Case Study #1

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**Cultural Connections for Younger Students:**

**A Party for a Japanese Refugee**

On Friday, March 11, 2011 an earthquake hit Japan and caused a series of Tsunami waves. It was the largest earthquake in the history of Japan and it caused a lot of damage. Homes were lost, people were hurt, and many had to find other places to stay since the places where they lived were no longer safe. Some Japanese families even had to move to other countries, at least temporarily. Your teacher has just told you that a little girl from Japan will be coming soon to join your class at your school. Her name is Bachiko, which means “happy child” in Japanese. She is moving to State College with her parents and younger brother.

Your teacher tells you that the first day she will be in class will be May 5. In Japan May 5 is children’s day and the whole country celebrates children and their mothers. But for Bachiko May 5 is even more special since it is also her birthday. Since she will be here the class thinks that you should all plan a celebration for her. She won’t know anyone here yet. She won’t have any friends yet. And, even though she speaks some English, she is more comfortable speaking Japanese. You want to help her celebrate Children’s Day and her birthday and you also want to help her feel welcome since she will probably be missing her home very much. You want to make sure that the party includes some of the sorts of things that kids do in Japan. How can you plan the party? How can you help her celebrate her special day?

**Global Knowledge/Global Empathy**

**Asking the right questions:**

Begin by asking questions that help your students connect with Bachiko’s story. Ask them to think of holidays they celebrate that they would miss if they had to go to a different country during that time of year.

Ask them to think of how they would feel if they had to be far from home for their birthday. What sorts of things would they miss? What sorts of things would they be able to do in a new place?

Adjusting the conversation based on the maturity of the class, talk about the challenges to Bachiko of having to move to a new place. Ask them about what they think of moving and what sorts of challenges moving brings—compare moving to another place in the country where you currently live to moving to a new country.

Talk about natural disasters. Ask them if there are times when they feel scared of them and discuss ways for them to reduce their fears. Talk about how they happen all over the globe. Make sure not to let them think that they only happen in places like Japan.

**Gathering information:**

Brainstorm with the class the sort of information they need in order to plan the party (solve the problem). Create a list of things that the class needs to learn to be able to do this.

Create a list of things that the kids need to learn about Japanese culture. Ask the kids to think of any Japanese culture that they already know of (sushi, animation, pokemon, origami, etc.). Ask them to consider whether their experience of these cultural items might be different from how Bachiko and her friends experience them.

Depending on the class—consider teaching more about earthquakes, tsunamis, and other natural disasters. Use this as a chance to balance learning about sciences with learning compassion for those that are affected by these events. Consider talking about Katrina or other US natural disasters (tornadoes) so that they don’t think these things only happen to others.

**Imagining a way to address the problem:**

Once you have begun to gather materials and information that can help the class imagine the party that they would like to throw, have them begin to describe what they want to do for the party. Do they need to make origami, kites, etc? What foods? Music? What other activities? Help them imagine all of these things.

Then ask them to imagine the party and think of how they would like to tell a story about it. Asking them to be the storytellers of this will help encourage their imagination and empathy. (While possibly throwing the party would be a fun idea—it might not be the best learning activity and could be difficult to do). Do they want to write a story about Bachiko and the party? Do they want to create a cartoon/animated version? Do they want to make a series of pictures? Consider whether you want them to work in groups or individually or in some combination. Group work is generally helpful for these types of projects. Maybe you make a few groups and let each one decide between a story, pictures, an origami play, etc… There are lots of options.

When the students have their projects complete have them present them to the class. Then have the whole class talk about the strengths and weaknesses of their projects. What do they think Bachiko would have liked most? What might have been hard for her? What parts were fun for them to plan? What parts were hard? The idea here is to make it clear that they have done good work, that they imagined a way to help someone else, but that it would not be possible to “fix” the situation. Bachiko would surely be a bit sad—but their party would also surely really help. And the more the party made her feel welcome, the more of a success it would be.

Next ask the class to engage in some sort of fundraising or other project to help the kids in Japan. Now, when they do this, they will feel much more connected to the communities they are trying to help.

**Assessment:**

There should always be some assessment with these projects. It is possible to determine how well students gathered information, whether they asked good questions, and whether they could appreciate the limits to their work as well as its strengths.

**Strengths:**

Asks students to imagine a direct connection with a young Japanese earthquake victim—which creates a greater link. Makes the crisis in Japan more real.

Asks them to imagine themselves in a similar situation—this will deter othering (the idea that this situation would only happen to others).

Gives them an opportunity to learn more about Japan through their own interest in solving a problem.

**Risks:**

Risks making them feel sorry for Bachiko in a way that might make her seem helpless. You can teach in ways that confront this tendency.

Risks developing a negative stereotype of Japan—since it could seem like a country that suffers disasters and needs our help. You can teach in ways that confront this tendency by not allowing them to describe Japan in negative terms.

**Adaptations:**

This case study could be adjusted to describe a child from almost any other nation that had to suddenly move to your school district. The possibilities are limitless.

**Web resources:**

### [Teaching Kids About Earthquakes, Tsunamis, and Japan Through Online Resources](http://www.techsavvymama.com/2011/03/teaching-kids-about-earthquakes.html): <http://www.techsavvymama.com/2011/03/teaching-kids-about-earthquakes.html#ixzz1La20D34Q>

* Talking to kids about the Earthquake: <http://www.thechildrenshospital.org/news/pr/2011/talking-to-kids-about-japan.aspx>
* The Science of Earthquakes (for kids): <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/learn/kids/eqscience.php>
* Kids web Japan: <http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/>
* Japan for kids: <http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/japan_for_kids.htm>