

*History*  
UNFOLDING

# CLAN, EMPEROR, SHOGUN

## JAPAN IN THE MIDDLE AGES



**MindSparks**  
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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# Introduction

## Medieval Japan

The labels “Medieval” or “Middle Ages” call to mind the knights, lords, ladies, and castles of the Europe of the age of chivalry, feudalism, and the Crusades. Efforts to apply these terms to other cultures usually distort their true nature and the real pattern of their histories.

Japan is one valid exception to this rule. From about the 11th century, Japan entered a feudal age that was to last until the great transformation and modernization of that society in the Meiji era of the late 1800s. One activity in this set quotes a historian who makes this point by describing Japanese feudalism and comparing it with feudalism in Europe:

*Both had land-based economies, vestiges of a previously centralized state, and a concentration of advanced military technologies in the hands of a specialized fighting class. Lords required loyal services of vassals, who were rewarded with fiefs of their own. The fief holders exercised local military rule and public power related to the holding of land.*

It is essentially this theme that ties together the illustrations and lessons in this set. The set uses 12 visual displays to focus on several key aspects of the theme, and on the broad sweep of Japan’s history from the rise of its imperial state through the era of the Tokugawa shogunate. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

### **Island Nation**

The natural features of Japan made it difficult to establish a unified central state. Despite Japan’s unbroken imperial tradition, decentralized authority prevailed more often than not before the modern era.

### **China’s Shadow**

China influenced the political institutions and ideas of the Japanese elite from an early time. It also shaped Japan’s culture, art and much more. Yet at the same time, the Japanese were always able to adapt Chinese and other foreign imports to their own uses and cultural traditions.

### **From Emperor to Shogun**

The family of the emperor of Japan was seen as descended from divinity. Yet for much of Japan’s history, the emperor was limited by the powerful localized clans and lords beyond the imperial capital. With the crises of the 12th century and beyond, a new figure—the shogun—worked to impose order on a fragmented Japanese society in a different way.

### **The Tokugawa Shogunate**

The Tokugawa shoguns established a new, more militarized central control. Yet because of Japan’s feudal nature, this shogunate too was often subject to limits. The shoguns sought to freeze society in its tracks. But Japan under the Tokugawa shoguns was a dynamic order not easily kept in place by any central political authority.

## Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

## How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

**A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET** This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

**DIGITAL IMAGES** The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

### **DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS**

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.



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**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will appreciate the impact of geographical factors on Japan's unique history.
  2. In particular, students will better understand how Japan's rugged terrain and island status affected its history.
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# Island Nation

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

This drawing shows a peasant in the Japanese countryside wearing winter clothing during a time of troubles in the 1400s CE. It suggests the simple technological level of Japanese farming then and earlier. In the third century BCE, settlers from Korea began to replace less technically advanced peoples in Japan. These newcomers mostly practiced wet rice farming methods. Japan's rainy summers are ideal for growing rice in paddies. But the work was intense and took a great deal of labor. It also often required the careful use of irrigation methods and close cooperation between all members of the village.

**Illustration 2**

Shinto is Japan's native religion based on reverence for natural forces and places of special spiritual power. A *torii* is a gateway of crossed pillars found near Shinto shrines. This *torii* is on Miyajima Island, just off the coast of Japan's main island, Honshu. Unlike China, Japan was rarely united under a single ruler or government. Its geography helps to explain why. As this photo suggests, Japan's small valleys and plains are ringed by rugged mountains in many places. Mountains run down the center of Honshu, dividing it into eastern and western sides. Smaller ranges extend off of this spine. This splits the nation into many separate regions which rarely could unite for long. Japan was primarily a land of villages, with all the families of a village organized into one or two clans. Clans were like large extended families, though not all clan members were related by blood. The clan heads were the most powerful figures in Japan until the first central government arose in the sixth century CE.

**Illustration 3**

In China, the constant threat of invasion by northern nomads often made political unity necessary. But Japan is a series of narrow islands off the coast of Asia. The sea protects Japan. Thus, many Japanese have seen even the sea's destructive power as a good thing. In the 13th century, after conquering China, the Mongols attacked Japan twice, in 1274 and 1281. Each time, storms destroyed their huge fleets and doomed their plans. This illustration shows Japanese opposing the second Mongol invasion. These typhoon-assisted victories led the Japanese to believe they had been protected by a *kamikaze*, which means "divine wind."

# Illustration 1



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## *Discussing the Illustration*

1. This drawing is of a peasant in the Japanese countryside wearing winter clothing. It is from the 1400s CE. From this illustration, what can you tell about the life and work of Japan's peasants at that time?
2. Long ago, rice became the main crop raised by Japan's farmers. Economists might say that this drawing only hints at how "labor intensive" traditional Japanese farming was, especially wet rice cultivation. Can you explain what economists mean by the term "labor intensive"?
3. What else do you know about wet rice cultivation and its several stages?
4. Despite the simple technological level of the peasant in this drawing, wet rice cultivation could not have been carried out easily without well-organized villages and a high degree of cooperation among all farmers in a village. From what you know about traditional rice farming, can you explain why?

