



The Proud Family: “Romeo Must Wed”

A Disney Channel Episode for Cable in the Classroom

Ages 10-13

Program Summary:

Penny is thrilled to be playing the lead role in Romeo and Juliet at school. But trouble soon begins, as she and her stage Romeo, a Chinese-American boy named Kwok, become close. Kwok’s family does not approve of the friendship, although they bristle at being considered racist. Much to Penny and her family’s surprise, Kwok explains that before his birth his parents arranged for him to wed a girl in China.

Penny and Kwok’s relationship becomes strained. Penny can’t understand why Kwok’s family would treat marriage this way, and his attempts to explain his family’s “tradition” merely frustrate her more. Penny is so upset that she nearly gives up her starring role opposite Kwok. When she does appear as Juliet, she implores: “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other word would smell as sweet!” Kwok is moved, and whispers his news to her: the marriage is off! For a moment, the two abandon the script and express their real-life feelings of relief and joy. Though initially shocked, the audience – including both sets of parents – is quickly delighted by the display of genuine friendship between this modern-day “Romeo” and “Juliet.”

Objectives:

The student will:

- Explore their own cultural identity
- Become aware of cultural values and customs of others
- Learn about Chinese-Americans and China
- Become familiar with aspects of William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet

Pre-Viewing Questions:

- Who was William Shakespeare?
- Where is China? (locate on a classroom map or globe)
- What is an “arranged marriage”?

Post-Viewing Questions:

- Why were Kwok’s parents upset about his friendship with Penny?
- Where were Kwok’s parents from? What do you know about China and Chinese customs?
- Why did the Prouds think the Wongs’ attitude was racist? Do you think the Wongs were biased?
- With respect to dating and marriage, in what ways were things different for Penny and Kwok than they were for the characters they were playing, Juliet and Romeo? In what ways were they the same?



- If you were to rewrite “Romeo and Juliet,” setting the story in current context, how would it be different?
- Do you know someone—a friend, neighbor, or classmate—from a culturally different background than your own? What have you learned from that person about his or her culture?

Vocabulary:

Tragedy, thespian, engaged, dignity, obscurity, arranged marriage

Social Studies

Activity #1: Tracing Family History

Penny Proud’s ancestors came from Africa; Kwok Wang’s parents were born in China. Have students gather information about their own family histories by talking to their parents and other relatives about the countries and cultures of their ancestors. Start by having students organize information on a family tree. For each person on the tree, students should list as much of the following information as they can find out:

- Name
- Place of birth (city, state, country)
- Birth and death dates
- When married and to whom
- Occupation
- Noteworthy accomplishments or interesting information

What parts of the world are students and their families from? Using map pins, mark the locations on a classroom map.

Activity 2: A Rose by Any Other Name

Ask students to consider the names of the two main characters in *The Proud Family* episode (Penny Proud and Kwok Wong). What can you tell about these characters just from their names?

Now introduce the following famous line from *Romeo and Juliet* that Penny and Kwok are rehearsing in the episode:

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other word would smell as sweet."
--William Shakespeare, from *Romeo and Juliet* (II, ii, 1-2)

Discuss the context and meaning of this famous line with students. The “star-cross’d” lovers Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet are doomed because their families are at war with one another



—and their last names determine which sides they’re supposed to be on. Here Juliet asserts that names are artificial and meaningless, and in the same scene implores Romeo to cast off his name so he won’t be bound by it.

Ask students if they think their own names reveal their family, cultural, or ethnic identity.

My Name: _____

What My Name Means (consult a dictionary of names or other resource):

Why I Was Given This Name:

Ways I Get Teased About My Name:

Nicknames I Like:

Nicknames I Hate:

What I Love About My Name:

Names I’d Rather Have:

My Name’s Ethnic Connections:

Other Names That Reflect My Ethnicity/Culture:



EXTENSIONS: Extend the “name game” by having students:

Create an acrostic using their names.

Pair up and interview each other about their names. Then have each student write a short newspaper article about his/her partner’s name.

