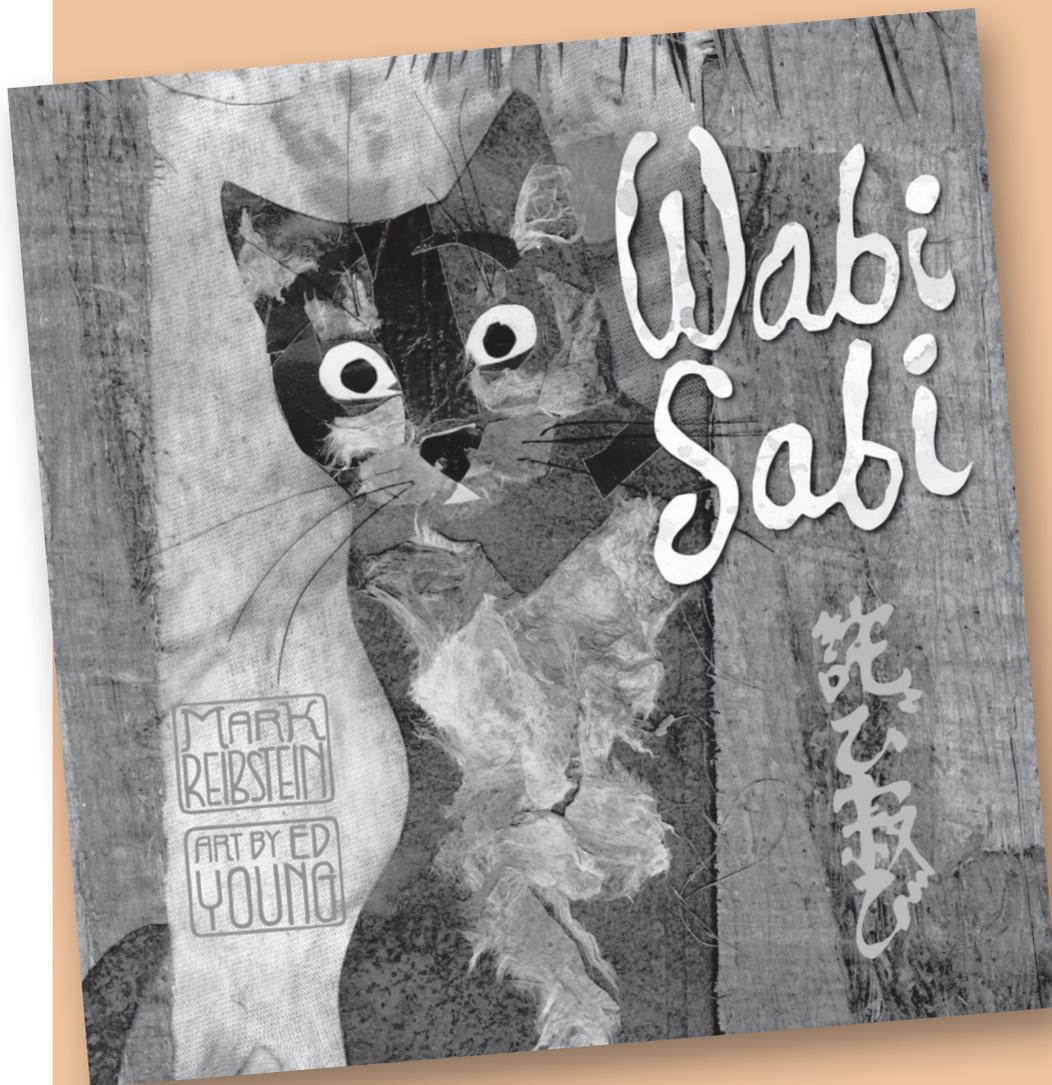


# WABI SABI



## Curriculum connections

- ❖ Reading Comprehension
- ❖ Poetry
- ❖ Social Studies
- ❖ Science & Natural Studies
- ❖ Art

