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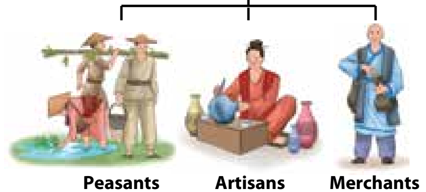
Feudal Japan

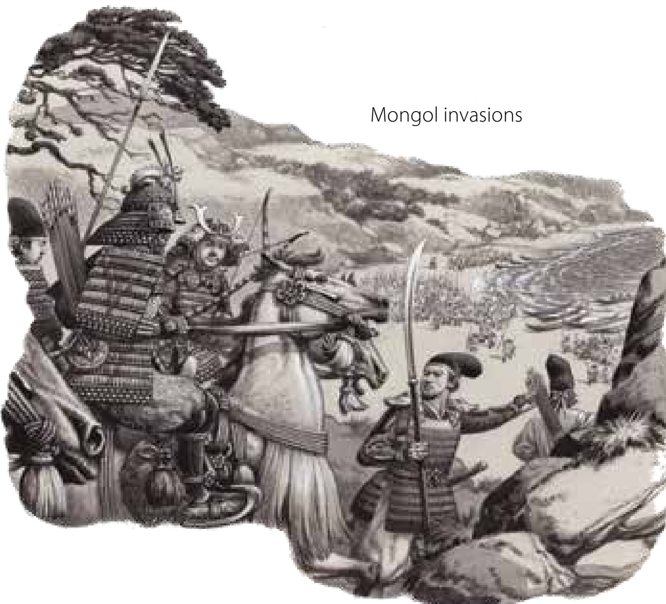
Buddhism

Reader

Samurai



Japan's feudal society


Mongol invasions

Shinto shrine

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Feudal Japan

Reader

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Feudal Japan

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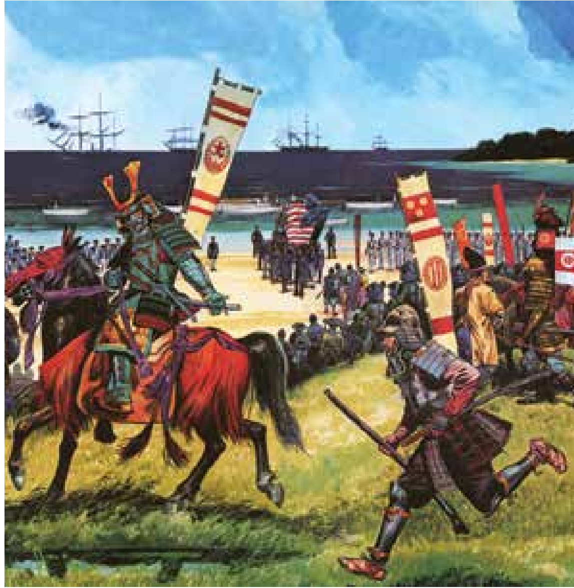


Feudal Japan

Reader

Core Knowledge Sequence History and Geography 5

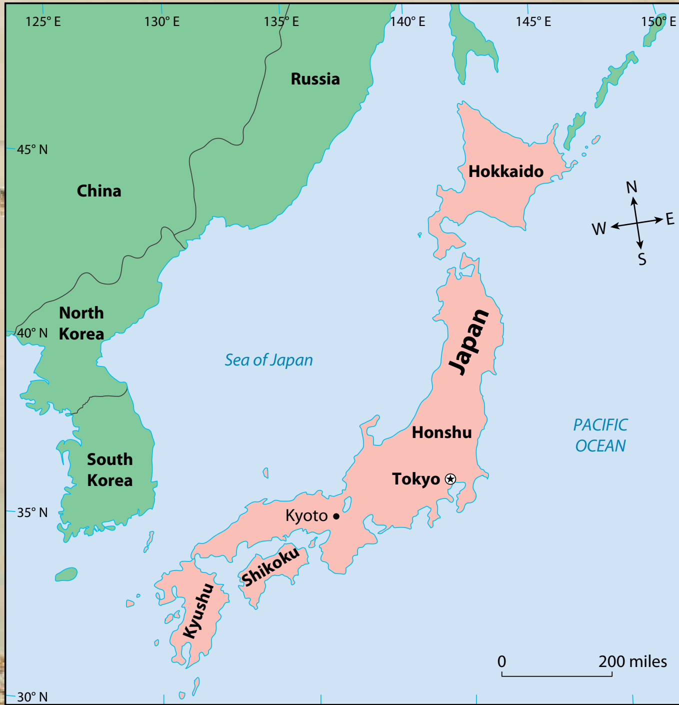
Chapter 1
The Rise of an Empire

> **The Big Question**
>
> How did China and Korea influence the development of Japanese culture?

Japan, Now and Then Japan is an island nation in the Pacific Ocean. It is located east of China and the Korean Peninsula, and is part of what we call the **Pacific Rim**. To people in these lands, the sun seems to rise first over Japan. That is probably why the Japanese call their country Nippon, which means origin of the sun.

> **Vocabulary**
>
> **Pacific Rim,** n. a term used to describe nations that border the Pacific Ocean

The Islands of Japan



Japan is a Pacific Rim nation made up of four main islands.

There are four major islands and thousands of small ones in the Japanese **archipelago** (/ar*kuh*peh*luh*goh/). The largest island is Honshu (/hahn*shoo/), the home of the capital city of Tokyo (/toh*kee*oh/), Kyoto (/kee*yoh*toh/), and other great cities. To the south lie the major islands of Shikoku (/shih*koh*koo/) and Kyushu (/kee*yoo*shoo/), and to the north is Hokkaido (/hah*kye*doh/).

Vocabulary

archipelago, n. a chain of islands

isolation, n. separation from others

clan, n. a group of families claiming a common ancestor

Today these islands make up one of the most economically advanced nations in the world. Japanese companies ship automobiles and electronic goods all over the world, and hundreds of thousands of travelers fly in and out of Tokyo's busy airports every day. But Japan was not always so open to foreigners. For several centuries, Japan distrusted outsiders and lived in self-imposed **isolation**. At various times in their history, the Japanese were deeply influenced by their near neighbors—the Koreans and the Chinese. But they shut their doors almost completely to Europeans and Americans between the 1600s and the mid-1800s.