## *Follow-up Activities*

1. Find out about "Jomon" culture in Japan, which existed from around 10,000–300 BCE, and what sorts of farming if any the Jomon culture carried on. Also find out about the Yayoi peoples who came from Korea and began taking over in Japan in the third century BCE. Who were the Yayoi, and what kinds of agriculture did they practice? Write a brief essay describing what is known about each of these groups and their farming patterns and practices.
2. **Small-group activity:** Rice is very nutritious, but it takes a great deal of time and labor to produce. Learn more about all of these stages of wet rice production as they were traditionally carried out by farmers in Asia. These include growing and transplanting seedlings, preparing wet rice paddies, harvesting the crop, and threshing, hulling, and other tasks needed to make the rice usable as food. Make drawings of rice plants and of each of these stages in the process of growing rice.



## Illustration 2



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### Discussing the Illustration

1. This is a *torii*, or a gateway of crossed pillars. It is at a shrine on Miyajima Island just off the coast of Japan's main island, Honshu. *Torii*s are often found at the shrines of gods later worshipped as part of Japan's main native religion. Can you name that religion?
2. Under Shinto, many gods called *kami* ruled various aspects of the natural and social order. Why do you suppose Shinto shrines are often in remote natural settings such as this one?
3. For centuries, Japan was mainly a land of smaller regions controlled by powerful local families or clans. An imperial government arose in the sixth century CE but rarely won complete control over the local clans or districts. This photo calls attention to one aspect of Japan's geography that made it hard for any central government to unify the nation. Can you explain?
4. What else do you know about Japan's geography? What other geographical features might be important in understanding Japanese society?

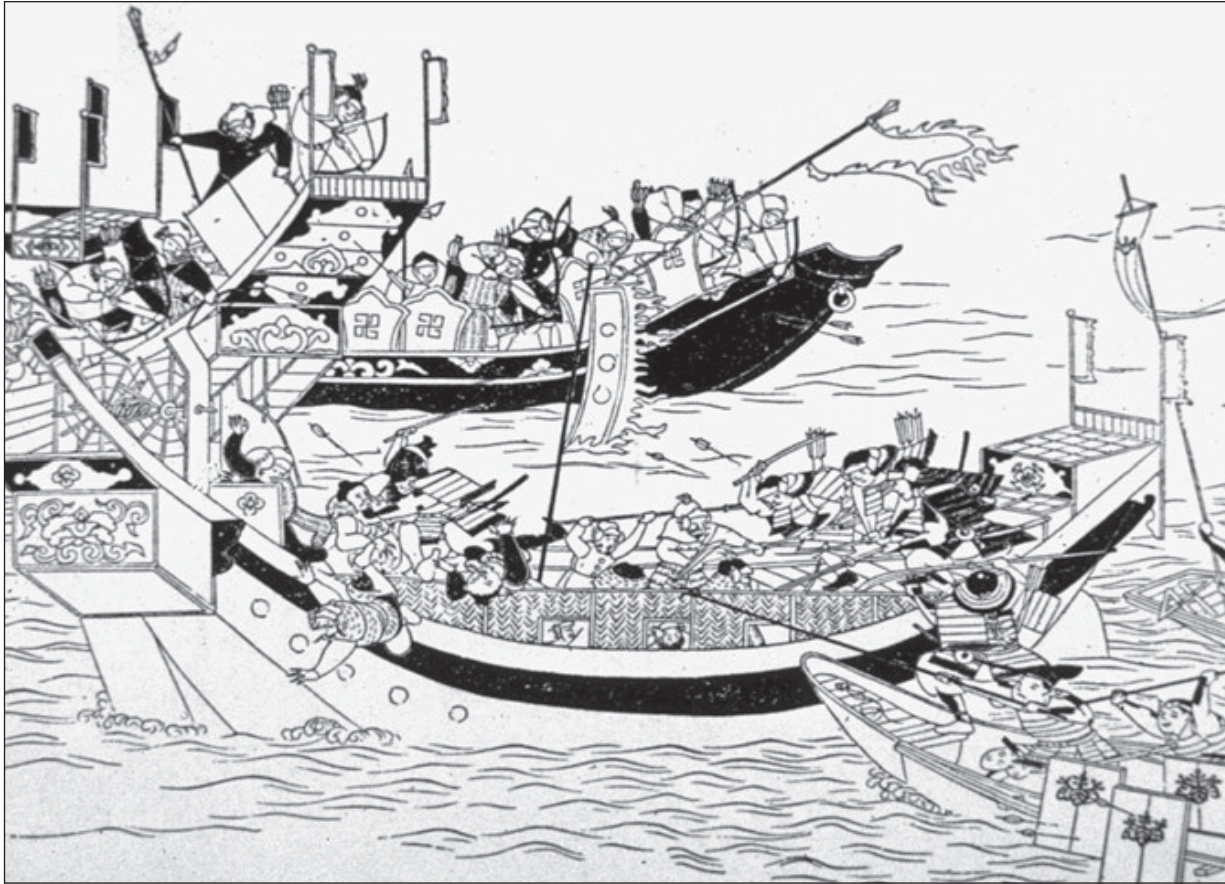
### Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Create a map of Japan and a bulletin-board display of photos of various mountain regions, valleys, seaports, etc. Be sure to identify the larger plains on the island of Honshu on which much of early Japanese history took place—that is, the plains on which present-day Kyoto and Tokyo are located. Call your display, "Japan: Regions and Environments."
2. One historian says this about rice cultivation in Japan as compared with China:

*Unlike China, which had to undertake massive public works and water-control projects, leading to a highly centralized government, Japan had abundant water. In Japan, then, local political and social developments were relatively more important...*

Learn more about agriculture and water-control efforts in ancient China and Japan. Based on what you find out, write a brief essay explaining why you do or do not agree with what this historian says here.

