



TITLE

THE PAPER MENAGERIE: A LITERARY ANALYSIS



DISCIPLINE: English

TOPIC: Chinese-American experience/ culture

STANDARDS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.4 | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2 | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.9 | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.2 | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3 |
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.4 | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1 | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2 |
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3 | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4 | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.5

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will critically analyze The Paper Menagerie by Ken Liu, focusing on authorial choices and use of literary devices.
- Students will engage with research about major themes in the text concerning Chinese-American identity, family, culture, history, and assimilation, as well as connect it back to the author's message.
- Students will practice annotation, analysis, and writing skills.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- How does Ken Liu use literary devices and authorial choices to communicate themes of Chinese-American identity?
- How does the force of assimilation impact the characters in the short story and their relationships?
- How can you connect to Ken Liu's writing of conflict with your cultural identity, regret and loss, and exploring your family history and culture?

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Digital or physical copy of The Paper Menagerie by Ken Liu

KIT INCLUDES:

- [Graphic Organizer](#)
- [Free online copy of book \(Gizmodo\)](#)
- [Free online audio copy of book](#)

CLASSROOM HOURS NEEDED:

65-105 min

FINAL ASSESSMENT TYPE:

Essay practice



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INTRODUCTION

Students will read *The Paper Menagerie*, a short story by Ken Liu about a bi-racial boy with an immigrant Chinese mother and his relationship to his Chinese culture, heritage, ancestry, identity while living in America. This story is representative of many untold experiences of children of immigrants and Chinese-American children struggling to discover their own identities when forced to separate themselves from their cultural backgrounds in the name of assimilation and normalcy. Students will focus on analyzing the author's choices and use of 4 main literary devices-- figurative language, characterization, imagery, and motif-- and their effect on developing important themes throughout the story. Lesson can be taught in its entirety, or teacher can pick the activities most relevant to their class.

WARM UP: ANNOTATE AND REFLECT (30-40 MIN)

Assign *The Paper Menagerie* for Homework the night before or in class (should take 20-30 min). Annotate as needed;

- First with the title: Before reading the book, what does the title suggest? What themes come to mind?
- Ask students to look for these literary devices in particular: motifs, figurative language characterization, and imagery; What effect do they have on the reader? How do they impact your understanding of the story?

Using the provided graphic organizer, take a few minutes to write a quick summary of the plot and jot down initial thoughts on respective columns.

- Guiding questions: What themes were present in the story? How did it make you feel? How did you connect to Jack's story? What kind of authorial choices does the author make? Does his use of figurative language/ imagery/ etc stand out to you?

Graphic Organizer- Warm-up:

Share out with a seat partner. Note down anything interesting/ relevant they mention you hadn't considered before on the last column.

**ACTIVITY #1:
RESEARCH
(OPTIONAL)
(30 MIN)**

• With a partner, research a topic related to Chinese culture/ identity explored in the book. Some topics are but not limited to:

- Cultural background/ history of zhezhi animals/ papercraft
- Great Famine
- Sigulu Village
- Singming
- Cultural revolution 1966
- Hong Kong girl trade/ "adoption"
- Asian mail order wives for American men
- Chinese immigrant experiences assimilating into America

• Examine how the author presents these themes/ ideas in the text. What language does he use? Focus on how the author uses these themes to develop the relationship between Jack and his Mom. Note down specific textual evidence (quotes).

• Write a brief presentation on Google Slides or Canva conveying the main ideas of your research, and teach the class what you learned.

Free Databases for research: JSTOR (sign up with email), Proquest, Gale In Context, School Library Databases, Google Scholar

**ACTIVITY
#2: SAVE
THE LAST
WORD
(15 MIN)**

• Take a few minutes to skim the story and pick the quote/ sentence that you feel is most impactful to you. Pick a sentence that you feel confident explaining why you chose, and specifically how the choices of the author impacted your perspective as a reader.

• Then, write your quote down on a sticky note. Get into a group of 4-6, and share your quote with the group. When it is your turn to share, read the quote out loud and let everyone else in the group try to guess/ explain why you chose that quote/ why you felt it was important. No interruptions while the person is speaking. Imagine passing around the sticky note like a talking stick around the circle, and you can only speak when you have it.

• When the circle is done sharing, explain why you initially chose that quote. Why was it significant to you? Was there really powerful figurative language, or the use of a strong motif? Then, reflect on what you heard in the group, sharing how other's ideas have impacted your perspective or helped you notice something unclear before.

**ACTIVITY #3:
WRITING A
QUESTION
AND THESIS
(20 MIN)**

- Students examine all their resources from the unit-- presentations, graphic organizer, annotations, group activity (Save the Last Word).
- Students will "group" evidence; Find patterns across the story; Looking at the most prominent literary devices, which is the most impactful for the development of the story? How does Liu use this device across the story?
- With all your knowledge of the author's literary choices and their impact on the meaning of the story, practice writing a guiding question that examines a literary device (figurative language, motif, imagery, characterization) and its impact on a broad idea or theme throughout the text (Chinese-American identity, connection to ancestry, etc). Once you have a guiding question you will be answering, draft a thesis statement in response.
- Response to the question directly. If your question asked how the author uses figurative language to represent the theme of Chinese-American identity, consider what specific kind of figurative language the author turns to most. Is it anthropomorphism, metaphor, simile?
- Then, what specifically about Chinese-American identity do metaphors recurrently communicate? Is it a loss of cultural identity? The impact of American assimilation on Chinese culture?
- Teacher picks one question to go over. As a class, students try to craft a thesis statement to that question together. Can be used as an essay question for test.