



Project-based Learning: Teaching about Okinawa

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A Thematic EFL Unit about Okinawa

This article is about a project-based EFL unit on Okinawa that I designed for Japanese high school and college students. I piloted the unit at my university, which has quite a few students from Okinawa, and also at various high schools which take students on school excursions to Okinawa.

The reason I chose the topic of Okinawa is that it's the only place in Japan where a major land battle was fought during World War II. More than 200,000 out of 800,000 people in Okinawa were killed. I believe that Japanese young people should know more about this history.

The relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps Futenma Air Station in Okinawa is a hot issue in Japan. Through the media, I have followed the Japanese Government's policy as well as the reactions of people in Okinawa. I have been very moved by the strong feelings they have of being discriminated against, even by Japanese living on the mainland. It is impossible to understand their feelings fully, but I believe we have to do something to deepen our understanding of their situation and take action to alleviate their burden.

For this EFL unit, I designed my own teaching activities. These include the story of "The Girl with the White Flag" about a 6-year-old girl who survived the 1945 Battle of Okinawa. This is mentioned in the high school text *Cosmos Reading*.

Step 1: Introduction to Okinawa

The first step in my Okinawa unit is an introduction to the topic. First, I bring realia such as CDs of Okinawan music and Okinawan food to class and challenge the students' five senses by repeating "What's this?" Students brainstorm among themselves, then list what they know about Okinawa. To test their knowledge, I recommend the *Okinawa Awareness Quiz* (right) printed with Jerry Burks' article in GILE Newsletter #35 (June 1999). This can be accessed at <www.gilesig.org>.

Step 2: Deepening Students' Understanding

The second step is for students to deepen their learning. This stage of the unit consists of 5 parts.

- In the first class, students make pairs or groups and then do research on a particular topic they have chosen regarding Okinawa.
- Next, they make class presentations on their research. In my seminar, students dealt with topics such as sugarcane, Okinawan food, coral

reefs and U.S. military bases. When students are not presenting, they listen, ask questions and write comments in their worksheets.


- Then, students listen to a *kamishibai* paper theater performance of the story of *The Girl with the White Flag*, made by one of my students. After listening, I read the story again and have students match the pictures to the passages and put them in order. Next, they do a role-play and act the story out. At the end of the lesson, they write comments about the story.
- In the next class, students watch a documentary film on the Japanese girls who worked as nurses during World War II in Okinawa. They were called *Himeyuri* (*lilies*). After watching the video, they put the most impressive words which remain in their minds into English and read these aloud to their classmates.
- In the final class, students read newspaper articles, then hold a discussion and debate on the issue of relocating the US Futenma Airbase.

Step 3: Student Production and Study Tour

The third step is for students to create posters and speeches, then to actually visit Okinawa.

- First, they collaborate to make a group poster. To do this, they draw a map of Okinawa and color in the U.S. military bases. Next, they write peace poems round the island of Okinawa on their map. They also make a historical chart of Okinawa. Their posters are displayed on the classroom walls or school walls in the corridor.
- Then, students make English speeches about peace. As a model, they read the English version of the famous speech by Ms. Sugako Nakamura, an Okinawan high school student (Muroi & Potter, 2000 pg. 24). Students write speeches in English about peace and deliver them in class. The other students listen, ask questions and write in their evaluation sheets.
- The final step is for students to take part in their school study tour to Okinawa. There, they visit the Himeyuri Peace Museum and other peace monuments on Mabuni Hill. They listen to talks by older people who experienced World War II. They learn to appreciate Okinawan culture through *sanshin* concerts and *eisa* dancing, making sugar from sugarcane, trying traditional dyeing and tasting Okinawan food. After the trip, they make reports with speeches back at school about their experiences.

My seminar students' feedback after this unit was excellent. A student who did research on coral reefs in Okinawa wrote the following peace poem:

<p>Let's protect the blue sky So that birds can fly happily.</p> <p>Let's protect the blue sky So that nature can be fair forever.</p> <p>Let's protect the blue sky So that everybody can keep smiling.</p> <p>Let's protect the blue sky So that we can be positive again.</p>	<p>沖縄</p> 
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Another student made a speech on the importance of taking different perspectives and putting herself in other's shoes. She said she wouldn't accept U.S. military bases if it was decided to relocate them to her hometown. All the students agreed we should not ignore the sacrifice and suffering Okinawans have made for Japan's security and should try to change the situation.

