

Week 3

Reading: *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*

Question 13:

While I might not break it down so far as to suggest that merely “knowing a lot of words means knowing a lot of things,” I would certainly agree that reading and literacy are vital to being well-rounded in one’s knowledge base. I know many words relating to chemistry and biology because they stuck with me throughout high school, but I don’t make the claim to know chemistry or biology because all I know are the keywords. I can make plenty of context jumps should I have to in a conversation, but that wouldn’t be me “knowing” the thing I’m talking about, it would be wording the conversation so that my partner is actually answering the questions for me, or believes that my knowing the definition is an indicator of previous and evidently thorough study. However, if one ever expects to acquire a broad base of knowledge, reading is by far the fastest and most enjoyable way to acquire interest in the subject enough to pursue it farther. Many of my childhood heroes transcended cultures, and it was the eagerness to understand how my heroes managed to break the language and cultural barrier that I began studying language and culture. I fully blame my ability to hold my own in Jeopardy on my reading every book I could get my hands on from the time I could read. Reading is certainly an important aspect in learning and knowing.

Question 15:

I chose this question specifically because I could not answer it right away. I believe it is incredibly important to teach the youth up-to-date information regarding subjects like science, where the new advances in information greatly affect our lives, but the myths are just as important. If you want to learn about human nature and understand what humans are at their very core, one of the greatest ways to understand that is by looking at the myths of cultures that have long since gone or evolved. The stories that survived are often the ones with the important lessons, the things that were seen to have been the most useful when taught to younger generations. The myths also serve as a comparison: showing the children just how much we have grown as civilizations, and often make learning history more enjoyable. Knowing one’s history and understanding morales are both vital building blocks in a well-developed human. Knowing science and maths are certainly important, but without the history of how the technology was used before, and the understanding of right from wrong that the traditional tales teach us (especially important in teaching children) how can we hope for the future innovators to use the knowledge they have amassed for the greater good?

Question 14:

When Napoleon set up the public school system in France that the western world would later capitalize upon, the same the author nodded to in the reading, he knew two things: the first is that a literate, if not well-educated public can be a powerful force. The second thing is that if he set up mandates for a public school, he controlled what the people of his country learned. In that way, he could create an incredible force of citizens shaped specifically to his needs. These facts were proven after the fall of the Soviet Union, when the level of soviet propaganda fed to

the people of the U.S.S.R. resulted in the those very people crying in confusion and hurt when they realized how much they had been lied to by their own government. With this information presented I say, yes, schoolteachers are amazingly powerful. They teach us at the ages when we are most malleable. We hope that the teachers will sculpt us well; teach us what we should know instead of what other forces would have us believe, and show us how to be a driving force in aid to our respective communities. But, in the same breath, the teachers are controlled by what they are supposed to teach us, according to various advisors to the education system. It is a system of checks that is intended to keep us well educated, and does restrict the teachers slightly.

Reading: *Gender, Shifting Boundaries and Global Cultures*

Question 2: The view a Japanese person holds of Japan is directly related to the aspect of Japanese culture they connect with and experience on a daily basis. A salaryman with a stay at home wife and children and friends with the same home life will see Japan as the more traditional 'man is the bread winner' sort of country, where as a teenaged girl may focus on the more technological, evolving part of Japanese culture and see Japan as a modern ground-breaking country. Because there are an enormous number of subcultures in Japan that have a nearly uniquely Japanese touch to them, it is perfectly possible for two randomly chosen Japanese people to have completely opposing views of what Japan is to them.

Question 6: I do believe that a culture can be spoilt, but not in the ways suggested by the quoted anthropologists in this reading. The way to spoil a culture is to forcibly enter the culture, tell those people who live it that their way of life and practices and traditions are inferior, and then force them to change to a more modern civilization, so that the only remnants of their culture are then practiced incorrectly and lose meaning. Having McDonalds in France has not spoiled France's culture, just like having a McDonalds in Japan has not spoiled Japan's culture. Truthfully, if a company is doing their job correctly, expanding into a new country will actually mean changing their menu and or attractions in order to appeal to the people of the culture the company is entering. When Disneyland first expanded to France, they attempted to market exactly as they had done in America, and the resulting low crowds nearly ruined their venture. It was only after they changed and adapted the park to fit to France that they began pulling in the same level of crowds as they do in America. As for the example of rock music in India, I personally find it ridiculous to suggest that music can 'ruin' a culture. Music is a form of purely human communication that often transcends the boundaries placed by the societal mind; that should be seen as beautiful, not threatening.

