreciation for the story by sharing the following information about the development of the book with the class. Early versions of the book did not have a child as one of the characters. Molly Bang’s editors suggested that she include one. After she added the boy, she felt that the story had two plots going on at once (i.e., the dad who was mainly interested in running the restaurant and the child who loved the bird and lost it), which made the story more interesting. Molly wants readers to notice that the boy isn’t in the written story at all—he appears only in the illustrations. (This example shows the importance of both the words *and* the pictures in telling the story in a picture book.)

Obtain a copy of the book and allow students to study the illustrations. (Molly Bang made the pictures using scissors, an X-acto blade, and construction paper. She cut out the pictures, picked up the pieces with tweezers, dipped them in glue, and attached them to a larger piece of paper. It took her about a year to finish the illustrations.) Have students make their own cut paper pictures using scissors and construction paper and “frame” them in paper frames.

Have students research the significance of cranes in Japanese culture. Why are cranes considered lucky?

Make vegetable prints. Obtain vegetables that have a variety of outside textures or are different in appearance when they are cut (cross-wise or length-wise), such as carrots, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, etc. (Request some vegetables that are not fresh and can no longer be sold from a grocery store.) Dip the vegetable pieces in thick tempera paint and press them down on paper. Students can make interesting print designs using different vegetables on the same piece of paper. If assistance from adults or older students is available, have students make potato prints. Press a cookie cutter into a piece of potato, and trim around the shape with a knife. Follow the same procedure as with other vegetable prints.

If possible, take a field trip to a Japanese restaurant. Ask the tour guide to talk about foods that are commonly served and arrange a demonstration of how foods are prepared. If such a trip is not possible, invite someone with some expertise in Japanese cooking into the classroom to prepare food for a tasting party.

Involve the students in a paper recycling project. Start at the classroom level by having them think of ways they can get more use from paper. For example, they might make notepads from used paper, set up boxes for paper that has one side blank and for usable construction paper scraps, and use grocery sacks for the covers of books they write. Organize the students into teams to visit other classrooms or present messages on the school intercom encouraging others to save paper too. The school might initiate a newspaper recycling project in which all classrooms are involved. Students could graph the weight of newspapers collected weekly and post the graph in a central location for all to see.

Have students make a display of all sorts of paper products and different types of papers. Allow several days for this display to accumulate so they have the opportunity to notice less obvious items. Discuss the variety in thickness, texture, and durability of these different papers.

Have students research cranes. What different types of cranes are there? Where do they live? What do they eat? What are their habits? Have students record their findings on a chart that compares and contrasts the cranes. They might also include a drawing of each type of crane on the chart.

With the assistance of the art teacher or another person with experience in origami, do a simple origami project with the students. (There are several books on the topic of origami with directions for projects ranging from simple to very complicated.)

RELATED THEMES:

cultural art forms
birds
Japan

RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:

Program #7 — Liang And The Magic Paintbrush
Program #55 — Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters
Program #73 — The Legend Of The Indian Paintbrush

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

A native of New Jersey, Molly Bang has traveled and worked in many places around the world. Although her first love is illustration, she also writes her own stories. She states that she has developed her skill as a writer by reading folktales and modeling her stories after traditional patterns. In addition to writing and illustrating books, Molly enjoys working with school children on their own stories and art. She makes her home in Massachusetts.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:

HOW MY PARENTS LEARNED TO EAT
by Ina R. Friedman, illus. by Allen Say (Houghton Mifflin)

"PAPER" THROUGH THE AGES
by Shaaron Cosner, illus. by Priscilla Kiedrowski (Carolrhoda)

PERFECT CRANE
by Anne Laurin, illus. by Charles Mikolaycak (HarperCollins)

HIGHLIGHTED BOOK:

EASY ORIGAMI
by Dokuohtei Nakano, trans. by Eric Kenneway (Viking)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

HOW PAPER IS MADE
by Neil Curtis & Peter Greenland (Lerner)

FROM TREE TO PAPER
by Wendy Davis (Sundance Publishing)

GRANDFATHER'S DREAM
by Holly Keller (Greenwillow)

PINK PAPER SWANS
by Virginia Kroll, illus. by Nancy L. Clouse (Eerdmans)

THINGS I CAN MAKE WITH PAPER
by Sabine Lohf (Chronicle)

PLAY WITH PAPER
by Sara Lynn & Diane James (Carolrhoda)

IF ALL THE WORLD WERE PAPER
by Miriam Nerlove (Albert Whitman)

THE CRANE WIFE
retold by Sumiko Yagawa, trans. by Katherine Paterson, illus. by Suekichi Akaba (Morrow)

PAPERMAKING
by Susie O'Reilly, photos by Zul Mukhida (Thomsen Learning)

COUNTING CRANES
by Mary Beth Owens (Little, Brown)

THE CLOUDMAKERS
by James Rumford (Houghton Mifflin)

