

Lesson 5: Life in Ancient Japan

Getting Started

Traveling still further east from China, you have now arrived in ancient Japan! In this lesson, you will learn about the geography, government, and economy of ancient Japan.

Stuff You Need

- ✓ *Geography of the World: The Essential Family Guide to Geography and Culture* by Jayne Parsons
- ✓ *Life in Ancient Japan* by Hazel Richardson
- ✓ colored pencils, crayons, or markers

Ideas to Think About

- How do people of different cultures divide their societies by rank or status?
- How is power distributed among the citizens of different societies?
- How do rulers in different societies claim and wield power?
- How can trade foster cultural exchange and shift balances of power?

Things to Know

- People first settled on the islands of Japan 30,000 years ago.
- Early in Japan's history, **clans** of warriors controlled regions of Japan.
- In 250 A.D., the Yamatai clan conquered many other clans and became known as the **Yamato** – eventually they ruled most of Japan.
- A **shogun** was a general who was allowed unlimited authority to keep the peace in Japan. The shogun held tremendous power.
- Ancient Japanese merchants traded with merchants from China and Korea.

Reading and Questions

Read the Introduction through page 17 of *Life in Ancient Japan* by Hazel Richardson. These pages cover the geography and early history of Japan, including information about the clan system and government of early Japan.

1. How does the *Kojiki* say that Japan was created?

2. How did the Jomon people get their name?

3. What were the *uji*?

4. How did the Emperor Kotoku appease the clan leaders who objected to a centralized government run by the emperor?

Activities

Activity 1: Geography and Natural Resources of Japan

The islands of ancient Japan contained many natural resources that early residents could use. In this activity, you'll explore maps of ancient and modern Japan and list the natural resources that you have learned about from your reading.

On the "Geography and Natural Resources" of Japan activity page, do the following:

- Label the Japanese islands of Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu, and Hokkaido.
- Label the ancient cities of Heian, Nara, Kamakura, and Edo.
- Using the map on page 185 of *Geography of the World*, label the modern Japanese cities of Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe, Sapporo, Kyoto, and Nagoya.
- In the space at the bottom of the page, list all of the natural resources that you have learned about that were available to residents of ancient Japan. You will find them listed in the reading for this lesson.

Activity 2: Power in Ancient Japan

Power and control of the government shifted in ancient Japan. In this activity you'll explore some of those shifts, learning more about the people who wielded power at different points in ancient Japanese history. There are two options for this activity. Ask a parent which option you should complete.

Option 1

In this activity, you'll write about four different groups that held power in ancient Japan – the *uji*, the emperors, the noble families, and the **shoguns**. Drawing on pages 10-17 in *Life in Ancient Japan*, answer the questions on the "Power in Ancient Japan" activity page. Where possible, include examples to illustrate the ways that different groups came to power and held power.

Option 2

Pages 10-17 of *Life in Ancient Japan* describe the shifting balance of power in Japan among various ruling groups and individuals. Use your own paper and the art materials of your choice to create a flow chart or other graphic organizer that will show the changes in the rule of Japan over time, from the time of the *uji* (as early as 57 A.D.) to the rule of Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the 1580s. For each major shift, be sure to write down approximate dates and describe who was in power and a few key details about their influence.

Activity 3: Trade Between Japan, China, and Korea

In this activity, you will explore the economic interactions between Japan and its neighbors, China and Korea. Use the "Trade Between Japan, China, and Korea" activity page to do the following:

- First, label Japan, China, and Korea.
- Draw a red arrow from Japan to China. Along this arrow, write the names of goods that were traded from Japan to China.
- Draw a blue arrow from China to Japan. Along this arrow, write the names of goods that were traded from China to Japan.
- Draw a red arrow from Japan to Korea. Along this arrow, write the names of goods that were traded from Japan to Korea.
- Draw a blue arrow from Korea to Japan. Along this arrow, write the names of goods that were traded from Korea to Japan.

Please be sure to save this activity page — you will need to come back to it in Lesson 6!

Wrapping Up

Power shifted quite a bit in ancient Japan, as you saw from today's readings. **Clans**, emperors, powerful nobles, and **shoguns** all controlled Japan or strongly influenced its government at one time or another. In the next lesson, you'll learn more about the culture of Japan.

*Geography and
Natural Resources of
Japan*



POWER in ANCIENT JAPAN

Instructions: Use the information on pages 10-17 in *Life in Ancient Japan* to help you answer the following questions.

THE UJI

Who were they?

When did they hold power?