## Illustration 3



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### Discussing the Illustration

1. Another key geographical factor in Japanese history was the sea. What aspects of Japan's geography made the sea so important in its history?
2. This drawing shows part of a famous sea battle in 1281 CE. In it, an invading force of 140,000 was defeated by Japanese vessels and a typhoon. The invaders were feared warriors who had recently conquered all of China. Can you name them?
3. The invaders tried and failed twice within a decade to conquer Japan. Both times, the weather played a key role. This led Japan to give thanks to the force they called *kamikaze*. Can you explain? What can you learn about naval technology at the time from the details of this illustration?
4. The sea is powerful, and it can be destructive. But to the Japanese, it has also been seen as a protector. And this also helps explain why the Japanese rarely felt a need to unite under a single, all-powerful central government. Can you explain?

### Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Find books with collections of Japanese landscape and seascape paintings. Find other collections of similar kinds of Chinese paintings. Do some reading about landscape painting in ancient Japan and China. Based on what you learn, choose what you think are five typical paintings for each society. If you can, post these on a bulletin board, or else pass them around the class. Have each group member write a paragraph about one or two of the paintings. As a group, share these in a discussion with the class about your group's views of the overall differences between Chinese and Japanese depictions of nature.
2. In 1274 and again in 1281, the fierce Mongols, who had just conquered China, tried to invade and conquer Japan. Learn more about these two great invasions. In a brief talk to the class, summarize what happened. Also explain how these events help to show the influence of the sea on Japan and its history.



**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better appreciate how much Japan borrowed from China in the early centuries of its national history.
2. Students will also understand how Japan was able to adapt Chinese influences to its own cultural traditions.

# China's Shadow

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

Japan's earliest central government was ruled by an emperor and staffed by aristocrats from Japan's most powerful clans. The imperial court was deeply influenced by China. That is clear from the famous 17-Article Constitution issued in 604 CE by Prince Shotoku Taishi, who ruled as regent during the reign of Empress Suiko (592–628). Prince Shotoku is shown here with some courtiers. The 17-Article Constitution described Japan's ruling constitutional principles. As Article 1 suggests, these rules express Chinese Confucian ideals, stressing reverence for traditional ritual, family loyalty, duty, and respect for authority.

**Illustration 2**

Buddhism was also brought to Japan from China. Its spiritual teachings focused on the individual's search for enlightenment. Buddhism often attracted support in troubled times, when people seek spiritual guidance and peace of mind. But Japan's early imperial rulers also saw it as helpful in their political struggles with certain powerful clans. Each clan had its own specific god, called a *kami*. Buddhism preached a more universal message, one for all people regardless of clan, village, or region. (In time, under the influence of Buddhism, the rituals associated with the *kami* also evolved into a more unified religion, Shinto.) Buddhism's notion of a single universal truth and spiritual law may have weakened the hold of the *kami*. In this way, Buddhism helped Japan's early imperial state strengthen its authority over local clans who opposed it.

**Illustration 3**

Confucianism, Buddhism, and other Chinese influences reached their height at Japan's imperial court during the Heian period (794–1192 CE). That period began when Japan's capital was moved to Heian-kyo (present-day Kyoto). Whereas men ruled in politics and warfare, women at the imperial court played a key role in fostering poetry and literature in a Japanese script (the men preferred Chinese). No one was more famous than Lady Murasaki Shikibu, shown here. She knew how to write in Chinese also, but she hid that fact. Her most famous work, *The Tale of the Genji*, was probably written in Japanese script. Some call this work the world's first novel. It evokes the fleeting beauty of all things in its tale of the complex life of a prince called Genji.



# Illustration 1



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## Article 1

*Harmony is to be valued, and an avoidance of wanton opposition is to be honored. All men are influenced by partisanship, though a few are wise. Hence there are some who disobey their lords and fathers, or who feud with neighboring villages. But when those above are harmonious and those below are friendly, there is concord in their discussions, and right views of things naturally prevail. Then what is there which cannot be accomplished?*

Article 1 of Prince Shotoku's  
17-Article Constitution (604 CE)

### Discussing the Illustrations

1. This illustration shows Prince Shotoku Taishi and some of his courtiers. Prince Shotoku ruled as regent during the sixth and seventh centuries CE. The early imperial government was staffed by aristocrats from powerful noble clans, and it was ruled by an emperor who was seen as “divine.” What does this mean? How do the details in this painting help show the deep reverence felt for Prince Shotoku?
2. Japan's early emperors were deeply influenced by China in many ways. The 17-Article Constitution that Prince Shotoku issued in 604 CE is an example of this. Article 1 shows the influence of Confucius and Confucian ideas. What do you know about Confucius and his ideas? In what way might the illustration also be said to express Confucian values?
3. Confucian influence can be seen in the phrase, “when those above are harmonious and those below are friendly, there is concord.” Given what you know about early Japan and its clans, why might such ideas have appealed to the early emperors of Japan?

### Follow-up Activities

1. Starting in the sixth century CE, Japan's rulers sent many missions to China. These were made up of scholars, merchants, and others. The Chinese welcomed these missions. But they were angered at one point when Prince Shotoku sent a message with one mission in which he addressed China's emperor this way: “From the Son of Heaven in the Land of the Rising Sun to the Son of Heaven of the Land of the Setting Sun.” Learn more about ancient China and Japan. Try to find out why the Chinese emperor would have been angry about this address. Pretend you are that emperor. Write a long letter to Prince Shotoku explaining your displeasure. Then pretend you are Prince Shotoku and write a letter in reply.
2. **Small-group activity:** One Japanese capital city, Heian-kyo, was designed similarly to the Chinese Tang Dynasty capital of Chang'an. Learn more about both cities. Draw diagrams of them as part of a bulletin-board display on these two capitals and their importance to each society.

