



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
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## **The Delicate Marriage of Theatre and Film**

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Teaching theatre arts to modern American students is a continual defense against the slow, antagonizing attack against the art as a whole. American society is continually conditioning itself against the need, relevancy, and beauty inherent within live theatrical performance. The stage has been bought and sold by corporate entities for the glamour and glitter of money and fame versus the toil and sacrifice embodied within the steady production of a fine art. The artists whose sole purpose and desires are to create mirror reflections of the world colored with the hope and integrity for a brighter tomorrow are forced to sacrifice their passions. American society prefers its art as it does its food; cheap, fast, and on the run. We order our entertainment at the same time we order our Big Macs. It is misguided notions that create the fundamental challenge presented before theatre arts' teachers in this modern American society. How to stop the slow and steady annihilation of this most significant and powerful art form before a generation of students who feel that its time and worthiness has long since passed?

As a result of my fellowship in the Yale National Institute 2006 Seminar, *Stories around the World inFilm* I have created a theatre arts curriculum that could become a saving grace for the continuous study of theatre arts in the American classroom while reigniting passions for teaching theatre arts despite its challenges. **The Delicate Marriage of Theatre and Film** is a secondary theatre arts curriculum unit designed to introduce students to Classical Japanese Theatre and its representation in Japanese cinema. This celebration of Classical Japanese Theatre and film introduces students to the dramatic art forms of Noh, Bunraku, and Kabuki Theatre alongside a critical study of notable films whose fundamental cinematic and artistic elements are embedded within the stylized structure of Classical Japanese Theatre.

The journey of creating this exciting curriculum is motivated by my desire as an actress and educator to empower students with the fundamental elements of theatre. I want my students to become the next generation of powerful artists in this magnificent art form who truly create a substantial body of groundbreaking and courageous work.

Through the serious study of classical theatre, I feel my students will definitely be empowered with the tools and confidence to consciously create, produce, and perform theatrical works which inspire and affirm both themselves and their greater world community. To ensure that my goal is realistically attainable, the immediate responsibility upon my shoulders is to guide and instruct my students in a direction in which they have no other recourse but to become respectfully conscious creators of this exciting art form.

I teach theatre arts at an inner-city high school in Houston, TX. The school is located in southwest Houston,

which is regarded as one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in America. This diversity brings with it many challenges, not the least of which are the issues of socialized criminal behavior, gang violence, drugs, teen pregnancy, and drop-outs. Our school community has gallantly and courageously met the challenges of educating and socializing over 500 students who were traumatized and suddenly displaced by the negative effects of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. I deliberately strive to have a classroom environment that is welcoming, affirming, and relaxed. I use the basic fundamental benefits of a theatre arts education to ensure the success of my students: cooperation, consideration, and communication.

Through my continual efforts of igniting a true love and sincere respect for theatre, I direct my theatre arts department as a young "professional" company. With this, I choose a theme to be studied through course lectures, discussions and classroom reading materials as well as performed for audiences through our productions. The department produces seven plays per academic year. Of these seven plays, one is classical, one is a musical, and the remaining are contemporary plays which reflect and reinforce our chosen theme.

As I create this curriculum study, I can not resist reflecting upon my own training as a young actress. Not unlike many of my students, I was introduced to theatre through the graceful beauty of the religious performances at church. It was my church community which initially identified my strength for communication and stage performance. I remember the nuns encouraging me to leave the safety of our isolated community to go and gain more in-depth study and technique at Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts (HSPVA). With their guidance and rehearsal, I auditioned and was one of only a mere handful of students admitted to this highly prestigious and competitive high school with no prior formal theatrical training. My years of study at HSPVA were rigorous and extremely intense. Yet, as I gained more technical expertise with each passing day I felt the energy and vitality of my performances at church slipping away from me. The vitality of spiritual performance was replaced by the intense demand for technical structure through a strict format. I felt my creative energy literally becoming stifled.

In an effort to reunite myself with my initial love of stage performance, I continued my education in theatre through college. To my delight, I did find the creative energy I was looking for. This came through my observations of the jazz musicians on my campus. I was continuously awed by their ability to instantly connect and create powerful, exciting music with other musicians literally on the spot. Through conversations, several musicians remarked that it was this immediate performance ability that kept them on the verge of creation. They were always "in the moment" of their music because it was always new. Though the standards may be memorized and well-known to all, the beautiful nature of jazz allowed and encouraged each musician to bring new interpretations to the stage. This newness kept the stage "hot" with creative energy flow.

