

JOINT CLASSROOM RESEARCH PROJECT TANABATA EVE / YUKATA DAY*

SHEILA CLIFFE**

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, for the first time, we instituted yukata day as a way for “Expression of Culture Department” students to express their culture, through their clothing. We chose to do this on the eve of Tanabata, a popularly celebrated festival in the Japanese calendar. Tanabata falls on the seventh day of the seventh month. As this is at the beginning of the summer, it gives students a chance to practice wearing yukata so that they will be ready to wear it during the vacation at fireworks and other local Japanese festivals, which are common in this season.

After this event, the students said that they would have liked it to be more of an event, rather than just wearing yukata for a day, and nothing special happening. In view of the students’ comments we decided to do some classroom research and see if we could establish the effectiveness of using modern technology, in a multi-faceted approach, to teaching an old traditional story.

THE LEGEND OF TANABATA

There are various stories associated with Tanabata. It is thought that the name Tanabata comes from the kind of loom that the weaving princess worked on. The legend is also associated with the two stars Altair and Vega, who are placed one on each side of the milky way on the 7th of July. The most widely known version of the story in Japan is as follows:

Tenkou (or Tenkai), was the god of the sky. He had a daughter called Orihime, (or the weaving princess), a weaver, who made all the clothes for the gods. He was worried that his daughter would never marry, as she spent all her time weaving. So Tenkou introduced Orihime to a herd-boy, Kengyuu or Hikoboshi, a human, who lived on the other side of the milky way. Orihime and Hikoboshi fell madly in love, (and in some versions, they marry).

*七夕と浴衣の共通教育プロジェクト

** Sheila Cliffe 十文字学園女子大学短期大学部 表現文化学科 (Department of Culture and Communication)
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However, they were so much in love with each other that they spent all their time together and neglected their duties. The cow herd became sick and the gods' clothes wore out and they had no new ones. At this Tenkou became very angry and he separated the two lovers, one on each side of the milky way. Hikoboshi and Orihime were lonely and pined for each other. Eventually, Tenkou relented because they loved each other so much, and agreed that they could meet on just one night a year, the 7th of July. If the sky is clear on the 7th of July, Orihime can cross the milky way, (heavenly river in Japanese) and meet Hikoboshi. If it is cloudy or rains, then the water in the heavenly river becomes too high for her to cross. One version of the legend says that a flock of magpies will make a bridge to carry her across the river if this happens. In the Chinese version, the moon, (which is a half moon on July 7th), will come down from the sky to make a boat, and Orihime will ride in the moon boat across the river, to meet her love.

Thus the story of Tanabata is a very romantic one, and this festival is loved in the East. It is celebrated in different ways in different parts of Japan, but it is typical to put up a sprig of bamboo, and to attach ones wishes to it, written on small pieces of paper, called tanzaku.

METHOD

The project was set up in collaboration with the NPO organization "Kimono Project", who are involved in creating events and supplying kimono wearers, and kimono dressers for other people's events. Their aim is to spread the wearing of kimono in Japan, especially among young people. The concept was that we would re-create the milky way, using helium filled balloons, and LED lights. The students would do this work and then other students would be able to write wishes and attach them to balloons, and float them into the milky way. We also planned to supply shining drinks for the students.

Several teachers agreed to do lesson plans based on the legend of Tanabata, and a library display was also set up, introducing Tanabata celebrations in past times. In these various ways, we attempted to create an environment where the students would learn about Tanabata through diverse methods and from various sources, thus enriching their learning experience. We planned to take a questionnaire from the students after the event, to assess the effectiveness of this approach to teaching a traditional story. My lesson plans for an oral communication class, and for a writing class appear below. Other teachers' plans are in Ms. Hoshino's Japanese section of the research.

Sample Lesson Plans

1) ORAL COMMUNICATION CLASS

Aim:

The aim of the class was for the students to recreate the story of Tanabata and perform it as a

drama, wearing their yukata. As the class has four students there was a role for each student.

