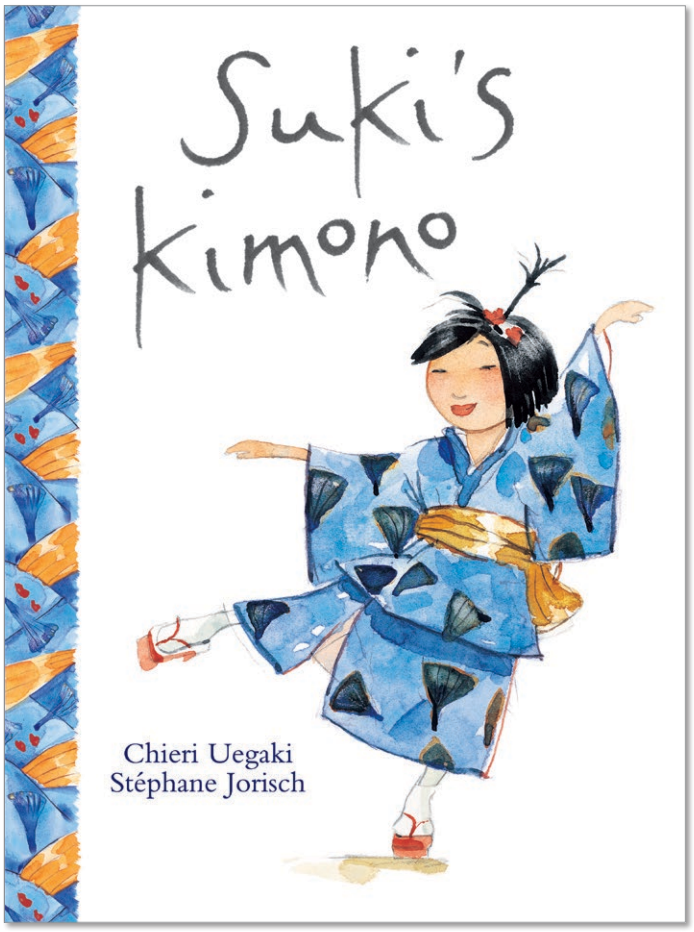
Suki's Kimono — Teaching Guide

About the Book

Suki's favorite possession is her blue cotton kimono. A gift from her obāchan, it holds special memories of her grandmother's visit last summer. And Suki is going to wear it on her first day back to school — no matter what anyone says.

When it's Suki's turn to share with her classmates what she did during the summer, she tells them about the street festival she attended with her obāchan and the circle dance that they took part in. In fact, she gets so carried away reminiscing that she's soon humming the music and dancing away, much to the delight of her entire class!

Filled with gentle enthusiasm and a touch of whimsy, *Suki's Kimono* is the joyful story of a little girl whose spirit leads her to march — and dance — to her own drumbeat.



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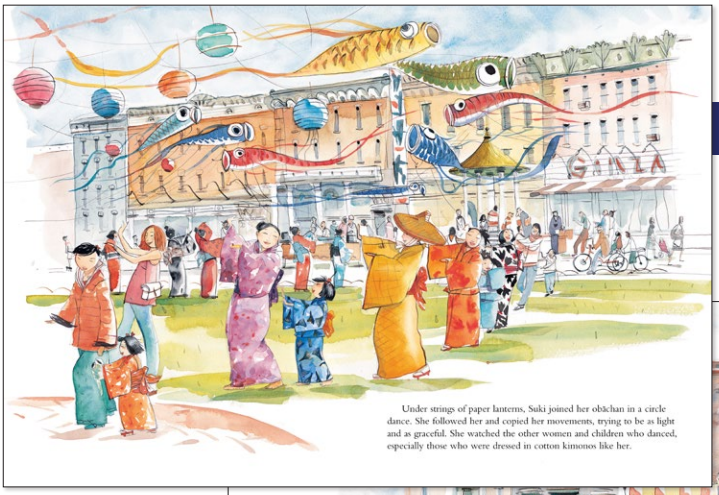
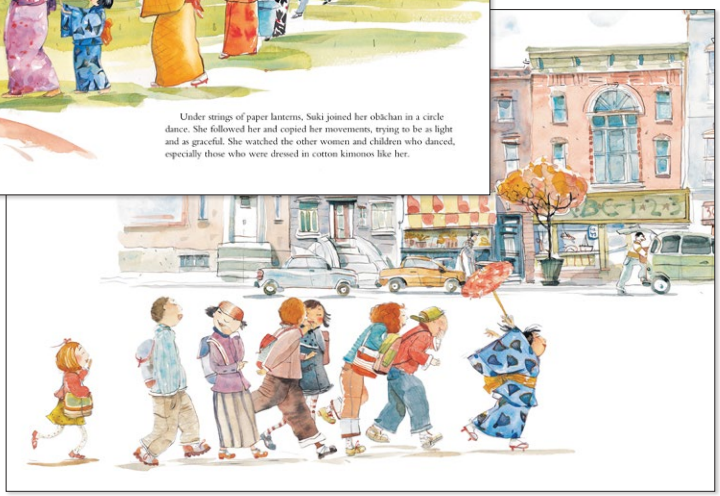
About the Author