- All of the years of passionate struggle to understand the elusive essence of acting, has resulted in a bewildering array of systems, methods, theories and techniques. The actor is left with many questions: University training, or private study? Lee Strasberg, or Stella Adler? How is one to choose? Who are these people? What do they teach, and how did their ideas evolve?
- Most of the important teachers of acting have been actors themselves. They have grappled with the real world demands of their art and tried to extend its boundaries. They have intensely examined the process of acting and dedicated their lives to penetrating its mysteries. They have built upon the foundations laid down by their predecessors. (Brestoff, xii)

Professionally as an actress, I have been consciously seeking this constant creative flow of energy through stage performance. Admittedly, I have enjoyed great experiences onstage alongside some wonderful artists. I am honored to have been both directed and coached by legends of the American stage whose lessons on this

craft have literally left me spellbound. Yet I must honestly conclude that I think it is the nature of Western theatrical practices which most inhibits our performers from becoming both simultaneously lost and alive within the newness of constant creative energy. Unlike jazz musicians, theatre practitioners must rehearse for weeks at a time to master an illusion for our audiences to believe. Although trained actors are grounded with a strong foundation in improvisation, we are still guided and restrained by the artistic visions of the other artists (playwright, director) while onstage. Our challenge is to constantly stay "in the moment" of discovery during performance. This artistic challenge for theatre performers has led many to search for and create new methods of performance.

**The Delicate Marriage of Theatre and Film** is my conscious search for the energy and newness of stage performance that I immediately fell in love with through the religious performances I experienced in childhood. Historical studies of the origins of theatre supports the spiritual connection to my early religious performance experiences. Although theatre is now practiced as a truly western art form, it has its earliest foundations within the passion plays of early Africa.

The world's earliest report of a dramatic production comes from the banks of the Nile. It is in the form of a stone tablet preserved in a German museum and contains the sketchy description of one, I-kher-nefert (or Ikhernofret), a representative of the Egyptian king, of the parts he played in a performance of the world's first recorded "Passion" Play somewhere around the year 2000 B.C. This Egyptian Passion bears a notable resemblance to the Passion Plays of the twentieth century. Its purpose is obviously the same as that of the one at Ober-Ammergau, or the Tyrolean, or the Persian Passion Play of Hussein . . . the principal object, as always, being to keep vivid in the minds of the faithful the sufferings and triumph of a god. ([www.theatrehistory.com](http://www.theatrehistory.com))

These passion plays were actually highly ritualized religious events whose primary purpose was to gain favor with the Gods and/or deities for specific purposes such as supplying fruitful harvests, bringing sufficient rain for crops, and the well-being of the community. Many of theatre's fundamental elements are inherit within each passion play; the use of masks, costumes, dance, instrumentation, chanting and/or song. These rituals were highly participatory events wherein the entire community played a role. Unfortunately due to the nature of the oral tradition coupled with the struggles of Africa over time, very little has survived which can be used as an instructional guide for teaching and recreating these magnificent events as they were performed in Africa. Yet, to my amazement and delight, the classical theatre of Japan may be the truest living theatrical tradition of cultural stage performance which is most like the passion plays of early Africa.

"For a Samurai to be brave, he must have a bit of Black blood." Japanese Proverb

Experience has taught me that it is far better to be proactive in my teaching than reactive. I will begin this unit in precisely the same manner I have outlined this text: by clearly stating my objectives and motives for creating and teaching this curriculum. It is important that my students have an immediate sense of ownership of the work they study in class. I am constantly asked, "What does this have to do with me?" By approaching this curriculum from a historical and ethnological perspective, I am certain to gain the immediate attention and respect of most of my students, their parents, and community; which the majorities of which are descendants of Africa living in America. In doing so, my students will gain a more positive image of themselves and their ancestral global legacy while being introduced to a new culture.

Presbyterian minister Reverend James Marmaduke Boddy (1886-?), of Troy, New York, was a graduate of Lincoln and Princeton Universities, and the first known African-American writer to address the issue of the African presence in early China and Japan.

In "The Ethnology of the Japanese Race" Boddy attempted to document what he considered a prominent and indelible African strain running through early Japanese history, and that the Japanese people are, at least in part, "Asian Negroes". Reference the work of pioneer ethnologist and anthropologist James Cowles Prichard, M.D. (1786-1848),

"They are described as having peculiar features, 'crisp hair' and 'dark complexion'. Besides their Negro features, which are very observable, the early Japanese historians themselves have described for us the 'Black Barbarians of the South,' who, in an age which antedates authentic history, came from the south in ships and settled in Japan."

Rev. Boddy concluded by saying that:

"These immigrants mingled and amalgamated one with another and with the natives, and in time became a homogeneous race, whose predominating physical characteristics bespeak the unmistakable presence of a large Negro element."  
([www.cwo.com/~lucumi/boddy.html](http://www.cwo.com/~lucumi/boddy.html))

I teach theatre history using a large map of the world so that students can better identify the progression of the art form. I will employ this same method for tracing the theory of the above cited historian, Runoko Rashidi. Runoko Rashidi is a Pan-Africanist scholar who has spent years researching the African presence around the world as well as African foundations in early civilizations. Though Rashidi is not a theatre historian (and does not claim to be), his research definitely supports the obvious similarity between the passion plays of early Africa and Classical Japanese Theatre. His scholarly research gives detailed evidence as to how and why these elements came to be.

