



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 3-5

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

A Jar of Dreams

Yoshiko Uchida

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

A Jar of Dreams

Yoshiko Uchida

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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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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, research, decision-making

Comprehension

Predicting, comparison/contrast

Writing

Description, journals, poetry, letters

Vocabulary

Word mapping, analogies, synonyms

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, role play

Literary Elements

Characterization, setting, foreshadowing, point of view, simile, historical fiction, theme

Summary

The story takes place in Berkeley, California, during the summer of 1935. The narrator, eleven-year-old Rinko Tsujimura, lives with her parents, her younger brother Joji, and her older brother Cal. Rinko hates feeling different—hates being taunted or left out because she is Japanese—but when Aunt Waka comes from Japan for a summer visit, Rinko learns to value her heritage.

Money is tight and Papa's barbershop is not doing well, so Mama starts a home laundry in the basement and Papa fixes up the broken-down wringer-washer donated by their kindly neighbor, "Mrs. Sugar." The family goes to meet Aunt Waka's ship at the pier in San Francisco and Rinko is surprised to find that despite the loss of her husband and son, Aunt Waka is good-humored and easy to talk to—not the sorrowful widow she had imagined. A threat arrives in the mailbox telling Rinko's family "get out of our territory Jap laundry, or you'll be sorry." Then the harassment begins: Someone slashes the tires on Papa's Model T, and when Papa drives around to make pick-ups, he discovers that someone has already taken the bundles of laundry his customers left out for him. No one has any doubt that this is all the work of nasty, bigoted Mr. Starr of Starr's Laundry. One night when Joji finally agrees to put his beloved dog, Maxie, outside as a watchdog, the dog is shot dead.

Aunt Waka surprises everyone by suggesting that Papa must stand up to Mr. Starr, face to face. Papa and his old friend, Uncle Kanda, do just that. Calmly but firmly, Papa points out to a spluttering Mr. Starr that he has just as much right as anyone to run a laundry business—despite Mr. Starr's insistence that the Japanese are undercutting prices and should all "go back where they came from." However, when Mr. Starr threatens Rinko and Joji, Papa grabs his arm and tells him never to bother the Tsujimura family again. Rinko is never again afraid of Mr. Starr. Papa decides to realize his own dream of running a repair shop, with Uncle Kanda as a partner. Mrs. Sugar, who brings over a broken radio, is his first customer. Cal, who has gone off to Stockton to earn money picking fruit, announces to his parents' horror that he plans to help support the family instead of going to college to become an engineer. While on a secret trip to see Cal about his decision, Uncle Kanda is hit by a car and hospitalized with serious injuries, but recovers and reveals that Cal has changed his mind about giving up college.

One day as Rinko tries on the kimono Aunt Waka has given her, Rinko finds herself talking as she never has before about how ashamed she feels sometimes of the part of her that is Japanese. Aunt Waka understands, but encourages Rinko to be proud of her heritage. Summer ends and it is time for Aunt Waka to go home to Japan. As Aunt Waka throws a streamer to Rinko from behind the ship's railing, Rinko realizes that her aunt has helped her to feel better about herself—and to respect the part of her that is Japanese.

About the Author

Yoshiko Uchida was born in 1921 in Alameda, California. While she was a senior at UC Berkeley, Pearl Harbor was bombed. Like many other Japanese Americans, her family was sent to an internment camp. They spent five months living in the stables and barracks at Tanforan Racetrack and were then moved to Topaz, a camp in the Utah desert. Uchida taught there until she was allowed to go to Massachusetts to obtain her M. Ed. at Smith College. Her parents were not allowed to leave for another year. Uchida took a job as secretary so that she would have her evenings free for writing.

Story after story was rejected, but one was eventually published by *Woman's Day*. Many of the others were later published in literature anthologies for young people.

Uchida's work gives young Asian Americans a sense of their past and dispels the stereotypes that many non-Asians have about the Japanese. Many of her more than 20 books on Japanese culture, such as *Journey to Topaz: A Story of the Japanese American Evacuation*, draw on her own experiences.

Initiating Activities

Choose one or more of the following prereading activities to help students draw from their background knowledge about the events and themes they will meet in *A Jar of Dreams*.

1. Prediction: Have students examine the cover illustration and title. Ask what predictions they have about the book. What do the clothing styles shown on the cover tell you about the time period in which the story is set? What happens just before and after the cover scene in front of the ship? What is the relationship between the woman and girl? What do their expressions tell you about how they feel toward each other? What can you guess about the story's main character? What sort of dreams does she have? What sort of "jar" are they in? What do you think the tone of the story will be? humorous? suspenseful? instructive?
2. Anticipation Guide: Have students respond to each of the following statements with either a "thumbs up" (I agree) or a "thumbs down" (I disagree). Discuss their responses.
 - We should try to love everyone, despite our differences.
 - We should learn tolerance for everyone, despite our differences.
 - The United States is a big melting pot.
 - We should celebrate our differences and remember our individual heritages.
 - When you become an American, you give up your native culture.
 - There used to be more prejudice in this country than there is today.
 - People who say that immigrants take jobs away from other citizens are wrong.
 - You should follow your dreams, no matter what.
 - If you want something badly enough, you can get it.
3. Discussion:

Persecution: What is prejudice? Have you ever experienced it? What is persecution? Have you ever known or read about someone who was disliked because he or she was different from other people? How was the person treated? Did anyone help? What are some examples of how prejudice has existed in this country from colonial times to the present? What groups of people have been most persecuted? Why? What about today? What can be done about continuing prejudice—abroad and in this country? What should you do if someone picks on you or your family?

