

**Title:** Comparing Gender Roles in two Japanese novels: *The Sailor who Fell from Grace with the Sea* by Yukio Mishima and *Kitchen* by Banana Yoshimoto (Literature Grades 11-12)

**Introduction/Summary:** *The Sailor who Fell from Grace with the Sea* by Yukio Mishima is a novel about a thirteen-year-old boy named Noboru in Yokohama, Japan. The novel was published in 1963 and seems to take place in that same time period. Noboru's father has died and his mother Fusako is an independent businesswoman who runs a high-end European-style clothing and merchandise store. The novel focuses on the son and his definition of what manhood is, which is particularly influenced by one of his friends, named The Chief. This group of boys seem to believe that manhood is unemotional, uncaring, and daring. When Fusako falls in love with and has an intimate relationship with a sailor Ryuji, Noboru's initial admiration of Ryuji turns to disgust. He simply cannot believe that someone like a soldier would have these intimate feelings for his mother and seemingly want to act as a father to him.

*Kitchen* by Banana Yoshimoto was published in 1988 and is often cited as an example of contemporary Japanese literature. It focuses on a young woman Mikage Sakurai who recently lost her only living relative, her grandmother. Mikage is feeling lonely and unattached until a kind young man Yoichi who knew her grandmother offers for her to move in with him and his mother Eriko. Quickly, Mikage finds comfort in this accepting home and in the wisdom of Eriko, who happens to be Yoichi's transgender father. The plot centers around Mikage finding who she is in the world and coming to terms with her love of Yoichi. The title stems from Mikage's love of kitchens. Food and its preparation are repeated motifs in the novel.

**Duration of Lessons:** 2-3 class periods or 1-2 blocks

**Connection to standards/common core:**

English and Language Arts, Grades Eleven and Twelve (Ohio)

CCSS.ELA – Reading Literature, **Key Ideas and Details** - 1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA – Reading Literature, **Key Ideas and Details** - 3. Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA – Writing, **Text Types and Purposes** - 1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.

CCSS.ELA – Writing, **Research to Build and Present Knowledge** - 9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**Guiding questions/essential questions:** How do the depictions of the gender roles compare in these two novels? What literary elements lead to these differences?

**Learning Objectives:** Student will compare the depiction of gender roles present in the two novels and analyze the impacts on each.

**Materials:**

- a) Copies of the text being studied--this lesson must be completed AFTER students have read the novels.
- b) Copies of the note-taking sheet

**Pre-Assessment: Informal questioning:** Begin by asking students to identify commonly held beliefs about gender roles in their cultures. What is manly? What is womanly? Depending on the cultures present in your classroom, this could offer a range of answers. You may even want students to journal on these topics for homework the night before, share briefly in class with one another, and then have a limited discussion as a whole class.

**Lesson Activity:**

1. Begin by asking the students to make some generalities about the roles of men and women in both novels. How do these generalities compare to our own culture? Are men typically assertive whereas women 'should' be passive?
2. Pass out the comparison note pages to the students. Students could work in pairs or small groups to complete the analysis. Depending on time or the class, you could also jigsaw the chart to allow the students to focus more deeply on their group's specific character or just one side for each gender or just one.
3. Regardless of how the teacher divides the task, students should summarize instances that fall under that specific heading. Be sure students pull quotations to support their assertions for each. Pulling quotations from the text for support will insure that these are text-based responses and not simply student opinion.
4. Once students have pulled evidence for the characters, they should think about the 'point of analysis' at the bottom of the page. What comparisons can be made among these men and women?
5. Ask students to consider the following questions: What leads to these different depictions of character? Does setting & publication have anything to do with the differences? How do the authors' depictions of gender impact the tone or mood of the novels?

**Post Assessment:** Students will complete a comparison essay on a specific character or a specific gender.

**Extending the lesson:** Truly, these two novels offer quite a bit of rich comparison. You could have students also compare the depiction of fathers in the novels, as Ryuji attempts to father Noboru to fatal ends and Eriko chooses to become a mother to Yoichi after his wife dies. Both novels also have existential themes at work.



**Sources:**

Kellerman, Robert. "A Room of Her Own in Banana Yoshimoto's *Kitchen*." *Pacific Asia Inquiry Volume 1, Number 1*. University of Guam. 2010. Web. 21 February 2016.

Mishima, Yukio. *The Sailor who Fell from Grace with the Sea*. Trans. John Nathan. New York, Vintage, 1994. Print.

Yoshimoto, Banana. *Kitchen*. Trans. Megan Backus. New York: Grove Press, 1993. Print.

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## Traditional Masculine Qualities

Exhibiting/Commenting on Traditional Qualities

Quotation for Support

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Noboru

Ryuji

The Chief

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Yoichi

Eriko as a man

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**Point of analysis:**

## Non-Traditional Masculine Traits

Exhibiting/Commenting on Non-Traditional Qualities

Quotation for Support

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Noboru

Ryuji

The Chief

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Yoichi

Eriko as a man

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**Point of analysis:**

## Traditional Female Behavior/Traits

Exhibiting/Commenting on Traditional Qualities

Quotation for Support

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Fusako

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Mikage

Eriko as a woman

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**Point of analysis:**

## Non-Traditional Female Behavior/Traits

Exhibiting/Commenting on Non-Traditional Qualities

Quotation for Support

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Fusako

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Mikage

Eriko as a woman

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**Point of analysis:**