



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Kirra- Kirra

Cynthia Kadohata

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Kira - Kira

Cynthia Kadohata

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Table of Contents

Summary	3
About the Author	3
Background Information	4
Characters	4
Initiating Activities.....	4
Vocabulary Activities.....	5
Sixteen Sections.....	14
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
Post-reading Discussion Questions	37
Post-reading Extension Activities.....	38
Assessment.....	39
Scoring Rubric.....	40

Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Creative thinking, following directions, identifying attributes, inferring, predicting, compare/contrast, supporting judgments, concept map

Literary Elements

Story mapping, characterization, setting, theme, cause and effect

Vocabulary

Target words, synonyms and antonyms, word maps, using a dictionary, journals

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, debate, drama, interviewing, oral presentation

Writing

Creative writing, personal narrative, letters, dialogue, journalism, short story, haiku, folktale, sympathy card

Critical Thinking

Compare/contrast, brainstorming, research, analysis, evaluation

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—culture, history, Japanese traditions, recipe, maps, labor unions, time line; Science—health, astronomy, agriculture, observations; Math—percent, ratio; Art—design, drawing, illustration; Geography; Music

Genre: fiction

Settings: Iowa and Georgia in the 1950s and early 1960s

Point of View: first person

Themes: family love, cultural values, death, sacrifice, “the world as a glittering place”

Conflict: person vs. society, person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. nature

Style: narrative (reminiscing)

Tone: candid, humorous, sad

Date of First Publication: first published in Japan by Hakusuisha; 2004 in the United States

Summary

Kira-Kira is the story of Katie Takeshima, a Japanese-American girl growing up during the 1950s. Katie adores her older sister Lynn, who teaches her about *kira-kira*. The word means glittering in Japanese, but Lynn applies it to life. When Uncle Katsuhisa finds jobs for Katie’s parents, the family leaves a Japanese community in Iowa and moves to Georgia where people stare at them. It is Lynn who explains to Katie that people, including the kids at school, don’t want to get to know them because they are Japanese. Katie sees the harsh conditions her parents face working in the poultry industry and learns that some workers—but not her traditional Japanese mother—want to unionize. Emotional, physical, and financial pressures mount when Lynn gets seriously ill. Katie is forced to grow up and take care of her family. But it isn’t until after Lynn dies that Katie remembers what Lynn taught her—to look at the world as *kira-kira*, a place that glitters and where the ordinary can be magical.