Activity #3: Culture Vultures

Help students become aware of their own cultural values by having them answer questions designed to analyze expectations about behaviors and customs. Review the list of possible questions presented below and omit any topics that might be unfamiliar, embarrassing, or inappropriate for your class.

Organize students into small cooperative groups and give each group a copy of the list of selected questions. Have students in each group discuss the questions and offer responses, with a designated group member recording the answers. Make sure students know that they can choose to not answer a question, and that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers—just different ways of doing things.

In your family, culture, or background, what is considered customary?

1. How do people greet one another? Describe what is typical for people who know one another well, and for people who are not acquainted. How do you greet a person of higher social status?
2. How do people take their leave of one another? (Describe variations for the categories mentioned above.)
3. When is it customary to give or receive gifts? What types of gifts are considered appropriate? Do different gifts convey different meanings? Provide several examples of traditional or symbolic gifts, and explain their significance.
4. Who attends social gatherings and family celebrations? Are they inter-generational (with children, adults, the elderly?) Do men and women generally socialize together or separately?
5. How are birthdays celebrated? Are certain birthdays especially significant? Describe what is customary for a first birthday, a 10th birthday, and the birthday of an adult, as well as for any ages that hold special significance.
6. What special holidays are celebrated? Choose three and describe how they are observed.
7. Are certain foods prepared for special occasions or holidays? If so, list the foods and the holidays.
8. Are certain foods forbidden? If so, what are they, and why are they to be avoided?



9. How do adults and children spend their leisure time? Describe specific activities that people enjoy doing. Are they different for adults and children?
10. How do people get married? Who makes the arrangements?

Have each group report on the responses of members. Discuss similarities, differences, and any patterns that emerge.

EXTENSION:

Choose other cultures, countries, or regions related to the class's social studies curriculum. Assign one to each cooperative group and have students research answers for the questions above. As a class, compare those answers with the answers students gave for their own cultures. Discuss similarities and differences, exploring possible reasons.

Activity #4: Cuisine of China

Kwok's family immigrated to the United States from China. Explain that there are many types of Asian Americans, including people of Korean, Japanese, Filipino, and Vietnamese descent. Locate China on a map or globe.

Have students learn about China by reporting on traditional foods from various regions. Have students work in groups of 3-5, with each group researching the cuisine of a particular region: Canton, Sichuan, Mongolia, and so on. Instruct each group to identify and report on the ingredients, cooking techniques, utensils that are typical of the region. Each group should create a menu listing traditional regional foods along with the key ingredients, style of preparation and description of each dish. Encourage groups to prepare and enjoy at least two of the dishes on the menu.

Activity #5: Family Ties

"To you, it's crazy. But to Mr. and Mrs. Wong, it's tradition."

That's what Penny's mother tells her confused and outraged daughter after the Prouds have learned that Kwok's parents expect him to marry the Chinese girl they chose when he was first born.

In planning an arranged marriage for their son, the Wongs were adhering to a proscribed cultural practice—one that was customary in their ancestral homeland, but considered "strange" in the United States. Having others see your customs in a negative way can be difficult, and Chinese immigrants often met with hostility when they arrived in the U.S. Give students a glimpse of what it was like for Chinese immigrants adjusting to life in America by having them read *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*, by Bette Bao Lord.



Instruct students to write a report summarizing the book's plot and describing at least two incidents in the story that illustrate aspects of the Chinese-American experience.

Interdisciplinary: Social Studies and Language Arts

Activity #1: Chinese Proverbs

Explain to students that a proverb is a wise saying. Provide a few familiar examples, such as “a stitch in time saves nine,” “waste not, want not,” or “the early bird catches the worm.” Discuss what each proverb means as well as the underlying values it promotes, such as efficiency, thriftiness, or industriousness. Ask students to share a proverb with which they're familiar and explain its meaning.

Working in pairs or small groups, have students explore Chinese proverbs.

