

**Tales of Compassion: The Nine Color Deer**  
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**2018 UC Berkeley Summer Institute on China**

**Introduction**

The main goal of this 5-day lesson is for students to write their own short jataka-inspired personal narrative of a time they showed compassion for others. The secondary goals are for students to critically read and analyze the text (the jataka and fresco of the Nine Color Deer), discuss its narrative elements in a structured discussion, and use these elements to help them plan their narrative. Furthermore, systematic analysis of the Nine Color Deer fresco, as implemented using Visual Thinking Skills, allows for student competency in artistic literacy, a key component in my English Language Arts curriculum.

The first day, students will examine the fresco found in the Mogao Grottos, read the jataka, and complete a plot diagram for homework. The second day, students will engage in a structured class discussion about the moral and meaning of the jataka. The third day students will write a short personal narrative of a time they kept a promise to someone (or did not or someone kept a promise to them) and complete it for homework. Next, students will partake in a structured peer-editing session, in which they identify 1-2 areas of strength and one area of improvement; they will improve and type their jataka for homework. The fifth and final day of the lesson, students will publish their narratives in Google Classroom so that they can participate in a Gallery Walk and read at least 3 other students' narratives.

This lesson comes in the second week of a Language Arts Narrative-Writing unit, in which we will read and study folktales from around the world that tell about compassion, empathy, amongst other moral virtues in order for the students to write research and rewrite folktales from their own cultures that tell about these virtues; furthermore, we will discuss the role of the Silk Road in moving the story from its origin in India to China, where its fresco was found in Dunhuang. Furthermore, students will write a reflection that discusses how that folktale traveled from its location of origin, e.g. Guatemala, to its current location, i.e. Los Angeles and draw parallels to how the jatakas traveled from India to China.

**Content Standards**

**ELA-LITERACY**

Speaking and Listening 6.1.A: Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

Speaking and Listening 6.1.B: Follow rules for collegial discussions, set specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

Speaking and Listening 6.1.C: Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion.

Reading Literature 6.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Reading Literature 6.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

Reading Literature 6.3: Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

Visual Arts 4.1: Construct and describe plausible interpretations of what they perceive in works of art.

## Essential Questions

1. What can folktales teach us about how to live a good, compassionate life?
2. How did the Silk Road promote the transmission of culture and knowledge? How does the story of the *Nine Color Deer* and the fresco show this exchange?
3. How do parents and family members telling us stories or sharing stories between friends mirror the exchange of information along the Silk Road?

## Objectives

SWBAT interpret text (narrative and murals) for symbols and their meanings.

SWBAT engage in scholarly group discussions, using academic language.

SWBAT engage in editing skills to critique and improve their work (art and written work).

SWBAT conduct interviews and record information.

## Materials □

- ❖ Dunhuang Books:
  - *China Dunhuang* edited by the Dunhuang Research Academy
  - *The Silk Road in Cartoons: Stories from the Dunhuang Murals (1)* edited by Yu Zhongzheng and Cao Changguang
- ❖ Nine Color Deer PPT
- ❖ Plot Diagram graphic organizer

- ❖ Inner-Outer Circle Discussion Protocols
- ❖ Conflicts notes
- ❖ Student Notebooks and Pen for notetaking
- ❖ Legal Paper, Color Pencils

### **Equipment**

- ❖ Teacher Computer and Projector
- ❖ Student computers

### **Teacher Preparation**

Day 1

- ❖ Share *The Nine Color Deer* on Google Classroom
- ❖ Make copies of Plot Diagram
- ❖ Review PPT on *NCD: Vocabulary and Background*
- ❖ Make copies of *Inner-Outer Circle* Discussion Guide

Day 2: Divide chairs in half and place desks into inner and outer circles

Day 3: Review the writing process.

Day 4: Review Peer-Editing Protocols

Day 5: Pick Chinese-inspired music for Musical Desks

### **Time**

This lesson is broken into 5 50-minute periods.