A team of scientists led by an anthropologist at the University of California-Berkeley has discovered the fossilized remains of what they believe is humanity's earliest known ancestor, a creature that walked the wooded highlands of East Africa nearly 6 million years ago.  
([http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2001/07/0712\\_ethiopianbones.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2001/07/0712_ethiopianbones.html))

The 2001 scientific discovery of human fossils in The Middle Awash River Valley of Ethiopia confirms that the human race descended from Africa. This irrefutable evidence can easily be used to further justify the African presence in early Japan. Referencing the world map, I will demonstrate the waterways which were most likely used by early African travelers to reach Japan. It is important to note that these early African travelers brought with them their culture, traditions, and religious beliefs.

"The Blackest people I have ever seen in my life are from India. Not from the Congo. You have another phenomenon in India in terms of religion and philosophy and culture — and that is Buddhism. If you look at all the early images of the Buddha, they are all Black. Kinky hair, tightly curled hair . . . very Africoid characteristics." (Runoko Rashidi, "Tony Brown's Journal")

It is important to note the African influence in early Buddhism because this directly supports why there are such strong similarities between the religious passion plays of early Africa and the earliest form of Classical

## NOH

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- Noh had a purpose beyond that of simple diversion. It too was a religious observance of a kind difficult for us to sense, impossible for us to re-create. Reading about the Noh theatre had not prepared me, except in the most elementary way, for what I had seen. The performance revealed a kind of theatre I had not imagined and could not understand, though I felt sure that, as with all great theatre, there was more to it than met the eye. (Nakamura, 9)
- The ancient gods had a hard time getting the world going out of chaos, but with the seventh generation the islands of Japan were created, and its creators also produced a sun goddess, Amaterasu, two other children, and Susano-o, a storm god who, pleasing no one, was banished to the land of darkness. Before leaving, he visited heaven to say goodbye to his sister, which he did in a curious and destructive fashion, climaxed by his flaying a piebald colt backwards and throwing it through the roof of Amaterasu's palace. His sister, furious, went into the rock cave of heaven and closed the door. The sun vanished. Here was, for all their difficulties, the greatest crisis the gods had faced. They made their offerings; they sang her hymns of praise, with no success. Then Ame no Uzume, the "heaven-alarming female," thought of something else. She started a fire, and when it was blazing, she overturned a tub, jumped on top of it, bared her breasts, raised her skirts, and singing an obscene song, danced. Her performance was so cheering that the gods shook heaven with their laughter. Curiosity getting the better of her, Amaterasu opened the door to see what was going on, and an enterprising deity pulled her out of the cave. The godlike way to meet adversity, it seems, is to brighten up the night of despair with lively song and dance. That's the only way to make the sun shine again. (Nakamura, 10)

I will begin this curriculum study of classical Japanese theatre with an in-depth discussion of Noh. Noh theatre is the oldest Japanese theatrical art form and has many of the performance elements of the passion plays found in early Africa. As with passion plays, Noh has its firm foundations deeply rooted within the spiritual and is performed not as a spectator event but as a participatory ritual experienced both by and for the entire community. Noh theatre emphasizes the Zen Buddhist ideals of simplifying life while acknowledging the beauty, grace, and significance of nature and man's relationship to it.

These Zen Buddhist ideals are clearly evidenced in the Japanese arts of painting, landscape design, flower arrangement, and gardening which flourished during this same era.

Noh theatre is a seven-centuries long dramatic tradition which is passed down from master to disciple or, more commonly, father to son. Though Noh continues its strong characteristics of song and dance rituals performed as a part of Tribal ceremonies and festivals, it has slowly developed into a more structured theatrical art form. Father and son, Kan'ani (1333-84) and Zeami (1363-1443) are credited with creating the form and structural elements of Noh theatre which continue to this date. Kan'ani became a well-known performer and respected dancer of Noh. He revolutionized Noh performance in 1368 when he used a kusemai dance, and ancient song and dance ritual, for the first time in a play called *Shirahige*. Zeami was trained in his father's performance practices of Noh and began performing with his father in 1374. Zeami soon became a great writer and scholar of Noh theatre.