All Ages

*An exquisite illustration of a unique world view.*

Written by Mark Reibstein  
Illustrated by Ed Young

## Research In Practice: Looking for similarities and differences

Robert Marzano's meta-analysis of education research concludes that the process of comparing and contrasting is very effective for student learning in all content areas. By looking for similarities and differences, students have the opportunity to practice making judgments and connections. Several of the activities in this guide demonstrate the use of this strategy. The use of a Venn diagram or other graphic organizer can be differentiated to be a simple task or a springboard toward much deeper thinking. Creating and understanding metaphors and analogies is a more complex form of looking for similarities and differences. The suggestions in this guide are only the beginning. Using *Wabi Sabi* to develop additional activities that require students to connect, compare, and contrast will help your students now and in the future.

## LANGUAGE ARTS

### Building Background

*Wabi Sabi* takes place in Japan. Before reading the story, create a Before/After/Now Chart (a three-column chart with the headings *Before*—What We Know Before Reading, *After*—What We Know After Reading, and *Now*—What We Know Now that We Conducted Research). Under the *Before* column, ask students to share what they already know about Japan. List students' ideas and talk about what they know or what they think they already know. After reading *Wabi Sabi*, ask students to share what they learned about Japan or conclusions they have drawn from their reading of *Wabi Sabi*. Ask students to use books, the Internet, or other resources to research the culture and geography of Japan. In the final column record any additional information they learned from their research. Ask students to discuss and compare what they knew before reading with what they know after their reading and research.

### Comprehension Connection

Helping students make connections to their reading is an important component of comprehension instruction. Ask students to think about *Wabi Sabi* and the journey she took to discover the meaning of her name. Have any of the students ever taken a trip? In what ways was their trip similar and different from *Wabi Sabi*'s? Use a Venn Diagram to compare and contrast the trips. *Wabi Sabi*'s journey was also a metaphor for the process she went through as she learned to accept herself. To build inferential comprehension, ask students to think about how *Wabi Sabi* learned more about herself as she searched for the meaning of her name. In what ways is this like a trip or journey?

### Vocabulary

#### *Strong Verbs*

In *Wabi Sabi*, the author chooses his words carefully to convey certain ideas and feelings both in the narrative and in the Haiku. Ask students to look for examples of strong

verbs that help us visualize or use our other senses to understand the author's meaning. Some examples might include twitching, pricks, tickles, and snapped. Make a class chart of strong verbs and encourage students to use the verbs in their writing. The chart could be kept in a central location and added to over time.

### ***What's in a Name?***

Names have special significance and there is often a story behind them. Wabi Sabi tries to understand what her name means by asking others. Have students choose a city, town, or other place to research. How did that place get its name? Ask students to decide if they think it is an appropriate name for that place. As a variation, students may choose to research the story behind their own name. Why were they given that name? Does it have any special meaning?

### **Fluency**

Reading and rereading until it sounds like conversation is an excellent way for students to practice their fluency. Ask pairs of students to each choose a different page in the book and practice reading it to one another. When all students have practiced, have students read their page with expression and fluency. Props, masks, or simple costumes could be added to enhance the Reader's Theater experience.

## **WRITING**

### **Understanding Haiku**

Haiku are featured throughout the book. Haiku are short poems that follow a particular pattern: 5 syllables, 7 syllables, 5 syllables. Begin this lesson by reviewing syllables. Students can clap or use instruments to identify syllables in their names or other words. When all students understand syllables, review the Haiku in the book *Wabi Sabi*. Tell them that Haiku uses a special syllable pattern. Have students work together to read the Haiku in the story and try to determine what the syllable pattern

might be. When students have identified the pattern, have them try to create their own Haiku. They can use the ones in *Wabi Sabi* as a guide. As an extension, ask students to look at the translated Haiku at the end of the book. Do they notice that these poems do not follow the syllable pattern? What could be the reason for this?

