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Project Summary
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Project 1: 4-week Unit in "Literature & Film" on Akutagawa and Kurosawa

I teach "Literature & Film" every fall as an elective for English majors. Typically, we spend the first eight weeks studying four story-to-film adaptations, then the remaining eight weeks in writing mode as the students write a 30-page screenplay adaptation of a short story they choose from a list I provide. The texts we read (and the films we watch) until now have been primarily American, due in part to our focus on the cultural narratives that influence a screenwriter's vision of a printed text. They then draw from that as they create their own visions, identifying their influences as they make certain choices for the script.

With this new unit, I introduce a Japanese adaptation to augment the discussion of cultural narratives. Rather than limit the unit to two weeks as in prior semesters, this will be a four-week unit dedicating two weeks to the short story "In a Grove" by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, and two weeks to the film *Rashomon* directed by Akira Kurosawa. In addition to covering general techniques of adaptation, this unit introduces Japanese modernist literature and Japanese cinematic innovations. Further, as students learn about the two texts, they will also see the ways in which social issues, culture, national identity, and personal experience infiltrate the narratives we produce and necessitate changes to the source material.

Both the short story and the film tell a story set in the Heian era about a samurai, his young wife, and a bandit. The short story, however, written in 1922, has a distinctive modernist sensibility in its structure and its theme. The film, produced in 1950, demonstrates a postwar sensibility. Students are thus introduced to the Heian period, the Taisho period, and the Showa period in this unit; as well as the contributions of both Akutagawa and Kurosawa to their respective genres.

Because there is a good deal of material that can be covered, this unit will guide the students through the rest of the semester as they work on their own adaptations. As challenges arise with their adaptation process, I will be able to redirect their attention to the techniques Kurosawa employed in his retelling of Akutagawa's classic story and the reasons motivating his changes.

In the end, the overall focus of this unit is the relationship between culture and narrative. By observing and analyzing a different nation's cultural products, students are released from their attachment to their own culture (e.g. biases, defenses, or inattentions) and more clearly see the ways in which prose and film capture, reflect, or possibly create contemporary values.

This unit will serve as the foundation for a new course I am planning for Spring 2019 as a "Movies & Popular Culture" offering, tentatively titled, "Godzilla, Hello Kitty, and Hatsune Miku: Contemporary Japanese Narratives." The basis of this course will be narrative studies as a way to engage with Japanese popular culture.