

## Teaching News Is Elementary

### January 15, 2016

Each week, this lesson will share some classroom activity ideas that use the newspaper or other NIE resources. You are encouraged to modify this lesson to fit the needs of your students. For example, some classrooms may be able to use this as a worksheet and others might need to ask and answer the questions in a class discussion.

**Materials you will need for this lesson:** The Seattle Times e-Edition, colored pencils, pencil and paper.

**Article: “Finding serenity in a historic Tokyo house and garden”**

**Pages: NW Traveler, I5**

**Date: Sunday, January 10, 2016**

#### **Pre- Reading Discussion Questions:**

Look at the title and the image of the garden on page I5. What does it mean if something is historic? Why do you think the house and garden shown in the photos might be historic? Besides plants and trees what else do you see in the garden? How does looking at the photo of the garden make you feel?

#### **Vocabulary:**

Read the following quotes and determine the meaning of the word based on how it's used in the sentence:

“Traditional Japanese gardens require careful and constant pruning of trees, but the signs note that this “garden’s main trees are dead and healthy **specimens** are **rampant** with massively overgrown trunks.”

**specimens:** something (such as an animal or plant) collected as an example of a particular kind of thing

**rampant:** growing quickly and in a way that is difficult to control

“There’s only one thing that slightly **mars** the **serenity** here: the rather large number of signs asking you not to touch anything.”

**mars:** to ruin the beauty or perfection of (something)

**serenity:** a feeling of calm and peace

**“In another room, which is open to the outdoors, you can sit on the floor and contemplate the view.”**

**contemplate:** to think deeply or carefully about (something)

**Journal Writing Prompts:**

**“In another room, which is open to the outdoors, you can sit on the floor and contemplate the view. Around the house, various windows of different shapes and sizes offer different perspectives on the garden.”**

Imagine yourself sitting in a room that is open to the outdoors and a garden. Write about what you see as you sit and contemplate the view. Also describe any sounds you may hear in the garden (the wind, birds, water, etc.) Note the temperature it is outside, the feel of it on your skin (is it hot, is it windy) and describe the season of the year based on the way the trees and other features in the garden look. Also, describe how you feel as you sit and quietly look out at the garden.

**Discussion Questions:**

**Review the excerpts and discuss the following questions:**

**“The garden looks and feels different from the classic Japanese-style garden laid out around a pond that you’re likely to find elsewhere, for a couple of reasons. It’s built on the side of a rather steep natural hill and walking up and down the rustic paving stones requires enough attention sometimes to keep other thoughts out of your mind.”**

**“Traditional Japanese gardens require careful and constant pruning of trees, but the signs note that this “garden’s main trees are dead and healthy specimens are rampant with massively overgrown trunks.”**

Have you ever visited a Japanese garden? Japanese gardens utilize elements such as ponds, hills, sand and stones, trees and plants, to create smaller reproductions of natural scenery. What things do you see in the photo of the garden that identify it as being Japanese-style? What elements can you identify in the photo that are found in Japanese gardens? Why do you think gardens like this are an important part of Japanese culture?

**Small group discussion and activity:**

**“Entering the house you’ll need to take your shoes off to walk on the tatami floors, which is calming in itself. The building is made of natural wood and**

**is unfurnished, with no decorative clutter to distract the mind, although there are some lovely painted screens.”**

Do you think the house described above would be calming – why or why not? How do you think clutter affects you? Do you think clutter is distracting – why or why not? Using colored pencils or crayons, draw a room that you would find calming. What types of materials would you have in your room? Would it be empty or would it include furniture or other decorations? What would the window(s) in your room look out to? What other things would your room include that you would find visually calming?

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