CHIERI UEGAKI is a second-generation Japanese Canadian who was born in Quesnel, British Columbia. When she was one year old, Chieri and her parents moved to East Vancouver, where she and her two younger sisters grew up. Chieri's first picture book, *Suki's Kimono*, was released in 2003. She has since written stories for Pearson Education, *Chirp* and *Chickadee* magazines, and has published three more picture books: *Rosie and Buttercup*; *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin*; and *Ojiichan's Gift*.





About the Illustrator

STÉPHANE JORISCH is an illustrator whose imaginative work has won many awards, including the prestigious Governor General's Award for Children's Illustration. His works are produced in watercolor and gouache as well as pen and ink, following in the footsteps of his father, who illustrated comic strips for newspapers in Europe. *Suki's Kimono* is his second book, and it was named an Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Award Honour Book. In addition to his books for young people, Stéphane also illustrates for magazines and has created designs for the renowned Cirque du Soleil. Stéphane was born in Brussels and grew up in Lachine, Quebec. He now lives in Montreal with his girlfriend and their three children.

Kids Can Press

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About This Resource

Every text, even a picture book, can be a platform for children to better understand the world. Picture books in particular help young children develop their sense of self. When children look at pictures and illustrations, they are trying to place themselves and the people they know inside the story. It is important that students see themselves in the texts they encounter, and know that who they are is valued. Picture books also help children develop empathy and gain an understanding of the experiences of others. A curriculum that embraces diverse ways of being and lived realities gives students opportunities to learn about their own and other people's experiences, and this builds understanding and respect, as well as academic foundations and the desire to learn to read. The activities in this guide are aimed at exploring these themes.

Activity One: Choral or Group Reading of *Suki's Kimono*

Introduce the book by showing children the cover of *Suki's Kimono*. Then, leaf through the entire book slowly, just looking at the pictures.

Next, turn back to the beginning and review the glossary — which can be found under the dedications on the copyright page.

Now, engage the group in either a teacher-led read-aloud, or, for children old enough to take turns reading to the group, a choral reading of *Suki's Kimono*.

As you read the story, pause after each spread and ask children to look at pictures and point out what they see. Then discuss some of the below observations with the group.

Spread-by-Spread Discussion

Spread 1: Your students might notice that Suki's sisters are older than she is and that they're wearing typical Western-style clothing. If they don't point these details out, point out for them the cat blending into the design on Suki's blanket or the details of the items in her room. Ask students what they think the older sisters are worried about with Suki's outfit. Encourage discussion.

Spread 2: After reading this spread, point out to the children that the picture on the left side is today, and the picture on the right side is Suki's memory of what happened when her grandmother visited in the past. Discuss the facial expressions of the characters on the left side of the spread, and then compare them to those of the characters on the right. What do students notice about the people in these pictures?

Spread 3: After you read this page, explain that we are still in Suki's memory of that day. Point out the fish- and globe-shaped paper lanterns, and discuss the people — many of whom are Japanese, but not all — in the circle dance. Where do students think this festival is taking place? What clues do they see?

Context: Explain to students that the circle dance shown in these pictures is called Bon Odori. Bon is a traditional festival that takes place every August in commemoration of deceased family members and ancestors. The festival includes dance performances, in which dancers wear cotton kimonos just like in this picture. Some dances can be very large and include hundreds of people dancing and celebrating. Others are smaller — like this one, which likely takes place in Canada, where the Japanese population is smaller than it is in Japan.

