

Undergraduate Library Research Award Reflective Essay

Tonbo came to life in many different parts over the course of two semesters. The project began as a research paper on Obon Odori for my Asian Mythology course in early Fall 2021. While I had attended Obon as a child, I never knew much about the origins of the festival, so I wanted to learn more about its history and significance to the Japanese community. During my research process, I relied entirely on the library's resources. I borrowed hardcopy books, browsed online resources primarily through OneSearch+, and scrolled through the Asian and Pacific Studies LibGuide to find the most useful databases. The well-organized layout of the physical library, as well as the online resources, helped me collect research in a timely manner.

In late Fall 2021, I used my research to create a picture book on Obon Odori for my final project in Children's Literature. I focused mostly on crafting the story itself and deciding how to present death in an appropriate and sensitive way to children. I noticed most academic journals recommend using biological, concrete examples of death, because spiritual or metaphorical explanations could confuse children. Even so, I found several picture books centered around Heaven, but few approached the topic from a Buddhist or, more broadly, Asian perspective. By focusing on the interconnectedness of death, Asian philosophies, and rituals, I felt that I could fill a gap in the existing literature and allow more children to see themselves in fiction. After finishing the first draft and consulting Dr. Aimee Ross-Kilroy, I decided to continue working on it independently.

To evaluate my resources, I used the skills I learned from the library's Digital Citizenship Workshop, *The Information Pandemic: Who Can You Trust?* While the workshop focused primarily on evaluating news sources, I found that I could implement some tools from the session in my academic research. Librarian Alexis Weiss covered the SIFT Method which

prompted me to stop and evaluate the origin, quality, and reliability of my resources. When choosing references, I made sure to select a wide-variety of peer-reviewed articles that approached my topics from different perspectives.

In Spring 2022, I consulted Librarian Rachel Wen-Paloutzian to help me expand my research. With Wen-Paloutzian's help, I found additional resources on grief in Japanese culture and historical photographs of Obon through databases like JSTOR and Calisphere. She also suggested that I add a back matter section to highlight the importance of Obon Odori, particularly in relation to Japanese American internment. At first, I was hesitant to discuss the prejudice Japanese Americans faced during World War II. In my research, I found that the dominant historical narrative about Japanese Americans centered around WWII or internment camps. I didn't want my ethnic group's history to be defined by discrimination and white standards, so I planned to focus on something entirely cultural. However, attending the library event, *80 Years Later: Remembering the Japanese American Incarceration*, changed my opinion. The panelists shared their personal experiences and expressed how the trauma from internment was still impacting their families today. I was moved by their stories, and after the event, I decided to dedicate a paragraph in the back matter to Japanese American internment.

Lastly, I asked Carol Raby, the Curriculum Materials Collection curator, to evaluate my project. Raby's passion for picture books drove my interest in learning about children's literature, and her constant encouragement motivated me to pursue my creative endeavors. Raby recommended stories translated from other languages to improve my understanding of how death is presented in children's literature worldwide. She also helped me choose published picture books with well-written examples of back matter. I tried to mimic the format of those books when organizing the layout of my text.

I'm incredibly grateful for everyone who helped me throughout this process. I wouldn't have been able to complete my project without the library and the irreplaceable individuals who support my education.