Method:

- 1) The story used as a stimulus has been outlined above. It was taken from the website “Tokyo with Kids”, and is available at the following link: http://www.tokyowithkids.com/entertainment/tanabata_myth.html
- 2) The story was read twice so that the students could understand it. It was then placed on the desks so the students could refer to it, while writing their script.
- 3) The characters’ names were written on the board: Tenkou (Orihime’s father), Orihime, Hikoboshi and the narrator.
- 4) The students gradually wrote the script, referring to the story as they went.
- 5) The students chose their roles and practiced the drama in the classroom.
- 6) Finally the students went down to the room being used for the Tanabata event and they performed their play.

Results:

The students were rushed for time, and so they did not have enough practice to perform the play well, but they enjoyed working with this story and were able to make a reasonable performance for the video camera, holding their scripts.

2) WRITING CLASS

Aim:

The aim of the lesson was for the students to listen to the Tanabata story and then to reproduce it in their own words and pictures in manga (cartoon) format.

Method:

- 1) Before the class I prepared an illustrated background of the Tanabata story, including white spaces in which the students could reproduce the story. At the bottom was also a picture of a tanzaku, for them to write their Tanabata wish.
- 2) The story used as a stimulus was taken from the website “Tokyo with Kids”, and is available at the following link: http://www.tokyowithkids.com/entertainment/tanabata_myth.html
- 3) After listening to the story, the students began to decorate and colour their sheets and to draw and write in the story of Tanabata on the white spaces.
- 4) The students were unable to complete the story in the class time, and they took it home to finish as homework.

Results:

The stories and pictures were unique as each student chose to tell the story through speech bubbles or through an explanation of each picture. The scenes of the story each student chose to illustrate were also different. Another lesson would have been useful to finish the work.

An agreement was drawn up with “Kimono Project”, who would support our Tanabata event in the following ways.

- 1) They would provide helium, balloons.
- 2) They would provide LED lights.
- 3) They would provide black light.
- 4) They would provide kitsuke (dressing services).
- 5) They would provide tanzaku, (paper slips), shining paint and brushes.
- 6) They would provide a video and slideshow of the event.
- 7) They would provide 4 members of their staff to be in the school for the whole day.

Once the agreement was drawn up, the budget had to be approved on the school side.

The college staff then had various academic and practical preparations to do. The classroom had to be found, reserved, and blackouted out for the day. The kindergarten teachers were informed, so that the children could be invited. Posters and various signs were constructed. Parking permission was obtained, cups and drinks were ordered. Various teachers prepared lesson plans based on the Tanabata story, (see mine above). While the Japanese staff member dealt with the paperwork and coordinated between the school and “Kimono Project”, I trained the students from my kimono seminar to be able to dress other people in yukata. The first period of the day included a class for Chinese students. In this class we would teach yukata dressing, for those who preferred not to wear their yukata from home. The organisers’ offices were located in the same building as the event space, and so these functioned as convenient dressing rooms for those who preferred not to dress in the classroom. A supply of yukata and obi to borrow was found for the students. After the event a questionnaire was conducted in order to establish student response to the project, their learning experience, and to find out if they had suggestions for further improving the event. In addition to the questionnaire, the three students who helped from the kimono seminar group, were asked to write a short passage about their experience.

RESULTS

The response to the questionnaire was low. Out of a total of 62 first year students, 46 students answered the questionnaire, (74%), and out of 74 second year students, 46 students answered the questionnaire, (62%). Of the students who answered the questionnaire, 14 first year students did not take part, (30% of the first year responses), and 26 second year students did not take part, (56% of the second year responses). The responses only show that 52 students were involved in the event, but in reality a lot more than 52 students took part in this event. Thus the data that was obtained was incomplete. This section will outline the results of the limited documentation that was obtained from the questionnaire, and also the

results from the three kimono seminar students who participated as dressers and helpers for the event.

Questionnaire Results

1ST YEAR STUDENTS NOT TAKING PART 14

Q. What do you think about experiencing an old story through wearing yukata and using new lighting technology?

I think its good. 2

I think its new and fresh.

I think its good, but I really don't want to wear a yukata.

I don't want to have to bring yukata all the way from my house, and in the hot summer I don't want to wear yukata outside of my private time.

