

Grade Seven Student Work

During the first half of each unit we work together to explore life in a particular culture, over a particular period of time. Students read assigned chapters from their Enki Book. Then, in class, we work more deeply with the issues raised in the readings, through discussion, peer-writers workshop, writing assignments, and art work.

Some of these writing assignments are done as a group, with each student taking on a section of the story, from a particular perspective (usually one of their choice), and then the teacher puts these together into a coherent review or retelling of the story. Other times students write their own complete essay on the topic, making use of the writers workshop to get peer feedback on their ideas and execution.

Once the cultural and historical ground is established, we shift into the “Peer Project” section of the class. The primary goal now is for the students to learn the art of self-respectful compromise: how do they bend on group decisions without giving up something core for themselves. Then they to learn to work with one another’s strengths and weaknesses, desires and aversions. Finding creative approaches to taking the content further through research, writing, art work, and technological opportunities is an ongoing undertaking.

Excerpts of different kinds of writing, and some associated art work, follow, as well as links to sample projects done by peer groups. This Unit began with the story of Zhung Ha (aka Zheng He) in his boyhood in southern China. Zhung Ha traveled throughout the story with us, eventually becoming one of the first great navigators in history - a hundred years before Columbus and company.



Excerpts from Group Writing Undertaking: The study of Ancient China brought with it opportunities for writing about many different time periods, events, and people. In the sample pieces below, the students told of daily life in ancient China and of the life and teachings K'ung Fuzi (Confucius), writing different sections and combining these into a full story.

IN THE MARKET

The first rays of the sun peeked over the horizon as Gan-Ma set up his banner. The air was fresh and every blade of grass was sparkling with dew. "It looks like it is going to be a busy day," thought Gan-Ma as he finished setting up his banner. Gan-Ma was right.

The market was hopping that day, so Gan-Ma was busy all morning and into the afternoon. At lunch time the market was almost empty but for a few children.



Then suddenly, shouts and curses rang out all over the market. Gan-Ma saw boys running all over the place, tagging the banners that were in front of shops. The banners streamed out like flags in the wind. Gan-Ma hurried outside to stop the boys from tagging his banner. As he hurried across his shop, Gan-Ma saw a boy hiding behind the stall next to his. It was Ma Ha. Gan-Ma had seen him before, when Ma Ha was running errands for his mother. Zu-ling, who sold meat, said that Ma Ha's father worked for the government.

Now that Gan-Ma thought of it, he had never seen Ma Ha tagging banners before. "Finally, a kid with some sense," Gan-Ma thought as he ran to his banner. But he was too late. A boy had tagged Gan-Ma's banner. Grumbling and cursing, Gan-Ma fixed his banner and went back into his shop.

~Haydn

JA HELPING MA HA FIND HIS INNER DRAGON

My brother and the older boys were teasing me because I was scared to hit the banners at the market. I hid and felt scared. I went home feeling like a coward. My sister, Ja, asked me, "Are you ready to find your inner dragon?" She has been encouraging me to brave. She tells me stories to help me understand about demons.

My next trip to the market, I hit a banner. It felt good and bad. Good because I finally had the courage, bad because I didn't want to upset the vendors or get into any trouble. Still, I felt proud. My sister is nice and helps me by looking after me. She knows what I need. She sees more courage in me than I see in myself some days.

~Josie

A FLY ON THE WALL

Fly the fly buzzed through the market, looking for a meal. He tasted the air and found a hot current of steam wafting gently from a pork dumpling stand. Stealthily, he flew towards the dumpling stand, alighting under a bowl near the vendor's wok, where the pork dumplings were frying, glistening enticingly with fat. But he knew better than to fly into the pan. He felt the heat, and he knew that if he was to fly into the hot wok, he would be, quite literally, fried.