Noh plays are commonly divided into two categories — Zeami's Phantasmal Noh or Present Noh. The difference between these two dramatic forms is the characterization within the plays. Phantasmal Noh contains the waki, a Buddhist Priest, a mountain warrior-priest, or a Shinto priest who lives in the real world. The play also contains a shite who lives in the world of the spirits. In Present Noh, the waki and the shite are characters who live on the same plane and time - some plays have these characters in direct conversation with one another. Despite these differences of characterization, all Noh plays have the fundamental principle of jo-ha-kyu. Jo is the slow, simple, dignified, and graceful introduction. Ha is the development of the play, containing the play's most important material thereby breaking the pace of the jo. Kyu is a short, quick, highly paced finish which always reverts back to the opening jo.

This predominance with the many levels of existence and the relationship of the spiritual world to the real world and vice versa is the fundamental characteristic of Noh Theatre. Noh lends us to experience the dimensions of Zen Buddhist philosophy by simplifying the present existence of its participants and performers; thereby it enables a greater concentration on the possibilities of spiritual knowledge which are not readily seen and common to all. This being said, the Noh stage is extremely bare and is covered and supported by carved beams which continue the ideal of simplicity. On the center wall of the stage is a painted single pine tree. The large emptiness of the stage is both accented and enhanced by the beauty of Japanese cypress from which it was created. The staging of Noh theatre supports the Zen Buddhist ideal of nothingness and space. The stage is a literal depiction of the clear mental focus required and attained through Buddhist meditative practices.

- When viewing a piece of sculpture it is important to remember that it is made up of the fullness of the space it occupies and the space which surrounds it. This surrounding space is rather vague and indefinite, and thus it might be better to say that it has a breadth which links it with the universe. The strongest characteristic of sculpture is that it exists as a definite individual form with limitless space. The space surrounding a piece of sculpture is similar to the blank spaces in a Japanese ink painting, which make a true masterpiece appear larger and more intense than it actually is. Zeami made the following interesting observation on this subject:
- "There are times when an audience says of an actor, 'He's best when he is doing nothing.' This is due to the secret inner movement of his heart and mind. The two main parts [song and dance] of a play, plus mime, are all performed with the body. The time 'when he is doing nothing' is the spaces between these physical aspects of his acting. The actor's strict care and concentration are the elements which make these still pauses interesting. He must be careful not to lose his intensity even down to the deepest recesses of his heart at such times as the movement after the end of his dance, song, dialogue, gesture, etc. The concentrated intensity in the depths of the actor's heart is sensed by the audience, and thus the silent pauses are made interesting." (Nakamura, 34)

The above cited quote directly speaks to my artistic desire for a more organic performance experience. Many theatrical scholars have commented on the beauty of stillness in stage performance. The challenge for the actor is how to achieve this nothingness organically and consistently on the western stage. What I have come to view as both a challenge and an incredible advantage of Noh, is the fact that there are no rehearsals prior to performance. Each participant has been trained for many years under the tutelage of a master making them well prepared for their role and/or responsibility in the performance. The participants simply meet once prior to the performance to gain awareness of one another's individual rhythms. This empowers each performance to become a new organic stage experience. The actors and performers are cautiously aware and "in the moment" of their performances as a result of the newness inherent within Noh. This characteristic nature of Noh Theater ensures that each performance is whole and new versus a duplicated pattern of set

events.

In Noh, then, we have a theatre in which performers create art directly instead of creating an illusion which the audience is to accept as real. In realistic drama each actor portrays one character through words, vocal and facial expressions, and movements. Events are shown (dramatized) rather than told (narrated). In Noh the entire ensemble unites to create one being, who is something more than a normal human. To accomplish this, Noh utilizes the narrative and lyric modes as well as the dramatic. (Bethe and Brazell, 15)

The use of masks in Noh Theatre is a symbolic element which enhances both the reality and stillness of the actor. Unlike Western theatrical practices, masks in Noh Theatre are not used to shield the actor. On the contrary! Masks are used to enhance the symbolic representation of the character's spirit with which the actor must communicate during this ritualistic performance. Each mask is believed to have separate powers and characteristics inherent within the character or spirit for which it was created. The challenge for the masked Noh actor is to communicate emotions through the magnificence of their physical movements. The actor's emphasis and mastery of physical movement is greatly enhanced by the slow, perfected nature of Noh theatre.

## **NOH Teaching Strategy**

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This unit will be taught using a variety of methods and resources. Students will begin viewing short video selections on theatre history and the African presence in early Asia as a part of our historical introduction. Through visual documentations, students will observe Noh staging and performance techniques before we begin a class reading of a Noh play written by Zeami. It is important to note that my goal is to have students gain an understanding for the theatrical art form prior to being introduced to the filmmaker's interpretation. It is my hope that this method will ensure that students have gained the knowledge and confidence to identify the film's Noh elements on their own. Students will view the Noh film selection just prior to beginning their major Noh performance project which is outlined in further detail at the end of this curriculum.

