



Crow Boy

by Taro Yashima

Teacher's Guide

Written By Linda Crosswhite

Crow Boy

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CLASSROOM
FAVORITES

by Taro Yashima

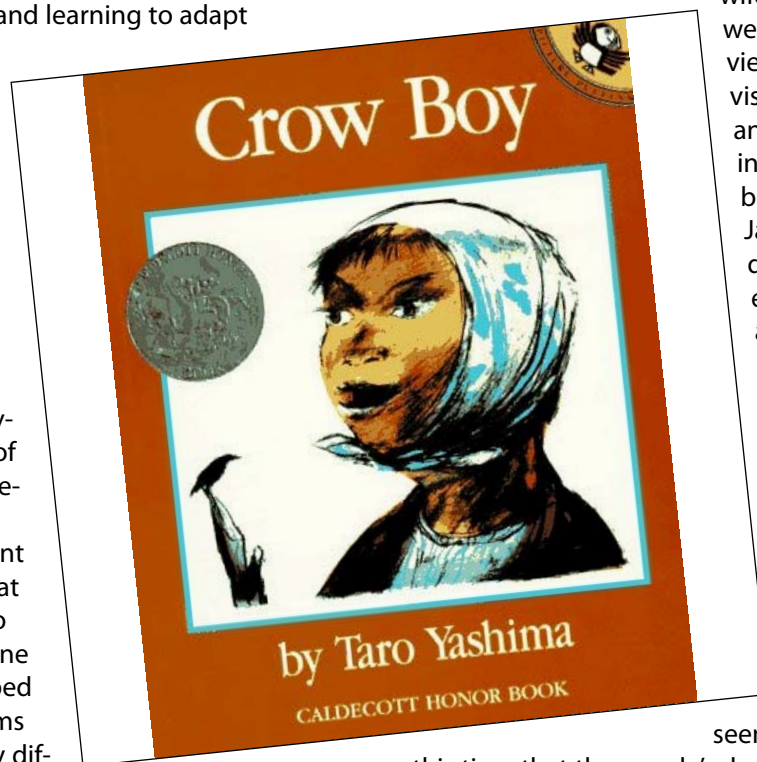
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Synopsis

This sensitive story is about a frightened Japanese boy named Chibi, who lives in the mountains, far from the village school where he is treated as an outcast for six years. The story begins on the first day of school, when he is discovered hiding in fear under the floor and earns the nickname "Chibi," meaning "tiny boy," because of his small size. As the story progresses, we see Chibi arriving every day to school, alone, and learning to adapt and persist, despite his learning difficulties and the ostracism and taunts of the other children, who call him "stupid." Finally, in the sixth and last year of the village school, a sympathetic and insightful teacher, Mr. Isobe, arrives. He takes Chibi under his wing and spends time getting to know him. He discovers Chibi's vast knowledge of the natural world, and appreciates Chibi's accomplishments, including his excellent drawings of nature. Finally, at the year-end talent show, to the astonishment of everyone but Mr. Isobe (who has helped him rehearse), Chibi performs for the first time—the many different calls of crows, which the boy has learned from his long daily walks to and from school. Later, Mr. Isobe tells the audience how Chibi learned these things, by getting up at dawn every day, walking many miles alone observing nature, then walking the return miles to arrive home at sunset. Chibi is then honored for perfect attendance for six straight years—the only child in school to have achieved this. Everyone feels sorry for their poor treatment of Chibi, and they applaud him. The children give him a new nickname—Crow Boy—in respectful acknowledgement of his talents, and in subsequent years, as Chibi grows up and is seen in the village selling charcoal to help support his family, he is given acceptance and respect, and he responds with gratitude and pride.

Author Sketch

Jun Atsushi Iwamatsu (1908-1994), who used the pseudonym, Taro Yashima, was born on September 21, 1908, in Kagoshima, Japan. He studied at the Imperial Art Academy in Tokyo and became a successful illustrator and cartoonist in Japan, but suffered because of his opposition to Japan's militaristic government; he and his wife, Tomoe, also an artist, were jailed for their political views. In 1939, the couple visited the United States on an art study fellowship, leaving their young son, Mako, behind with relatives in Japan. When war was declared on Japan, Yashima enlisted in the U.S. Army and served in the Office of War Information and the Office of Strategic Services; it was during this time that he adopted his alias to protect his son and other family members from reprisals in Japan. After the war, Yashima returned to Japan and retrieved his son, whom he had not



seen in ten years, and it was at this time that the couple's daughter, Momo, was born.