I am glad it was not compulsory.

I think it is very important not to forget our culture.

We tend to forget, so I think its a good idea.

I don't know.

Q. Reason for not taking part

No special reason. 6

No lessons. 3 (If I had lesson I would have taken part 2)

I had some business to do. 2

I don't have a yukata. 1

I have no interest. 1

A pain to get ready. 1

Q. What are your comments or impressions of the lessons you received that related to Tanabata?

I wrote tanzaku in calligraphy class for the first time since elementary school, so it was fresh and interesting.

Calligraphy class.

We all made the story into a play which we performed, in Sheila's class.

We all made tanzaku in calligraphy class, but I couldn't think of a wish. It was fun, anyway.

Q. What would make the event more interesting?

If other department students were wearing yukata too, it would be more natural.

If other departments were wearing yukata.

If there was some food prepared.

I don't know.

I don't think its fun.

Q. Do you want to take part next year?

Definitely.

If I have time. 9

I don't know. 4

No. 1

1ST YEAR STUDENTS TAKING PART 32

Q. How did you take part?

Wearing yukata. 30

Sparkling drink. 25

Group photo. 30

Making milky way. 16

Q. What was good and why was it good?

Wearing yukata 3.

Wearing yukata was different from everyday and felt fresh 2.

I love yukata.

Everyone wearing yukata together.

Everyone wearing yukata together and experiencing summer.

Wearing yukata made me really feel Tanabata.

I think its really great to have this event just once a year. I really loved everyone's yukata style.

I was able to learn how to wear yukata and that was great.

I don't have a chance to wear yukata so that was really good.

I enjoyed taking lessons wearing yukata.

I rarely get a chance to wear yukata.

I thought yukata is really great.

I was happy to see everyone in yukata.

I don't usually get to see my friends in yukata so we took lots of photographs and had a lot of fun. I relaxed in the dressing room.

I was really happy to take a photo with all my friends in building 7. 2.

Taking a photo together and all the teachers and students wearing yukata. It was a really good occasion.

The lighted up milky way was really beautiful. 5.

Making the milky way. 2.

I really felt I was experiencing Japanese culture.

The lighted balloons.

It was so fun to make the milky way and have a real image of it.

It was interesting to hang tanzaku from balloons.

The milky way was really beautiful and the LED lights in balloons were so interesting.

The shining drink was really interesting.

Q. What do you think about experiencing an old story through wearing yukata and using new lighting technology?

The classroom had a lovely atmosphere and the small children really enjoyed it. It was also nice to take lessons wearing our yukata.

I thought it was really good. I think its interesting to remake an old story in this way.

It was good. 4.

It was really fun.

I think it was new and everyone really enjoyed it. Me too. 2.

Now there are few opportunities to wear yukata in Japan, so this is a really good chance. 4.

I felt cool just looking at the view.

If you can make something traditional fun, I think its really good.

I think the people who like Tanabata will increase after this. Please continue it.

It was very good to wear yukata with the overseas students and have a chance to talk with them.

I think it is good to have this chance for students and teachers to enjoy together.

I think it was really Japanesey and it will become a good memory for me.

We didn't really have any special events before, so this was great.

I think it was really good to celebrate something traditional in a very new way.

I was a bit worried about how the balloons were lit, but I found it wasn't scary but very beautiful.

I was helped to learn to wear my yukata and I could relax in the wonderful lighted area, so it was really fun.

I enjoyed the cool freshness and the cheerfulness, so different from everyday.

I think its very interesting.

I felt I was in a different age and that was wonderful.

Q. What are your comments or impressions of the lessons you received that related to Tanabata?

I enjoyed learning about Tanabata history from Mr. Takeda.

I took Ueno sensei's class in yukata and it felt like old times and we talked about yukata manners in Takarazuka which was good.

I was not so interested.

Q. What would make the event more interesting?

It would be good if there were no lessons that day. 5.

It would be nice to have a party, with no reservation system.

Just how it was this year. 3.

The shining drink tasted great but it would be good to have the event in a larger classroom. It was too crowded.

