



A Girls' Guide to the Islands

Sample lesson plan

Today we'll start **A Girls' Guide to the Islands** by Suzanne Kamata, an American writer who lives in Japan. The book describes a series of trips she takes with her disabled teenaged daughter to visit art museums on the islands in the Inland Sea. Lilia is deaf and gets around in a wheelchair. This makes visiting the museums a challenge for her and her mother. Yet the two see works of art by some of the world's greatest artists and enjoy adventures together.

Vocabulary

Provide new vocabulary ahead of reading or flag difficult words during group reading. *Tip:* Make a note of vocabulary words discussed in class and send the list to the students by email or text message between classes.

ferry	installation	surreal
exhibition	experiential art	cataracts
disabled	titled/untitled	hodgepodge
sign language	in the minority	retro
hallucinate	amuse-bouche	accessibility
dysfunctional	fish mousse	travelogue
accessible	menial tasks	dumping ground
inappropriate	obscured	kitsch
gallery	dissipate	docent

wild boar	Sci-fi vibe	manga
disembark	hallowed	cochlear implants
inadvertently	discomfiting	kimono

Introducing the book and Chapters 1-3

→Before Reading (10-15 minutes)

- Summarize story
- Cover unfamiliar language and character names
- Discuss title image
- Draw on students' experiences

Class activities and discussions:

- Read the blurb on the back of the book as an introduction.
- Ask the students what they know about art. Do they visit museums? Which are their favorites?
- Ask about the students' experience of living with a disability. Do they have disabled friends or family members? What is it like to travel with them and go to places like museums?
- Look at the cover of the book: What does it make you think the story will be about?
- Places: Find Japan and the island of Naoshima on a map and online.

A note about Japanese names: The Japanese names in the story may be unfamiliar to students. You can review them before they read each chapter.

It can reassure students to know that Japanese is a largely phonetic language. If they sound out the words the way they know how, their pronunciation will be reasonably correct. Consider sounding out some of the names together in class as phonetics practice.

→During Reading (15-20 minutes)

In the first three chapters, we learn about Lilia and the trip she and her mother take to see an exhibition by one of her favorite artists, Yayoi Kusama. It is the first trip to a museum they attempt together.

→Reading

Students read the chapters silently or the class reads them together. The teacher can model by reading the first paragraph. Then students can read one at a time or as a group. Alternatively, while class reads silently, the teacher can choose to listen to some students read quietly (“whisper read”) to check fluency.

→After Reading (15-20 minutes)

Discuss the chapters. Clarify confusion, target unknown vocabulary, revisit parts of the text that caused problems. Encourage students to anchor their comments using specific examples in the text: Where on the page are the words that tell you that? How does the writer let you know?

Questions to elicit discussion:

- Who is Lilia? How old is she? How is she disabled?
- Why does her mother want to take her to a museum?
- What exhibition do they see?
- What are some of the artworks they see?
- Is the trip to the museum a success? Why or why not?

Listening: You can play the Audiobook of chapters 1-3 to recap after class discussion.

→Introduce next lesson (5 minutes)

Next class, we’ll read and discuss chapters 4-6 in **A Girls’ Guide to the Islands**.

- Read the chapters before class
- Highlight any difficult words or confusing parts

- Keep this question in mind as you read:
“How do Lilia and her mother get to Naoshima?”

Here are some [videos](#) and [links](#) that help illustrate a few of the artists’ work:

- Yayoi Kusama: Documentary
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRZR3nsileA>
- Claude Monet, James Turrell and others in Chichu Art Museum:
<https://theconversation.com/if-i-could-go-anywhere-japanese-art-islandchichu-a-meditation-and-an-education-133439>
- David Hockney Acatlan
<https://www.thedavidhockneyfoundation.org/artwork/3883>
- Takeshi Kitano: Anger at the bottom
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdo44d-RLLo&t=105s>

A note about artwork titles: There are many artworks mentioned by title in this story. It may help your students to point out that the titles of artworks always appear in italics. (*Love Forever, Stern, Inland Sea Driftwood Circle*)



Listen!

A Girls’ Guide to the Islands by Suzanne Kamata, read by Suzie Althens

Putting a finger on the text while listening to the audio can improve language fluency. Help readers engage with the content in two modalities... and it’s fun!

You can find the audiobook at gemmamedia.org.