## **Japanese Film Series**

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The films selected for this curriculum study have been primarily selected for their heavy reliance upon the elements of Classical Japanese Theatre. I strongly encourage teachers to view each film in this series privately before sharing the film with your students. In doing so, you will have the opportunity to judge whether the subject matter and/or images are appropriate for your particular student and community population. In addition to a private film screening, I also suggest that you write a brief letter of explanation of this curriculum unit to your parents with a short synopsis of each film requesting for them to sign permission slips allowing their children to view the film selections. In my experience I have found parents truly appreciate the consideration given to them prior to the implementation of a lesson. By using this proactive method of communication, I have also encountered little opposition to my subject matter and teaching materials beyond the request for additional explanations and/or discussion.

## Throne of Blood

This film series will begin with a screening of Akira Kurosawa's **Throne of Blood**. Chosen for its depiction of Noh theatre elements, **Throne of Blood** is Kurosawa's breathtaking film interpretation of William Shakespeare's **Macbeth**. Akira Kurosawa is undoubtedly one of Japan's greatest filmmakers and is credited for bringing Japanese arts onto the world stage. His use of world classical literature as the basis for Japanese cultural interpretations coupled with his ingenious film style truly sets him amongst the greatest filmmakers in the world.

"A Noh play with its three-part structure: Jo, Ha and Kyu (intro, destruction, haste) is a good structure for a screenplay."

("Kurosawa: A Documentary on the Acclaimed Director")

**Throne of Blood** is regarded by some film critics as one of the best film adaptations of William Shakespeare's **Macbeth** to date. Kurosawa masterfully keeps much of the textual elements of Shakespeare's play in tact while embracing his dramatic Japanese Noh interpretation of the play in film. **Throne of Blood** stars Kurosawa's longtime collaborator Toshiro Mifune as Washiza (Macbeth) and legendary Japanese stage actress Isuzu Yamada as Lady Washizu (Lady Macbeth). As in **Macbeth** this film is about the greed and desire for power and revenge at any costs. It is also about the innate power of persuasion that a woman may have over her lover.

"I have them repeat their lines and gradually proceed to the movements. This is done with costume and makeup from the beginning."

("Kurosawa: A Documentary on the Acclaimed Director")

Though many elements of Noh theatre can be identified in this film, the greatest and most notable are the acting styles which have definitely set this film in a class and genre all its own. Toshiro Mifune gives a completely mesmerizing performance as the power hungry Washiza. Notice the quality of his movements and the vocalization of his lines throughout the film. These are all Noh acting techniques masterfully adapted to film!

"Until the shooting — until the first day of rehearsals be a blank page, bring nothing to the role." ("Kurosawa: A Documentary on the Acclaimed Director")

Isuzu Yamada gives one of the most hauntingly astounding performances on film I have ever seen in her role as Lady Washizu, Washiza's ruthless and most calculating wife. I truly appreciated Kurosawa's Noh theatrical interpretation for this film the more I watched Yamada's command of energy and movement during her performance. It felt like a live theatre experience!

In **Kurosawa: A Documentary on the Acclaimed Director** (2000), Isuzu Yamada is interviewed on her experience being directed by Kurosawa during the filming of **Throne of Blood**. Speaking extremely highly of the respect and warm regard she holds for Kurosawa, Yamada remembers the struggle she endured mastering the techniques of Noh theatre for her performance. She says that Kurosawa was adamant that her face remain stiff and unmoving as a mask. Her eyes were not to blink and her head was not allowed to make sudden movements of any kind. She was literally directed to control her physical and emotional self as if she were wearing a heavy mask on her face; thereby she forced all emotion to be displaced through her subtle



body language and intense vocal variations. Yamada remembers a moment when after taping a scene; Kurosawa made her tape the scene again because she blinked her eyes.

For students gaining the invaluable experience of this curriculum, *Throne of Blood* is truly an "actor's film on acting." This film effectively demonstrates the necessity for actors to gain complete control of their vocal, physical, and mental tools. After viewing this film, I am confident that students will gain the motivation to learn the techniques necessary for Noh performance.

## Bunraku

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Bunraku is the classical Japanese theatrical form of doll theatre or what is more commonly referred to as puppetry. Bunraku developed in the early 15th century with plays mostly which were mostly legendary, historical, or heroic in nature. Unlike Noh, Bunraku plays were more secular in nature. Performances featured puppets which were each handled by one puppet master throughout the play. Bunraku plays were told through a vocally powerful narrator whose responsibility it was to communicate the emotional intensity and sensibility of the character puppets onstage. This narrator was usually a mature actor whose considerable years of experience and training gave him enormous stage presence before an audience. The narrator was usually onstage alongside a younger musician who played the classical Japanese string instrument samisen. Together the presence and pairing of both performers create a unique experience and performance element of Bunraku.