A present exchange.

Bingo game.

To serve tanabata desserts would be nice.

I don't know.

Play some kind of tanabata games.

Use a larger classroom.

Make posters with images from 613 to make people more interested.

Use it as a chance to teach kimono and yukata dressing and manners.

Use people not wearing yukata as cameramen, and take pictures.

Ordinary drinks like orange juice and calpis.

Have food as well and make it like a matsuri.

Q. Do you want to take part next year?

Definitely. 13.

If I have time. 16.

I don't know. 3.

No.

2ND YEAR STUDENTS NOT TAKING PART 26**Q. What do you think about experiencing an old story through wearing yukata and using new lighting technology?**

I think its important to remember cultural festivals. If this is new and interesting, I want to know.

I think its interesting. 2.

Its suitable for our department.

It sounds interesting, but I can't tell only from people's words.

I think it sounds good.

It sounds difficult to take part in for shy girls. Yukata sounds OK, but lights.....

I think we don't need a matsuri with yukata in school.

It sounds rare and interesting.

Yukata day sounds fun. 2.

It really sounded fun. I would have enjoyed it if I could take part.

It sounded like a fun plan. Even looking at the yukata is fun. Yukata is wonderful.

Those who want can enjoy it.

I was amazed to hear about the shining drink.

It sounds like a wonderful new experience.

I just have zero interest in Tanabata.

I think it would make people more interested in Tanabata.

Q. Reasons for not taking part

No lessons. 8. (if I had lessons I would have taken part. 6.)

Job hunting. 5. (if I had no job hunting I would have taken part. 5.)

I have no interest. 5.

No special reason. 4.

I was busy with another Tanabata event. 1.

I felt too nervous to be dressed in yukata. 1.

It was too difficult to bring in yukata. 2.

I had a medical appointment. 1.

Last year there was no special event, so it was boring. 1.

Q. What are your comments or impressions of the lessons you received that related to Tanabata?

Mr. Takeda's lesson was interesting.

I could know about the origins of Tanabata from Mr. Takeda.

The video about the milky way was interesting.

I enjoyed writing tanzaku in calligraphy lesson.

Mr. Kobayashi's Tanabata essay was difficult.

It was good to learn about Tanabata from Mr. Takeda.

Mr. Takeda's lesson was deep and interesting.

It was new and interesting to learn about the origins of Tanabata.

I learnt about Altair and Vega from Mr. Takeda.

It was easy to learn about Tanabata from Mr. Takeda.

Q. What would make the event more interesting?

A guest speaker or singer.

Make it a rule to wear yukata.

Have university students join in.

Have a poster contest.

Use a bigger space.

Have an after class party and write tanzaku.

Have it when there are no classes.

Make something special for yukata wearers.

Have a joint event with the kindergarten.

We do not need this event: We should use the money for something else.

2ND YEAR STUDENTS TAKING PART 20

Q. How did you take part?

Wearing yukata. 16.

Sparkling drink. 15.

Group photo. 19.

Making milky way. 14.

Q. What was good and why was it good?

Making the milky way.

Sparkling drink looks and taste.

The sparkling drink was good, but the room was so small that I was bumping into people.

It was good that could borrow a yukata because I wanted to wear a cute one, and I could.

Making the milky way was a great and exciting new experience. 2.

The staff were cool.

It was really hot so I was very glad for the shining drink and it was really interesting.

I was happy that we could enjoy wearing yukata together.

We don't have a chance to wear yukata in school, so it was really good.

I thought it was really great to wear yukata and to make the milky way out of lighting and balloons. I want to do it next year too.

The shining drink was really good.

It was a big improvement on last year with making the milky way.

The small kids were delighted with 613 classroom.

Making something together.

Room 613's milky way had a really special feeling that made me excited.

The milky way and wearing yukata for a day.

Q. What do you think about experiencing an old story through wearing yukata and using new lighting technology?

It was fun.

We could not experience this outside school, so it was fun.

It was easy to be a part of and fun to celebrate Tanabata together.

Its good that we make important events more than other schools.

It was fun and will be a good memory.