History and Legends

Throughout much of their early history, the Japanese lived in social groups of families and friends called **clans**. Each clan had its own chief. It also worshipped one god or goddess as its ancestor—its link to heaven.

In about 400 CE, the Yamato (/yah*mah*toh/) clan, which lived on the central island of Honshu, became the strongest of the clans. The Yamatos identified themselves as descendants of the goddess Amaterasu (/ah*mah*ter*ah*soo/) and declared their right to rule Japan.

The Legend of Amaterasu

The Yamatos supported their claim to the throne with a mystical legend. According to this legend, a god and goddess were strolling on the rainbow bridge that led from the sky to the dark sea below. They dipped a jeweled spear into the ocean and shook it into the sky. Drops of sea spray became the first island of Japan. The goddess then gave birth to the rest of the islands.

According to legend, the first emperors of Japan were related to Amaterasu, the goddess of the sun.

The godly pair created children to help rule the islands. One was Amaterasu, goddess of the sun, who lived in the sky. As time passed, Amaterasu bore many gods and goddesses. Among her first children was one man. He became Japan's first emperor.

In 645 CE, because of his family's power and the legend of Amaterasu, the head of the Yamato clan became emperor of Japan. He called himself the son of heaven and chose the rising sun as the symbol of his empire. For centuries, the Japanese honored their emperors as living gods. Today's emperor still traces his roots to the Yamato clan.

Vocabulary

Shinto, n. a Japanese religion in which people worship gods and spirits associated with nature

Buddhism, n. a religion that began in India and is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama

gangplank, n. a small movable bridge used to get on and off a ship

Borrowing from Neighbors

During this early period of Japanese history, the Japanese borrowed or were inspired by certain things that came from Korea or from China. It appears that the early Japanese had no written language. Inspired by China's writing system, the Japanese used simplified forms of Chinese characters to create a writing system of their own. Korean craftsmen taught the Japanese to make tools and ornaments of bronze and iron.

However, the Korean import that had the greatest effect on Japan was a new religion. The Japanese had long practiced a nature religion known as **Shinto**. In about 550 CE, the Koreans introduced a Chinese form of **Buddhism**.

One day a Korean boat dropped anchor on the Japanese shore. Korean sailors moved a large box down the **gangplank**. A gong sounded. Priests chanted as a gold and copper statue of Buddha was lifted from the box and displayed to the people.

The new religion spread slowly, but eventually it took root in Japan. The ceremonies of Buddhism with the gongs, priestly robes, and candlelit altars attracted many Japanese. The religion itself attracted many people, as Buddhism promotes the personal search for a state of peacefulness, without suffering. The new religion also increased Japan's fascination with mainland culture and especially with all things Chinese.

In the 600s, Prince Shotoku (/sho*toh*koo/), a powerful Yamato prince, became fascinated with China. He realized that much of what the Japanese had learned from the Koreans was actually coming from China. Instead of learning about Chinese ideas indirectly, through the Koreans, the emperor decided to go directly to the source. He sent young Japanese nobles to China to study its culture.

After this expedition, Chinese ways became examples to follow. The Japanese built their first capital city at Nara, laid out like the capital of China. Japanese nobles began dressing in Chinese fashions. The Japanese studied Chinese philosophies, literature, geography, medicine, and astronomy. They imitated Chinese patterns of government and adopted the Chinese calendar. They imported the custom of tea drinking and created elaborate **tea ceremonies**. They even learned to raise **silkworms** and weave silk.

Vocabulary

tea ceremony, n. a way of preparing and presenting tea

silkworm, n. a caterpillar that produces silk, which is used to make thread or cloth

This temple in the city of Nara, Japan, was built in 607 CE.

Japanese Culture

All of these imported ideas helped Japan grow stronger. Eventually, the country no longer felt the need to rely so heavily on its mainland neighbors. After the 800s, the Japanese changed some Chinese ways to suit Japanese needs and styles. For instance, instead of choosing government officials based on tests of ability, as the Chinese had done, the Japanese decided to fill the government positions with the sons of Japanese nobles. This meant that **aristocrats** controlled the government.

> **Vocabulary**
>
> **aristocrat**, n. a person of the upper or noble class whose status is usually inherited

There were cultural changes as well. Japanese artists added color to the traditional black ink of Chinese paintings. They wrote their own poems and sculpted in bronze. Wealthy landowners supported artists and encouraged a Japanese style. All of these changes led to the development of a unique Japanese culture.

Japanese bronze statue

Chapter 2
Religion in Japan

Native and Imported Religions
Two of the religions that have helped shape the Japanese people are Shinto and Buddhism. Shinto is the native religion. Buddhism is the faith that Korean missionaries brought from China.

The Big Question

What are the basic teachings of the Shinto and Buddhist religions?

Shinto: Spirits in Nature

Shinto is Japan's oldest religion. It is based on nature. Japan is a land of pine forests, oceans, and green rice fields. It is the place where snowcapped Fuji, the country's tallest mountain, rises high into the clouds. From the earliest times, Japan's people have celebrated their country in poetry and art. This love of nature is at the heart of Shinto.

Vocabulary

spirit, n. an unseen life-giving force

Followers of Shinto believe that each part of nature contains a **spirit**. These spirits are known as kami (/kah*mee/). Believers in Shinto worship the kami of mountains, rivers, rocks, and trees. They believe that heavenly

Mount Fuji, Japan’s tallest mountain, is a sacred place in the Shinto religion.

bodies have life. The sun is the golden goddess Amaterasu, and the moon is her silvery brother Tsukiyomi (/soo*kee*yoh*mee/).

The Shinto religion is based on ceremonies rather than rules. No one person is named as its founder. Its ancient beliefs have no sacred book or "bible." The faith did not even have a name until the Chinese labeled it Shinto. The name means "way of the gods" and was first used in the 500s to distinguish the native Japanese religion from Buddhism.

Shinto focuses both on the gentle, beautiful aspects of nature as well as on the fierce occurrences such as earthquakes, **typhoons**, and volcanoes. For example, one of the kami might be found in an oddly twisted tree, an unusual insect, or a wise old man. Have you ever felt a sense of awe when viewing a full white moon or a red maple leaf? Someone who follows Shinto would say such feelings are inspired by kami.

Shinto followers worship their gods at **shrines**. These holy places are usually surrounded by sacred trees and have flowing water nearby. **Rituals** begin with washing ceremonies. You may have heard the saying "cleanliness is next to godliness." According to Shinto, one must be clean in the presence of spirits.

