

THE TALE OF THE MANDARIN DUCKS

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From the book by Katherine Paterson ©1990 illus. by Leo & Diane Dillon (Lodestar, New York)
Themes: Japanese Culture/Folktales, Greed, Kindness
Grade Level K - 3
Running Time: 12 minutes

SUMMARY

A greedy lord captures the drake to enjoy its beautiful plumage, separating a pair of inseparable mandarin ducks. A kind kitchen maid, no longer able to bear the duck in captivity, frees it from its cage. When the lord discovers the missing drake, he banishes the servant and her husband, deciding they must be executed.

In a surprising turn of events, the servants are freed by two messengers, beautifully dressed in garments that mock the colors of the ducks.

OBJECTIVES

- To help children learn about Japanese culture.
- To help children understand the value of being honest and caring.
- To help children understand the importance of valuing the natural environment.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Locate Japan on a map. Show children how far Japan is from where we live. Using library books as reference, discuss with children the life styles, clothing, foods, and occupations of the Japanese people. If children have first-hand experience with aspects of Japanese culture, encourage them to share information or objects that represent this culture.

Talk with children about wildlife that

enhance their homes in ponds, lakes, woods, the sky, etc. Ask children to describe ducks they may have seen and the sounds these birds make. Encourage children to think about the different ways people can work to protect these animals' habitats.

Explain that **The Tale of the Mandarin Ducks** is a folktale. See if children can recall other folktales they may be familiar with. Ask: Are these tales true? What makes the tales similar to one another? What is your favorite folktale? Why?

Share the book **The Tale of the Mandarin Ducks** with children. Then ask:

- What tells you the story takes place in Japan?
- How do you feel about the lord's behavior?
- How do you feel about what Yasuko did?
- Who rescued Yasuko and Shozo from the woods?
- What or who did the rescuers seem to be like?
- What do you think life was like for Yasuko and Shozo after they were rescued?

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Offer children styrofoam balls and colorful feathers they can use to create their own mandarin ducks. Have children pay close attention to the ways they combine the colorful feathers. Have children decide whether they will create a duck or a drake and encourage them to discuss how this affects their color choices.

Take children to a local museum or library that may have an exhibit focusing on Japanese culture. Have children look for items of clothing, foods, homes, and other

objects they are familiar with from viewing **The Tale of the Mandarin Ducks**. As children enjoy the exhibit, encourage them to think about the similarities and differences between the Japanese culture and their own.

Have children create their own folktales. Children may want to write their stories or dictate them to you as they tell them. Supply sheets of white paper children can use to draw pictures to accompany their tales. Display the folktales on a wall or bulletin board where they can be shared with visitors.

Talk about the contrasting values of greed and caring that were central to **The Tale of the Mandarin Ducks**. Have children think about how the lord's greed failed, in the end, to get him what he wanted, and how Yasuko and Shozo's caring and selflessness resulted in a happy ending for the two of them. Encourage children to think about times in their lives when greed or kindness ruled their decision-making. Ask: How did it feel to be greedy? To be kind?

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