### **Lesson Procedure**

Day 1: Introduction and Reading

1. Show students PPT about China
  - a. Discuss the Silk Road and how it connected Ancient China with Central Asia, the Roman Empire, North Africa
2. Jataka background

- a. What jatakas are and where they originated and how they travelled.
3. Project Mogao Cave 257: <https://www.e-dunhuang.com/cave/10.0001/0001.0001.0257>

Using Visual Thinking Skills, students will answer:

- a. What's going on in this picture?
- b. What do you see that makes you say that? (Refer to previous student comment)
- c. What more can we see?
4. Read the jataka *The Nine Color Deer*
5. Start Plot Diagram

Homework:

1. Plot Diagram
2. Prepare Open-Ended Discussion Questions about the moral/lesson/theme of the jataka.

Day 2: Class Discussion

1. Collect Plot Diagram
2. Review protocols for Inner-Outer Circle Class Discussions
3. Students will take place in inner or outer circle and share discussion questions.
4. Reflection: Students will write two paragraphs:
  - a. Paragraph 1: How does the discussion of this jataka enhance or deepen your understanding or appreciation of this story?
  - b. Paragraph 2: What is 1 goal you have for yourself in future discussions?

Homework: Brainstorm times in your life where you kept a promise to someone (or you did not, or someone kept a promise to you, or they did not).

Day 3: Drafting

1. Review your brainstormed list.
2. Pick your favorite story. Write the narrative. You can keep the plot the same, but pick different characters to represent you, e.g. animals to represent people. Page limit is 1.5

pages typed, you must include a clear plot, descriptive details, a clear conflict and resolution, a clear protagonist, and a clear moral at the end.

#### Day 4: Peer-Editing and Final Draft

1. Students will be assigned to a group of 3 students; review peer-editing protocol
2. Students will type their final drafts on Google Docs; students must use 12-point, Times New Roman or Arial font. Title of the file: Jataka.Last Name.Period #

#### Day 5: Gallery Walk and Reflection

1. Students will publish their jataka on Google Classroom.
2. Students will walk around the classroom and when music stops, they will sit at the nearest computer and read the jataka at that desk for 3 minutes.
3. Students will complete 3 rounds of Musical Desks.
4. Students will return to their own desks and complete a Reflection in their notebooks. They will reflect on their own interpretation of *NCD*, their own jataka (and the process of recalling their jataka), their classmates' jatakas.

A Man Betrayed the Nine—Coloured Deer  
Who Had Saved His Life

ONCE UPON A TIME, there was a deer king who was a previous incarnation of a bodhisattva. The deer had nine beautiful and glistening colours on his skin and a pair of snow—white antlers. He often strolled along the bank of the Ganges, grazing the rich grass. Crows were his good friends. Once there was a flood and a man was drifted down among the waves. He heard him crying, " Help! Help! All the deities on and above the earth, have pity on me! "

The deer saw that the man was holding a log, struggling and crying and was going to be drowned, he jumped into the water in spite of everything. He cleaved through the waves, swam over to the man and told him, " Don' t be afraid! Ride on my back, hold my antlers fast and I will carry you out. "

When they climbed on the bank, the deer was already exhausted and lay on the bank for a rest.

The man alighted, walked three rounds around the deer and then bowed before him. " Please accept me as your servant, saviour, " he said, " and I will serve you all my life. "

" Go back to where you are from, " said the deer. " I have no use for you here. If you want to repay me, never tell any-

one where I am. People are greedy for my beautiful skin and antlers. If they knew where I am, they would surely come and hurt me. "

The man remembered what the deer had told him and bid farewell.

At this time, the queen of the kingdom in which the man lived dreamt of the nine—coloured deer one night. She saw the deer' s beautiful skin and his snow—white antlers and liked them very much. Since then, she pretended to be sick and lay in bed. The king did not know what had happened to her and came to inquire about it. He asked the queen, " Why are you lying in bed the whole day? "

" I saw a beautiful deer in my dream, " she told the king. " He has nine beautiful colours on the skin and a pair of snow—white antlers. I want his skin to make a nice mattress with and his antlers to make the handle of my whisk. Your Majesty should catch that deer for me; otherwise I will die. "

" Don' t worry about it, " the king told her. " I am king of the kingdom and what can' t I get? "

The king immediately ordered the whole country : " Whoever is able to catch the nine—coloured deer, I will share my land with him. I will grant him gold bowls filled with silver grains and silver bowls filled with gold grains. "

When the man heard this order, evil ideas rose in his mind. " If I tell where the deer is, " he thought, " I will be as rich and noble as the king. The nine—coloured deer is only

an animal. What does it matter whether he is alive or not."