## Illustration 2

### Article 2

*Sincerely revere the three treasures. The three treasures—Buddha, the Law, and the Monastic orders—are the final refuge of the four generated beings, and are the supreme objects of faith in all countries. What man in what age can fail to respect these teachings? Few men are utterly bad. They may be taught to follow the teachings. But if they do not betake them to the three treasures, how shall their crookedness be made straight?*

Article 2 of Prince Shotoku's  
17-Article Constitution (604 CE)



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

### Discussing the Illustrations

1. Here is Article 2 from Prince Shotoku's 17-Article Constitution. It is evidence of another key set of ideas brought to Japan from China. What set of ideas?
2. Actually, Buddhism was not native to China either. Can you explain?
3. Buddhism came to Japan in the sixth century CE. Buddhism is a set of practices and beliefs aiding the individual search for enlightenment. What do the "three treasures" suggest about Buddhism? How does the Japanese statue here give you a sense of Buddhism's idea of spiritual enlightenment?
4. Buddhism is centered on what are called its Four Noble Truths: (1) all life is suffering, (2) all suffering is due to desire or attachment, (3) suffering can end if desire ends, and (4) the way to end desire is to follow the "Middle Path" of right thought and action. What else do you know about the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism? Why do you think this religion appealed so strongly to Japan's early rulers?

### Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** In 788, a Buddhist temple was established on the slopes of Mount Hiei, near Heian-kyo. In time, the Tendai Buddhist monastic center on Mount Hiei would grow into a huge temple complex and develop close ties with the imperial government. It gained great wealth, artistic and cultural influence, and political power. As a group, learn more about it. Create a bulletin-board display explaining Mt. Hiei's political, artistic, and religious role in Japan from its origins until 1571, when it was destroyed.
2. Japan's early emperors and their backers at court often struggled for control against leaders of other powerful clans. Buddhism may have helped the emperors in their political struggles with these clans. To some extent, this can be seen in the struggles of the Soga clan against the Nakatomi and Mononobe clans in the fifth and sixth centuries CE. Learn more about these struggles and the role Buddhism played in them. Sum up what you learn in a brief essay.

## Illustration 3



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### Discussing the Illustration

1. Chinese influences on Japan's imperial court were at a high point during the Heian period (794–1192 CE). That period began when Japan's capital was moved to Heian-kyo. What modern-day city is there now?
2. Whereas men ruled in politics and warfare, women at the imperial court played a key role in fostering poetry and literature. Perhaps the most famous female writer was Lady Murasaki Shikibu, shown here. Her most famous work is often called the world's first novel. Can you name it? What do you know about this novel? What do you think Lady Murasaki is doing in this illustration? Why? What impression does the drawing give you of this important female writer?
3. Like other women at court, Lady Murasaki probably wrote in Japanese, not in the Chinese preferred by the male writers at court. She did know how to write in Chinese, but kept that a secret. Why do you think she hid that fact? Why do you suppose it was important that these female writers produced a body of literature in their native Japanese language?

### Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** The Heian court gave the world a remarkable body of literary works by several court ladies. The most famous is *The Tale of Genji*. Yet many other works also exist. The women who gave us these literary works did much to shape the nature of early written Japanese prose. One historian has described the spirit of their writings this way:

*The small, highly inbred, aristocracy enjoyed a respite of unprecedented peace, which it used to develop a highly refined, if somewhat rarefied, outlook on life. The defining rule in this outlook was the concept of beauty and especially its intimate relationship to the Buddhist notion of impermanence.*

Learn more about Lady Murasaki, her writings, and the writings of some of the other Heian court ladies. Select some passages that you think can help to clarify what the historian quoted here means. Share the writings with the rest of the class.



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**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand the unique role of the emperor in early Japanese history.
  2. Students will better understand the nature of the transition from rule by the emperor to the more feudal era of the shoguns.
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# From Emperor to Shogun

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

Claiming divine origin, the Yamato clan founded Japan's imperial dynasty at least as early as the sixth century CE. This dynasty has lasted to the present day. During the Heian era (794–1192 CE), Japan was most united under the emperors. Shown here is a small-scale replica of the Imperial Palace in Heian-kyo. The replica was built in 1895 for the 1100th anniversary of the move of the imperial court to Heian-kyo. As unified as Japan was in the Heian era, even then many emperors were weak and easily controlled by other clans at the palace. The Fujiwara were the most powerful of these clans. For centuries, they intermarried with the imperial family. They often acted as regents for young emperors, and for some adult emperors. They also regularly forced emperors to retire early when they preferred a new one.

**Illustration 2**

Among the most colorful figures in Japanese history were the samurai warriors, one of whom is shown here. Their importance began to grow toward the end of the Heian era when the central government began to weaken and powerful local clans or nobles gained more control over their lands. These landholders began hiring their own private armies for protection. To afford horses, training, bows and arrows, and a sword, a warrior needed land of his own and peasants farming it for him. He obtained such land from the powerful noble to whom he pledged his loyalty. This personal relationship is often called “feudal,” similar in other words to that of lord and vassal in Europe at around the same time.

