

MYSTERY POT QUESTIONS, VENN DIAGRAM, AND GEOGRAPHY

MYSTERY POT QUESTIONS

This geography activity involves active learning, categorization skills, brainstorming, discussion, questioning, and strategy conferences.

From having prepared “Asia Packets” (booklets of information about Asia’s geography) and from reading novels or biographies set in Asia, students discovered a great deal about Asian countries. On large sheets of paper hung on the wall, we brainstormed Asia category topics. Some that our students suggested were politics, history, geographical information, industry.

Students were then given several 3x5 cards on which they were to write questions about Asia, using their Asia Packets as references. After a time of thinking and writing, cards were collected and redistributed randomly among students. Almanacs and atlases were available for reference, and students were asked to write an answer on the card for each question. Each card was then taped on the appropriate category poster.

Active learning! Students consulted the reference books and each other and worked hard to answer questions. When cards were finally posted, the class discussed the process. They discovered most of their questions could be answered if they asked enough people; they would eventually find someone knew. The few questions yet unanswered became a group effort, and at last we discovered answers. We determined which categories had the most question cards, discussed interesting or difficult questions students encountered, and concluded the discussion with interesting facts we had learned from the activity.

Given more than one class period, a QAR activity could be added to the question writing. We chose to concentrate on a review of information and not specifically the kinds of questions students asked.

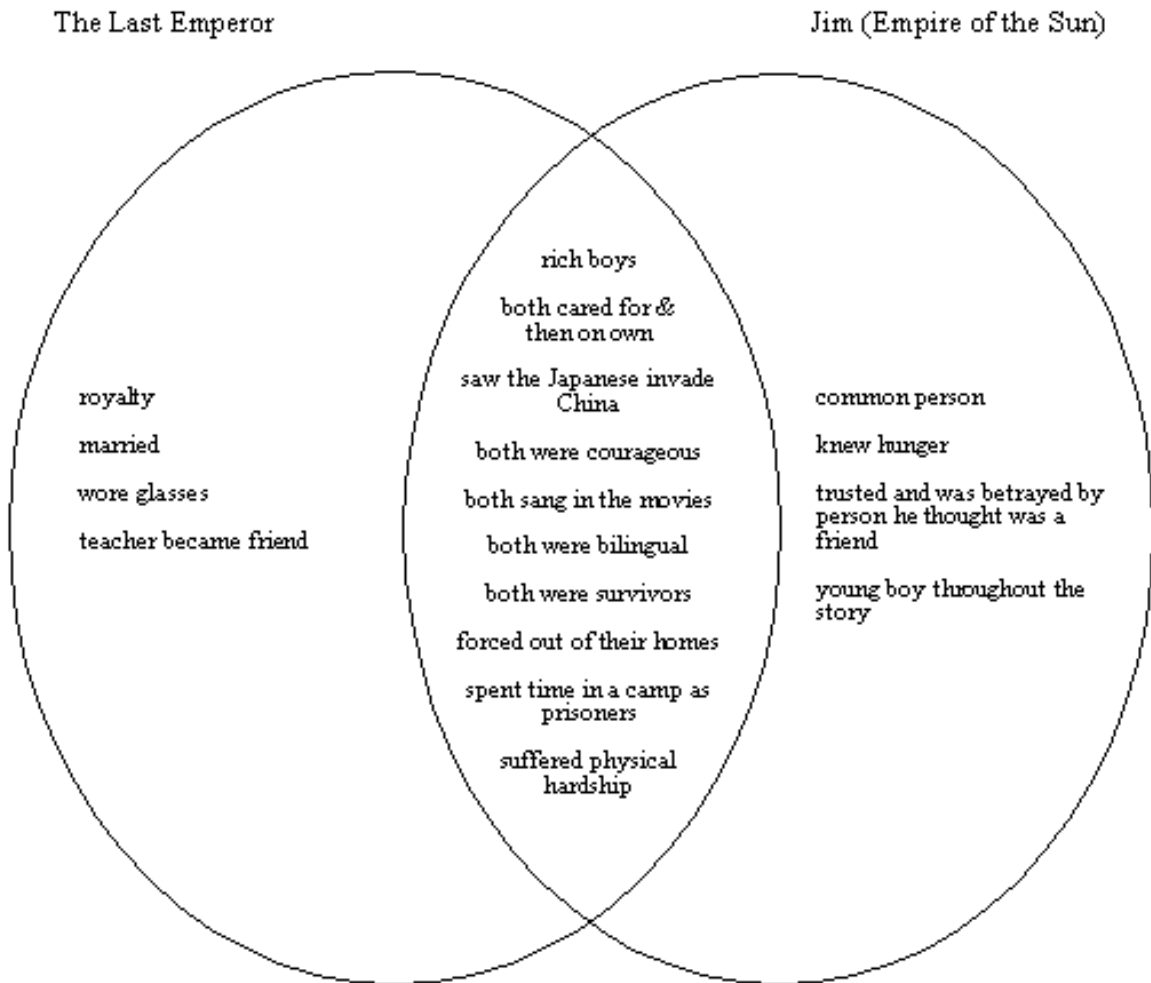
VENN DIAGRAM

In our English-geography classes, quite often our students formed four or five-member literature discussion groups. In their small groups, students talked about something of interest from their books, then shared specific items with the whole class. Because students were reading different novels about Asia or biographies of Asian people, we wanted them, in one discussion session, to concentrate upon what was happening to the characters in their own books. We used the Venn diagram as a framework for comparing and contrasting two characters.

We teachers modeled with characters from our books. Where the circles overlap, we wrote comparison characteristics. In the outside areas of each circle, we wrote contrasting characteristics. Students then paired and prepared a Venn diagram for their two books’ characters. Good discussion occurred during the writing. Students talked about many aspect of their books during their character study.

We had frontloaded our unit with the movie *The Last Emperor*, about the last Chinese emperor imprisoned in the Forbidden City. At the end of the unit we showed *Empire of the Sun*, a movie about a British boy interned in Shanghai when the Japanese invaded China. After the final

movie, we asked students to pair and list, in a Venn diagram form, the comparisons and contrasts between the two movies' characters. The whole group contributed to a large diagram on the board, providing a review of the unit, clearing up any questions about the movies or the historical events.



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