

# Irony - Comprehension & Analysis Activity

USING KEN LIU'S  
"THE PAPER MENAGERIE"



## IRONY ACTIVITY

Using Ken Liu's "The Paper Menagerie"

A photograph of a green origami crane, likely a paper menagerie, resting on a wooden surface. The crane is made of shiny, metallic-looking green paper and is shown from a slightly elevated angle, casting a shadow on the wood.

Comprehension & Analysis

by Danielle & Carina @ Nouvelle ELA

## IRONY: "The Paper Menagerie"

<b>PURPOSE</b>	<p>"The Paper Menagerie" by Ken Liu is a fictional short story about a young man who remembers his Chinese mother's efforts to connect with him through origami.</p> <p>This short story serves as an effective tool for teaching how <b>irony</b> influences a text's message and impact on its readers.</p>
<b>MATERIAL</b>	<p><a href="#">"The Paper Menagerie"</a> – this short story is available for free at <i>Gizmodo</i>. It is also available as a PDF through other free means online.</p>
<b>OBJECTIVE(S)</b>	<p>Students will cite evidence of irony and analyze its impact on the text's theme (RL.9-10.1 and 3).</p>
<b>SUGGESTED LESSON</b>	
<b>BELL RINGER</b> (7-10 min)	<p>Use the <b>corresponding bell ringer prompt</b> included in this resource (<a href="#">access the editable version here</a>). This includes a mini-introduction to the literary element and a quick practice for students to apply their learning of this literary element as they read the short story.</p> <p><b>Optional:</b> Have students share and discuss with a partner or in small groups.</p>
	<p>Conduct a first read of the short story. You can read this aloud as a class, listen to the audio reading aloud, have students read in pairs, groups, or independently. You know your students best.</p> <p>Complete the worksheet* and have students work through their literary analysis. This can be completed as a guided practice, a group analysis, or independent practice.</p>

Suggested ~50-minute lesson plan outline included complete with extension ideas, standard(s), and linked materials.



**Irony** occurs when there are **two contradicting meanings** of the **same situation, event, image, sentence, phrase, or story.**

Example: On their way to dinner, the Rodriguez family got lost and rear-ended by another car only to arrive at the restaurant so late that it was closed. Mr. Rodriguez said, "Well, this has been a great night."

**Irony** occurs when there are **two contradicting meanings** of the **same situation, event, image, sentence, phrase, or story.**

**PRACTICE:** Using the **event** below, create a contradiction in order for it to be ironic.

Sam and Tyler are getting married today.



Includes an editable bell ringer activity that introduces the literary element & provides students with a guided practice opportunity

## IRONY: "The Paper Menagerie"

**Instructions:** Throughout the short story, Jack experiences a lot of shame, especially as a young boy with little understanding of his mother. Cite evidence that supports his shame, then analyze why feeling that shame is ironic.

	EVIDENCE TO PROVE HE FELT SHAME	ANALYZE WHY THIS SHAME IS IRONIC.
HIS MOM BEING "BOUGHT" FROM A MAGAZINE	<i>"What kind of woman puts herself into a catalogue so that she can be bought? The high school me thought I knew so much about everything. Contempt felt good, like wine" (Liu).</i>	As a young boy, Jack feels contempt towards his mother because he believes she placed herself in a catalogue to be bought. Ironically, he later learns that she did this because it was her only hope of escaping her life as an abused indentured servant.

	EVIDENCE TO PROVE HE FELT SHAME	ANALYZE WHY THIS SHAME IS IRONIC.
HIS MOM ONLY SPEAKING CHINESE TO HIM		
HIS MOM TRYING TO SPEAK ENGLISH		
HIS MOM COOKING CHINESE FOOD		
PLAYING VIDEO GAMES		
HIS MOM TRYING TO SPEAK ENGLISH	<i>"After a while, she tried to use more English. But her accent and broken sentences embarrassed me" (Liu).</i>	Ironically, Jack's mother tried to learn English when she was a young girl to report the abuse she faced, but her captors threatened to have her imprisoned for being undocumented if she did.



Students read the short story, then analyze quotes for the impact and purpose of the irony throughout.

Suggested answers included.

## IRONY: "The Paper Menagerie" ↗

There are many "right" answers to the following questions, so it's all about how you support your ideas. Use evidence from the short story, other texts (i.e. novels, movies, songs, etc.), and your own experiences to support your claims.

1. Author Ken Liu writes, "There are many ways to say I love you in this cold, dark, silent universe, as many as the twinkling stars." In bullet points, list at least 5 ways Jack's mother communicated her love for her son.

Answers will vary. See a possible list below:

1. Making the origami to soothe him when he was inconsolable
2. Constantly mending Laohu when damaged
3. Creatively making a waterproof shark origami out of foil to prevent water damage which upset Jack
4. Learning to speak English and cook American food to please Jack
5. Writing letters to Jack in the hopes that he better understands her

2. Like Jack, why might young folks feel pressured to "fit in"?

Answers will vary. A possible answer might be because standing out feels scary. Young folks who are in any way "different" from their friends and peers could fear being ridiculed or made fun of. Our society has trained many to believe that fitting in and being different should be avoided rather than celebrated.



# Includes optional short response questions:

- Text-to-text
- Text-to-world
- Text-to-self
- Drawing prompt