So Fly, twitching with anticipation, instead waited for small pieces of food to be flung out of the pan whenever the dumpling-seller gave it a vigorous stir. As he waited impatiently, he watched two boys run toward the stands. As the children passed the pork stand, he saw one of them cover his nose and mouth, and say to the other: "I don't know how people can eat that dirty meat — we Muslims do not eat dirty pigs. Hurry, let's get to the beef — that smells good!"

So the boys ran on toward the beef kabobs, a few stands down. Fly buzzed in confusion. He thought pork — fatty, and full of protein — was the best thing in the world. How could anyone dislike it? With his preference for pig, Fly would certainly not be joining the ranks of the Muslims anytime soon.

~Kai

Group Writing: The Life of Master Ch'iu

Ch'iu lived by a small town in a little house with one room. The night before Ch'iu was born, a unicorn came to his mother in a dream and said Ch'iu would grow up to be a great man. So Ch'iu's mothers taught him all she could. She told him stories of emperors from the Xai ,Shang and Zhou Dynasties. And the great deeds of his father, who had died when Ch'iu was a baby. When Ch'iu was eight years old, his mother told him that she had no more to teach him. But she knew someone who could.

When K'ung Ch'iu was eight years of age, his mother took him to Master Lan, one of the only people left in the region who still knew and practiced the "Six Arts," skills used by royalty



in times gone by. Over the years, wise Master Lan taught K'ung Ch'iu calligraphy, chariot-riding, archery, mathematics, and rites – but not music, because Master Lan had not mastered that particular art.

The master owned instruments, and when K'ung Ch'iu asked about them, Lan replied “The stringed-singers remind me how small I am, and help me hold humility as the highest of virtues.” Because Master Lan had mastered all the other arts, and by not mastering the last one, he distanced himself from the perception of perfection. This must have had a large impact on the young K'ung Ch'iu, as humility features largely in ‘Confucian’ philosophy.

CH'IU'S PURPOSE IN LIFE

I wake up. I feel that something is going to be bad and good. I am reluctant to go to Master Lan's. When I get there, Master Lan looks older. When I ask him about the stringed-singers he responds that he has taught me all he knows.

Next, I went to a duke's palace. I started out working in the counting houses. My knowledge in mathematics was very helpful. Day after day, I inspected bags of grain and wheat. One day, a great war broke out. After the battle, I peered out, and saw a music master walking toward me, carrying a stringed-singer. I asked to study with him, and he accepted me. Day after day I tried, but the music was nothing less than hell in decibels! The music master soon asked me to give up, but I persevered, and one day I got it.



After this, the Duke said that I could look after his herds, and I left the grain houses for this new point in life. The children of the Duke asked me to teach them the old ways. I found myself teaching kids of both royal and peasant birth. I knew that I had found my purpose in life.

Another example comes from the 2016 group's choice to write about the Mongol Women Warriors, who were revered by Genghis and Khubilai Khan.

Joshua



As I was trying to talk to the people to show them I would rule wisely, I kept getting interrupted.

"You could never rule us!" yelled one man.

"Will she respect how we do things!" roared another.

"What was Genghis Khan thinking!" It went on and on.

"Listen!" I said, "I have been informed of all your religions and I promise to rule you fairly." But they still wouldn't listen.

I obviously needed some protection as a rebellion was likely to form, but I did not have the resources or men to quell one. It might be time to tell Father of my predicament, I thought. I will send messengers tonight then I will see what Father will do.

As I woke up the next morning, I wondered if the messengers had reached Father, and if so what would he do about it. I needed more men, but Father was off conquering more land for our people. Would he send soldiers, or would he come himself, or would he send a fair amount of the army - if Father did, would he have enough men.

All these thoughts ran through my head as I walked down the hall for breakfast. I decided I would find out when it happened, right now I needed to focus on the task at hand: stopping a rebellion without the resources to hold my own. I sure was in a predicament, I hoped I could do it.

Hannah

I watch Alaqai getting ready to move so far away, as all her sisters before her have done. I know I have taught her well, but am sad just the same. But I can't cry, I just can't in front of my children it would be unthinkable. I must keep it in for Alaqai's sake.