Vocabulary

typhoon, n. a windy storm with heavy rain; a hurricane

shrine, n. a place considered holy because it is associated with a holy person or event

ritual, n. an act or series of actions done in the same way in a certain situation, such as a religious ceremony

Shinto shrines were built to worship kami, or Japanese nature spirits.

Millions of Japanese practice Shinto today. They worship in their homes, at small roadside shrines, and at larger temples and gardens. They recite prayers and offer gifts of cakes, flowers, and money to the kami.

Buddhism: The Open Mind

Imagine yourself standing before a Buddhist master. He asks you a question and tells you that by answering you will better understand the ways of the Buddha. The master says, "You have climbed to the top of a ten-foot pole. How can you climb the rest of the way?"

How would you answer that question? Would you think that no one can climb higher than the top? If so, the Buddhist master would probably suggest that you meditate. That is, sit quietly and open your mind to all possibilities.

To understand the master's advice, it will help to learn a little about the founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama (/sih*dar*tuh/ gow*tuh*muh/). He was a young prince who lived in India in the 500s BCE. He asked searching questions about life. Eventually, he became known as the Buddha, or the "Enlightened One."

One day while sitting and meditating for a long time under a giant fig tree, he believed he became "enlightened." He believed that he had gained knowledge of the true path in life. Gautama spent the rest of his life teaching others what he had learned.

Buddhism is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who is called Buddha or the "Enlightened One."

The Buddha's followers carried his teachings from India to other parts of the world, including China, Korea, and Japan.

The Four Truths and the Eightfold Path

What were those thoughts about life that the Buddha had under the fig tree? In his first **sermon**, the Buddha spoke of Four Noble Truths. These Truths are the foundation of Buddhism.

Vocabulary

sermon, n. a speech on a religious topic given by a religious leader

The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism

1. *All life, from birth to death, is filled with suffering.*
2. *This suffering is caused by wanting worldly things.*
3. *Suffering will stop when one learns to overcome desire.*
4. *We can learn to overcome desire by following the eightfold path.*

You probably noticed that the fourth Truth refers to an "eightfold path" that a person should follow. According to Buddha, there are eight things that one must do to achieve

enlightenment. A person has achieved enlightenment when he or she has no desire or suffering.

The **dharma wheel** is the symbol for this eightfold path. By getting rid of greed, anger, and fear, people can gain happiness and **serenity** and eventually achieve enlightenment.

Vocabulary

dharma wheel, n. the symbol of Buddhism. The eight spokes of the wheel symbolize the eightfold path.

serenity, n. a feeling of calm and peacefulness

Steps in the Eightfold Path

Right Understanding (understanding Buddha's teachings)

Right Thought (thinking kind thoughts)

Right Speech (not telling lies or using angry words)

Right Action (not harming any person or animal)

Right Work (doing jobs that help others and makes no one suffer)

Right Effort (thinking before you act)

Right Mindfulness (being alert and aware)

Right Meditation (gaining a calm and focused mind)

Each spoke on this Buddhist dharma wheel stands for one of the eight “right” things.

Buddhism took root in Japan after 500 CE. Different groups tried to understand exactly what the Buddha had meant when he talked about achieving enlightenment. Some believed that the ideal of Buddhism was to follow the Buddha’s focus on meditation. Other groups believed that the Buddha also wanted people to stay in touch with the world and help others follow the right path.

Zen Buddhism followed the second school of thought. Zen masters focus on teaching their students the *way* to peace. Zen does teach that people can find happiness through meditation, but it also teaches that through doing orderly tasks people can find happiness. These tasks include ordinary daily work, the ritual tea ceremony,

Vocabulary

Zen Buddhism, n. a type of Buddhism developed in Japan that emphasizes meditation and thoughtful tasks as the way to peace

and even **martial arts**. Therefore, Zen Buddhism focuses on both discipline and meditation.

> **Vocabulary**
>
> **martial arts,** n. any of several arts of self-defense, such as karate and judo, that are widely practiced as a sport

Do you remember the question about climbing above the top of the pole? It was a Zen master who encouraged students to open their minds. What he meant was that Buddhists should allow their *minds* to climb higher than the top of the pole. That is, even if clearly their *bodies* could go no farther, their minds could. Zen Buddhist teachers today still encourage their students to meditate and let their minds go beyond the limits of normal thought. Zen teachers help people to open their minds to all possibilities. For a Zen Buddhist, "climbing above the pole" means giving the mind freedom to rise above the things of this world and reach true understanding.

Shinto and Buddhism

When Buddhism first arrived in Japan, some Japanese saw the new religion as a threat to Shinto. In time, however, most people began to look at things differently. They came to see that Buddhism was not a replacement for Shinto, nor was it a rival religion. They grew to see Buddhism as an addition that completes their religious beliefs. Many followers of Shinto began to embrace Buddhism without giving up their older ideas. Both Shinto and Buddhism live on, side by side in modern Japan. Many Japanese men and women who honor the kami at Shinto shrines also follow the mental discipline of Zen Buddhism.

Chapter 3
Japanese Feudalism

The Big Question

In what ways was a shogun more powerful than an emperor?

Rise of Feudal Japan You may have learned about feudalism when you studied the European Middle Ages. Feudalism is a system of government in which land is exchanged for loyalty and services. Under feudalism, people were born with a permanent position in society.

Vocabulary

lotus, n. a water lily, considered sacred in parts of Asia

By 800 CE, the descendants of the Yamato clan were firmly established as the rulers of Japan. They built a splendid palace in the present-day city of Kyoto, where emperors would continue to live for more than one thousand years. Safe inside the palace walls, these rulers of Japan strolled in gardens where golden sunbeams sparkled on **lotus** pools. They dressed in silks and drank ceremonial tea.

Kyoto's Imperial Palace garden today.

Japanese emperors, such as Emperor Kanmu of the Yamato clan, became isolated inside their palace and gardens.

Outside the palace walls, however, life was very different. As the rich got richer, the poor got poorer. Ordinary people eventually grew tired of paying high taxes to support the fancy lifestyle of the court. Some began to refuse to pay their taxes. Others moved away from the emperor's court and placed themselves under the protection of wealthy landowners. These changes decreased the emperor's tax income and increased the power of the landowners.