Spread 4: Before reading this page, ask students if they think the drums are quiet or loud. What images in the picture help communicate the sound the drums make? Now read the page to children and tell them about taiko drumming.

Context: Tell students that these types of drums have been used in Japan for more than 1500 years. They were once used to signal military action and to communicate over great distances. Today, they are mainly used in theatrical performances and during religious ceremonies. They are commonly played at festivals such as the one in *Suki's Kimono*. Some of these drums are as small as a Western snare drum, and others are as big — and as heavy — as a car! The people who play these drums are more than musicians — they are also performers, and in this way taiko drumming is as much dance as is it music.

Turn now to the right side of the spread and talk with students about the handkerchief purchase. If students don't know what a souvenir is, help them understand that it is a small token to help you remember a special time. Ask children if they think this idea is linked to Suki's kimono, as well as to her handkerchief.

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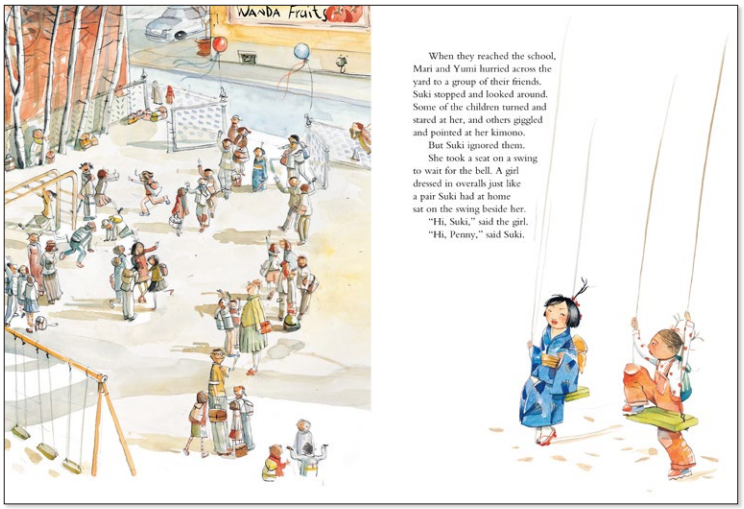
Spread 5: After reading these pages, point out to students how everyone in the pictures is communicating something through body language. What do students think the mom is thinking as she takes the photo? Why do they think the sisters would pretend they don't know Suki? Ask: How do you know that Suki isn't bothered by her sisters' actions?

Spread 6: Continue the conversation about body language on this spread. Ask: How does Suki feel on the walk, and how do you know? Point out the other people in the picture and ask what the children think those people are doing. Point out that the words in the story tell Suki's perspective on the morning, but the picture shows a different perspective of what's going on. Ask why the author and illustrator might have wanted to do that.

Spread 7: Notice how the picture on the left is from a distance, zoomed way out to show the whole schoolyard, and the picture on the right is zoomed way in, showing just Suki and Penny. Ask: How does it seem Suki feels when she walks into the schoolyard? Make sure students try to compare how she looks in the picture to what the words say about how she feels. What does her expression tell you about how she feels once she gets on the swings?



Spread 8: Urge students to once again notice what they can tell about Suki's feelings based on the facial expressions in these pictures. Ask: Does swinging change Suki's mood? Has anything like that ever happened to you? Notice how Penny seems to be coming around to Suki's way of thinking — at least she doesn't get up and walk away like Suki's sisters did. What do you think this tells the reader about Penny?

Spread 9: Direct students to notice Penny's facial expression on the left side of the spread. Say: It seems like she's beginning to admire Suki now. How can you tell? Now direct students' attention to the facial expression and gestures of the boy sitting in front of Suki on the right side of the spread. Discuss with students how pictures help to tell this story. Ask them if they would understand the story less, or differently if there were no pictures at all.

Spread 10: Ask: How is Suki's handling of the boy teasing her unusual or unexpected? What would you do in that kind of situation? After discussion of this idea, point out ways in which the words can tell more of the story than the pictures. Ask: Would you have noticed that Suki tucked her pink handkerchief away if the words hadn't pointed it out? It's hard to see there, in her obi. Discuss with children what they think that handkerchief can do for Suki. How does it help her stay strong in the face of teasing? On the right side of this page, point out that the teacher is also dressed unusually. Might this matter to the story?

