

Arts and Crafts for Peace: Saori Weaving

An activity of the Maria Hertogh series



Image: Fujita Masaya

During Maria Hertogh's childhood in Indonesia and Malaya, many people's lives were badly affected by the Japanese Occupation of the region during World War II. For instance, Maria's parents could not look for her because they were held captive during the Occupation. Read about Maria Hertogh at <http://more.whatsup.sg> to get glimpses into those historic years.

After World War II, the world saw and experienced another side of Japan — it was determined to grow peace. Sharing its rich culture — especially its arts and crafts — was one way. Most were traditional and even ancient. In contrast, Saori weaving was a post-war creation that quickly spread abroad into a peaceful movement.

Saori weaving was started by a 57-year-old Japanese, Misao Jo, in the late 1960s. She decided to weave a sash (*obi*) for her kimono by hand. Her 84-year-old mother taught her how to weave. Her husband and sons made a special loom for her. Instead of using a traditional design, Ms Jo expressed herself as a unique individual.

"I have a brain and emotion. I'm a human being. I will weave an obi that is full of humanity," said Ms Jo. She had so much fun weaving that Ms Jo didn't stop even when she was in her 90s. And, in just four decades, Saori weaving spread to over 40 countries, including Singapore.

At the individual level, Saori weaving is about the uniqueness of every human being. But, as a global movement, Saori weaving is also about our common humanity. Pull these threads together and you have a powerful tale that needs to be told.

1) Identify three other arts or crafts programmes that have gone global — they have spread beyond the shores of the countries where they originated. Here are two examples:

- One thousand origami cranes
- Global Art Project for Peace

You may know of others. Add them to the list.

2. Form four groups in class. Each group picks one of the programmes identified by your class.

3. Work in your groups to compile all the information you can find about your focus arts programme. Jot down the key points in the space below. List your sources as well. For example, if your group's focus programme is Saori weaving, your information might include how Misao Jo started weaving, what she did with her first creations, Ms Jo's four "slogans" of Saori weaving, and the spread of Saori weaving worldwide. One of your sources might be the website of Saori Global at <https://www.saoriglobal.com>.

Points about our group's focus arts/crafts programme:

4. Using your findings, develop a script for telling the story of your focus arts programme as a movement that helps to grow peace through its involvement of people around the world. Select a member of your group to be the storyteller.
5. Have each group's storyteller present to the class the story of its focus group's global arts or crafts programme.
6. Discuss, as a whole class, what turned out to be the most meaningful part of each group's story. Jot down your views here.

Group 1's story:

Group 2's story:

Group 3's story:

Group 4's story:

My overall impressions:

7. Have a whole-class discussion to explore which one of our local arts and crafts would be best for promoting peace and goodwill amongst communities in Singapore. Jot down your own thoughts here and share them with your class.

My view about which local artform or crafts can promote peace and goodwill (and why):