### **Prompted Writing**

Wabi Sabi's master and many of the characters she meets throughout the book respond to questions with, "That's hard to explain..." Although Wabi Sabi discovers the answer to her question in other ways, sometimes it is important to be able to explain something to someone else. Have students think about something that used to be difficult for them to do, but is now simple because they understand it. Ask them to choose one of those things and explain how to do it in writing. Remind students to focus on organizing their writing. They should make the steps easy to follow for someone else. Students may choose to explain how to tie shoes, make a sandwich, or any other task.

## **SOCIAL STUDIES**

### **Geography/Math**

Using an atlas find Japan, Kyoto, Mount Hiei, and Ginkakuji. Use the key to determine how far Wabi Sabi had to travel to get to Mount Hiei from Kyoto. What is the distance between Mount Hiei and Ginkakuji? What is the total round trip distance Wabi Sabi traveled? To differentiate the lesson, ask some students to determine the distance in miles and kilometers. As an additional technology extension, use a program such as Google Earth to create an interactive map of Wabi Sabi's travels, complete with web links and information about her journey.

### **Travel Journal**

Ask students to pretend they are Wabi Sabi. Have them write several journal entries that tell about

their experiences. What did they see, hear, feel, smell, and taste along the way? Students can use the illustrations and descriptions in the book for ideas, but they can also use their own imagination and what they know about this region of Japan. Technology could be integrated by making this journal a blog.

## Japanese Good Luck Cat

In Japan, it is very common to see a Japanese Good Luck Cat (Maneki Neko) in shops and other places of business. Believed to bring good luck and financial prosperity, they are popular throughout Japan. They come in many colors—each with its own significance. Have students look at several photographs of Maneki Neko and research the significance of the various colors and placement of the beckoning paw. Have students create their own Maneki Neko out of modeling clay or on paper. After their research, ask them why the author might have used a cat for the main character in *Wabi Sabi*? How does this reflect Japanese culture?

## Tea Ceremony

Wabi Sabi sees her reflection in a cup of tea offered by Koshi on Mount Hiei. The Japanese tea ceremony itself is an example of wabi sabi. Learn more about the tea ceremony by inviting a guest speaker or watching a video of the ceremony. Discuss how the simple, but elegant, process is memorized and practiced so the person serving the tea can concentrate on the guest. Recreate the tea ceremony in the classroom for a special treat.

## SCIENCE AND NATURE

### Wabi Sabi in Nature

The concept of wabi sabi is described in the front of the book as a feeling, rather than an idea. It is a way of seeing the world. Beauty is found in ordinary and simple things. Look for examples of wabi sabi throughout the book.

Have small groups of students work together to look for these examples, then share them with the class. Ask each group to explain why the example they chose is “wabi sabi.” Once students understand the concept, ask them to bring in objects from nature or take pictures of nature. Ask them to share why their item or picture represents the concept of wabi sabi. As a follow up activity and science extension, have students place all of their objects from nature in one pile. Have them try to classify the objects in different ways. They might do this by color, shape, texture, or other categories. Ask students to discuss with one another how they classified the objects and list the different ways they chose to classify them. Did all students classify them in the same way?

## ART

### Collage

A collage is a collection of different materials or images assembled together to create something new. The illustrator of *Wabi Sabi* helps to tell the story of the cat, Wabi Sabi, through the medium of collage. Ask students to bring in items or pictures that are meaningful to them, and use them to create a collage. After the collages are complete, have students work with a partner to complete a Venn diagram, comparing and contrasting their collages. In what ways are they the same? In what ways are they different?

### Papermaking

Paper is believed to have originated in China in AD 105. This art spread throughout Asia and was embraced in Japan toward the beginning of the Seventh Century. Connect to history and recycle at the same time by making paper. Students can shred or rip paper into small pieces. Next, soak the paper in water until it becomes very soft. This mixture can be placed in a blender or food processor to break down the fibers more completely. Then, use small screens and spread the mixture over the screens. Dried

flowers, seeds, or other natural elements can also be added. Place in the sun to dry. There are also paper making kits available commercially. The created paper can be used to display student-created Haiku or other writing.