What did they do?

THE EMPEROR

(for example, the early Yamato emperors)

Who were they?

When did they hold power?

What did they do?

NOBLE Families

(for example, the Fujiwara family)

Who were they?

When did they hold power?

What did they do?

THE SHOGUN

(for example, Minamoto no Yoritomo)

Who were they?

When did they hold power?

What did they do?



Trade Between Japan, China and Korea



Parent Overview

Lesson 5: Life in Ancient Japan

Getting Started

? Big Ideas

- How do people of different cultures divide their societies by rank or status?
- How is power distributed among the citizens of different societies?
- How do rulers in different societies claim and wield power?
- How can trade foster cultural exchange and shift balances of power?



Facts and Definitions

- People first settled on the islands of Japan 30,000 years ago.
- Early in Japan's history, **clans** of warriors controlled regions of Japan.
- In 250 A.D., the Yamatai clan conquered many other clans and became known as the **Yamato** — eventually they ruled most of Japan.
- A **shogun** was a general who was allowed unlimited authority to keep the peace in Japan. The shogun held tremendous power.
- Ancient Japanese merchants traded with merchants from China and Korea.

⦿ Skills

- Analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the civilizations of Medieval Japan. (SS)
- Describe the significance of Japan's proximity to China and Korea and the intellectual, linguistic, religious, and philosophical influence of those countries on Japan. (SS)
- Discuss the reign of Prince Shotoku of Japan and the characteristics of Japanese society and family life during his reign. (SS)
- Describe the values, social customs, and traditions prescribed by the lord-vassal system consisting of shogun, daimyo, and samurai and the lasting influence of the warrior code in the twentieth century. (SS)
- Trace the development of distinctive forms of Japanese Buddhism. (SS)
- Study the ninth and tenth centuries' golden age of literature, art, and drama and its lasting effects on culture today, including Murasaki Shikibu's Tale of Genji. (SS)
- Analyze the rise of a military society in the late twelfth century and the role of the samurai in that society. (SS)

Introducing the Lesson

This lesson will introduce your child to ancient Japan, with a focus on its geography, government, and economy.

Reading and Questions (Answers)

1. How does the *Kojiki* say that Japan was created?

- The *Kojiki* says that Japan was created when the god Izanagi and goddess Izanami stirred waters with a spear. The water that dripped from its end became the island of Onokoro, where the god and goddess lived. Some of their children became the other islands of Japan.

2. How did the Jomon people get their name?

- "Jomon" means a cord pattern, and the Jomon people decorated their clay pots with ropes of clay.

3. What were the *uji*?

- The *uji* were clans of warriors who controlled different regions of ancient Japan.

4. How did the Emperor Kotoku appease the clan leaders who objected to a centralized government run by the emperor?

- He formed the government from members of important clans, giving clan members rice and land in exchange for their loyalty.

Outline of Activities and Answer Keys

Activity 1: Geography and Natural Resources of Japan

In this activity, your child will label a map of Japan, noting both ancient and modern cities, and record a list of natural resources found in Japan. An answer key has been provided.

Answer Key: Geography and Natural Resources of Japan

Geography and Natural Resources of Japan KEY

Natural Resources of Japan: Your child may mention many natural resources such as rich soil for agriculture, gold, zinc, copper, bamboo, wood (such as cedar, maple, chestnut, and cherry), fish, shellfish, whales, animals (such as deer, bear, fox, and boar), clay for pottery

Activity 2: Power in Ancient Japan

This activity focuses on power in ancient Japan. Option 1 asks your child to provide information about Japanese *uji*, emperors, noble families, and shoguns. Option 2 asks your child to create a graphic organizer showing some of the shifts in power among these groups. Because it requires a deep understanding of power in ancient Japan to create an original graphic organizer to show important changes, Option 2 is the more challenging option. Please choose the option that you think will be the best fit for your child.

