

These notes are for:

- Grades 4–8

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Social Studies
- Information and Communication Technology

Example of:

- Middle Grade/Illustrated Fiction
- Historical Fiction

Experience of:

- Cultural Diversity
- Feudal Japan & life as a Samurai

Values addressed:

- Care and Compassion
- Understanding, Tolerance & Inclusion
- Honesty & Trustworthiness
- Integrity
- Respect
- Doing Your Best
- Fair Go
- Responsibility

Themes:

- Friendship & Teamwork
- Disability/Ability
- Discipline
- Bullying

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

Text © 2010 Walker Books Australia. All rights reserved.

These materials were developed for Educators in Australia. They have been revised from the original and may not directly correlate to U.S. curriculum.

Samurai Kids - Overview

Samurai Kids Book 1: White Crane

By: Sandy Fussell
 Illustrated by: Rhian Nest James
 ISBN: 9780763645038
 \$15.99 (\$19.00 CAN)
 No. of Pages: 256



Outline:

Niya Moto is the only one-legged samurai kid in Japan, famous for falling flat on his face in the dirt. None of the samurai schools will teach Niya, until a letter of offer arrives from the legendary samurai warrior Ki-Yaga, Sensei of the Cockroach Ryu. Niya joins the four other students of the Cockroach Ryu, all with challenges to overcome, and as they learn traditional samurai skills they become firm friends. Sensei knows appearance is not a measure of strength: "Cockroaches are only small, but they are very hard to kill," he teaches and the Cockroaches soon discover that differences can sometimes be advantages.

Author/Illustrator Information:

Sandy Fussell lives south of Sydney with her husband and two sons. She studied mathematics at university, is intensely interested in history and now works in IT. From the moment she could read, Sandy loved books and always wanted to be a writer. In school, she wrote what she refers to as "booklets" and "terrible plays that the teacher made the class perform". After school, Sandy forgot about writing for a long time and started a family. She came back to writing after one of her children stopped reading and she suggested that they write a book together. *Samurai Kids: White Crane* is Sandy's first children's novel.

Rhian Nest James spent most of her school years avoiding the Math and P.E. teachers by taking refuge in the Art room. So it was a most natural progression, upon leaving school, that she should attend the local Art college in Cardiff (Wales); and then go on to study illustration at Exeter College of Art (England). Rhian has been a freelance illustrator since 1986 and has illustrated for all sorts of publications, including many children's books. She now lives with her husband in Sydney, Australia.

Notes prepared by:

Sue Whiting was a primary school teacher for 25 years before leaving teaching to pursue a career in publishing. Passionate about literacy education, she completed a Graduate Diploma in Reading Language Education (1988), trained as a Reading Recovery Teacher (1997) and taught as a Reading Recovery and STLA for several years. She is also a successful children's book author who has written over 30 books including picture books, non-fiction, chapter books and novels.

How to use these notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

Sandy Fussell's inspiration for Samurai Kids Book 1: White Crane –

"In the beginning there was one sentence. It came from nowhere but it stuck in my brain.

My name is Niya Moto and I'm the only one-legged samurai kid in Japan.

And then I started to think what it would be like to be Niya. I practised a few flying leaps, one-legged, in the back yard. So I quickly discovered the next line – *Famous for falling flat on my face* – And that was the last of my input because from then on the characters dictated to me and I just followed. But behind all that is a love of Japanese history and culture. I've never been to Japan but one day..."

Talking and Listening Activities:

- Questions to discuss about characterisation:

Why do you think the book is called *White Crane*? How, in Japan, does the crane symbolise hope, honour and loyalty, happiness and 'wholeness'?

How and why do you think Niya identifies with the crane – physically and spiritually?

What makes each character 'different'? How do these differences contribute to each character's strengths?

How does one character's strength compensate for another's weakness?

Yoshi will not fight, even to win a team point at the games – is this right?

Why do you think Sensei believes that some of the old ways need to change?

Which character do you like the best? Why?

- Debate topics:

White Crane is not a story about disability. It is about ability.

Ki-Yaga is a great teacher.

- *White Crane* is an historical novel. The time, place and activities e.g. sword making, are real. The children and the Games are not. How much of an historical novel should be factual? Discuss.
- Discuss the similarities and differences between the Cockroach Ryu and the Dragon Ryu. Is one better than the other? Why / Why not?
- Students assume a character and field questions from the class, answering how they think the character would answer.

Reading Activities

- The author researched feudal Japan and the life of a samurai thoroughly before writing *White Crane*. Identify aspects of the book that reflect this research.
- Create a character profile for each of the samurai kids and Ki-Yaga. Note each character's appearance, strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, personality traits etc.
- Ki-Yaga has many wise sayings; for example, "A cracked bowl can hold water. There is nothing wrong with the bowl. It just needs to be held properly" (p14/15). Collect other similar sayings and then try to explain what they mean.
- What are the skills that the samurai kids must learn and practise for the Samurai Trainee Games? Divide the class into small groups, giving each group a different skill to research and then present to the class. (e.g. archery, sword fighting, haiku etc.)
- There is a glossary of "Useful Words" at the back of the book. Choose some other "useful" or "interesting" words from the book to add to the glossary. Pool ideas and create a class glossary for *White Crane*.
- The Japanese kanji symbols at the beginning of each chapter represent the seven virtues of bushido. Find in the book where these virtues are listed, then find the dictionary meaning for each virtue.
- Each samurai kid has a spirit totem. Create a chart as per the example below.

Kid	Totem	Why this totem suits the character
Niya	White Crane	
Yoshi		
Taji		

Writing Activities:

- Writing haiku poetry is one of the skills taught at the Ryu. Study examples of haiku and list the special features of this form of poetry. Write a haiku poem about one of the characters from *White Crane*.
- The author has used some wonderful imagery in *White Crane*, often employing elements of Japan in this imagery, e.g. 'noodle balls of nostril hair' and 'eyebrows raised like pagoda rooftops'. Collect other examples, then as a class create some more, using these as models.
- Read the scene in Chapter 5 where the Sword Master is making a sword. List the steps involved, then write a procedural (method) text for sword making.
- The samurai kids take a dangerous journey to the Games (Chapters 9 and 10). Write a recount of this journey.
- Sensei's story of the Dragon and the Cockroach is based on Aesop's fable – *The Lion and the Mouse*. Read *The Lion and the Mouse* and other examples of fables. Discuss fables and their features. As a class, try to adapt the text of a different fable to create a new one.

Cross-curricular Activities

Social Studies Activities:

- Divide the class into small groups. Each group is given one topic relating to the historical and cultural background of *White Crane* to research then present to the class.
- How was life different for a child in feudal Japan compared to today? How was it the same? Make a list of differences and similarities. Decide when you would have preferred to live and describe why.

Possible topics:

The Samurai
Bushido
Clothing
Food
Geography of Japan
Kanji
Weapons
Gembuku
The Komusu
Animals - crane, bat, tiger, snow monkey, wolf, long-tailed rat, striped gecko
Language
Customs
Shakuhachi flute



Illustration © 2010 by Rhian Nest James

Information and Communication Technology:

- Visit Sandy's author website
www.sandyfussell.com
- Visit the dedicated *Samurai Kids* series website
www.samuraikids.com.au

Research Sandy Fussell as an author.

Features include a *Samurai Kids* newsletter and teacher resources such as a WebQuest to set up a samurai training school.