During this time as well, Yashima was ill with stomach ulcers; it took him nearly four years to regain his health. In the early 1950s, he began writing children's books, initially to thank his young daughter for her love, which helped him recover. In 1954, Yashima moved his family to California, where he and his wife painted and taught. The family opened an art academy in Los Angeles and continued their work for many years; both their children became actors. Yashima died in 1994.

Critic's Corner

Yashima's colorful illustrations and simple, delicate

prose won for him many awards. *Crow Boy* (1956), *Umbrella* (1958), and *Seashore Story* (1967) were all Caldecott Honor Books, and Mr. Yashima was twice awarded the Southern California Council on Literature of Children and Young People Award; he also received the University of Southern Mississippi's Silver Medallion in 1974, and *Crow Boy* also received the Child Study Association of America/Wel-Met Children's Book Award in 1955. Yashima's works are held in many public and private collections and he held several one-man shows in cities across the United States. *Crow Boy* is an example of the humanism of his books, and it exemplifies the theme and goal he stated for his works: "Let children enjoy living on this earth, let children be strong enough not to be beaten or twisted by evil on this earth."

Timeline

First day of school	A strange boy from the country is found hiding under the schoolhouse. He is nicknamed "Chibi"—tiny boy.
Next six years	Chibi is regarded as strange by the other children. He is obviously poor, always comes to school alone from the country, and has trouble learning. Every day he eats the same lunch: a ball of rice wrapped in a radish leaf. He is ostracized, and he learns to amuse himself by day dreaming and observing nature.
Sixth year	A new teacher, Mr. Isobe, arrives. He is kind and insightful, and he gets to know Chibi. He discovers that Chibi has hidden talents, especially in the areas of art and nature lore.
The talent show	Chibi shows his talents by demonstrating the various crow-calls he has learned through observation during his many long, lonely walks from his mountain school to the village and back. Mr. Isobe tells the school how Chibi, for six straight years, has left home at dawn, walked to school, then turned around to walk back, arriving home at sunset. Chibi

After the show

In later years

is also honored for six years of perfect attendance. Everyone feels sorry for their misjudgment and poor treatment of Chibi, and they rename him "Crow Boy" out of respect for and acceptance of his uniqueness and abilities. Chibi is seen in the village, working to support his family. He is treated with respect and friendship, and he grows up happy and proud.

Selected Other Works by Taro Yashima

Umbrella (1958)
Golden Footprints (1960) (with Hatoju Muku)
Seashore Story (1967)
Momo's Kitten (with Mitsu Yashima) (1971)
The Village Tree (1972)

Bibliography

"Taro Yashima biography,"
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taro_Yashima>
"Taro Yashima, University of Southern Mississippi deGrummond Collection,"
<<http://www.lib.usm.edu/~degrum/html/research/findaids/yashima.htm>>
"Taro Yashima Teacher Resource File,"
<<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/yashima.htm>>

Related Reading

Ackley, Meredith & Weber, Valerie, eds., *Japan*
Akio, Terumasa, *Me and Alves: A Japanese Journey*
Allard, Harry & Marshall, James, *Miss Nelson Is Missing*
Bailey, Jill, *Birds*
Brown, Marc, *Arthur's Teacher Trouble*
Cassedy, Sylvia, *Red Dragonfly on My Shoulder*
Cobb, Vicki, *This Place Is Crowded*
Demi, ed., *In the Eye of the Cat: Japanese Poetry for All Seasons*
Feder, Paula Kurzband, *Where Does the Teacher Live?*
Giff, Patricia Reilly, *Next Year I'll Be Special*
Haskins, James, *Count Your Way Through Japan*
Jacobsen, Karen, *Japan*
Kalman, Bobbie, *Japan: The People*
Japan: The Land
Kalman, Maira, *Sayonara, Mrs. Kackleman*