A discussion of Bunraku theatre is synonymous with playwright, Chikamatsu Monzaemon. Born in 1653 to samurai parents, Chikamatsu became a major playwright for both the Bunraku and Kabuki theatres. To the delight of many, Chikamatsu created an entirely new literary genre known as townsfolk plays. His plays described the lives of his contemporaries and actual events. The most famous of these was the real life love suicide in May of 1703, in which a young merchant and a prostitute committed suicide at the Sonezaki Shrine in Osaka. Chikamatsu just happened to be visiting the city at the time of the suicides and was so inspired that he immediately wrote his Bunraku play *The Love Suicides at Sonezaki* and produced it a month later. Chikamatsu felt that art exists between the real and the unreal, which is certainly evidenced through the play of puppets imitating real life tragic events of his plays.

Chikamatsu wrote for both Bunraku and Kabuki stage. He broke with the tradition of plots based on supernatural and supernatural and spectacular action. In the course of his career he produced more than a hundred Bunraku plays. Seventy-nine were classified as jidaimono (historical drama), which dealt with events in the lives of samurai and aristocrats. Twenty-four were classified as sewamono (domestic drama) since they depicted sensational events and scandals among commoners. (McDonald, 20)

Chikamatsu's popularity grew as he continued to create characters whose struggle to love was denied by their lack of freedom amidst the oppressive expectations of their society, culture, and class. The fates of his characters' lives were controlled by entities and powers outside themselves. Man is helpless against the will of society and utterly powerless in controlling his own fate. Chikamatsu created characters whose emotional struggle for freedom and love rendered them with no alternative but to seek the freedoms afforded by death. Irony lies in the theatrical nature of Bunraku; whereas puppets (characters) are literally controlled in every aspect throughout the play by their puppet masters right up to the final and ultimate scene of death.

Regarded as Japan's literary answer to England's William Shakespeare, Chikamatsu's lover suicide plays inspired a sharp rise in lover suicides. These suicides became so prevalent that the government responded by actually making the act of suicide illegal.

Bunraku made several technical advancements during this time in regards to puppetry. Prior to the popularity of Chikamatsu's townsfolk plays, puppets were large enough to be seen by an audience yet small enough to be handled by one puppet master. Considerable advancements were made resulting in the puppets becoming  $\frac{3}{4}$  actual human size with movable eyes and fingers. These advancements in puppetry made it necessary for three separate puppet masters to handle a single puppet at one time. The puppet master who controls the head is the lead master for that particular puppet. The additional two puppet masters control either side of the puppet enabling the puppet to perform various movements such as walking, dancing, etc. All puppet masters dress in black with their heads and faces covered in an especially thin black material. This is an artistic device of Bunraku which manipulates the audience's focus from the puppet master to the puppet itself.

## Bunraku Teaching Strategy

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The Bunraku segment of this curriculum is certain to become a memorable one. After students have been introduced to the theatrical elements of Bunraku, they will then be instructed to view a series of wonderful websites devoted to the education of this classical art form. In contrast to the Noh learning segment of this curriculum, I will have students screen the Bunraku film selection immediately after the elements of this theatrical style have been discussed. Doing so will give students a better understanding of the unique elements required of this performance style. After an effective foundation of teaching has been made, students will enjoy the experience of writing their own Bunraku plays and creating the puppets for their performances.

### Double Suicid

**Double Suicide** is an artful film adaptation of Chikamatsu Monzaemon's famous *The Love Suicide at Amijima*.

**Double Suicide** is an elegant film interpretation of the 1720 tragedy directed by Shinoda Masahiro. Masahiro masterfully blends the elements of Bunraku theatre in each element of this film. It is easy to see that every aspect of this film was given careful consideration and respect to the Bunraku performance style. This said, a teacher can easily use this film to have students focus on single or multiple performance elements such as acting, costume, staging, and lighting design to name a few. For the purposes of this curriculum, I will direct students to be open to the magnificence of each element while paying particular attention to the acting and performance techniques used.

**Double Suicide** begins with a captivating scene backstage at a Bunraku theatre just before a performance. These opening scenes are very important because they give students a clear and unrestricted view of the preparation and technical expertise required of this performance style. Shinoda effectively shows the puppet master discussing the preparation for the final love suicide scene which is to be performed by puppets before he cuts to human actors who perform the Bunraku play from its beginning. Throughout the film, live actors are controlled by puppet masters. At strategic moments throughout the film Shinoda stops the action onstage in order for the puppet master to set-up the next scene. This technique effectively reinforces the idea of a

person's fate being literally beyond their control. I must admit that a true appreciation and understanding of this film can only be made with an understanding of Bunraku theatre. I strongly advice you to select a scene from the film to identify who the puppet masters are before students begin referring to the men in black as "ninjas."