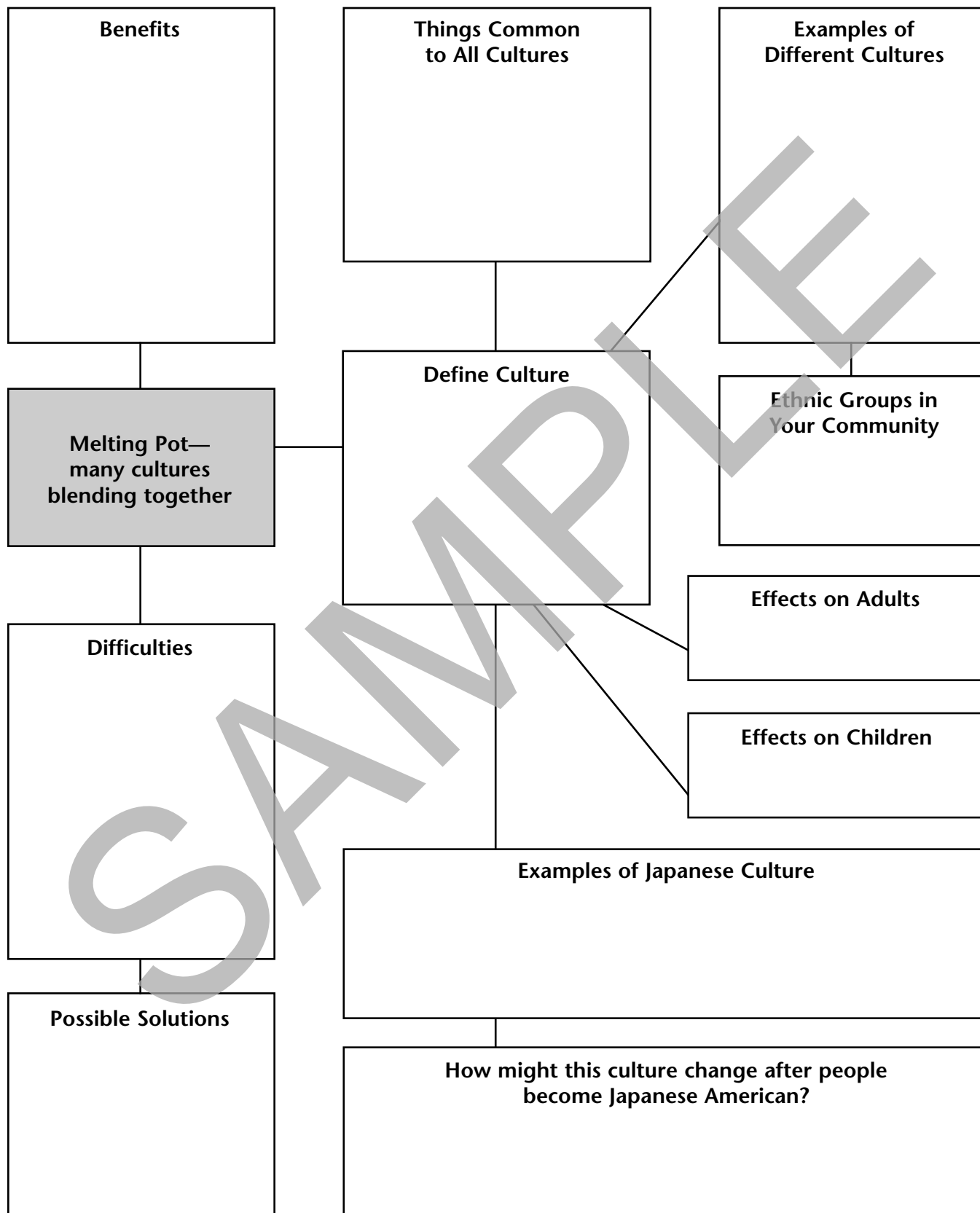
About the Author

Cynthia Kadohata was born in Chicago, Illinois. She grew up in Georgia, Arkansas, and “up north.” Today, she lives in Los Angeles, California, with her boyfriend, an adopted son from Kazakhstan, and a rescued Doberman Pincher named *Shika Kojika*, meaning “deer, little deer.” She loves to travel and says, “Traveling, seeing the country, is one of the things from which I derive my ‘writing energy.’”

Like her characters in *Kira-Kira*, Kadohata faced difficulties while growing up. Yet she has fond memories of her childhood: stargazing with her mother, horrifying her family by eating five tacos in one sitting, and having such a heavy Southern accent that one Northern teacher threatened to send her to speech therapy. In the novel, she draws upon those experiences, including her father’s working as a chicken sexer, and hopes readers will become more educated about Japanese Americans.

Kira-Kira is Kadohata’s first novel for middle-grade readers; however, her previous novels (*The Floating World*, *In the Heart of the Valley of Love*, and *The Glass Mountains*) also feature young characters. She has received fellowships for her adult writing from the National Endowment for the Arts, Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation, and Chesterfield Writer’s Film Project. *Kira-Kira* won the 2005 Newbery Medal for the most distinguished contribution to American Literature for Children. Her next novel, *Weedflower*, draws upon her father’s experiences in a World War II internment camp.

Culture Concept Map



Chapter 1, pp. 1–13

Katie admires her older sister, Lynn, who teaches her what is *kira-kira*, or glittering, in life. Their dream of owning a house ends when their parents' Oriental foods grocery store closes, and their parents accept jobs at a poultry plant in Georgia. Uncle Katsuhisa arrives to help them move. Katie notices the differences between her father and his older brother, yet she suspects they have a sibling relationship similar to hers and Lynn's.

Vocabulary

dismayed (2)
huddled (4)
Oriental (7)
poultry (8)
hatchery (8)
triumph (8)
deformed (8)
sweltering (9)
delicate (9)
enveloping (10)
gossiping (10)
nonsense (10)
unruffled (11)
strictly (13)