Option 1

In this activity, your child will write about four different groups that held power in ancient Japan — the *uji*, the emperors, the noble families, and the shoguns. Your child's answers may vary, but the answer key provides some possible responses:

The Uji

Who were they? *The uji were ruling clans of powerful warriors who controlled regions of Japan.*

When did they hold power? *By 57 A.D., the uji controlled Japan. This lasted until around 600 A.D.*

What did they do? *An uji would control a region of Japan. Families that lived on the land worked to produce goods for the uji to earn the right to continue to live on the land.*

The Emperor (for example, the early Yamato emperors)

Who were they? *The emperors were originally members of the most powerful clan in Japan by 500 A.D., the Yamato.*

When did they hold power? *Around 600 A.D., the Yamato clan decided that Japan should be ruled by a single emperor. The emperor retained a great deal of power until 858 A.D.*

What did they do? *The emperor owned all land and, with the help of clan leaders who were appointed to help run the government, created the rules of the society. The position of emperor was passed down within a family through generations. The emperor continued to perform some government functions and ceremonial duties, even when noble families and the shogun had control of the majority of political and military power in ancient Japan.*

Noble Families (for example, the Fujiwara family)

Who were they? *Noble families were wealthy and powerful families.*

When did they hold power? *Noble families had greater control by 858 A.D.*

What did they do? *While emperors performed ceremonial duties, noble families determined the course of the government after about 858 A.D. until 1156 A.D. The Fujiwara are a good example of a ruling Japanese family.*

The Shogun (for example, Minamoto no Yoritomo)

Who were they? *Shoguns were warriors who were granted great power by the emperor.*

When did they hold power? *The first shogun, Minamoto no Yoritomo, came to power in 1192 A.D.*

What did they do? *The shogun was more powerful than the government or the emperor and created his own military government. The emperor and his advisers retained some control of certain government functions such as taxation, but the shogun ruled Japan.*

Option 2

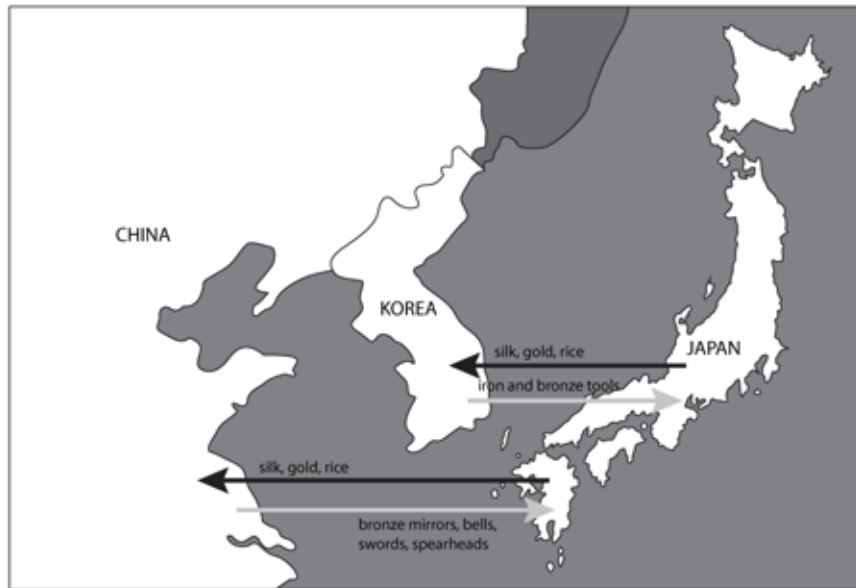
No answer key has been provided because your child has a lot of freedom in this activity to create a graphic organizer that will resonate with his own way of thinking about the transitions in Japanese power. You should be able to verify the factual information that your child chooses to include by consulting pages 10-17 in *Life in Ancient Japan*.

Activity 3: Trade Between Japan, China, and Korea

In this activity, your child will label a map to show the flow of goods between Japan and the countries of China and Korea. An answer key has been provided. Your child should save this page — he will use it again for part of Lesson 6.

Answer Key: Trade Between Japan, China, and Korea

Trade Between Japan, China and Korea



Wrapping Up

Questions to Discuss

- What are some of the advantages and disadvantages to Japan's geography? (Japan has many natural resources but is vulnerable to earthquakes, tsunami, typhoons, and volcanic eruptions. Islands can be isolated from the rest of the world but can also be protected against invasion.)
- What was the status of women in ancient Japan? (Women could be clan rulers in the Yayoi and Yamato periods, but they lost some of their status after 550 A.D. and were respected primarily as wives and mothers rather than as potential rulers.)
- How was rice important to the ancient Japanese economy? (Extra rice could be used in trade or to make goods like rice wine and vinegar that could also be traded. Rice was also used as currency — it could be used to pay someone's salary, to pay taxes, or in trade.)

Things to Review

- Review your child's "Geography and Natural Resources of Japan" activity page for accuracy.
- Review your child's "Power in Ancient Japan" activity (either the pre-printed activity page or your child's own graphic organizer).
- Review your child's "Trade between Japan, China, and Korea" activity page for accuracy.