Week 5

Readings: *Diary of a Voyage Abroad* and *The Autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi*

Reading these views of America from an outside perspective, especially given what I know of the American perspective on Japan from the same time period. It was enlightening to know that they saw American culture as just as strange and barbaric as the 1860's Americans thought of them. But what I found especially entertaining was the description of Muragaki's trip to the Smithsonian, and how he was disturbed by the objectification of the mummies. It shows the strong respect for the dead in Japanese culture. One would never display a dead body as a show piece for a museum, it was just disrespectful. But I actually laughed a little when his final thought on the subject was "they didn't earn the nickname of 'barbarians' for nothing!" At the same time, in the Fukuzawa reading, he tells the story of visiting the royal family of Hawaii after their time in San Francisco. He sees the natives and royalty of Hawaii as borderline barbaric for their lack of development. It shows quite well the differences in definition of what makes someone a barbarian. The other aspect I found incredibly interesting about the Muragaki reading was the description of the debate in Congress, and how shocked the emissaries were that the officials were discussing state matters in public. They went so far as to refrain from asking questions, out of respect for the government they were visiting. It's clear that they are quite used to the issues of the state being discussed and dealt with in private, but what is also made evident by this passage is how very formal the Japanese government must have been. Muragaki describes the government official of looking like a "madman" while debating his side, as his is moving his hands about wildly and yelling at the top of his lungs. Americans would see that as a passionate argument, but the Japanese value reservedness, and see this display as ridiculous.

Week 6:

Reading: "Japan Must Rejoin Asia"

1. This author clearly does not like Japan
2. I do regularly see more of a western influence as opposed to a Chinese or Korean influence in Japan, but Japan has it's own domain of 'asian' that incorporates its history and aesthetics with western technology and practices.
3. At the time, not moving to the side of the West was deadly for an 'undeveloped' country, as the western warlords would tear the country to shreds in an instant. Japan wanted to be seen as equal to the western nations, because it believed that it was, or if not, that it had the ability to be so. Korea and China were seen as little more than areas to be colonized.
4. The Japanese representative was certain that Japan would become a permanent member of the Security Council, but the writer thinks that he's leaning too heavily on the goodwill of other nations.

5. Korea and China still have festering wounds over what has happened in the decades since World War II and are concerned that Japan does not truly feel the guilt for its past actions that it tries to display on the world stage, mostly due to issues such as the Yasukuni Shrine visits and the Korean 'Comfort Women'.
6. The columnist sees the former prime minister as nothing more than a puppy trying to earn the favor of bigger players.
7. Perhaps, but here in lies the problem with this article: it didn't tell me (or any of its readers) *why* Japan should be concerned enough about its neighbors to embrace its identity as Asian. I can see two different ways to view this situation, one being that Japan is capitalizing on what it sees as successful habits in order to ensure the longevity of its nation, and the other being that Japan has forsaken its history in order to become a mockery of a representative of Asia. I just do not understand the lack of supposition here: the economic relations between the three are just fine, and although their government relations could be better, the writer did not give any situation in which Japan turning back to China and Korea would be a good thing, other than to soothe the egos of the still hurting countries and fulfill an idyllic definition of Asia. Other than proximity, the article gave me no reason to believe that Japan has any incredibly compelling reason to stop the current habits. Out of the sake of solving conflict, I think they should work on their diplomatic relations, but that does not mean that Japan should give up its practices.

Week 7

Reading: *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and His World, 1852-1912*

Given the information presented in this reading, I find that the main difference between Meiji era Japan and current Japan, or at least, the one that really sticks out to me, is the violence against foreigners. In all my time here, I have heard maybe one Japanese person tell a foreigner to go home, and while the people of Kyoto are protesting a new U.S. military base, the vast majority of the people I interact with clearly understand that I am in no way related to America's efforts to encroach on their peace. While I'm sure there are still foreign victims of crime in Japan, I don't believe it is specifically because they are foreigners, it's far more likely that they were easy marks.

At the same time, it is rather difficult to say what in this passage has stayed the same: the passage really revolves around the Emperor and his interactions and his portrayal of Japanese culture. The problem with this is that, as a foreigner, I have not much experience with the Emperor nor of public opinion regarding him. It is hard for me to say with any certainty what details have evolved, other than the nods to the technology of the time.

Reading: "Herman Melville and John Manjiro: Toward a Wave Theory of the Pacific"

Question 3: The 'missionaries' of Hawaii suffered from the same inflated, bigoted ego that would become the base of American Imperialism--these natives were uneducated, making them, in the eyes of the Americans, savages whose only use was hard labor that benefitted America. Missionaries are, as we accept now, meant to bring aid and the option of a new religion to areas

that could use the help. These missionaries were a farce meant only to ensure American superiority in new lands.

Question 4: Given the mindset of the Western world well into the twentieth century, Japan absolutely had the right idea in “locking the doors” behind the missionaries. Had they allowed the missionaries in those many years ago, their culture would have been almost completely broken down, and they would have likely been even more severely exploited by the West than they were when their ports opened later on.