## Illustrated Haiku

The Haiku in *Wabi Sabi* are full of descriptions that bring pictures to the mind. Have students illustrate the Haiku using a variety of mediums such as watercolor paints, markers, or colored pencils. When the drawings are complete students can try to guess which Haiku in the book matches up with each illustration.

## MOVEMENT AND GAMES

### Fukuwari

For a cultural extension, play the game Fukuwari. This traditional game from Japan is similar to “Pin the Tail on the Donkey.” Make a woman’s face on a large sheet of paper and create eyes, nose, and mouth from paper. Children are blindfolded and given the eyes, nose, and mouth to place on the woman’s face.

## CHARACTER EDUCATION

### Helping Others

*Wabi Sabi* relies on her friends and others she meets on her journey to find her way and to learn about herself. Ask students to list some of the ways Wabi Sabi was helped by others in the story. Next, have them list things they could do to help someone new to the school or town. Why is this important? What other stories have they read that show characters helping others?

### Living a Wabi Sabi Life

Respecting nature and taking the time to appreciate the small moments in each day are important parts of living a “wabi sabi life.” As a service project, have students organize a neighborhood or school cleanup project. Adding a few plants or flowers to a courtyard or other outdoor space can make a big difference. After completing the project, ask students to reflect on how their contribution made a difference. Compare what the space was like before with what it is like after all of their efforts.

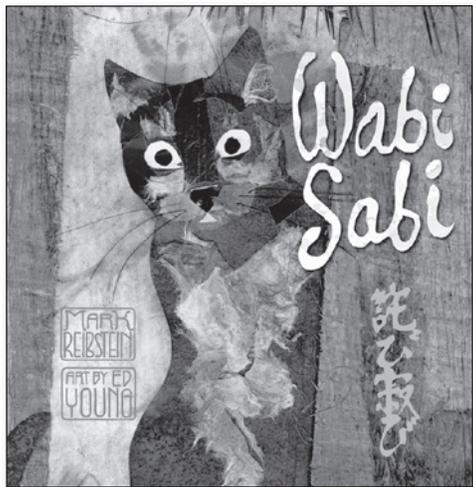
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## Comparing and Contrasting Research

*Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* by Robert J. Marzano, Debra J. Pickering and Jane E. Pollock

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## about the book



Wabi Sabi, a little cat in Kyoto, Japan, has never thought about her name, until visiting friends ask what it means. Her owner's answer? "That's hard to explain." The curious Wabi Sabi sets out on an adventure to discover the true meaning of her name. Using spare text and haiku, Mark Reibstein weaves an extraordinary story about finding real beauty in unexpected places. Caldecott Medal-winning

artist Ed Young complements the lyrical text with breathtaking collages. Together, they illustrate the unique world view that is wabi sabi.

### Wabi Sabi

Written by Mark Reibstein

Illustrated by Ed Young

978-0-316-11825-5

★ **"Simply beautiful."**

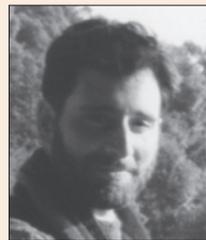
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

★ **"A magnificent offering."**

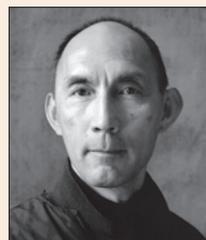
—Booklist (starred review)

**A New York Times  
Best Illustrated Book**

## about the author



Mark Reibstein is an English teacher and writer who has lived in New York, California, Hawaii, Japan, and Thailand. While living in Kyoto, he met a cat named Wabi Sabi, and they remained very close friends for ten years. Now Mark and his daughter live near San Francisco with their good friend Arlo, who is also a cat.



When illustrator Ed Young was young, he thought he could "disappear" into his own world, brought to life through his drawings. Years later, he has provided artwork for more than seventy books and has been awarded the Caldecott Medal for *Lon Po Po* and Caldecott Honors for *Seven Blind Mice* and *The Emperor and the Kite*. Although he still occasionally "disappears," he now lives in upstate New York with his daughters.