This painting shows a samurai on horseback. The samurai were fierce warriors.

Over time, more and more peasants sought protection from landowners. The landowners began to exert more and more influence over political affairs. Landowners also began to build up private armies of warriors known as **samurai** (/sah*muh*rye/). Soon the landowners became warlords, and eventually, the warlords began to struggle with one another.

> **Vocabulary**
>
> **samurai,** n. in feudal Japan, a Japanese warrior; the plural form is also samurai.

Yoritomo and the Rise of Shoguns

After many years of conflict, a warlord named Yoritomo (/yor*ee*toh*mo/) rose to the top. Yoritomo's march to power began when a rival warlord executed many of his family members, including his parents. Yoritomo swore he would get revenge.

Yoritomo and his brother established an army, with Yoritomo's brother as general. At first, only three hundred samurai marched behind them, but eventually, there were more than twenty thousand. The army won battle after battle, and Yoritomo gained military control of the country.

Yoritomo now held power, but he was worried. His followers had sworn loyalty to him, but they had also followed his brother into battle. Yoritomo saw his brother as a threat and sent soldiers after him. Eventually, Yoritomo's brother was forced to kill himself.

Yoritomo became Japan's first shogun.

In 1192, the emperor declared that Yoritomo was the supreme military commander, or **shogun** (/shoh*gun/). Yoritomo continued to honor the emperor, but a lot of power had shifted from the emperor to the shogun. The emperor was now nothing more than a **figurehead**, an honored symbol of the empire. The shogun had all the military power, and he soon began making all the political decisions as well. This was the beginning of the feudal period in Japanese history.

Vocabulary

shogun, n. a title meaning great general, given to the strongest military leader in feudal Japan

figurehead, n. a person who leads or rules in name only but actually has no power

vassal, n. a person who receives land from a ruler and in return promises to fight for that ruler

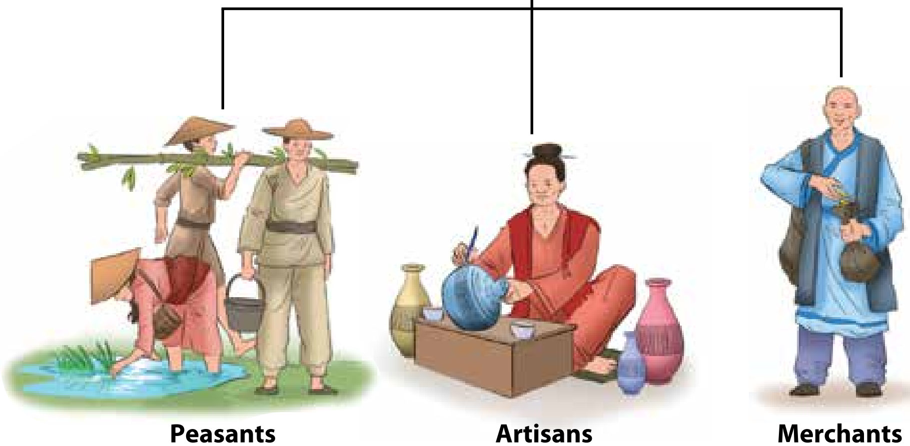
artisan, n. a person with a certain skill in making things

Japanese Feudalism

During the European Middle Ages, a king granted land to a lord. The lord, in return, swore loyalty to the king and agreed to fight in the king's army. Then the lord made similar land grants to his own **vassals**, or knights, who agreed to serve the lord. Below the knights were the peasants, or serfs, who worked the land. Thus, society was like a pyramid, with the king on top. Peasants, **artisans**, and merchants were at the bottom of the social order.

In Japan, the concept was the same, but the system had some differences. The top man under the emperor was the shogun. Below him were regional warlords known as daimyo (/dime*yoh/). After that came the samurai warriors. Ordinary people—peasants, artisans, and merchants—were on the bottom rungs of the ladder.

Japan's Feudal Society



The Japanese empire was big, and the shoguns put the daimyo in charge of large pieces of land. In return, the daimyo pledged their loyalty to the shogun and promised him the support of their armies. The daimyo then built strong forces of samurai warriors.

The samurai pledged loyalty and service but not to the central government. Instead, they were loyal to their local lords, the daimyo. Indeed, the word *samurai* means "those who serve." The samurai swore to serve and protect their lords—or die trying.

The long period of shogun rule, which lasted from the late 1100s to the late 1800s, was also the great age of the samurai. In many ways, these samurai warriors were like the medieval knights of Europe. They were professional fighters who served their lords, and they lived in accordance with a demanding code of behavior.

The Story of a Samurai

In order to get an idea of how the samurai lived, let's look at the life of an imaginary young samurai named Katsu. Katsu was born to be a samurai. He was the son of a samurai, and his sons would be samurai, too. As soon as Katsu could talk, his father began teaching him what it meant to be a samurai. He told him about **Bushido** (/boo*shih*doh/), or the way of the warrior. This code of values guided every samurai's life and would guide Katsu.

> **Vocabulary**
>
> **Bushido,** n. literally, "the way of the warrior"; in feudal Japan, a code of values by which the samurai lived

“Honor, bravery, and loyalty, my son,” instructed Katsu’s father. “These come before all else. This is the code by which you shall live your life.” On his fifth birthday, the boy received his first sword. Now he was a samurai.

Indeed, being a samurai was something to be proud of. Only about five percent of the people in all the empire were samurai. Other than the shogun or daimyo, only a samurai could wear a sword.

Katsu’s family lived in a large house near the families of other samurai. His father served the daimyo, who lived in a strong central castle. Around the daimyo and samurai lived artisans, merchants, and peasants. The daimyo, the samurai, and the ordinary people inhabited three separate worlds, and a person living in one of them would never even dream of living in any other.

Katsu’s father had faced death on the battlefield many times. But it was peacetime now. The ruling shogun was firmly in power, and there was no threat of civil war. Katsu’s father served the daimyo by overseeing the daimyo’s many peasant villages.

A samurai took all of his tasks very seriously. For Katsu’s father to fall short in his duties would bring disgrace on him and his whole family. Disgrace was a serious matter. A samurai who failed to serve honorably and loyally was expected to commit seppuku (/seh*poo*koo/)—to take his own life.