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Mother vow to send Lynn and Katie to Japan someday? Do you agree or disagree with Mother that a Kleenex cannot be called *kira-kira*? (*Mother is dismayed because the girls don't act Japanese, including their misuse of the word kira-kira. Answers will vary. Suggestion: Discuss whether words should only be used literally or if they can be used according to a person's outlook. p. 2*)
2. Who saved whom on the day the dog attacked? How can Katie and Lynn have different memories of the same event? (*Each girl believes the other one saved her life. Answers will vary. Suggestion: A person's point of view affects memory. Katie is afraid of being alone in the cornfield while Lynn thinks the corn is pretty. pp. 3, 5–6*)
3. Why does Katie believe her sister is a genius? (*Lynn said she is, and she wins her first chess game. p. 6; Note: Observant readers will notice that Lynn is referred to in the past tense—"used to keep a diary," "was the bravest girl in the world," "was also a genius" pp. 2, 6*)
4. Why don't Katie's parents keep their money in a bank? Do you think their decision is wise? Why? (*Katie's parents don't trust the bank. Answers will vary, but should include the higher risk of burglary at home. p. 7*)
5. What causes the family's Oriental foods grocery store to go out of business? (*There isn't enough business because few Oriental people live in Iowa. p. 7*)
6. How is Katie confused about Uncle Katsuhisa's name? What contributes to her confusion? (*Katsu means "triumph" in Japanese, and Katie thought "triumph" and "trumpet" meant the same thing. Answers will vary, but should include that Uncle Katsuhisa is loud as a trumpet. p. 8*)
7. What does Lynn say caused the scar on Uncle Katsuhisa's nose? (*The crows in Japan are mean, and one tried to steal Uncle Katsuhisa's nose. p. 9*)
8. Why is Father certain Uncle Katsuhisa's truck will make the long trip to Georgia? (*Uncle Katsuhisa told Father the truck will do fine, and Father believes his older brother. Katie thinks Father trusts Uncle Katsuhisa like she trusts Lynn. p. 10*)
9. How are Father and Uncle Katsuhisa different? (*Father is quiet, mild mannered, thinks a lot, talks little, and is interested in the news. He is shorter than Uncle and has a hard stomach. Uncle Katsuhisa is loud, makes a lot of noise for no apparent reason, talks a lot, acts without thinking, and doesn't care about what's going on in the country. Uncle Katsuhisa is soft. pp. 8, 11–13*)
10. **Prediction:** Why will Katie hit, steal, and lie?

Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Analysis: Begin Character Webs (see page 9 of this guide) for Katie, Lynn, Father, Mother, and Uncle Katsuhisa. Add information as you read the story.
2. Literary Analysis: Begin the Story Map on page 10 of this guide. Update it after reading each chapter.
3. Social Studies: Lynn tells Katie that the crows in Japan are mean (p. 9). Research Japanese crows in news stories on the Internet. Learn why some people think the crows are mean and a major problem in cities. Learn why others think humans cause the problem and that if garbage were handled properly, the crows would leave. Decide whether you think crows or people are the problem. Write a paragraph that supports your decision.
4. Writing: Katie thinks her father trusts his older brother the same way she trusts Lynn (p. 10). Write about why you trust an older brother or sister or about why a younger brother or sister trusts you. If you don't have siblings, describe a friendship based on trust.
5. Social Studies: Research how Japanese Americans were put in internment camps during World War II. Discuss in class the effects the war might have had on Katie's father and uncle.

Chapter 2, pp. 14–23

Katie's family is poor in that they won't borrow money, but they don't worry as long as they have plenty of rice. The 50-pound bags of rice being loaded into Uncle's truck make Katie's mother feel safe. After a late start, the family leaves for Georgia with Katie crying over Bera-Bera, her lost stuffed animal, and Lynn crying over her missing sweater. To keep their minds off the missing items and the sadness of moving, Uncle Katsuhisa sings funny songs and teaches the girls to spit.

Vocabulary

physical (15)
saliva (15)
peril (17)
technique (17)
sassed (18)
schedule (19)
hysterics (19)
embroidered (19)
delightful (20)
accents (21)
dreaded (21)
squinted (21)
belched (22)
restrain (23)

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Uncle Katsuhisa declare himself the best Japanese chess player in the United States after losing three games to Lynn? (*Answers will vary. Suggestions: Losing to a young girl embarrasses him or hurts his pride. He is a poor loser. p. 15*)
2. Why does rice make Katie's parents feel safe? (*Answers will vary. Suggestions: Having enough rice means the family will be fed even if the parents do not have money. [Rice is more than a side dish in Japanese households; it is served at every meal and is sometimes the entire meal.] p. 16*)
3. Why does Katie feel her mother won't let her and Lynn do anything? How does she feel about her mother treating her father differently? (*Mother doesn't want the girls to run, play, or climb because she sees the activities as dangerous, especially since she broke a leg when she fell, and she likes peace and quiet. Katie feels safe because she knows her parents love each other. pp. 16–17*)
4. What strange ideas does Mother think the girls might learn in college? (*Answers will vary. Mother wants the girls to act Japanese. Discussion should cover parents with home-country culture and kids adapting to a new country's culture. p. 17*)