**Illustration 3**

As private land-owning clans and feudal relationships spread, the Fujiwara and the emperors they controlled lost power. By the 12th century CE, two top military clans—the Minamoto and the Taira—began to struggle for political control. In 1192, after several decades of chaos and civil war, Minamoto Yoritomo won out. He is shown here. He ruled not as emperor or as a regent to an emperor, but as a military leader called a “shogun.” The emperor remained, but as a figurehead with much less power. Yoritomo did still have to rely on other great lords and their samurai, however. As a result, his effort to unite Japan under the shogun did not bring peace.

## Lesson 3—From Emperor to Shogun

# Illustration 1



Stock Montage, Inc

### *Discussing the Illustration*

1. Japan was usually united under the emperors during the Heian era (794–1192 CE). Shown here is a small-scale replica of the Imperial Palace in Heian-kyo. The replica was built in 1895 for the 1100th anniversary of the move of the imperial court to that city. What seems most unique about this palace? That is, what if anything seems uniquely Japanese about it?
2. Even during the Heian period, top officials of one very powerful clan could at times force emperors to resign. This clan intermarried with the imperial family, and from the seventh century CE to the tenth century CE, it often had total control over the emperors. Can you name this clan?
3. As this fact suggests, Japan's emperors never really had strong control over the nation or its powerful clans, even in these centuries when the emperors were at their greatest power. This is quite different from China, which was often united under strong emperors for long periods. Why do you think the two societies were so different in this way?

### *Follow-up Activity*

1. **Small-group activity:** From the sixth century CE to the ninth century CE, Japan's rulers copied many ideas and practices from the Chinese, including Buddhism, Confucianism, and many specific ideas about rulers and governments. For example, both the Chinese and the Japanese called their emperors the "Son of Heaven." The Japanese also copied the famous Chinese civil-service examination system. In both nations, the exams in this system were based on Confucian writings. And in both, the test was used to select officials in the imperial government. In China this actually helped strengthen the emperor and weaken the hereditary nobility. But in Japan, it never was able to do this. Your group's task is to find out why. Learn more about the civil service examination system and about the way it worked in both Japan and China. Report your findings to the class in a brief talk.



## Illustration 2



The Granger Collection, New York

### Discussing the Illustration

1. By the 11th century, the imperial government had weakened. Powerful local clans or nobles gained more control over their lands. These landholders often created their own private armies for protection. Their key fighters were a famous class of mounted sword-wielding warriors, one of whom is shown here. What name is used for these warriors?
2. To afford to be a samurai warrior, a man needed land of his own and peasants farming it for him. From what you see here and what you know about the samurai already, can you explain why?
3. The samurai warrior obtained land from a powerful military landowner or noble to whom he pledged his loyalty. In fact, “samurai” means “those who serve.” This personal relationship of samurai to great landowner reminds some of the ties between lord and vassal in Europe at the same time. What word do historians use for these ties? Does Japanese feudalism seem similar to European feudalism? Why or why not?

### Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** The samurai warrior has often been compared with the medieval knight in Europe. And both have been depicted as key figures in two “feudal systems” that were quite similar. Here is how one historian puts it:

*Both [medieval Europe and Japan] had land-based economies, vestiges of a previously centralized state, and a concentration of advanced military technologies in the hands of a specialized fighting class. Lords required loyal services of vassals, who were rewarded with fiefs of their own. The fief holders exercised local military rule and public power related to the holding of land.*

Your group’s task is to learn more about feudalism in Europe and Japan. Find illustrations to use in a bulletin-board display to illustrate as many of the points in this statement as you can. Write paragraphs to accompany the illustrations and use this material in a display titled “Two Forms of Feudalism.”

## Lesson 3—From Emperor to Shogun

### Illustration 3



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#### Discussing the Illustration

1. The growing power of private land-owning clans and the spread of feudal bonds between samurai and noble led to a crisis for the Fujiwara and the emperors they controlled. Why do you suppose that was so?
2. In the 12th century CE, two military clans began to fight for political control in Japan—the Minamoto and the Taira. In 1192, after a long struggle, the military leader shown here became Japan's new ruler. Can you name him?
3. Yoritomo was not an emperor. Nor was he a regent to an emperor, as the Fujiwara often were. He was a new kind of ruler, a shogun. What was the "shogun"? How does this illustration convey a sense of the shogun's power and authority?
4. The shogun controlled military affairs and had great power over many other clans. The emperor still ruled, it is true, but as little more than a figurehead. What does this mean? Why might the shogun have wanted to keep the emperor as a figurehead?

#### Follow-up Activities

1. The word "shogun" is actually a shortened version of "sei-i tai-shogun," which means "barbarian-subduing great general." The title was first used by Emperor Kammu (782–806 CE) for a commander fighting the Emishi in eastern and northern Japan. Learn more about these battles with the Emishi and the origin of the term "shogun." Write a brief essay answering this question: How does knowing the origin of the term "shogun" help in understanding the term itself and its place in Japanese history?
2. One of the great classics of Japanese literature is the *Heike monogatari* (*Tales of the Heike*). "Heike" is another name for the Taira, the clan that warred against the Minamoto in the 1100s. Learn more about this classic and choose some passages from it that you think will help to show what it is about. Share these with the class in a brief presentation. One book to look at is *Ten Foot Square Hut and Tales of the Heike*, by Chomei Kamo, translated by A. L. Sadler (Charles E. Tuttle Co, 1971).



**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand how the Tokugawa shogunate changed life in Japan.
2. Students will appreciate the dynamic nature of the Tokugawa era in spite of the traditional outlook of its rulers.