Because he was born to be a samurai, Katsu had much to learn. He learned to read and write, and he became an expert in fencing, wrestling, horseback riding, and archery.

Studying the ways of Zen Buddhism, he learned to calm his mind and racing heart, and to consider all possibilities before taking action. Katsu and other warriors learned to balance the Zen traditions of serenity and kindness toward all creatures with samurai fierceness.

Hundreds of tiny scales make up this samurai's armor. This design gave the warrior flexibility, as well as protection.

Most importantly, Katsu learned to face hardship and death without fear. To harden himself to suffering, he walked barefoot in the winter's snow. He went without food for days and worked in the blistering summer sun until he felt faint.

Between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, a samurai officially became an adult. He took part in a special coming-of-age ceremony and received a suit of armor. He began tying his hair in a topknot. From this ceremony on, a samurai carried two swords. The first, a long sword, was his battle weapon, to be used to kill others. If Katsu ever failed to serve his daimyo loyally, if he ever faced disgrace or dishonor, he would use his second sword, a short sword, to end his own life.

As Katsu grew to manhood, he came to recognize the serious role he'd been born into. As a samurai, he was more than a well-trained soldier. He was a protector of all that was right and honorable. He was always ready to defend his lord and protect the feudal way of life.

Chapter 4
Everyday Life and Arts

> **The Big Question**
>
> How did daily life differ based on people's place in society?

The Townspeople The daimyo lived in a castle, surrounded by a "castle town." High-ranking samurai lived closest to the daimyo; farther out were the dwellings of lesser samurai, and then those of artisans, merchants, and priests. Scattered through the nearby countryside were peasant villages. What was daily life like for ordinary people?

Townspeople—the artisans and merchants—wore clothes made of coarse linen and cotton rather than the bright silks of the upper classes. Their daimyo did not allow them to build big houses or to use gold or silver for decoration. Their children did not go to school, as young samurai did. Instead, they went to work.

The artisans ranked higher on the social ladder than the merchants. The upper classes thought that the merchants were the lowest type of people because they produced nothing but instead bought and sold what other people made. Members of the upper classes also looked down on merchants because they handled money. This was something noblemen did not do. Ideally, a samurai never handled money himself. He had servants to perform such tasks.

In this painting, a daimyo on horseback looks at his castle.

The artisans had to follow strict rules. A baker might take great pride in his profession; probably he was descended from a long line of bakers. Nevertheless, the baker would never go to where the samurai lived without an invitation. If he had to deliver a cake to a samurai house, he would do so modestly and quietly, and he would be sure to remove his wooden clogs before stepping into the samurai's house.

The Peasants

On the edge of town were temples, shrines, and burial grounds. Beyond those areas were the farmlands, a checkerboard of **rice paddies** interrupted here and there by tiny villages where peasants usually lived.

The seasons directed a peasant's life. There was the planting time when men, women, and children pushed rice seedlings into the knee-deep mud. There were long days of harvest when they hurried to bring in crops before the heavy rains.

The peasants did backbreaking labor, but their work was important. After all, the rice they grew was the source of the daimyo's wealth.

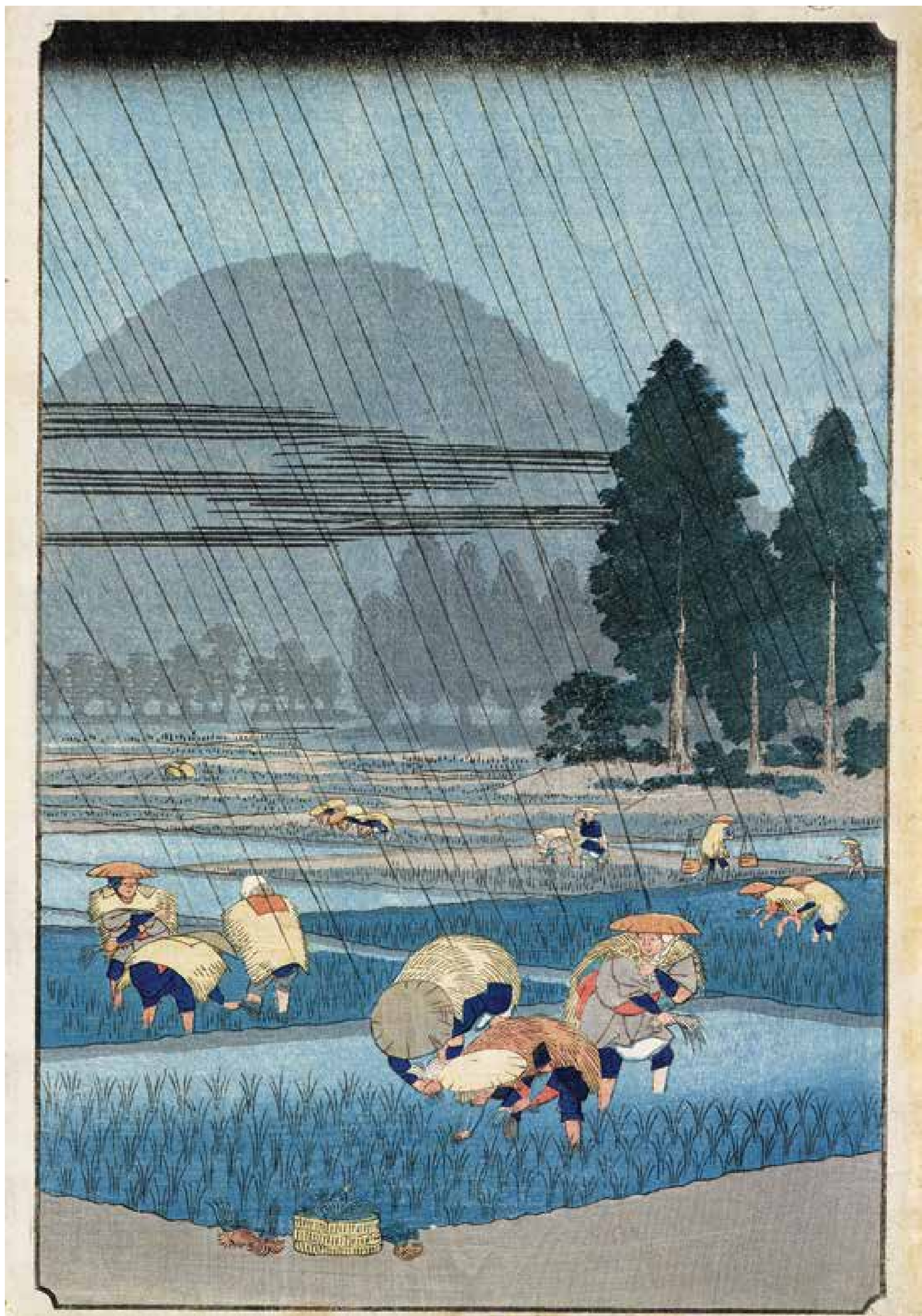
Arts and Entertainment

There was one activity that brought pleasure to the townspeople but was considered too common for the samurai. Several times each year, traveling **Kabuki** (/kuh*book*kee/) players probably came to town.