Teaching English should give learners new viewpoints, promote understanding of other cultures and stimulate thinking about global issues. The topic of "Okinawa" is very timely and gives us a good opportunity to reflect on a different culture and history within our own country.

References

- Higa, T. *The Girl with the White Flag*, Kodansha International, 2007.
Muroi, M. & Potter, M. *Okinawa*, Sanyusha, 2000.

The quiz at right is reprinted from "Teaching Peace in Okinawa" by Jerry Burks in GILE Newsletter #35 (June 1999) available on-line at <www.gilesig.org>.

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OKINAWA AWARENESS QUIZ

Test your knowledge of Okinawa!!

1. Okinawa's original name was the ___ islands.
(a) Ryukyu (b) Naha (c) Benten
2. Okinawa was a famous ___ nation in the 15th C.
(a) warrior (b) trading (c) rice farming
3. Okinawa was invaded by Japan in ____.
(a) 1609 (b) 1732 (c) 1854
4. Its name was changed to Okinawa (by force) in
(a) 1879 (b) 1928 (c) 1945
5. Okinawa's nickname is the ___ islands.
(a) dangerous (b) far-off (c) peaceful
6. The capital city of Okinawa Prefecture is ____.
(a) Naha (b) Nago (c) Kadena
7. What danger annually threatens Okinawa?
(a) snowstorms (b) typhoons (c) volcanoes
8. Which martial art was developed in Okinawa?
(a) judo (b) kendo (c) karate
9. Each year, Okinawans remember WWII on ____.
(a) June 23 (b) August 6 (c) October 24
10. Aside from Okinawa, how many places in main-land Japan experienced land battles in WWII?
(a) 0 (b) 6 (c) 14
11. In total, ___ people died on Okinawa in WWII.
(a) 30,000 (b) 80,000 (c) 200,000
12. How long was Okinawa occupied by the USA?
(a) 8 years (b) 12 years (c) 27 years
13. After 1951, Okinawans needed ___ to visit Japan
(a) a passport (b) a "hanko" (c) an invitation
14. When did Okinawa revert to Japan?
(a) 1972 (b) 1981 (c) 1989
15. How much of Okinawa's total area is occupied by American military bases?
(a) 2% (b) 7% (c) 11%
16. What percent of all US military bases in Japan are located in Okinawa?
(a) 26% (b) 53% (c) 75%
17. What event was held in Okinawa in 2000?
(a) Olympics (b) G-8 summit (c) Asian Games

ANSWERS

- 1 a, 2 b, 3 a, 4 a, 5 c, 6 a, 7 b, 8 c, 9 a
10 a, 11 c, 12 c, 13 a, 14 a, 15 c, 16 c, 17 b

<p>Shin-Eiken Association < www.shin-eiken.com > 新英語教育研究会 <i>Shin-Eiken</i> is a dynamic high school English teachers' group engaged in global, peace and human rights education. Check out their website or subscribe to their monthly magazine <i>Shin Eigo Kyoiku</i> (in Japanese).</p>	<p>Special Issue of "Shin Eigo Kyoiku" (New English Classroom) No. 494 (Oct. 2010) "<i>What Can We Learn From Mother Teresa?</i>" Sanyusha Press <www.sanyusha-shuppan.com> To mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Mother Teresa, Shin-Eiken issued a special edition of its Japanese magazine. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>What can we learn from Mother Teresa? What should we teach?</i> ▪ <i>Promoting Mother Teresa's ideals: love, care, concern, thankfulness</i> ▪ <i>Mother Teresa: Quotes, movies and DVDs plus a timeline of her life</i> Plus ▪ <i>Teaching about Jackie Robinson "Reaching for a dream"</i> ▪ <i>Peace education organizations, networks and resources</i>
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