Week 8:

Reading: Ulysses S. Grant

Question 1: The former president's viewing of the noh performance turned out in a way I had not expected. Ingeniously, his hosts had decided to present the noh in place of an opera performance, which, music aside, is a fair comparison to make. What is striking about the encounter is that noh was well on its way out of Japanese culture when Grant saw it, yet, if the encounter is to be believed, the combination of Grant's popularity and influence helped encourage the survival of noh to this day. In the introduction to the first edition of his Dictionary, Hirsch described the criteria that he and his team used to decide what was put in the dictionary, with one of them being the prevalence of the word used in periodicals without an explanation of what the word was. I would hazard a guess that Grant's visit to the Noh theater would have drummed up plenty of popularity of Noh and reestablished the dying art form firmly in the culture of Japan. Because of events like this, I imagine it was much easier for Noh to stay well set in the memory of the Japanese culture, so that it is seen to this day as a cultural heritage instead of a performance. Although this sort of influence came from a player outside of the culture, it is easy to speculate that had a Japanese person achieved such rank and popularity, they could have easily reignited the popularity of Noh as well.

Week 10:

Reading: *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture*

Question 6: To the Japanese, a direct painting of something was seen as the most basic type of art, because it only portrayed what was on the surface. True art to the Japanese showed the essence of the object, and was therefore sometimes inaccurate in size or shape. To the Western world, who had spent centuries perfecting the direct representation of an object, the Japanese 'high art' seemed hardly practiced.

Question 7: On the other hand, the Westerners loved the Ukiyoe paintings because they depicted scenes from everyday life. The Japanese were confused (and some insulted) when told that they should consider these everyday base paintings as evidence of high culture.

Week 11:

Reading: "Foreward" *The Book of Tea*

Even though Fenollosa effectively helped to save what he could of Japanese art, at the end of the day, he was not Japanese. He was taught the aesthetic by another, and then taught it to his students and so on. Okakura probably felt he had a better handle on what was oriental or not because Okakura was actually Japanese, not a foreigner. It is a rather understandable argument for a person to make. That's not to say that Fenollosa was not just as well read in the aesthetic, but there is a bit of a difference that perhaps cannot be taught when one is born and raised in a culture as opposed to merely living in it for a period.

Week 12:

Reading: "Tokyo Boogie Woogie"

Well, both of the questions this week were rather difficult as both referenced ideas that were hardly mentioned for more than a paragraph in the readings. If we look at the reverse of this question, in that "Did the SCAP policies actually encourage the spread of Democracy in Japan?" then to that I answer yes, but only to a point. Seeing as at that time, the only true democracy was America, it was smart for them to attempt to bring as much American culture to Japan as possible. But the fact that it was so heavily doctored to fit the ideal of democracy is a little troubling on paper. While hypocritical, the policies worked, and by assimilating carefully chosen aspects of American culture into Japan, the Japanese as a people were liberated from the war-time reservation that had stifled their spirits. With the right evidence (certainly more than what either of these articles provided) one could certainly argue that a strong part of Japan's liberation came from the pop culture front.

Week 13:

Reading: "The Japanese Jazz Artist and the Authenticity Complex"

Question 1: This is a ridiculous suggestion for two reasons: first, the fact that the Japanese actually helped to run the market for Jazz music for several years would imply that these people definitely appreciate Jazz music; secondly, if they want to throw out the idea that people need to learn to appreciate these genres as more than music, they need to aim it at home too. The vast majority of Americans only see these genres as music and lack the will to know what the history backing them is. I may be a little biased, but all this article made me think about was the movie *Swing Girls*. Due to the extenuating circumstances in the film, a group of teenage girls come to learn and understand the magic behind the Jazz beats. While learning the history of the genre is certainly a commendable idea, the fact that they suggested it at all paints these people as elitists who are blind to the world around them.

Question 2: Again, I feel like directing this statement at the Japanese is limiting in the true scope of the problem: the vast majority of people view music superficially. If it's a world problem, then of course there will be Japanese examples, just as there will be as many American examples. Even the people who say they only like jazz or only like rap can come off as superficial. I don't

think it's specifically Japanese, so making such a directed generalization without looking at patterns of human behavior is a fallacy.

Reading: "How Japanese is Pokemon?"

Quote 23: "*Sailor Moon's* setting in what appears to be Japanese everyday life deterred American girls from identifying with the story."

I can personally vouch for this when I say "no, it did not deter us in the slightest." When I was little and *Sailor Moon* had just hit the states, my friends and I were crazy for it. We would constantly mob the local Blockbuster in the hopes that another volume of episodes were out, and receiving the toys from the series always made the top of our Christmas and Birthday wish lists. While the corporations responsible for bringing the anime to America could have decided it was a failure, I promise, it was not out of the notion that the show took place in Japan. As a child, I could have cared less where it took place, the only thing I cared about were the amazing magical girls on my television.