What can Manga Teach about Japanese Culture?
A lesson plan for upper/intermediate primary school students in social studies, language arts, and fine arts
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Synopsis: Manga flies off the shelves in many school libraries, and new titles often have waiting lists several students long. Given its immense popularity with upper primary school students, manga provides an accessible and enjoyable means through which to introduce Japanese art and culture. In this unit, students will read a brief history of manga and anime in Japan, examine examples of popular manga and anime, identify elements of Japanese culture in popular manga and anime, and create their own examples of manga.

Standards:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.7
Analyze how visual and multimedia elements contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text (e.g., graphic novel, multimedia presentation of fiction, folktale, myth, poem).

(Corresponds to Indiana Standard 5.RL.4.1: Analyze how visual and multimedia presentations and representations can enhance the meaning of a text.)

Materials:
- Readings and Powerpoint about history of manga and anime in Japan (see links below for suggestions)
- Examples of popular manga (enough for each group to have one)
- Instructional video on manga
- Manga planning templates
- Drawing paper, pencils, colored pencils and/or markers

Historical Background:
Manga, or Japanese comic books, are speculated to have originated with picture scrolls created by Buddhist monks around the sixth and seventh century. Wood blocks and picture stories flourished in 18th and 19th century Japan, and modern manga developed in the post-World War II era. Led by artist Osamu Tezuka's creation of Astro Boy in 1951, manga became massively popular, both in Japan and overseas. Although people of all ages enjoy the diverse themes and stories of comic and graphic novels, manga has recently become increasingly popular with American youth.

Suggested Lessons:

Lesson 1
1) The teacher reminds students of the definition of culture. The teacher puts up an example of a popular American comic strip, and asks the class to identify elements of American culture in the comic strip. Then, the teacher explains that the class will be examining elements of Japanese culture through manga.

2) Students complete readings introducing Japan, with possible worksheet/graphic organizer/note taking, depending upon curriculum and needs of students. The readings
from the history and culture section from the University of Michigan’s “That Anime Project!” (http://www.umich.edu/~anime/index.html) are appropriate for this age group and can be divided among small groups of students. For students needing background knowledge on Japan, National Geographic Kids offers a nice introduction at http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/countries/japan/#japan-gardens.jpg.

Lesson 2
1) Students view the Introduction to Manga PowerPoint, which will provide a brief history and introduction to manga. If appropriate, students may also view short video clips of popular anime, such as *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Spirited Away*, or *Castle in the Sky*.
2) Students divide up into groups of 4 students. Each group is given a manga. As a group, students attempt to identify elements of Japanese culture in the manga.
3) Whole class discussion of major themes/characters/motifs
4) Students read on their own for homework or take a separate period for reading manga.

Lesson 3
1) Review elements of manga
2) Watch introduction to drawing manga characters video from Youngrembrandts.com (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnpd3WO7ZRE)
3) Complete manga planning sheet (a variety of free printables are available at http://www.donnayoung.org/art/comics.htm). Teachers can choose the templates that best meet the needs of their students.
4) Work time

Lesson 4
1) Work period

Lesson 5
1) Work period

Lesson 6
1) Gallery and closing discussion

Extensions/Modifications:
- Students create manga versions of popular well-known stories (fairy tales, classics) or for older students, historical events
- Students create a manga character or animal and draw a portrait