

TEACHING ASIA

Exploring Online Curriculum with Catherine Higbee Ishida

Interviewed by Linda S. Wojtan



Editor's Note: What follows is an interview with Cathy Ishida, who is earning an excellent national reputation for her stellar work with teachers. Cathy is on the staff of the University of Colorado at Boulder's Program for Teaching East Asia (TEA), where she has a number of professional development responsibilities. In addition to her work with the TEA program, Cathy played a major role in building the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Asia Community, thereby institutionalizing focused attention on Asia within the largest social studies teacher organization in the US. Longtime Asian studies educational specialist and EAA editorial board member Linda S. Wojtan conducted the interview with Cathy.

Linda Wojtan: Cathy, can you give our readers some background regarding your interest in Asia, and specifically, K-12 education?

Cathy Ishida: Many personal curiosities and interests regarding East Asia and Japan growing up led me to select Japan as my country of choice for what would be a life-directing, high school study abroad experience. As an undergraduate, I completed my BA in Japanese studies at the University of Maryland and Keio University. My experiences serving as an Assistant Language Teacher and Coordinator of International Relations in municipal governments in Fukuoka prefecture, Japan on the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program clinched my interest in a career in international education and caused me to question the homogeneous, isolationist narrative of Japanese history and culture I had learned. I completed graduate studies in international and comparative education at the University of Maryland and the University of Tokyo with research focused on educational experiences of non-Japanese citizens, such as Koreans and Latin Americans in Japanese school systems and Japanese immigrants in systems abroad. During my graduate studies, I coordinated workshops, study tours, project translation, and curriculum development for Japanese and American educators as part of a University of Maryland/University of Tokyo research team administering a three-year Japan-United States elementary educators' exchange. Since fall of 2005, at the University of Colorado's Program for Teaching East Asia, I have led professional development and curriculum development projects for K-12 teachers on topics of Japan and Korea and coordinated National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA) seminars.

Linda Wojtan: Regarding curriculum development, can you describe some of the Program for Teaching East Asia online curricula?

Cathy Ishida: Since 2008, the Program for Teaching East Asia (TEA) has published two online curricula for teaching about Japan. The first, *Imaging Japanese History: Lessons for High School*, is designed to enhance students' visual literacy skills, historical thinking skills, and knowledge of Japanese history (<http://www.colorado.edu/cas/tea/curriculum/imaging-japanese-history/index.html>). Thanks to the collaboration of Japanese studies academics, each of the five lessons begins with a scholarly essay useful for teachers and students' background information. Each lesson considers one period of Japanese history through analysis of one Japanese art form, such as *emaki* narrative picture scrolls, woodblock prints, and Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy* anime. Al-

though subtitled "Lessons for High School," these lessons are easily modified for middle school or undergraduate courses.

Secondly, last year we launched *Texts and Contexts: Teaching Japan through Children's Literature*. These are six elementary/middle school level lessons featuring authentic children's books about Japan (<http://www.colorado.edu/cas/tea/curriculum/texts-and-contexts/index.html>). In the field of children's literature, there are authentic books that teachers can use as a springboard to teach about Japanese history and culture. However, there is little elementary/middle school level curricula that aid teachers in developing students' understandings of Japanese historical, geographical, and anthropological concepts woven through the stories. The *Texts and Contexts* collection promotes the teaching of cultural studies of Japan while developing students' knowledge and skills in literacy and communication. While exploring a story about Japan, students will learn the concept of cultural borrowing, experience communication in Heian-style *tanka* poetry, or explore Japanese societal values and other cultural universals. Both elementary and middle school teachers have successfully used these lessons.

Both of the TEA curricula were field tested by teachers and reviewed by scholars in Japanese studies. They were funded through grants from the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership and the Freeman Foundation.

Linda Wojtan: Cathy, in addition to your work as the TEA Japan and Korea Projects Coordinator, you recently ended your four-year tenure as chair of the NCSS Asia Community. Can you briefly tell the readers what this is?

Cathy Ishida: The Asia Community is a special interest group of NCSS whose purpose is to promote and advance teaching and learning about Asia. Through the Asia Community's website and activities at the annual NCSS conference, national and international K-16 educators can communicate, interact, and share resources, ideas, research, and common concerns pertaining to teaching and learning about Asia. The Asia Community is a network for educators to share and learn about best practices, professional development opportunities, scholarly and curricular resources, and the latest scholarship on topics pertinent to Asian countries and cultures in the fields of world history, world geography, economics, civics, politics and international relations, and anthropology. I encourage the EAA readership to get involved!

Linda Wojtan: As a curriculum developer and user, what other online resources do you recommend for instruction about Asia?