Vocabulary

rice paddy, n. a field that is flooded to grow rice

Kabuki, n. popular, traditional Japanese dramas with singing and dancing



The wealth of a daimyo was measured by how much rice his peasants could grow.

Even today, a Kabuki player appears in colorful costume and distinct makeup.

Performance day had to be sunny because the theater had no roof. Performers in colorful costumes exaggerated their movements and wore heavy makeup. Filling the stage, they sang, danced, and acted out stories of love, war, and heroism.

Sometimes the spectators joined the actors on the stage. It was a noisy, lively affair. Tea and food vendors squeezed through the audience. The snacks they sold were in great demand because a performance could last up to eighteen hours.

An earlier form of drama, the Noh theater was seen as more fitting for the upper classes. In contrast to Kabuki, a Noh play had little action. Two actors wearing carved masks performed on a bare wooden stage. Meanwhile, a chorus of men chanted about ideals such as unselfishness and honor. The only scenery was a single

screen painted with a pine tree. This served as a reminder that Noh plays were originally performed at Shinto shrines, often in front of sacred trees.

This is a Noh mask of a young woman.

Some high-ranking daimyo, or lords, had Noh stages built at their own castles. In several ways, the actors were a lot like the samurai themselves. The all-male Noh casts were very physically fit. The actors were well-trained and highly disciplined. Before each show they spent time in a special "mirror room," where they meditated and focused their minds on their performance.

The Flow of Life in Three Lines

> **Vocabulary**
>
> **haiku,** n. a form of poetry having seventeen syllables in three lines

By now, you probably picture feudal Japan as a warrior's world, and in many ways it was. But there was one samurai who became famous by using his pen rather than his sword. Taking the name of Basho, this young samurai became a master of a poetry form called **haiku** (/hye*koo/). In just three written lines, Basho could create a picture, reflect a feeling, or capture the meaning of life. For centuries, other haiku artists took inspiration from him.

Basho was the pen name used by Matsuo Munefusa, a samurai who lived in the 1600s and wrote haiku.

The Japanese nobility had enjoyed poetry since the early days of the empire. Because haiku was short and simple, everyone could understand and appreciate it.

Haiku spoke of nature—a part of everyone's experience. It would become one of the world's most popular poetry forms. Sometimes funny and sometimes sad, haiku captures the flow of everyday life. As you end this chapter, let yourself imagine what this poet of Japan saw and felt more than three hundred years ago:

Spider, say again!

It's so hard to hear your voice

in the autumn wind.

—Basho

Chapter 5
Changes Come to Japan

> **The Big Question**
>
> How did foreign trade bring about the end of the shogun era?

The Mongols A peaceful, prosperous life for the townspeople and peasants depended on how well the local daimyo and samurai could defend their territory. But there were also times when Japan had to defend itself against outside invaders.

One of the most powerful military forces the world has ever seen were the great Mongol armies of the 1100s and the 1200s. The Mongols created an empire that stretched from China to eastern Europe. The Mongol ruler Kublai Khan, grandson of the great conqueror Chinggis Khan, set his sights on Japan in the late 1200s.

In 1268, Kublai Khan sent a letter to Japan's capital. He threatened to attack if the Japanese did not agree to pay him money to keep peace. Both the emperor and the shogun ignored the threats.

Kublai Khan launched an invasion of Japan from Korea. The first attack came in 1274 when a fleet of nine hundred ships arrived on the shores of the empire's southernmost island, Kyushu.

Kublai Khan

The Mongols created a large empire. In the late 1200s, Kublai Khan attempted to make Japan part of his vast Mongol empire.

The Mongols first tried to invade Japan in 1274.

On the first day of battle, the Mongol invaders were victorious, and they returned to their ships that night. It was a deadly mistake. A storm blew in, splintering the invaders' vessels and killing one third of their troops. The invasion failed.

A much larger attack came in 1281. This time, two separate armies joined in the assault on Hakata Bay. About forty thousand Mongol, Korean, and northern Chinese troops met up with another one hundred thousand troops from southern China. Some 4,400

Mongol warships arrived on the shores of Kyushu. Kublai Khan meant business.

Before the invaders could launch their attack, another storm blew in. This time it packed the fury of a full-scale typhoon, destroying most of the attacking ships and nearly half of the Mongol forces. Once again, the remaining Mongol invaders went home in defeat.

The Japanese did not believe that these storms were accidents or coincidences. They believed that each of these two storms was an example of kamikaze (/kah*mih*kah*zee/), meaning divine wind. The gods, wanting to protect Japan, had sent these divine winds to defeat the Mongol invasions.

The Japanese believe kamikaze, or divine winds, saved them from two Mongol invasions.

The Europeans Arrive

Almost three hundred years later, a different kind of threat reached Japan. In September 1543, an unusual ship appeared off the shore of one of Japan's smaller islands. It carried newcomers who came to trade. They brought one item unlike anything the Japanese had ever seen. According to one account, it caused an explosion like lightning and a noise like thunder.

The remarkable object was a **musket**, and the strangers who brought it sailed from Portugal. The Portuguese had already explored the coasts of Africa and Asia, as well as many of the islands of the Pacific. Now they had come to Japan, bringing the musket—a firearm that would change Japanese warfare forever.

Vocabulary

musket, n. a type of muzzle-loading gun that was used before the invention of the rifle

Japan at first welcomed the Western traders. After the Portuguese vessels, Spanish, Dutch, and English trade ships also arrived. Japan's daimyo were intrigued by Western ideas. They were also eager to obtain firearms. Over the centuries, the daimyo had spent many years fighting among themselves, struggling to determine who would be the shogun. The musket soon became an important weapon in these struggles. After the arrival of the Europeans, no daimyo could hope to become shogun unless an army of musketeers backed him.