Alaqai turns her right cheek to me and I sniff her so I might remember her scent when she is so far away. She turns her head showing me her other cheek

"No," I say.

I must see her again

"I will sniff the left cheek when you return."



She smiles, knowing we will meet again. She mounts her horse and starts riding away, not looking back but straight ahead, as I have taught; into her future .I turn back towards the ger, pick up a pail of milk, and, turning back towards my beautiful Alaqai, I wave a spoon full of milk in the air so she will have a white road of peace to follow as she fades into the distance - going.....going.....gone.

I set the pail down and run far from the ger, behind a large patch of grass, to the place I have always gone to shed so many tears. A place I go so that children will not see me. I lay down and cry into the mother of all as I have many times before. I know she will keep my tears safe from the children, as she has for ten years, ten long years of heart pain and sorrow and as she will for many more long years to come.

Rebecca

I turn to my horse; he is a proud black beast full of the power and stamina of the wind. I glance back at my mom for a moment; she is standing small and pale next to her white camel. I try to say something to her, something to sooth her, some way to tell her that I will come back a queen. But standing there holding the leather reigns that are a bridge to my new life, I realize there is nothing to do but turn around, climb on the back of this magnificent beast, and become a daughter worthy of the tiger before me.

I can hear the pound of my heart and the horse's become one with the wind. But even as I stare down at the grass blurred with speed, I find my thoughts wandering home. I remember being a small child with not a care in the world, running under the big blue sky; I remember drinking the fermented horse milk and laughing at my mustache. But mostly I remember mother; her beautiful smile, endless patience and her calm graceful demeanor that had surrounded my childhood in a warm fuzzy blanket. I shake my head, that's all behind me now. I am at this very moment, speeding towards the people I must make respect me; the people who will become my legacy; the people who are now my family in all but blood. So I straighten my back, tighten my hands on the reigns and turn to my new life like the proud tiger I am.



Students also did a variety of assignments, including writing poetry about Khubilai Khan's world.

Dash - Khanbalik

*The boats
the only disturbance
in the canals that
stretch far into the
horizon
will keep fading
like smoke
from a house
along the avenue of water.*

*Canals stretch for miles
Blessed with eternal grace
Moving with the moon
Gentle and carefree
Only to be disturbed
By boats floating along.*

Khanbalik

*Busily Rushing Feet
Inside overflowing markets
Hastily gathering bountiful goods*

*Busy crowds, loud and proud
People bustle quickly
People dodging one another*

*Cobblestone streets
Wide and straight empty suddenly
Thundering hooves pound
As men race to extinguish the fire.*

*red flower fighters
with buckets of water
will come to your rescue
as soon as the flower comes to you home
and tries to murder you*

*Pounding hooves run up and down
to each and every gate
stopping intruders
from coming in
and spilling
blood on their breast plates*



Castle at Khanbalik

*Silently standing
Walls
Around the big palace
Menacingly protect the royal family*

*Gleaming in the sunlight
High white walls as far as the eye can see
A grand palace, safe within.*

*Gold and silver
Sparkle in the sunlight
Palace walls of dragon and firebird.*

*Along straight streets
Stand market and temple
Mosque and church.*

The Grand Canal

*Slaves dead here,
Slaves dead there,
Half of three million,
Dead everywhere.*

*All for the sake,
Of the construction,
Of the grand canal.*

*To connect the kingdom,
Far and near,
To bring news,
And other wares,
From there to here,
And Everywhere.*



*Loud running hoofbeats,
Go across bumpy paths,
To take and receive the long rolled up scrolls.
Water rolls endlessly onward
Sliding now beneath arching stone bridges
My feet rock me as I float into Quinsai.*

*Busy people walk the paths
to the bath
Men and women go through separate doors
awaiting to wash and relax
sliding into the tub
sore muscles loosen
and foggy heads clear*