Cathy Ishida: Finding quality online curricula and resources about Asia is a selective process. Some criteria I consider when browsing websites are: 1) Is the resource/lesson authored by a teacher or scholar? 2) If teacher-developed, was the teacher a participant of a preparatory professional development program? 3) Has the lesson/resource been edited and reviewed? 4) Did the editing and review process include a scholar's input? In the box are a few websites I have used that meet these criteria and were featured in presentations by NCSS Asia Community members over the last four years. They also provide some diversity in regards to regions of Asia.

Linda Wojtan: Finally, I should note that the NCSS conference (Washington, DC—December 2–4, 2011) will feature *Teaching about East Asia as a Vital Issue* topic—can you tell us about sessions/activities being planned around that topic?

Cathy Ishida: Sure! To kick off the 2011 conference, there will be two pre-conference clinics on Japan sponsored by the Asia Community. The first, cosponsored by the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia, will be held at the Smithsonian Freer Gallery of Art and use Japanese artworks in the collection to consider instruction that explores connections between Japan's geographical features and climate conditions and Japanese culture, religion, and art. The second clinic focuses on enhancing elementary-level teaching about Japan through cross-curricular lessons, children's literature, and native Japanese guest-teacher programs.

During the conference, a Vital Issues panel will explore *Confucianism in East Asia*. The Asia Community is sponsoring the session "Teaching Asia Using Technology," in which presenters will demonstrate classroom-tested curriculum websites that teach topics of Asian history, geography, current events, and economies. There will also be a session in the higher education track on comparative US and Japanese teaching on Hiroshima/Nagasaki; one session on Japan in the elementary track; and secondary-level sessions on Afghanistan, US wars in Việt Nam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, instruction about East Asia using artifacts and primary sources, and China's environmental outlook.

Linda Wojtan: Thanks Cathy, it's been great talking with you! ■

LINDA S. WOJTAN is National Visibility Coordinator for the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia and the Japan Outreach Initiative of The Laurasian Institution. Her forty-year education career includes K-12 level teaching, university-based outreach, Japan exchange programs, as well as numerous professional development workshops and curriculum development projects.

Cathy Ishida's Online Curriculum Recommendations

Asia for Educators

URL: <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/>

Includes featured curriculum modules developed with faculty consultation on *East Asia in Geographic Perspective*, *Living in the Chinese Cosmos*, *The Grandeur of the Qing Dynasty*, *China & Europe: What is "Modern"?*, *The Song Dynasty in China*, and *The Mongols in World History*. Teachers also find useful the "Timelines" and "Central Themes & Key Points" for instruction about China, Japan, Korea, Việt Nam, and South Asia, as well as the "Primary Sources/DBQs" for teaching about China.

Korea Society K-12 Resources/Teachers

URL: http://www.koreasociety.org/k-12_resources/

Teacher-developed lesson plans to teach about the Koreas in geography, history, literature, art, music, religion, economics, and contemporary issues. Podcasts of lectures by Korean studies scholars are also available.

Literatures, Religions and Arts of the Himalayan Region: NEH Summer Institute Teacher's Implementation Plans

URL: http://college.holycross.edu/projects/himalayan_cultures/previous_institutes.html

Teacher-developed and scholar-consulted lesson plans that mainly focus on Nepal, Kashmir, and Tibet and offer instruction for many topics, including geography, history, literature, art, film, music, religion, environment, society, and contemporary issues. (Browse "Implementation Plans" by year.)

MIT Visualizing Cultures

URL: <http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/home/index.html>

Modules on early-modern China and modern Japan that include essays by academics, teach visual literacy, and enable students to do historical inquiry with visual primary sources. (On each unit page, click on "Curriculum" on the drop-down menu of the unit title. Scroll down to "click here for the teacher's edition.")

National Consortium for Teaching about Asia

URL: <http://www.nctasia.org>

Asia-related professional development opportunities for K-12 teachers and links to online curriculum.

National Council for the Social Studies Asia Community

URL: <http://tinyurl.com/6lfsmt8>

News and resources regarding NCSS Asia Community activities, Asia-related professional development and outreach opportunities, and useful curriculum for teaching about Asia.

Program for Teaching East Asia: Online Curriculum Projects

URL: <http://www.colorado.edu/cas/tea/curriculum/index.html>

Home to two Japan-related curriculum modules. *Imaging Japanese History: Lesson Plans for High School* offers a scholarly essay and lesson plan to analyze visual sources for five periods of Japanese history. *Texts and Contexts: Teaching Japan through Children's Literature* features authentic texts and teacher-developed, elementary-level lesson plans that integrate cultural studies of Japan with literacy and art education.

Silk Road Foundation

URL: <http://www.silkroadfoundation.org/toc/index.html>

The Silk Road Foundation's journal, *The Silk Road*, provides informative articles by scholars and regional experts on history and cultures of Eurasia and interconnections between West and Central Asia with South and East Asia. This site also has useful maps and timelines. (Click on the links on the left sidebar.)