## Kabuki

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The Kabuki does not represent the purest form of Japanese cultural expression. But it provides a comprehensive insight into average Japanese tastes and reveals much of Japanese culture not expressed in the No or in doll theatre. (Ernst, 2)

Kabuki theatre is the third form of classical Japanese theatre and is also the most commonly recognized. This highly developed art form began as "Women's Kabuki", a popular dance performance first performed by the actress and dancer Okuni in October of 1629. Her performance was so sensual and enticingly popular to the upper classes of male society that the government became cautious and immediately banned women from the stage citing the fact that many of the female Kabuki performers were prostitutes and thereby highly immoral to society. The banning of women on the stage did not diminish the popularity of Kabuki. The female performers were soon replaced with young, long-haired attractive boys who were trained and dressed as women for the Kabuki stage. The popularity of young men onstage impersonating females and dancing sensually became enormously popular. In the 17th century, "Young Men's Kabuki" success became so great that authentic women have never return to the Kabuki stage to play themselves. Young Men's Kabuki became so popular amongst the samurai society that men began fighting over boys during performances. This breakdown within the culture of the samurai prompted the government to again place a ban on Kabuki. This time young boys were not allowed onstage. This resulted in the currently practiced form known as "Men's Kabuki" where grown men became female impersonators in Kabuki. The rise in the popularity of female impersonators made it necessary to study new make-up techniques to ensure the illusion of femininity was created. This necessity created Kumadori — a special make-up and application technique designed especially for female impersonators. A declaration from the early days of Kabuki suggests its power.

People are easily influenced by the behavior of actors and prostitutes. Recently there has been a tendency for even high ranking people to use the argot of actors and prostitutes. This habit has become a kind of fashion, and people think that those who do not use such words and phrases are rustics. I am ashamed that this is so. Such a tendency will result in the collapse of the social order. It is therefore necessary to segregate actors and prostitutes from ordinary society. (Ernst, 6)

The popularity of Kabuki continued to flourish among the higher classes of society despite governmental laws enacted to create separation between the classes. Acting became criminal. A series of laws were created to ensure that actors did not rise in the ranks of societal power as a result of the money they were paid in Kabuki.

Although Kabuki is most known for its female impersonators, numerous advancements in stage technology currently practiced around the world were created as a direct result of Kabuki, two of which are the revolving stage and the trap door. The revolving stage made it possible to change scenes quickly and more efficiently

during a performance. Inspired by a spinning top, a large circular sub-floor was created just above the stage floor and placed on a rotating axis. A 360 degree set was then built atop this circular sub-floor. This advancement in stage technology allowed an audience to literally see a character walk from the front door of a house and around to the back door without interruption. The trap door is an opening in the stage's floor space which, when opened, allowed cranes of different sizes to bring everything from actors to large set pieces onto the main stage before the audience with very little disruption. Each of these technological advancements ensured the audience's enjoyment of a truly spectacular and larger than life production.

### **Kabuki Teaching Strategy**

The film segment of Kabuki Theatre will begin with selected footage from Kon Ichikawa's "An Actor's Revenge". The chosen footage will highlight the film's opening Kabuki theatre scenes. After students have viewed and discussed "An Actor's Revenge", Yasujiro Ozu's "Floating Weeds" will be viewed in its' entirety. This film was chosen for the cinematic techniques Ozu employs and for the subtle beauty of its storyline.

#### *An Actor's Revenge*

As a punitive assignment for a string of meticulously perfectionist but commercially unsuccessful films, Kon Ichikawa was tasked with the re-adaptation of an outmoded novel by Otokichi Mikami entitled *An Actor's Revenge*, and consequently, together with his wife and frequent collaborator, screenwriter Natto Wada, turned the banal pulp *shimpa* melodrama into a delirious, highly stylized, and idiosyncratic spectacle. Originally adapted into a three-part serial film by Teinosuke Kinugasa in 1935-36 (who himself had a career as a *kabuki onnagata* — a stage actor of female roles — before becoming a director) and featuring the original lead from the Kinugasa adaptation, veteran actor Kazuo Hasegawa for a performance that would mark his 300th film appearance, *An Actor's Revenge* tells the story of Yukinojo Nakamura (Kazuo Hasegawa), a renowned 19th century, Tokugawa-era *onnagata* consumed with one obsession throughout his entire life: to avenge his parents' death. (Acquarello, "An Actor's Revenge." February 2003 June 10, 2006)

*An Actor's Revenge* is most notable for its excellent use of Kabuki Theatre. The film opens with the main character onstage during a Kabuki performance when suddenly he looks out into the audience and notices the powerful, wealthy man who is responsible for his parent's death. Throughout the film this character is seeking revenge for his parent's death through the utter destruction of this powerful man.

