Heart of a Samurai

AUTHOR: Margi Preus
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GENRE: historical fiction

SUMMARY: Manjiro and his fisherman friends, all native to Japan, become stranded on an island after a storm capsizes their boat. They have a fear of the unknown world and know that their country will not allow them to return home. After struggling on the island, an American ship rescues the fishermen. Manjiro learns the English language and travels to many new places on the whaling ship. He has many adventures in America and finds that his fear of the unknown held him back from many dreams and possibilities. Manjiro’s bravery and curiosity help him achieve his desire to return home to Japan and become a samurai. (Based on a true story in 1841.)

BOOKTALK: Imagine yourself ship-wrecked on an island with a few friends and your only source of food is birds. You and your friends have never traveled outside your country and have heard rumors of barbarians and monsters. A ship rescues you and you weigh the risk of dying on the island, or sailing with possible barbarians. This is what happened to Manjiro, a Japanese native in 1841. Will Manjiro decide to stay on the island and try to survive? Or will he join the ship and experience new adventures, which may include suffering on the barbarians’ boat?

AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:
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Margi Preus is an author and a playwright. She lives in Minnesota, where she directs a theater and teaches children’s literature at a college. She has traveled to Japan twice for research for her books. Heart of a Samurai was her first novel!

Other books written by the author: Celebritrees: Historic and Famous Trees of the World, Peace Bell, The Legend of the Ladyslipper

CHALLENGING WORDS (...due to pronunciation, spelling and/or defining):

- p. 1 hoist, barbarians
- p. 2 intrusion
- p. 4 indigo gingerly
- p. 5 samurai, delirious
- p. 12 flint and steel, salvaged
- p. 13 taro, caterwauling rebuke
- p. 14 contamination
- p. 152 sarcasm
- p. 154 contemplated, offensive,
- p. 161 cajoling, abruptly
- p. 162 incessantly, humiliation,
- p. 163 apprenticeship
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why does Goemon have a great fear that the Barbarians are wanting to harm them? (chp. 4)
2. How did Manjiro’s great curiosity influence his decisions?
3. How did diving down to kill the turtle give Manjiro hope to return home? (chp. 29)
4. How are Manjiro’s shells compared to the people of the world? (chp. 40)
5. How did Manjiro’s great curiosity influence his decisions?
6. What are the similarities and differences between American and Japanese cultures?
ACTIVITIES with COMMON CORE STANDARDS:

Write a job description for a samurai and include what important characteristics and life experience are needed.

4.RI.1 Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
5.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
6.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

Whaling was a controversial topic. Take a stand either “for whaling” or “against whaling”. Support your stance by giving reasons in your written argument.

4.W.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
5.RI.8 Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).
6.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

Since 1986, whaling has been banned by the International Whaling Commission to help the whale stock. Some countries, however, continue to participate in whaling activities because they do not agree with the ban. Have students take a side in the debate and write an opinion paper on why whaling should continue to be banned or why whaling should be allowed.

4.W.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
5.W.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
6.W.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
**LIFE SKILLS:** perseverance, problem solving, courage

**RELATED INTERNET SITES:**
Read about the true story of John “Manjiro” Mung!
http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nakahama_Manjir%C5%8D

Find out about whales and whaling.

International Whaling Committee
http://iwcoffice.org/