It was a chance to make good memories with my college friends.

I was happy to wear yukata and join in such a fun event.

It was great, and Sheila's daughter is cute.

I have a great memory of hanging shining tanzaku in the dark classroom.

I have always written tanzaku since I was young so I was so happy to make shining ones in school.

Wonderful!

It was a lovely event for girls so I think the students are happy with it.

I was very happy to experience something like this for the first time.

It will be a great memory for me.

I think its good.

Its very good to make a new experience to teach something old.

If you use a new way of teaching something, people will remember it.

It was contemporary and interesting.

Much better than last year.

It was fun to experience this in a new way.

Q. What are your comments or impressions of the lessons you received that related to Tanabata?

I could learn something different about Tanabata.

Mr. Takeda's lesson was easy to understand.

Mr. Takeda's lesson about the history and origins of Tanabata was so interesting.

I understand the story much better than before, and I enjoyed writing tanzaku.

It was too detailed and difficult to understand.

I could understand the story's origins from Mr. Takeda.

Lessons ended early, which was great.

Wearing yukata in lessons was fun.

I didn't have lessons so I helped with kimono dressing.

In Gloria's lesson almost everyone was in yukata so it looked summery and cute.

I was surprised to learn that Tanabata was in Genji Monogatari.

There were lots of girls in yukata when I took my class. It felt cool and lovely.

Mr. Takeda's lesson was interesting.

I could learn something new from Mr. Takeda's lesson.

Q. What would make the event more interesting?

I think a lot of people would come if there was Tanabata food.

I was deeply moved by the milky way lights.

I think it would be good to continue yukata day.

I think it should be compulsory for everyone, and yukata and also geta be provided.

I would like to make the milky way in a bigger room. Because it was just an ordinary classroom, there developed a big line of people waiting to get in.

I think anything is OK if you get the chance to speak to girls who you do normally get the chance to speak to.

I know it is about money, but it would be more fun to make the milky way in a large space like the sub arena.

Tanabata is always so hot so it would be nice if there were iced drinks and ice cream.

There were not as many yukata as I had hoped, so I was disappointed.

The classroom was too small.

Some small gift would be nice.

I wish more tan dai students would take part in the 5th period Tanabata party.

Discuss it more and get some food made too.

Nothing special, but seeing all those yukata makes me feel cool.

Kimono Seminar Student Results

Three students from my kimono seminar group participated in this event as kitsuke (dressing) helpers. They wrote the following reports.

1) When I found out I was assigned to the seminar group for kimono this year I wondered what on earth I would do. But when we studied about kimono history my ideas about kimono began to change. I became glad that I could spend a whole year studying about kimono. When I heard about the Tanabata event, and that Sheila, a foreigner, would teach us how to put on yukata, I laughed. But I learned to put on a yukata, and to put it on other people, so I was glad. Now, most people do not know how to put on yukata and I was in that group of people, and its a shame. After 2 or 3 times I became able to wear it. I would like more people to be able to wear yukata.

2) On Tanabata event day, I dressed two people. By remembering what Sheila had taught me, I was able to dress them. At first I had no confidence, but when I was doing it, I was complimented by my friends. Coordinating the yukata is difficult, but it was a good experience. The milky way project was really romantic. The shining drinks, lighted balloons and shining tanzaku were lovely. Part way through I was able to help and I felt that I was growing up through this experience. I won't be here next year, but I hope that people will feel that it is easy to take part in this event.

3) When I was doing the yukata dressing I was nervous about whether or not I could tie the koshihimo. When practicing I usually had it too loose, so it was difficult tying it on another

person. I haven't worn a yukata since elementary school, so to be honest I was worried about whether I could wear it. Now at university I am wearing it again after ten years, and my interest in yukata is growing. Thanks to the Tanabata event I have had the chance to wear yukata, which I am grateful for.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Questionnaire

Regarding taking part in this event, only one first year student says that she has no interest. There is a slight perception that it is troublesome to get ready, but in fact everything could be arranged by the school, so it was not necessary to experience any inconvenience in preparing for this event. Not having any lessons and job hunting were the biggest deterrents for the second year students. However, most of those students would have taken part if they had been coming to school on that day, so their perceptions cannot be said to be negative. One student was deterred because she thought it was boring last year. Overall, about ten students in both the first and second year who answered the questionnaire appear to have no interest in the event, (about 15% of students). The limited data would suggest that the vast majority of students are interested in taking part in this event.