# The Tokugawa Shogunate

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

Minamoto Yoritomo was only the first of several military leaders who tried to unite Japan. Over the next few centuries, many others tried and failed, as great landholding families called *daimyo*, with their samurai warrior vassals, grew ever more powerful. After 1600, a new, more powerful shogunate finally imposed order on the *daimyo*. As a result, the *daimyo* forced their samurai warriors to give up their lands, settle in castle towns and take positions as salaried officials. It was only then that they adopted the more philosophical “warrior code”—*bushido*—for which they are famous. Yamaga Soko’s words here illustrate the strong Confucian ethic at the heart of this code of honor, loyalty, and stoic suffering. A dramatic example of this is offered by this illustration, showing the ceremony of *seppuku* or warrior ritual suicide, better known as *hara-kiri*.

**Illustration 2**

It was Tokugawa Iyasu who founded the new, more powerful shogunate. His power rested on his own huge holdings, about a fourth of the national territory. He redistributed other lands to the *daimyo* so as to strengthen his control over them. Then he forced them to live part of the time at his capital Edo (modern Tokyo) and leave their families there as hostages. Ruling with this now tamed *daimyo*, the shoguns ended Japan’s ruinous civil wars. The Tokugawa shogunate lasted from 1603 to 1868. This painting depicts the *daimyo* and their samurai warriors making this periodic switch of residence by traveling the highway from Edo to Kyoto.

**Illustrations 3A & 3B**

The shogun ruled a feudal system and tried to limit movement both geographically and from one social class to another. Yet the Tokugawa era was no simple, unchanging traditional order. The peace it provided allowed for agricultural improvement, a rapid growth of cities, and the rise of a new merchant class. These illustrations focus on one aspect of this era’s variety and richness. Illustration 3A shows a Kabuki performance, full of colorful sets, humor, conflict, and tragedy. Kabuki was part of the popular culture of cities and merchants. Illustration 3B shows a Noh play. Noh is a classical form of theater marked by stylized and disciplined movement, bare stages, and high-minded drama. In the Tokugawa era, it appealed especially to aristocrats and the warrior class.

# Illustration 1



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## The Way of the Samurai

*Outwardly, he stands in physical readiness for any call to service, and inwardly he strives to fulfill the Way of the lord and subject, friend and friend, father and son, older and younger brother, and husband and wife. Within his heart, he keeps to the ways of peace, but without he keeps his weapons ready for use.*

Yamaga Soko  
(1622–1685)

### Discussing the Illustrations

1. Minamoto Yoritomo was only the first of several military leaders who tried to unite Japan. From the late 1400s on, more than a century of wars took place between the great landholding families called *daimyo*. Finally in 1603, a new shogun arose to bring a long-lasting peace to Japan. Can you name him?
2. Under the Tokugawa shogunate, the *daimyo* forced their samurai warriors to give up their lands, settle in castle towns, and become salaried officials. Oddly, it was only then that the samurai fully began to adopt openly the warrior code for which they are famous. One dramatic and rather grim part of this warrior code is depicted here. It is called *seppuku*. Can you explain what this was and what the warrior here is about to do? How does this illustration capture the spirit of this warrior code?
3. Yamaga Soko's words sum up a key aspect of that code. Why do you think this code appealed to the samurai no longer involved in actual warfare?

### Follow-up Activities

1. *Bushido* is the name for the samurai code of conduct. Learn more about it. Also learn more about the way the idea of *bushido* has been used by many Japanese in the modern era, since the late 1800s. Then consider this statement from one writer:

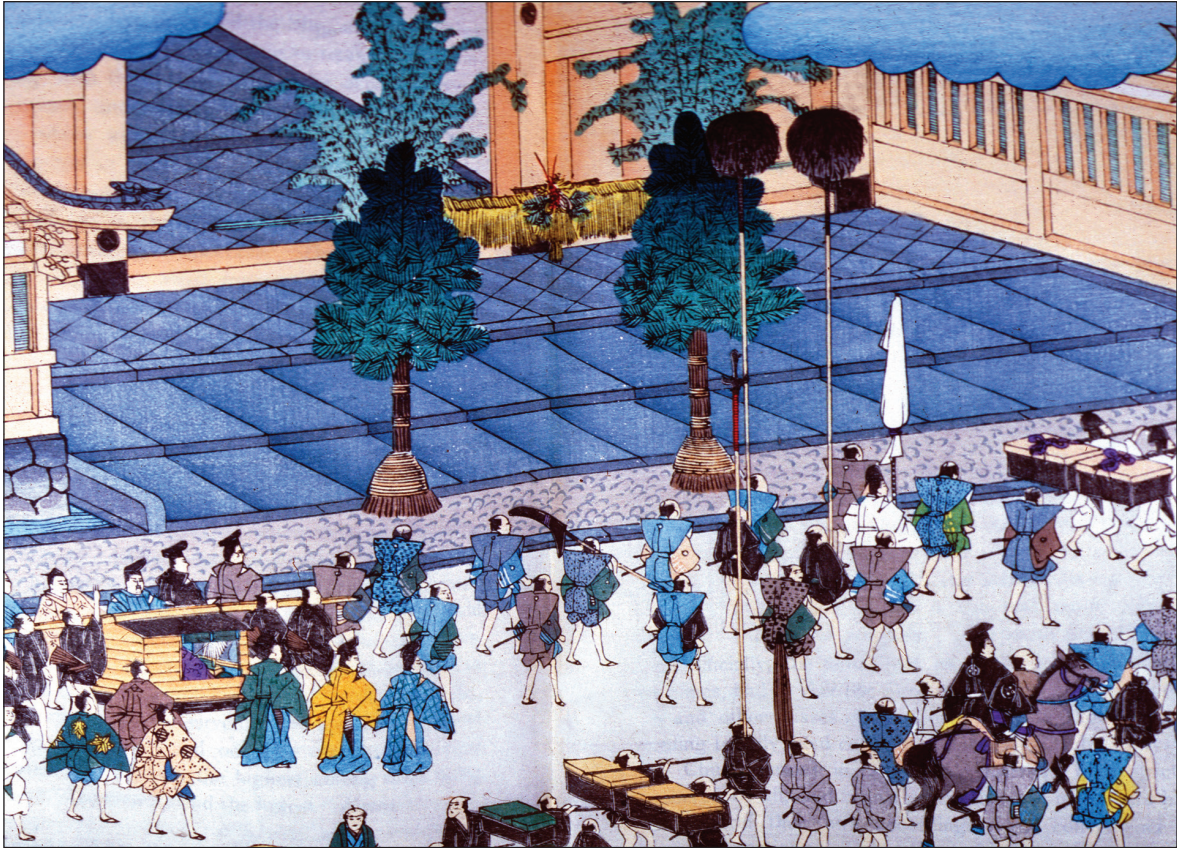
*Much of the bushido preached by the government and the militarists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was at best superficially derived from the "Way of the Warrior" espoused in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.*