[see: <http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/China/proverb.html>]

Assign one proverb to each group, and ask each group to do the following:

- Explain what the proverb means.
- Describe the lesson or cultural value it illustrates.
- List two examples of how the proverb relates to your own lives.
- Illustrate the proverb with a drawing, collage, or comic strip.

INTERDISCIPLINARY EXTENSIONS:

- Write a three- to five-paragraph story with the proverb as the “moral.”
- Create your own folk sayings.
- Read Benjamin Franklin's maxims. When were they written? What values do they promote?
- Research proverbs from around the world, and complete the above assignment for various cultures.

Activity #2: Family Oral History

Invite students to share a special story involving their immediate or extended family. Instruct them to relate an anecdote they are already familiar with, or search out new stories by talking with a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or cousin. Direct students as follows:

- Write the story down as you first heard it or remember it.
- Write the story as a first-person account from the point of view of the main “character.”
- Add details to make it more interesting.
- Include details that reflect your ethnic heritage or cultural values.



Language Arts

Activity #1: My World and Welcome to It

Ask students to write a short autobiographical sketch that showcases their own heritage. This mini-autobiography should focus on one family incident or event that the student remembers personally and that reflects family traditions or cultural identity. Use sample titles to get the ball rolling, for example:

A Warm Welcome for My Baby Brother
Westward Ho! Traveling with My Family Is an Adventure
Why I'll Never Forget [special holiday]
King of the World--My Proudest Moment
That Was a Close Call!

Before they begin writing, encourage students to think back to the event and recall specific details: What time of year was it? Who was there? What happened and when? How did you feel? Were any special foods, traditions, or music part of the event? Encourage students to write in the first person and to employ storytelling elements in their nonfiction narrative. To make the account interesting, it should have a beginning, middle, and end—and plenty of details to “keep it real!”

Activity #2: Learning about William Shakespeare

In *The Proud Family*, Penny and Kwok are rehearsing for a performance of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Using the library, Internet, and encyclopedias, have students find out more about William Shakespeare:

- When was he born? In what country?
- When did he die?
- What, if anything, is known about his life?
- How many plays did he write? List five of them.
- Why do some people think that he did not write all the plays attributed to him? What do you think?

Invite students to find out more about famous lines from *Romeo and Juliet*, some of which are heard in *The Proud Family* episode. Give each student an index card with one of the following lines written on it:

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?

Oh, I am fortune's fool!

Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow.



What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other word would smell as sweet.

A plague o' both your houses!

But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks?
O happy dagger!

My only love sprung from my only hate!

O true apothecary!

Provide resources and Internet access so students can investigate the meaning of the lines. Visit AllShakespeare.com for an interactive list of quotes and their meaning, in context, at:
<http://www.allshakespeare.com/quotes.php?notes=romeo>

RESOURCES

Web Sites

Southern Poverty Law Center

<http://www.tolerance.org/teach/expand/act/activity.jsp?cid=333>
Classroom activities and lesson plans for teaching tolerance.

It's Elementary: Stompin' and Rompin' with Shakespeare

<http://www.folger.edu/education/lesson.cfm?lessonid=140>
Use the rhythm of Shakespeare's language to introduce the Bard to elementary students.

Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/>

Tales from Shakespeare: A Summary of Romeo and Juliet

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/lambtales/LTROMEO.HTM>

Complete text of Romeo and Juliet

http://the-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/romeo_juliet/full.html

Dim Sum: A Connection for Chinese-American Culture

<http://www.newton.mec.edu/Angier/DimSum/chinadimsumaconnection.html>

Chinese Proverbs

<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/China/proverb.html>



Chinese Wedding Customs

<http://www.chinese-poems.com/wedcus.html>

Books

Yeh-Shen, A Cinderella Story. Retold by Ai-Ling Louie. Philomel, 1982.

In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson. By Bette Bao Lord; illustrated by Marc Simont. Harper, 1984.

Tales from Gold Mountain. By Paul Yee; illustrated by Simon Ng. Macmillan, 1990.

Child of the Owl. By Laurence Yep. Harper & Row, 1977.