Kline, Suzy, *Song Lee In Room 2B*
 Levine, Arthur A., *Boy Who Drew Cats: A Japanese Folktale*
 McDermott, Gerald, *Stonecutter: A Japanese Folk Tale*
 McKean, Barbara A., *Hayes Book of Birds*
 McKenzie, Ellen Kindt, *Stargone John*
 Merrill, Jean, *Girl Who Loved Caterpillars*
 Snyder, Dianne, *Boy of the Three Year Nap*
 Spier, Peter, *People*
 Surat, Michele Maria, *Angel Child, Dragon Child*
 Taylor, Barbara, *Bird Atlas*
 Yagawa, Sumiko, *Crane Wife*
 Yashima, Mitsu & Taro, *Momo's Kitten*
 Yashima, Taro, *Seashore Story*
Umbrella
Village Tree
Youngest One
 Zach, Cheryl, *Benny and the No-Good Teacher*

Themes and Motifs

Themes

- school
- self-worth
- relationships
- ostracism
- Japanese culture

Motifs

- differentness
- unique talents
- Japanese culture
- overcoming adversity
- group acceptance

Skills and Objectives

- Using context clues
- Recognizing story structure
- Analyzing character development

The following suggested plans and activities can be used with this book. You may choose to select and modify these to best meet the needs and interests of your students.

Comprehension Study

Building the background

1. Introduce the students to the author by sharing information about his background. You may also wish to display and/or share several of his other books to develop an understanding of his writing and artistic style.

2. Assist the “students in locating Japan on a map or globe. Explain that Japan was the author’s birth place and is the setting for this story.
3. Display fiction and nonfiction books, visual aids and any other available items related to the text. Give the students an opportunity to explore these materials.

Introducing the book

Present the book to the students. Have them locate the title and author/illustrator. Call attention to the fact that this book is a Caldecott Honor Book. Explain to the students that the Caldecott Award is given each year to an outstanding children’s book for its illustrations. Other picture books are also selected as honor books. *Crow Boy* was selected as a Caldecott Honor Book in 1956.

Give the students an opportunity to discuss the title and illustration on the cover. Turn to the dedication page and explain the purpose of this page. Mitsu is Taro Yashima’s wife and Momo is his daughter. Discuss why the “students think he dedicated this book to his wife, his daughter and a teacher. Have the students make predictions about the story based on the information they have. Record their responses so that the students can confirm their predictions after sharing this story.

Enjoying the Reading:

Setting the purpose for reading. Have the children read to confirm their predictions and gain the meaning of the story.

Post Reading: Confirming, analyzing, synthesizing or evaluating the reading.

1. Encourage the children to share their feelings about the story.
2. Assist the children in confirming their predictions.
3. Initiate a small group or whole class discussion of the story. Some of the following questions may help to start and/or guide this process:
 - Why do you think Chibi was hiding underneath the schoolhouse floor?
 - What was Chibi like at the beginning of this story?
 - Why do you think Chibi had no friends?
 - How did Chibi amuse himself at school?
 - What was Mr. Isobe like?
 - How did Chibi learn to imitate the crow’s call?
 - What caused the students to respect Chibi?
 - What would you have done if you were treated like Chibi?

Teaching Skills and Strategies

Using context clues: Words that may be unfamiliar to

students should be presented in context. This allows the meaning to be determined by the surrounding print and/or illustrations. Refer to the text to locate the sentence(s) and read the word(s) that might be unfamiliar to the students. You may wish to write each of the sentences on the board.

Focus on the unknown word by framing it. Example: "He was always at the end of the line, always at the foot of the class, a forlorn little tag-along."

Ask the students what they think the word "forlorn" means. List their responses. Example: Forlorn—sad, hopeless, lost.

Discuss their predictions and select the best meaning for each word. Explore additional words in a similar manner.

Recognizing story structure

Review the following story elements with the students: setting, characters, problem, actions, solution/outcome. Discuss how stories have actions at the beginning, in the middle and at the end.

Have them list or draw pictures of the actions of the beginning, middle, and end of the book. This activity can be completed individually or in a small group setting.