Write a brief essay explaining clearly why this statement is or is not correct.

2. **Small-group activity:** As described by Yamaga Soko and others, *bushido* was strongly influenced by both Zen and Confucianism. Learn more about Zen, Confucianism, and *bushido*. Give a brief talk to the class explaining the way Zen and Confucianism both find expression in the *bushido* of the 17th century.



## Illustration 2



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### Discussing the Illustration

1. The Tokugawa shogunate brought a long period of peace to Japan. Under the shoguns, the emperor remained in Kyoto (formerly Heian-kyo). But Tokugawa Ieyasu had his headquarters in his own part of Japan, in the city of Edo. What is the modern-day name for Edo?
2. To better control the *daimyo*, Tokugawa Ieyasu made them live part of the time at Edo and leave family members there when they returned to their own lands. This painting shows the *daimyo* with their warriors switching residence by traveling the highway from Edo to Kyoto. How does the painting help to show why this policy enabled the shoguns to control the *daimyo* as effectively as they did?
3. The shoguns ruled a feudal system and tried to limit movement both geographically and from one social class to another. Yet, the Tokugawa era was not an unchanging society. Agricultural wealth expanded, cities grew, and a wealthy merchant class developed. Why do you think this occurred?

### Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** The following is a famous saying regarding the decades leading up to the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate:

*Oda pounds the national rice cake,  
Hideyoshi kneads it, and in the end Ieyasu sits  
down and eats it.*

To fully understand this saying, you need to know more about Japan's history from the time of the Onin War (1467–1477), through the chaos of the century that followed it, to the final triumph of Tokugawa Ieyasu in the early 1600s. Learn more about these events. Create a large detailed timeline, write paragraphs on key events and people, and link these to points on the timeline. Display all of this, along with the above saying, on the bulletin board. As a group, discuss the timeline with the class and use it to explain the saying and why it is so famous in Japan.



## Lesson 4—The Tokugawa Shogunate

# Illustrations 3A & 3B

3A



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3B



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### Discussing the Illustrations

1. These two illustrations focus on just one aspect of the variety and richness of the Tokugawa era. Illustration 3A is a photo of a Kabuki performance. Kabuki was colorful and full of open conflict, tragedy, and humor. How does the photo illustrate this quality of Kabuki performances?
2. Kabuki was part of a growing popular culture that appealed especially to merchants, artisans, and other town dwellers. What else do you know about this popular culture? Why do you suppose it would have appealed especially in Japan's growing cities?
3. Illustration 3B is a photo of a Noh play. Noh is a classical form of Japanese theater. In the Tokugawa era, it appealed especially to refined aristocrats and the disciplined warrior class. From what you see here, can you explain why that might have been so?
4. Using these two photos, compare and contrast these two art forms and their different appeals.

### Follow-up Activities

1. The long struggles to unify Japan under the Tokugawa shogunate took place at a time when Europeans arrived in Japan and began trading there and doing missionary work. Then, early in the Tokugawa era, Japan's rulers ended nearly all contact with these Europeans. Why? Learn more about the activities of the Portuguese, Spanish, English, and Dutch in Japan in the 1500s and 1600s. Write a brief essay explaining what happened and why you think Japan cut off further contact with the West.
2. Learn more about Kabuki from its origins to the 19th century. Organize a brief talk or slide presentation on its history. Direct at least part of your talk to clarifying the following statement:

*[Kabuki] began to attract audiences from all levels of society. The government perceived this intermingling, particularly within Kabuki, as a genuine threat to the fabric of society, and as a result regulations and controls became increasingly far-reaching and draconian.*



# **Image Close-ups**



Island Nation

# Illustration 1



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Island Nation

# Illustration 2



© Instructional Resources Corporation

## Island Nation

# Illustration 3



© Instructional Resources Corporation



## China's Shadow

# Illustration 1



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### Article 1

*Harmony is to be valued, and an avoidance of wanton opposition is to be honored. All men are influenced by partisanship, though a few are wise. Hence there are some who disobey their lords and fathers, or who feud with neighboring villages. But when those above are harmonious and those below are friendly, there is concord in their discussions, and right views of things naturally prevail. Then what is there which cannot be accomplished?*