Spread 11: Ask children: How do you think Suki felt when she got in front of the class and started dancing? Now direct them to the right side of the spread and encourage students to look at the different facial expressions of the students in the picture. Ask them to identify some of the ways the children in Suki's class are reacting to her dance. What is the picture communicating that the words can't?

Spread 12: Ask: What can you learn about Suki as she keeps on dancing? What does it tell you that even when she forgets the steps at the end, she makes up a new one?

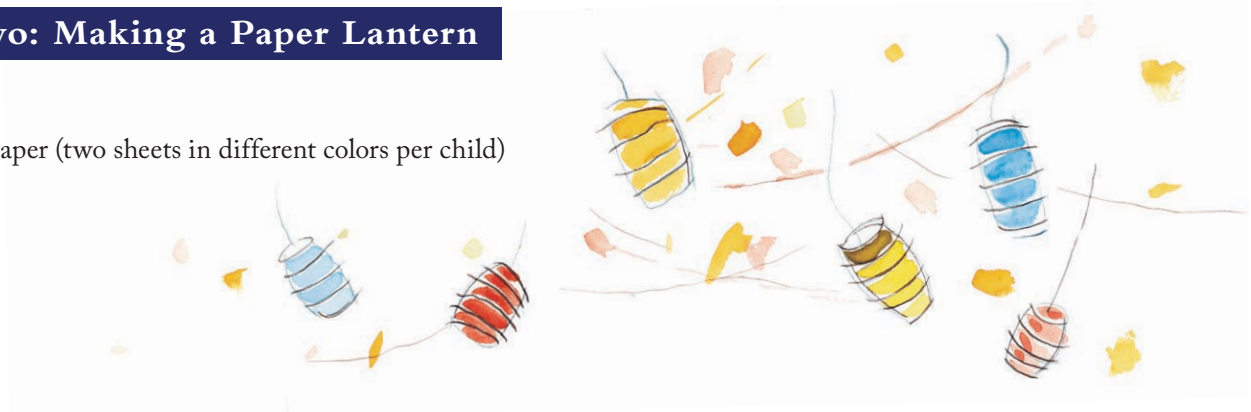
Spread 13: Ask: Why does Suki think she might be in trouble? Discuss different responses to that question and then direct children's attention to Suki's body language in the picture on the left side of the spread. She looks tired, and maybe a little embarrassed. Why do students think she might feel that way?

Spread 14: Ask: What is the author trying to communicate when she writes that Penny started clapping second — after the teacher, but before the other kids? What can we tell now about Penny and Suki? Now direct students to Suki's changed expression. What can we tell from this picture about how Suki feels?

Spread 15: At the end of the book, the author tells us that Suki's sisters are upset that no one noticed their clothing choices at school. Ask students what they think this means about their earlier judgment of Suki dressing in an unusual way. Do they think the sisters might ever be brave enough to wear traditional Japanese clothing to school? Other questions to ask students at the end of the story:

- What does it show about Suki that she danced all the way home?
- How is she feeling about her choice of wearing the kimono?
- What is the significance of the handkerchief at the end?

Activity Two: Making a Paper Lantern



Materials

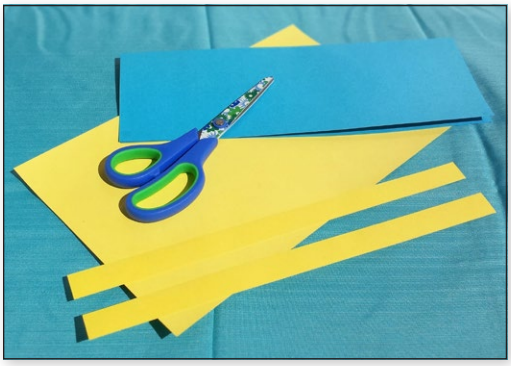
- construction paper (two sheets in different colors per child)
- scissors
- pencils
- staplers
- rulers
- string

Activity

Step 1: Choose two colors for your lantern. One will be the outside color, and one will be the inside color.