Having a Dream: What does it mean to "have a dream"? What are some dreams people might have? What are yours? What are some people willing to give up for their dreams? What are you willing to give up for yours? Under what circumstances would you give up your

Chapters 1-2, Pages 3-21

Vocabulary

advanced 4
draped 15
dismal 19

despise 5
splayed 15
accommodating 19

misfortunes 10
staggering 16
menacing 20

forlorn 14
ecstatic 17
commemorate 20

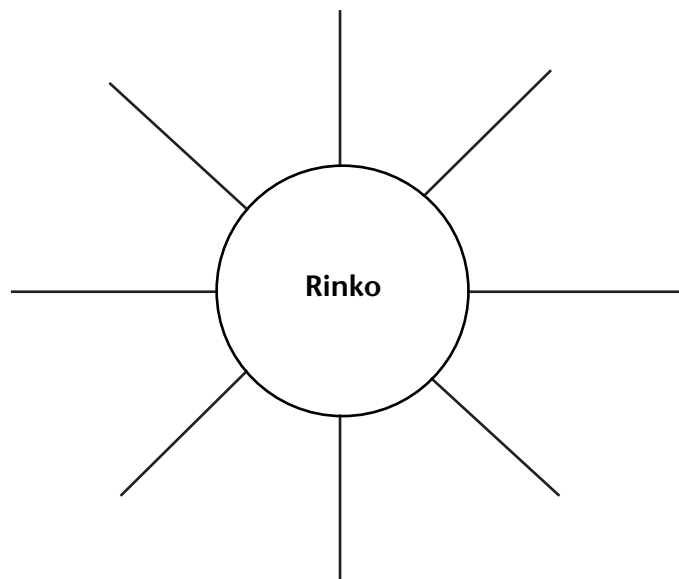
Vocabulary Activity

Have students answer these questions using one or more of the vocabulary words. (Answers in parentheses are sample answers. Accept any accurate sentence that contains a vocabulary word.)

1. How did Cal get his name? (*Uncle Kanda wanted to commemorate Cal's birth in California.*)
2. What does Maxwell the dog look like? (*A Basset Hound, he has long droopy ears, baggy draped skin, and splayed toes.*)
3. Why can't Rinko read Aunt Waka's letter? (*Rinko doesn't study much at language school, so her understanding of Japanese script is not very advanced.*)
4. Why is Mama so happy? (*She is ecstatic about the news that her sister is coming from Japan to visit.*)
5. Why does Rinko hate Mr. Starr? (*She has come to despise him because he yelled at her and called her "Jap."*)

Discussion Questions

1. What are your impressions of the narrator? (Draw the following graphic on the board and jot down student responses.)



(Rinko is Japanese American, 11 years old, wishes she weren't "different" from the white girls; likes to write in her notebook; can be "accommodating;" teases her little brother.) Is Rinko someone you would be friends with? Is she at all like you?

2. When Rinko finds the letter from Aunt Waka, how does she figure out that the letter has somehow stirred up her mother? *(Mama hasn't straightened up as she usually would; the letter and several other papers are scattered over the table; there are dirty dishes in the sink.)* Why doesn't Rinko read the letter? *(She can't read the Japanese characters.)* Why is she allowed to skip Japanese Language School? *(Mama was worried about Rinko's health; the school nurse had suggested more milk and fewer activities.)*
3. What is the setting of the story? How do you know? *(Rinko tells us that she lives in Berkeley and the letter is dated 5/1/35.)*
4. Why doesn't Rinko like to walk by the Starr Laundry? *(Once Wilbur Starr yelled at Rinko and Joji, calling them "Jap kids.")* Have you ever been in a situation like that? How did Rinko feel when Mr. Starr called her "Jap"? *(angry, frightened, ashamed)*
5. How do some of the white girls at school make Rinko feel? *(ashamed, left out)* How do you suppose she reacts? *(She probably doesn't say or do anything.)* What could she do? What would you do if someone called you names? If you were one of Rinko's teachers, what would you do? What would you do if you were one of her classmates and heard kids making ethnic slurs?
6. What is Papa's dream? *(to open a garage and repair shop)* Cal's? *(to become an engineer)* Rinko's? *(to become a teacher)* Do you think they will reach their goals? Do you believe that people can make their dreams come true if they work hard enough?
7. Why has Aunt Waka written the letter? *(She is coming for a visit.)* How does Mama feel about that? *(delighted)* Papa? *(He is preoccupied.)* Rinko? *(not so thrilled because she will have to give up her room)* Do you think that Aunt Waka has had a sad life? *(She has lost her husband and her only son.)*
8. Who is Joji? *(Rinko's younger brother)* Who is Cal? *(Rinko's older brother)* How do they get along with Rinko? *(They tease each other; Cal taunts Rinko; Rinko teases Joji about his dog's smell, threatens to tell on Joji for chipping ice off the block, teases Cal about his name.)*
9. How did Mama and Papa meet? *(Mama came to the U.S. to marry Papa in a marriage arranged by go-betweens.)* How would you like to have an arranged marriage?
10. **Prediction:** What will Aunt Waka be like? Will her visit be as unpleasant as Rinko expects?

Writing Activity

1. Imagine yourself in Rinko's room. Describe exactly what you see.
2. Rinko likes to write in her notebook. Write the entry she might have made the day Mr. Starr called her names.