Article 1 of Prince Shotoku's  
17-Article Constitution (604 CE)



## China's Shadow

# Illustration 2

### Article 2

*Sincerely revere the three treasures. The three treasures—Buddha, the Law, and the Monastic orders—are the final refuge of the four generated beings, and are the supreme objects of faith in all countries. What man in what age can fail to respect these teachings? Few men are utterly bad. They may be taught to follow the teachings. But if they do not betake them to the three treasures, how shall their crookedness be made straight?*

Article 2 of Prince Shotoku's  
17-Article Constitution (604 CE)



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

China's Shadow

# Illustration 3



© Instructional Resources Corporation

## From Emperor to Shogun

# Illustration 1



Stock Montage, Inc



## From Emperor to Shogun Illustration 2



The Granger Collection, New York



## From Emperor to Shogun

# Illustration 3



© Instructional Resources Corporation

## The Tokugawa Shogunate

# Illustration 1



© Instructional Resources Corporation

### **The Way of the Samurai**

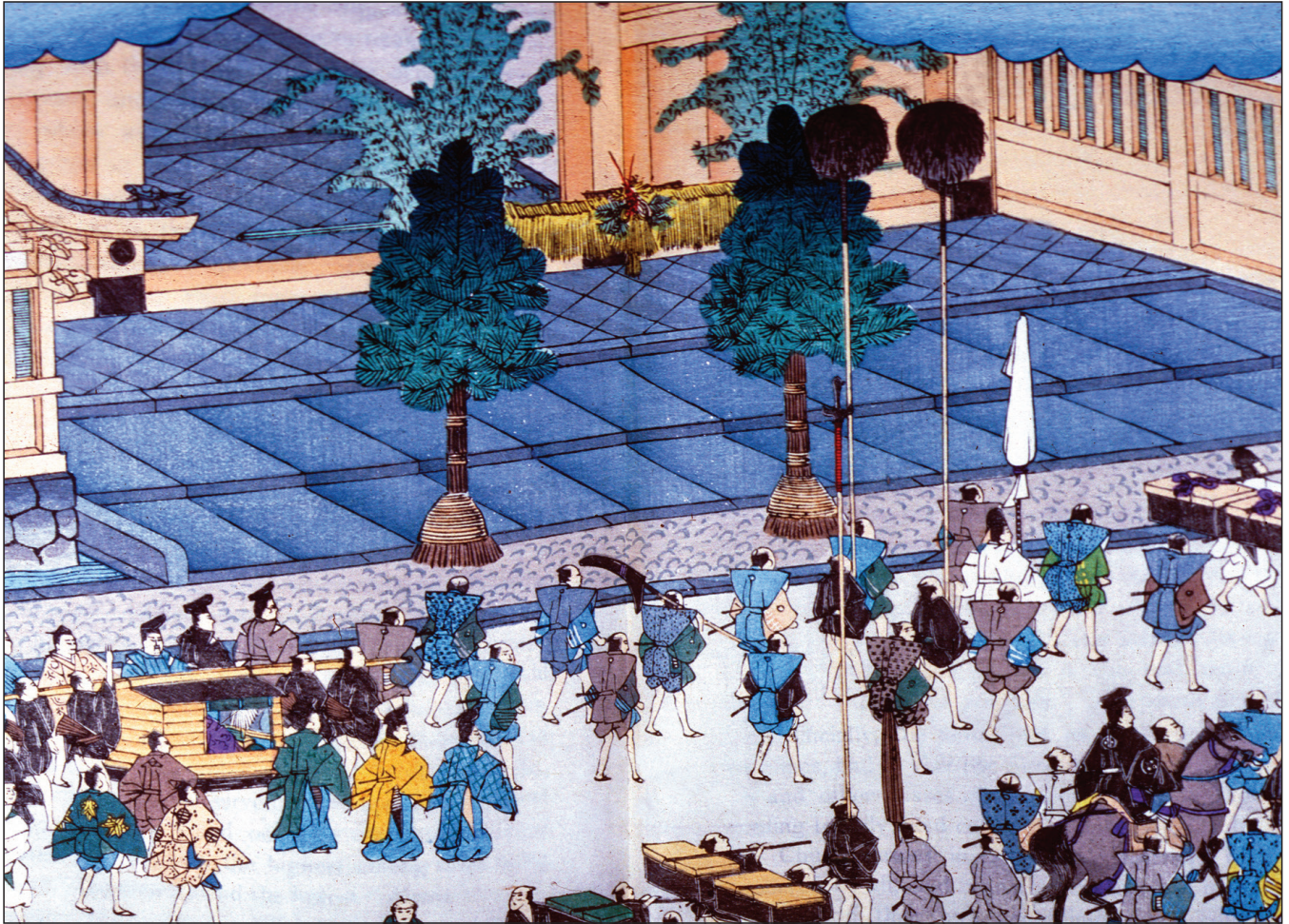
*Outwardly, he stands in physical readiness for any call to service, and inwardly he strives to fulfill the Way of the lord and subject, friend and friend, father and son, older and younger brother, and husband and wife. Within his heart, he keeps to the ways of peace, but without he keeps his weapons ready for use.*

Yamaga Soko  
(1622–1685)



## The Tokugawa Shogunate

# Illustration 2



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## The Tokugawa Shogunate

# Illustrations 3A & 3B

3A



© Instructional Resources Corporation

3B



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