Analyzing character development

Initiate a discussion about the main character in the story. Review how he changed from the beginning to the end of the story. Have students draw a picture or write about the character as he reacted to the events during the beginning, middle and end of the story. You may want to have the students refer to their story structure lesson to recall the events and relate the character's development to these events.

Across the Curriculum

The following activities may be introduced after the story, integrated into the appropriate content areas or used as learning center activities.

Writing

1. Review the story with the students, noting the events that happened at Chibi's school. Using their own school as a setting, have the students write a story based on a similar problem. These can be duplicated and given to each child to illustrate.
2. Share examples of well-written personal letters. Explain the proper format and type of content usually found in this form. Supply various types of

writing materials: paper, stationery, post cards, pencils, pens, etc. Have the students each write a letter to Chibi, inviting him to visit their classroom

3. Initiate a discussion about the differences special people make in our lives. Mr. Isobe was a person who made a difference in Chibi's life. Give the students an opportunity to talk about special people they know. Provide them with the writing materials needed to write a narrative paper about someone who has been very special to them. The final draft can be written and illustrated. Upon completion, these can be shared with their classmates.
4. Bring in samples of writing from various countries for the students to observe. (There is a good example of these in *People* by Peter Spier.) Discuss the difficulty in learning to write the characters in the different languages. Have the students work in small groups to develop their own characters to represent the letters of the alphabet. Have each group copy several sentences from the story using the "new" alphabet they have created to develop an awareness and appreciation for learning new languages.

Math

1. Create a chart for recording each child's attendance for a month. Have each student fill in the chart each day. At the end of the month, the results of the chart can be graphed to determine the number of students who had perfect attendance. This activity could be continued throughout the school year, if desired. Discuss reasons why students are absent and how difficult it must have been for Chibi to have perfect attendance for six years.
2. Contact a local bank or currency exchange to obtain some Japanese money and/or inquire about the current exchange rate. Have the students compare Japanese currency to U.S. currency. The students can work in pairs or small groups to write story problems involving the use of money. Each problem can then be solved using both U.S. and Japanese currency. Groups can exchange papers and solve each other's problems for further practice.
3. Refer back to the page in the text which shows an abacus. Explain to the students that this is a device for making computations by means of counters. This system was known to the Greeks and Romans and is still used in some Oriental countries. The beads are used as counters to represent specific values, depending on the type of abacus. If an abacus is available, give the students

an opportunity to use it to solve mathematical equations. This lesson can be extended by comparing the use of the abacus to a calculator and/or a computer.

Social Studies

1. Discuss the differences between the Japanese classroom illustrated in the text and the children's classroom. Have the students list or draw similarities and differences between their school and the Japanese village school.

Example:

<i>Our Room.....</i>	<i>Chibi's Room</i>
<i>Tables.....</i>	<i>desks</i>
<i>Centers.....</i>	<i>platform</i>
<i>White boards.....</i>	<i>blackboards</i>
<i>Computers.....</i>	<i>abacus</i>

2. Provide the class with fiction and non-fiction books about Japan. Give them an opportunity to explore these. Initiate a discussion about Japan. Have students divide into small groups to research specific information about this country such as: location and size, population, climate, resources and occupations, chief products, type of government, customs and any other information that is of interest to the students. After the research has been completed, give the students an opportunity to present the information gathered.
3. Refer back to the text to note the feelings that are expressed throughout the story. List each of these feelings on a chart or the board. Next to each feeling, record the situation. Discuss why each feeling occurred, and what we can do when we have these feelings.
4. Invite a guest speaker who is knowledgeable about Japan to speak to the class about the culture, customs, and people of Japan.

Science/Health

1. Initiate a discussion about crows. Provide resource books for the students to use to find out information about these birds. Provide the students with four inch-by-six inch index cards on which to write information about crows. These cards can be placed on a bulletin board for all to read.
2. Discuss foods that are common to Japan. Chibi brought a rice ball to class for lunch each day. Have the students discuss foods they eat for lunch. Introduce the food pyramid. Explain the importance of eating healthy foods. Have the stu-

dents assist in planning a menu of healthy school lunches for a week.