The Portuguese brought muskets to Japan.

Along with the Western traders came **missionaries**. A Catholic group, the **Jesuits**, hoped to set up permanent missions in Japan. On the west coast of Kyushu, a local warlord offered the Jesuits harborside land in the little fishing village of Nagasaki (/nah*guh*sah*kee/). In time, this village would become the chief city on Kyushu.

Vocabulary

missionary, n. a person on a journey for the purpose of spreading a particular religious belief

Jesuit, n. a member of the Catholic religious group called the Society of Jesus

For twenty-five years, the Westerners—both traders and missionaries—enjoyed a welcome in Japan. The technology and ideas they introduced would greatly influence the course of Japanese history.

The arrival of European traders and missionaries in the 1500s introduced new weapons and the Christian religion to Japan.

A Closed World

In 1603, the Tokugawa (/toh*koo*gah*wuh/) family of shoguns gained control of Japan and ruled from the city of Edo, which is now Tokyo. Earlier shoguns had welcomed Western trade and ideas. Now, the Tokugawa removed the welcome mat, banning all foreign missionaries from Japan. This was done largely because Christian teachings challenged traditional Japanese ideas and beliefs. Also, the governing powers of various Christian churches were not within the control of the ruling shogun. The ruling shogun ordered that no Japanese would be permitted to practice Christianity. He even used torture and execution to persuade people to abandon the religion.

Still, the missionaries and priests kept coming, along with foreign trade ships. The Japanese worried that foreign armies determined to turn Japan into a colony would follow these visitors. From 1600

The Tokugawa shoguns allowed the Dutch to have a trading post at Nagasaki. No other Europeans or Americans were allowed into Japan. In this image you can see the Dutch trading post.

to 1868, shoguns barred nearly all Westerners' ships from Japan's harbors. Only the Dutch could visit as they were mainly interested in trade, but even they were confined to one port near Nagasaki.

In 1636, the shogun issued an **exclusion** order. The order prevented Japanese people from traveling abroad and foreigners from coming in. In 1639, it became against the law to build a big, seagoing ship. The surrounding seas helped the shoguns isolate their people, although Japan continued to trade with its Asian neighbors.

Vocabulary

exclusion, n. the state of being shut out or kept out of a group or agreement

secluded, adj. having little or no contact with others; isolated

Under the Tokugawa shoguns, Japan would remain a **secluded**, or closed, world for more than two hundred years.

Opening Doors

In the late 1700s, Japan was still maintaining its "exclusion" policy, banning trade with all Westerners except the Dutch. However, three nations—Russia, Britain, and the United States—began to knock loudly on its doors.

In the early 1700s, Russia's ruler Peter the Great asked that Russian ships be allowed to stop at Japanese ports for supplies. Peter died before setting up trade relations with Japan, but in the late 1700s, Catherine the Great tried again. Czarina Catherine tried to force the shogun to open his ports, but the Russian strong-arm methods backfired. Japan closed its doors more tightly. The shogun ordered that any foreign vessel that came close to his shores be destroyed.

Meanwhile, Britain had forced trade agreements with China. The shogun's fears increased. He worried that Japan, too, would be forced to welcome foreign ships.

He was right to worry. In July 1853, four black-hulled American vessels steamed into Tokyo Bay. A stern-faced United States naval officer, Commodore Matthew Perry, came before the shogun. Perry presented a letter from the president of the United States. It demanded that Japan open its ports to trade.

Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Tokyo Bay in 1853. His visit helped open trade relations between Japan and the United States.

Perry soon made a second visit—this time bringing four extra warships. The American show of force did the trick. The shogun and his advisers knew that they could not stand up against the United States Navy. They signed a **trade treaty** with the United States.

Vocabulary

"trade treaty," (phrase) an international agreement of conditions of trade in goods and services

This first treaty turned out to be only the beginning. After agreeing to trade with the United States, how could the shogun refuse other nations? Britain, France, and Russia soon demanded and won trade rights, too. Suddenly, Japan was bustling with foreign traders.

The End of Shogun Rule

After several years of foreign trade, some Japanese grew unhappy with the arrangement. They thought that the foreigners had been given special privileges, and they blamed the shogun for allowing this to happen. Many Japanese complained about their lives under the shogun. Merchants, although making plenty of money, remained near the bottom of the social ladder. Peasants paid heavy taxes. The samurai, who were much less important than before because of the growing importance of trade, were discontented. The daimyo grumbled about being forced to maintain expensive houses in the capital.

Eventually, a rebellion against the shogun broke out. Where did the rebels look for the solution to their problems? They looked to the emperor. Remember, although shoguns ruled the land,

an emperor still served as a royal figurehead. “Honor the emperor!” became the rebels’ cry.

In 1867, the shogun stepped down and in 1868, a new government was formed. The emperor was restored to the role of official head of state. Shinto was once again declared the **state religion.** The Shinto religion reminded people that their emperor ruled as a descendant of the sun goddess Amaterasu.

Vocabulary

state religion, n. a religion established by law as the only official religion of a country

This was not, however, a return to the old days when the emperor ran the affairs of state. A new government conducted business in the name of the emperor.

The end of shogun rule marked the end of Japan’s feudal age. The new government announced that rank in Japanese society now included consideration of how much a person knew of Western science and practical affairs. The old system of inherited rank—samurai, peasants, artisans, and merchants—was abolished. Japanese of all ranks were equal under the law. Samurai could buy and sell goods, and artisans, merchants, and peasants could serve in Japan’s new modern army.

The Japanese adopted a new attitude about the world they shared. Remember when the shoguns closed Japan’s doors to Westerners and did not allow its people to leave their home shores? In contrast, the new government stated that “knowledge shall be sought throughout the world.”

The Japanese began to visit the United States and Europe. They studied Western science and shook off their longtime dislike for trade and commerce. Japan built a mighty naval fleet. The Land of the Rising Sun prepared to take a powerful place in world affairs.

Japan's last shogun was removed from power in 1867.