So he told the king's messenger that he could tell where the deer was living. The king's messenger brought the man before the king. When the man told the king he knew where the deer was sores appeared on and covered up his face.

"Though this deer is an animal," the man told the king, "he has great magical power, so Your Majesty should send many people to go with me and only then can he be captured."

The king immediately detached his troops to accompany the man to the river bank. This was seen by a crow and it doubted that they were coming to catch the deer, so it shouted aloud, "Hurry up, my friend! The king is coming to catch you!"

But the deer was fast asleep, so the crow cried in vain. Seeing that the king's troops were approaching, it flew down on the deer's antlers and shouted more loudly, "Hurry up, my friend! The king's troops are come to arrest you."

This time the deer woke up from his sleep. He looked around and saw that he was already surrounded by the soldiers ring upon ring. Realizing that there was no way to escape, the deer went toward the king's troops. The soldiers drew their bows and were about to shoot when the deer opened his mouth, "Don't kill me," he said. "I want to see your king and I have something to tell him."

The king heard these words and ordered his soldiers to put down their bows and arrows. Then the deer said to the king, "Your Majesty, please spare my life first. I have done a great favour for your country."

"What favour?" asked the king.

"A few days ago I saved one of your people," the deer said. Then he knelt before the king and asked, "Who told you that I am here?"

The king pointed at the sore-covered man and told the deer that it was he who had told him his whereabouts.

The nine-coloured deer looked at the man and tears rolled down his face. "Your Majesty," he told the king, "a few days ago, it was that man who was almost drowned by the flood and was saved by me. He swore that he would not tell where I live but he now has gone back to his promise. If I had known he would tell my presence, I would have carried ashore the log which he was holding then."

When the king had heard the deer's grievances, he felt angry and ashamed. He reproached the man on the spot and then set the deer free. When he returned to the capital, he issued an order throughout the country: "From now on, whoever chases the nine-coloured deer will be severely punished and his kinsmen will be killed too."

The man went home. He festered all over and stank in the mouth. He died not long after that. The queen, having failed to get what she wanted, died of shame, too.

From then on, throngs of deer came to the country. They strolled in the fields and grazed the rich grass. There were favourable climate and abundant harvests of all food crops all over the land. People were free from diseases and disasters. They were working in contentment and peace.

*from Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo, vol. 3, p. 452*

*Translated by Li Yuliang*



Name : \_\_\_\_\_  
Language Arts, Period : \_\_\_\_\_  
Date : \_\_\_\_\_

## **Inner-Outer Circle Discussion: Student Guide**

### **Day 1 : Read the Text**

1. Read the text
2. Write 3 open-ended questions. These kinds of questions can:
  - a. identify confusion and ask for clarification (e.g., “I wasn’t sure about \_\_\_\_\_. What do people think this means?”)
  - b. offer an interpretation (e.g. “I think \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. What do you think?”)
  - c. ask for interpretation, comparison, or evaluation (e.g. “What did you think the author means when \_\_\_\_\_?” or “How is \_\_\_\_\_ different from \_\_\_\_\_?”)

### **Day 2: Inner-Outer Circle Discussion & Reflection**

1. Sit in the inner circle or outer circle. One seat will be empty in the inner circle on purpose.
2. Inner circle students will be the only ones speaking. They can
  - a. Affirm: I appreciated \_\_\_\_\_’s comment because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. Extend: Another piece of evidence for \_\_\_\_\_’s interpretation is \_\_\_\_\_.” “\_\_\_\_\_’s comment made me think about \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. Disagree: I looked at \_\_\_\_\_ a different way because \_\_\_\_\_.
  - d. Close or Revisit: Have we finished this question? Who would like to ask another?
3. Outer circle students will take notes on the main topics/content/themes of the discussion and provide feedback on the dynamics of the discussion to the inner circle participants.
4. When appropriate, a student from the outer circle may take the empty seat in the inner circle to participate briefly, but he or she should return to the outer circle when his or her contribution is finished.
5. The teacher stays in the outer circle, using the empty seat in the inner circle as appropriate to help guide the conversation if necessary.
6. At the end of class, debrief on the discussion. Outer circle can share their observations about what was discussed as well as the dynamics of the discussion. All students will write a reflection on what they learned about the content and what they noticed about the dynamics of the discussion. Each student should set speaking and listening goals for the next discussion. Repeat the next discussion with a new arrangement of inner-outer circle participants.