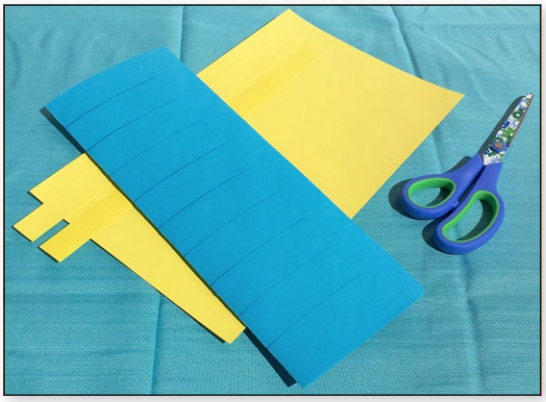
Step 2: Use the color you chose for the inside of the lantern, and cut two straight strips down the long side of that sheet of paper. The large remaining piece will form the inside of the lantern. The two strips will decorate the outside of your lantern.

Step 3: Take the color you chose for the outside and, with the narrow end facing up, draw 8 to 10 lines across the sheet using a ruler and a pencil. Make the lines very light, so that they won't take away from the beauty of the lantern.



Step 4: Now fold the sheet of paper carefully down the middle, long-ways. This will form a long, skinny rectangle. The fold will be perpendicular to the lines you drew.

Step 5: Using your scissors, and starting at the crease in the paper, cut along the lines you drew. But be careful! Stop an inch from the end so that you don't cut the paper all the way through.



Step 6: Open the paper up and roll it together so that the short ends of the paper join up. You want to form a cylinder. Holding the ends carefully together, staple the cylinder once at the top and once at the bottom. You may need to work with a partner for this part.

If you really don't want people to be able to see the pencil marks you made, refold the paper so they are on the inside. Do this carefully so the slats will still open nicely.

Step 7: Now get the smaller sheet of paper that you made for the inside color of the lantern. Roll it up from the short end and slide it into the cylinder. You should be able to see it through the slats you made in the outside paper. Center it in the middle and push the outside paper down so the ends of both papers line up. This will force the folds you created in the outside paper to open. Staple the papers together at both ends.

Step 8: Take the long strips of paper you cut from the inside color, and staple them to the outside of the cylinder, one along the top and one along the bottom.

Step 9: Cut a length of string about 70 cm (28 in.) long. Staple one end of the string to one side of the top of your lantern, and the other end of the string to the other side of the top of the lantern. This will allow your lantern to hang from the ceiling!

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These colorful paper lanterns will decorate your classroom for the rest of the activities about *Suki's Kimono*, just as the lanterns in the festival decorated the circle dance performance.

Teacher's Note: Hang these lanterns from the ceiling of the classroom.

Activity Three: Art Project — My True Self

Materials

- colorful magazines with plenty of pictures
- scissors
- glue
- construction paper
- markers

Activity

The project for today is a collage self-portrait. Explain to students that a collage is different from a painted or drawn self-portrait because there is no need to make the image look exactly like a person. The idea is to find pictures of objects, colors or people that the student feels reflect their true self.

Some students will want to create an image of themselves wearing something culturally significant, as Suki does. Encourage them to look for blocks of color and to cut them into the right shapes. Remind students that there are many ways to present one's culture: for one person it could be a kimono, for another it could be a dashiki and for another it could a baseball cap.

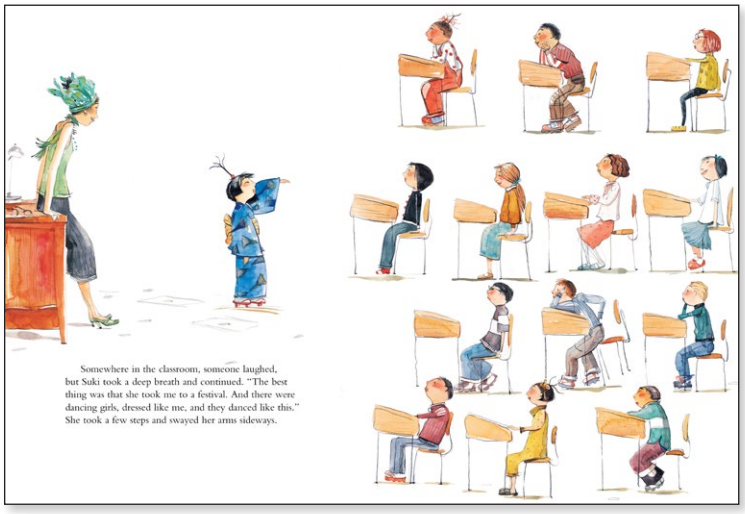
Other students may not feel that an item of clothing represents their true self. For these children, encourage them to show who they are through objects, color or the secret knowledge of carrying something significant tucked into a pocket, as Suki tucked the pink handkerchief into her obi.