3. Refer back to the text to note what Chibi did to distract himself from what was going on at school. Make a chart similar to the following:

Senses	Chibi's Distractions	Other Possible Distractions
<i>See</i>		
<i>Hear</i>		
<i>Smell</i>		
<i>Taste</i>		
<i>Touch</i>		

Next to each of the senses, list the things that Chibi used to distract himself during school time. Have the students look around the room and school to determine what they can see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Discuss how these things could also be distractions. Add these distractions to the chart.

Art

1. Have each of the students bring a cardboard box to school to use in the creation of a peep box. (Shoe boxes work well.) The outside of the box can be decorated to resemble a school. The inside of the box can hold a model of a classroom. Cut a peep hole in each end of the box. Cut a number of other openings in the box to allow for light. (These could be in the form of windows on the sides of the box.) Provide the students with assorted construction paper, cloth, felt, small boxes, clay, scissors, glue, markers, paints, brushes and any other media to use in decorating the outside and creating a three dimensional classroom inside the boxes.
2. Divide the students into small groups. Provide each group with a piece of heavy cardboard and a map of Japan. Mix three parts of salt with one part of flour. Add enough water to form a salt and flour mixture to use in the creation of a relief map. The students can begin by drawing an outline of Japan on the cardboard. Next, they can add a thin film of the salt and flour mixture inside the outline. After this has dried, masses of the mixture can be added to create various land formations.

When the map is completed and still moist, water-color paints can be used to add color.

3. Give the students an opportunity to examine Chibi's black and white drawings in this book. Discuss why the teacher might have liked these. Provide the students with large sheets of white drawing paper and black crayons and/or markers. Have the students use these art materials to draw a scene from the book, their classroom or a scene from the classroom window.
4. Bring in examples and/or pictures of Japanese art. This style of art is represented in decorated screens, fans, fine textiles, lacquer ware, porcelain, wood carvings and bronzes. Discuss ways Japanese art has influenced art in the United States.
5. Assist the students in developing an appreciation for the art work of Taro Yashima. Display the pictures in his books and lead a discussion about his technique, colors used, and the effect the illustrations, have on the story.

Music

1. Bring in recordings of Japanese music to play for the students. Give them an opportunity to move creatively as they listen.
2. Discuss the comment, "Listen to the birds sing." Do they think birds really sing? Use a recording of bird sounds to allow the students to hear the various sounds birds make. Assist them in identifying sounds of the birds familiar to your area. They can also imitate these sounds as Chibi did with the crow in this story.

Drama

Let the entire class participate in a dramatization of this story. Select a reader, Chibi, old teacher and Mr. Isobe. The rest of the class can be the children in the school. As the reader reads the story, the students can pantomime the appropriate scenes.

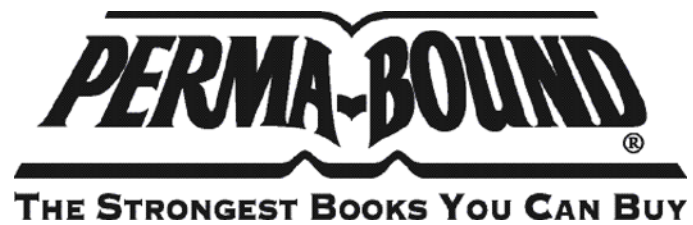
Alternate Assessment

- Keep a teacher's journal of those strategies that best helped the students understand the story.
- Record the children's behaviors and learning by jotting these on "Post-its." These comments can later be transferred to a journal containing daily comments on the students.
- Prepare a chart to record the completion of the projects for each of the students.
- Record the students' responses as they briefly retell the story.

- Collect a piece of each child's writing to evaluate.
- Develop a criteria for evaluating student work or refer to established forms of evaluation to assess the projects and activities completed.

Culminating Activity

1. Display all student writings, art work and other projects. Invite the parents or another class to attend a dramatization of *Crow Boy*. Have the students present any information they have learned during this literature study.
2. Three of Yashima's books, *Crow Boy*, *The Village Tree*, and *Umbrella*, have been adapted into educational movies and filmstrips. If possible, share one or more of these with the class.
3. This is also an excellent time to introduce Japanese folktales to the class. Share some of these with the students. Provide others for the students to read and share .in small groups.



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