The next questions established opinions about event. It was clear that wearing yukata and taking a group photograph were important to the students. Less students were involved in making the milky way or taking a drink in the event room. The majority of the students expressed positive feelings about wearing yukata and the fact that they wanted to take a group photograph shows that they saw the event as a special occasion. Only two first year students express negativity about wearing yukata, but overall the results are positive about this experience. Even students who did not want to wear a yukata still said that it was interesting to teach a traditional story in this multi-media way, and most students felt that it was innovative and made culture come alive if you approach it in this way. The second year students expressed no negativity at all, and appreciated that you could teach an old story in an enjoyable way. They also saw it as a good chance for interacting with staff and other students who they would not normally interact with, and appreciated the chance to wear yukata. Their comments are overwhelmingly positive, even from the students who were not able to take part.

It was important for us to establish the students' responses to our lessons concerning the legend of the Tanabata story. However, there is almost no data on any lesson but Mr. Takeda's. Both first and second year students responded positively to Mr. Takeda's class and video concerning Tanabata. Other teacher's lessons were hardly mentioned. Whether this is because the students forgot about them, or because the students who responded did not take those classes is unknown. This is a weak point in the data, and it is necessary to make a

concerted effort to obtain data on the lessons that we provide if we continue this project next year.

As this event was for the students to enjoy learning about Tanabata together in a new and different way, it was important to get their ideas on how the event could be improved for future years. The suggestions here fell into about five main categories. For convenience they are grouped into these categories below.

- 1) Offer some kind of food or drinks related to tanabata. 6 students.
- 2) Use a larger space. 6 students.
- 3) Cancel lessons. 6 students.
- 4) Have the whole university involved. 3 students.
- 5) Turn it into a matsuri or party, with games or contests. 4 students.

Other suggestions were to make it compulsory to wear yukata, to have it as a joint event with the kindergarten, to use the time to teach kimono and yukata manners, to have a poster contest, to have a guest singer and, from one student, not to have the event at all.

Regarding these suggestions, the question of finance immediately becomes involved. The space was small and cramped, but it was also a convenient location near to dressing rooms. If the event could be moved entirely to another part of the school, then perhaps this could be solved. To make the event university wide would be a great outcome but this would require some rethinking of the aims of the event, as the whole university would be unlikely to pick up the theme of Tanabata in their lessons. While cancelling lessons sounds like an attractive option, one of the points of the event is to go about one's daily life in yukata, so this would defeat this purpose of yukata day. If lessons were cancelled other events and activities would also need to be thought out, requiring a whole lot of extra resources and organization. One possibility would be to start at lunchtime and continue after school with a kind of party or matsuri time.

Seminar Student Reports

All three of the students positively evaluated their experiences helping as dressers on this day. Two of them mentioned not having confidence at the beginning, but they gained in confidence as they were able to dress their fellow students. One student mentions growing up through the experience and they all have mastered a new skill, which will be useful for them in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

It is very hard to draw conclusions from the limited data that was available, but from the limited data that is there it appears that the event was very popular with about 85% of students. Most of the students really appreciated the chance to wear yukata and take

photographs together. They also valued the chance to meet and interact with students from other classes or years. They also with the teachers, in a way that they did not normally do. Most of the students also appreciated the chance to learn something about culture in this new and interesting way. Thus it can be said that for the majority of the students this event was a very positive experience. They also enjoyed having the dark classroom, making the milky way and hanging tanzaku, although the most important part of the event for them was wearing yukata. It is to be expected that there will be a few students who are not interested in taking part in such an event, but the vast majority were very positive about it.

Unfortunately the data about the educational outcomes is not available, so it is impossible to establish whether or not there is any benefit to the students in terms of educational outcomes, but the students certainly had a positive experience.