



Home/Garden Connection

A Post-Visit Lesson to *Asian Gardens: Science and Culture*

Dear Parents,

Your son or daughter visited the Missouri Botanical Garden today and participated in a garden class called “Asian Gardens: Science and Culture.” During the field trip, your child:

- Visited our Nanjing Friendship Chinese Garden and Seiwa-en, our Japanese garden.
- Compared and contrasted cultural elements from China and Japan.
- Learned about various Chinese philosophies and how the Chinese Zodiac came about.
- Practiced using an abacus to represent numbers.
- Discussed cultural symbols and traditions and explored their use in art, garden design, literature, and poetry.
- Learned about Zen gardens (also known as ‘dry landscapes’) and received a desktop Zen garden to bring home.
- Discussed the environmental impact of global warming on Japan’s moss gardens and what might be done to reverse its effects.
- Observed Japanese koi fish and discussed their color patterns.

Game: China and Japan All Around Us

As a family, compete to see how many products you can find around your home that came from either China or Japan. Look for the telltale ‘Made in China’ stickers or notations on the bottoms of plastic items and ceramics. Take note of Japanese brand names in your home, such as Atari, Nintendo, Sony, Casio, Epsen, Seiko, Hitachi, Kawasaki, Konika, Kyocera, Minolta, Nikon, Suzuki, Toshiba, and Yamaha.

Take a drive and count how many Japanese cars you see around you. Watch for cars and other vehicles made by Toyota (including Lexus and Scion), Mitsubishi, Nissan (Datsun), Honda, Isuzu, Mazda, Subaru, Suzuki, and Yamaha.

How many of these products and vehicles do you use every day?

The next time you get dressed, check the zippers on your clothing. Odds are you’ll find at least one with ‘YKK’ inscribed on the zipper pull. This stands for, “Yoshida Kōgyō Kabushikigaisha” which translates to, ‘Yoshida Manufacturing Company’. YKK is the world’s largest zipper manufacturer, and one can find YKK zippers on clothing, portfolios, purses, backpacks, shoes, and anywhere else zippers are used.



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Language Arts: Haiku and Tanka

The popular poetry form known as Haiku is familiar to most people, with its 3-line, 17-syllable (5-7-5) format. Haiku traditionally focuses on a single natural event or impression.

Haiku was derived from a form of poetic entertainment in the high courts of 9th-12th century Japan known as ‘*tanka*’. Poets of this period wrote *tanka* as a kind of game, in which one poet would begin a poem with a haiku-style verse consisting of the familiar 5-7-5 syllabled triplet. Another poet would then follow this with a 14-syllable couplet (two lines consisting of 7 syllables each). An example might be:

- (5) Flowers bloomed today
(7) Along the garden pathway
(5) Where I chose to walk.
- (7) The fragrance wafted by me,
(7) Drifting on the lightest breeze.

Another poet would then contribute another 5-7-5 verse, and another would contribute another 7-7 couplet, and so on. This practice of composing strings of alternating verses was called *renga*, and some of the resulting poems were comprised of hundreds of *tanka*.

Poets tended to find that the most challenging verse to compose was the ‘*hokku*’, or starting verse. The art of composing these opening verses became the poetry we know of as ‘haiku’ today.

As a family, try your hand at composing *tanka* poetry of your own. Have one family member compose a ‘*hokku*’, and another compose the 7-7 couplet, and build from there. How long of a poem can you compose?

Science: Create a Moss Garden

The Japanese make use of moss in many of their gardens, especially around the bases of bonsai trees. The small size of moss plants makes them ideal representations of ‘grass’ in container landscapes.

Moss is fairly easy to care for, and can make a fun indoor garden. To make one of your own, you will need:

- A large, wide-mouthed jar, preferably large enough that you can put your hand into it.
- Enough gravel to cover the bottom of the jar.
- Potting Soil
- Buttermilk
- Moss
- Plant Misting bottle



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Place enough gravel in the bottom of your jar to make a layer ¼” thick.

Mix 1 cup of potting soil with ¼ cup of buttermilk. Spread this mixture over the gravel. Depending on the size of your jar, you may need to do this a couple of times to make enough to so that it forms a layer of soil about 3 inches thick. (Moss prefers acidic soil, and the buttermilk provides the proper pH.)

Find a moss growing outside and harvest a clump that will fit inside your jar. You will likely find it growing in damp, shaded areas. Dig down to take about an inch of the soil upon which it is growing to avoid damaging its rudimentary roots.

Press your moss onto the soil layer. Press firmly to avoid leaving air pockets between the moss and the soil.

Mist the moss generously with room-temperature water and cover the jar with a lid. Mist it daily for the first two weeks to ensure that the air inside the jar is as humid as possible, and then continue to mist when the jar seems to be drying out. Place the jar in a north-facing window or in a place where it can receive filtered light. Avoid placing it where it will receive direct sunlight for a long time. Note that moss will turn brown if it becomes too dry, but tends to green up again when it receives the water it needs.

You may wish to add decorations to your garden, such as small ceramic decorations intended for Bonsai pots. The Garden Gate shop at the Missouri Botanical Garden sells a variety of small Japanese stone lanterns, pagodas and figures that can make charming additions to your moss garden.