Remind children that the thing that makes a person feel authentically themselves can't always be seen on the outside. One way to find expression of their inner selves is through abstract color and object collection.

Hang the completed collages on the classroom wall.

Activity Four: Presentations to the Class

Arrange the group into a circle sitting on the floor. Return to spread 11 of *Suki's Kimono*. Remind students that Suki's presentation was completely spontaneous, and that she stood in front of her brand-new class and told them all about her summer, and then danced for them.



Now, ask students to think about something they have done recently that was out of the ordinary of their daily lives. Maybe it was something they did with a friends or a family member, possibly during a recent school break. It can be anything.

Going around the circle, ask each child to stand up, one at a time, and tell the group about their experience. If they get nervous or feel shy, encourage them with questions, such as:

- Who was with you that day?
- How did you get to the location?
- What foods did you eat that day?
- Did you bring home anything special to remember the day?
- If you didn't, what might have been something special you could have brought home that would have reminded you of that day?

For students who don't feel they have anything to share, ask them to find their collage from Activity Three and show it to the group. Encourage students to explain how the collage represents who they really are. If they get shy, encourage them with questions, such as:

- Why did you use these colors? Do they mean anything specific to you?
- Does anything in your collage represent your family or where you come from?
- Does anything in your collage represent something you like to wear?
- What else would you like us to know about your collage?

Activity Five: Independent Writing

Provide students with what they need to create a story. If they can read and write well, this should be a writing activity. (Although, of course, they are welcome to illustrate it as well!) If children are pre-writing, have them draw the major events in a story and create their own picture book.

The prompt is: A child who feels out of place.

Some children will write or draw about their own experiences. Some may want to create an imaginary story. Encourage both options and recommend that students be as creative as they like. Magic can happen in their stories! Animals can speak. Children can travel to outer space or to distant lands at the snap of their fingers.

The question for them to answer is: What does their character do when they feel out of place? How do they find themselves back at home?

Step 1: Brainstorming

Either provide students with paper and pencils to write down ideas for stories, or talk with them about their ideas. Children should be encouraged to think about something that might make a person feel out of place.

Step 2: Character and Setting

Ask children to decide who their story is about and where it happens. Is the main character based on them? If not, what is that character's name? Where does the action happen?

Have students jot these ideas down or tell them to you or a partner. If children will be mostly drawing, they can sketch out their ideas about person and place, just like those who are writing.

Step 3: The Plot

Using *Suki's Kimono* as an example, have students decide the beginning of their story, the main problem in their story (the reason their character feels out of place), and how that problem is going to get solved. This is the plot.

For example, point out that at the beginning of *Suki's Kimono*, she was getting ready for her first day of school. What is their character doing at the beginning of their story?

Suki's main problem was that her sisters and classmates didn't understand why she wanted to wear something unusual to school. But through her confidence in who she was, she did it and she prevailed! What do your students' characters do in order to feel better about feeling out of place? Or, how do their characters find their way back home?

Once students have written or illustrated their stories (this could take several class sessions to complete) host a reading and encourage everyone to read their stories aloud or to narrate what happens in their pictures.

Post-Activity: Music Project — Drum Circle

There is an expression that everyone should find a way to "march to the beat of their own drum." This expression means that people should feel free to be individuals, to find their own true selves and express it.

One of the best ways to express our true selves is through music. If your school has a music teacher, or is able to hire a professional drummer, this suggested final activity with the group can drive home the most important lessons from *Suki's Kimono*.

With the help of a musician who has experience leading drumming circles, host a session in which children can both play the drums and dance. Hang their paper lanterns from the ceiling and encourage them to dance under the lanterns and imagine who they could grow up to become.

Resources used in *Suki's Kimono* Teaching Guide

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