Glossary

A

archipelago, n. a chain of islands (4)

aristocrat, n. a person of the upper or noble class whose status is usually inherited (8)

artisan, n. a person with a certain skill in making things (24)

B

Buddhism, n. a religion that began in India and is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (6)

Bushido, n. literally, "the way of the warrior"; in feudal Japan, a code of values by which the samurai lived (26)

C

clan, n. a group of families claiming a common ancestor (4)

D

dharma wheel, n. the symbol of Buddhism. The eight spokes of the wheel symbolize the eightfold path. (17)

E

exclusion, n. the state of being shut out or kept out of a group or agreement (45)

F

figurehead, n. a person who leads or rules in name only but actually has no power (24)

G

gangplank, n. a small movable bridge used to get on and off a ship (6)

H

haiku, n. a form of poetry having seventeen syllables in three lines (35)

I

isolation, n. separation from others (4)

J

Jesuit, n. a member of the Catholic religious group called the Society of Jesus (43)

K

Kabuki, n. popular, traditional Japanese dramas with singing and dancing (32)

L

lotus, n. a water lily, considered sacred in parts of Asia (20)

M

martial arts, n. any of several arts of self-defense, such as karate and judo, that are widely practiced as a sport (19)

missionary, n. a person on a journey for the purpose of spreading a particular religious belief (43)

musket, n. a type of muzzle-loading gun that was used before the invention of the rifle (42)

P

Pacific Rim, n. a term used to describe nations that border the Pacific Ocean (2)

R

rice paddy, n. a field that is flooded to grow rice (32)

ritual, n. an act or series of actions done in the same way in a certain situation, such as a religious ceremony (12)

S

samurai, n. in feudal Japan, a Japanese warrior; the plural form is also samurai. (23)

secluded, adj. having little or no contact with others; isolated (45)

serenity, n. a feeling of calm and peacefulness (17)

sermon, n. a speech on a religious topic given by a religious leader (16)

Shinto, n. a Japanese religion in which people worship gods and spirits associated with nature (6)

shogun, n. a title meaning great general, given to the strongest military leader in feudal Japan (24)

shrine, n. a place considered holy because it is associated with a holy person or event (12)

silkworm, n. a caterpillar that produces silk, which is used to make thread or cloth (7)

spirit, n. an unseen life-giving force (10)

state religion, n. a religion established by law as the only official religion of a country (48)

T

tea ceremony, n. a way of preparing and presenting tea (7)

"trade treaty", (phrase) an international agreement of conditions of trade in goods and services (47)

typhoon, n. a windy storm with heavy rain; a hurricane (12)

V

vassal, n. a person who receives land from a ruler and in return promises to fight for that ruler (24)

Z

Zen Buddhism, n. a type of Buddhism developed in Japan that emphasizes meditation and thoughtful tasks as the way to peace (18)

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Americans arriving in what is now Tokyo Bay on 8 July 1853, Escott, Dan (1928–87) / Private Collection / © Look and Learn / Bridgeman Images: 1, 46

Dharma wheel (photo) / Godong/UIG / Bridgeman Images: 18

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Japan: Emperor Kanmu was the 50th emperor of Japan, according to the traditional order of succession. (r. notionally 781–806). 16th century painting on silk / Pictures from History / Bridgeman Images: 21

Japan: Oda Nobunaga on a piebald horse watching repairs on his castle by Naka-ura Sarukichiro. Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797–1861), 1847–1852 / Pictures from History / Bridgeman Images: 31

Japan: The Japanese sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami with her guardians Myojin and Taga Myojin. Hand-colored Shinto woodblock print, 18th century / Pictures from History / Bridgeman Images: 5

Japan: The wandering poet Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) conversing with two roadside tea drinkers. Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839–1892), 1891 / Pictures from History / Bridgeman Images: 36

Japan: Tokugawa Yoshinobu (October 28, 1837-November 22, 1913) the 15th and last shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate of Japan, Beato, Felice (Felix) (1825-c.1908) / Pictures from History/Felice Beato / Bridgeman Images: 49

Kublai Khan, 1294 (ink & colour on silk), Araniko or Anige (1245–1306) / National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan / Ancient Art and Architecture Collection Ltd. / Kadokawa / Bridgeman Images: 39

Map of Asia at the time of the greatest extent of the domination of the Mongols in the reign of Kublai Khan, from L'Histoire Universelle Ancienne et Moderne, published in Strasbourg c.1860 (coloured engraving), French School, (19th century) / Private Collection / Ken Welsh / Bridgeman Images: 39

Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199) founder and the first shogun of the Kamakura Shogunate of Japan/ Universal History Archive/ UIG / Bridgeman Images: 23

Mongols invade Japan (gouache on paper), Nicolle, Pat (Patrick) (1907–95) / Private Collection / © Look and Learn / Bridgeman Images: Cover D, 40

Mountains and coastline, two views from '36 Views of Mount Fuji', pub. by Kosheihei, 1853, (colour woodblock print), Hiroshige, Ando or Utagawa (1797–1858) / Private Collection / Bridgeman Images: 11

Nichiren summoning the divine Shinpu wind to destroy the Mongol-Chinese fleet attacking Japan in 13th century (engraving), Kuniyoshi, Utagawa (1798–1861) / Private Collection / Ancient Art and Architecture Collection Ltd. / Bridgeman Images: 41

Nyoirin Kannon, Kamakura Period (bronze), Japanese School / Minneapolis Institute of Arts, MN, USA / Bridgeman Images: 9

Rice Planting in Hoki Province with a Distant View of O-Yama (woodblock print), Hiroshige, Ando or Utagawa (1797–1858) / Leeds Museums and Galleries (Leeds Art Gallery) U.K. / Bridgeman Images: 33

Samurai of Old Japan armed with bow and arrows (colour litho), Japanese School / Private Collection / Peter Newark Military Pictures / Bridgeman Images: Cover B, 22

Samurai Warrior's Armour, Japanese School / Tower of London, London, UK / Bridgeman Images: 28

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The Arrival of the Portuguese in Japan, detail of the left-hand section of a folding screen, Kano School (lacquer), Japanese School (16th century) / Musee Guimet, Paris, France / Bridgeman Images: 43

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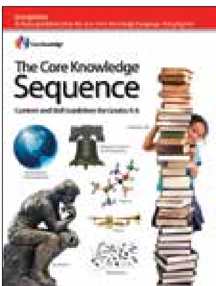

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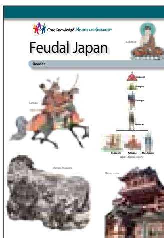

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