What I found most compelling about this film was that the fact that the main character chooses to never forgo his stage female personae in real life. In Kabuki he plays a woman and in the character's personal life he continues to carry himself as a woman. I must admit being confused that, while in female personae, he is able to attract the love and commitment of other women who desire him as a man. A man dressed as a woman. Though I realize that this plot is not completely unbelievable for some, I just question if secondary students might get off-task with discussion and commentary while viewing this film. This said I will only show the first opening scenes at the Kabuki theatre in an effort to keep my students on task and focused.

#### *Floating Weeds*

"Floating weeds, drifting down the leisurely river of our lives," has long been a favored metaphor in Japanese prose and poetry. This plant, the *Ukigusa* (duckweed in English), floating aimlessly, carried by stronger currents, is seen as emblematic of our own journey. And sometimes, this identity is made explicit — in the lives of traveling actors, for example." (Richie, "Stories of

Floating Weeds" )

Yasujiro Ozu's ***Floating Weeds*** is a classic lesson in elegant filmmaking techniques. This movie is about a traveling Kabuki actor who returns to the small town where his estranged wife and son live. As is often the case with homecomings, the actor must face many harsh realities of life as he struggles to regain a sense of placement within the family he walked away from in search of stardom in the Kabuki Theatre.

I selected ***Floating Weeds*** as the feature film for the Kabuki theatre study for many reasons. Throughout the film are intimate scenes of the challenges and responsibilities traveling actors must face daily as a result of their profession. This film is ripe with thematic elements for my students to discuss and elaborate upon such as the conflict between age and youth, class divisions, oppression, and love. Students should easily be able to grasp the theme of "floating" and the cinematic ploys Ozu employed throughout this film to continue this theme. Ultimately, students will get a clear understanding of Kabuki Theatre and its culture as a result of viewing ***Floating Weeds***.

## Lesson Plan One: Experiencing NOH

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Topics: Theatre Arts, Acting, Music, Dance, Playwriting

Sub Topics: Cultural Studies, History, English, Reading, Writing

I suggest implementing this lesson directly after completing the Noh segment of this curriculum study.

1. Select a Noh play to read together as a class. Discuss the play's dramatic elements as students visualize how its' actual production.
2. Using improvisation, select various students to dramatize the different elements of the play before the class (including the instrumentation and use of mask acting). After each Noh improvisation, students will discuss the positives and negatives of each performance as they relate to Noh production elements.
3. Divide class into cooperative groups of three to four students. Using the Noh play as their guide, assign each group to write an original Noh play of their own. Each original Noh play must contain the same characterizations and elements found in classical Noh.
4. Each cooperative group will perform their play before the class for critic and discussion.

## Lesson Plan Two: Puppet Play

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Topics: Theatre Arts, Acting, Visual Arts, Playwriting

Sub Topics: Cultural Studies, Creative Writing

This lesson plan is designed for the Bunraku Theatre segment of this curriculum. I suggest implementing the beginning of this lesson just after your introduction to Bunraku so that the puppets will be near completion before the film is viewed. In doing so, the students are able to use the film as a clear guide for the rehearsal

and performance phase of this lesson.

1. Divide students into collaborative groups of four. Using the plays of Chikamatsu Monzaemon, each group should write their own puppet play. Students may decide to write either a jidaimo — legendary or historical — or sewamono — a play that is about more contemporary people.
2. After the plays are completed, students are to begin constructing their puppets. Each play must have at least one puppet. The puppet construction may become as broad and varied as your classroom resources allow. If resources are limited, do not be dismayed. Wonderful puppets can be constructed by recycling everyday household items such as the cardboard roll of paper towels, old fabric, balloons, newspaper and glue. The head of the puppet is constructed using the paper mache method of a balloon, newspaper, and glue. Detailed instructions can easily be found on various websites. After the head is constructed, use a wire cloths hanger as the neck and shoulder body of the puppet. Attach the head to the top of the hanger with floral wire and hot glue. The paper towel rolls are attached to either end of the hanger becoming the puppet's arms. Lastly, drape the puppet with fabric to cover the puppet's construction. Allow students to create the puppets face with paint and/or markers as best suits their production.
3. Each cooperative group will perform their play before the class for critic and discussion.

## Lesson Plan Three: Creating New Theatre Experiences

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Topics: Theatre Arts, Dance

Sub Topics: Cultural Studies, Creative Writing, Movement

This lesson is designed as a final culmination performance project after students have been fully introduced to Classical Japanese Theatre. As a result of this exciting curriculum unit, students should produce thought-provoking and engaging theatrical performances.

1. In cooperative groups of three to five actors, students are to select a scene from a classical plays, such as William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.
2. Using their knowledge of Classical Japanese Theatre, students are to produce their scene using elements from each of the classical styles studied.
3. Each cooperative group will perform their scene before the class for critic and discussion.

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