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Integrating English and Social Studies through the Lens of Tokugawa Japan: An 8 Week Curriculum for Sixth Grade

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Integrating English and Social Studies through the Lens of Tokugawa Japan:

An 8 Week Curriculum for Sixth Grade

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Abstract

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Integrating English and Social Studies through the Lens of Tokugawa Japan:

An 8 Week Curriculum for Sixth Grade

The following curriculum is intended for sixth grade students in a general education, integrated English and social studies classroom. This curriculum is based on the foundational ideas of child-development, concept-based, constructivist learning, and the integration of the language arts and social studies curricula as a way to deepen students’ engagement with the curricular material. Through these central pillars the curriculum immerses students in a historical era while allowing them to develop their own understanding of the past and create connections to the world in which they live. The aim of this curriculum is for students to explore the world of Tokugawa Japan while developing the skills and thought processes to engage with contemporary ideas and challenges. In order to meet these aims, the students will read historical fiction novels set in this historical era, visit museums with relevant works of art, and delve into their own independent research projects. This curriculum examines the rationale for a developmental and concept-based unit, presents its learning objectives and finally provides lesson outlines and relevant resources to implement the study.
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I. Rationale

The discipline of social studies offers students not simply a way to understand the past, but the means to engage with the ideas and concepts that shape human interactions. Social studies provides opportunities for students to interrogate ideas over time and across geographical locations and cultures. The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) states that “social studies equips [students] with the knowledge and understanding of the past necessary for coping with the present and planning for the future, enables them to understand and participate effectively in their world.” (NCSS, 2016, pg. 2) The following curriculum is based on this principle; the primary aim of this curriculum is that students to become immersed in the world of Tokugawa Japan while developing the skills and thought processes to engage with contemporary ideas and challenges.

This curriculum is founded on the ideas of child-development, concept-based, constructivist learning, and the integration of the language arts and social studies curricula as a way to enhance students’ engagement in the study. Through these three pillars the curriculum immerses students in a historical era while allowing them to develop their own understanding of the past and create connections to the world in which they live. The concepts of the study remain true across time and space; they are statements that can be applied to cultures and eras that extend beyond the specific unit of study. In this way, the students are able to develop a framework along with specific statements and hypotheses that can be used to investigate and understand the present day.
Child Development

In developing a curriculum for sixth graders, it is essential to understand the central role that emotional and social development play in the lives of early adolescents. Many developmental psychologists have pinpointed eleven to twelve years old as a turning point in development, thereby evidencing the liminal space this age range occupies. For instance, in Erikson’s (1963) theory of development, based on a series of conflicts, the school age range ends at eleven while the adolescent age begins at twelve. Thus, during this sixth grade year children are moving out of the “industry versus inferiority” complex (Eccles, 1999, p. 33), where they are just learning to be competent in their skills and are gaining confidence their own unique abilities. As they move away from this stage, students are newly aware of themselves as individuals, generally with more a secure self-image. During this time they work hard to become more responsible and independently accomplish increasingly complex tasks. This opens up the ability within the curriculum for more independent, in-depth assignments and analysis. As they continue to develop this established sense of self, towards the end of the year students are entering the “identity vs. role confusion” complex. Entering this stage, children begin to form their own value systems. Yet they simultaneously face challenges to their self-confidence and their sense of self is called into question more frequently and dramatically (Erickson, 1963). Moreover, as they enter early adolescence, students work to reconcile their existing worlds, primarily defined by their families, with the newly important world of their peers. They might experience insecurity as they attempt to negotiate their new
value systems, or those of their peers, with those of their prior understanding of themselves as defined by their families. Thus, learning about the social structures of other societies and studying the value systems, roles of leadership and social dynamics in an academic context can allow students to explore their own internal conflicts.

Thus, students’ emergent cognitive awareness can be a boon in the classroom and open up wide new areas of curriculum. Ideas of group membership, loyalty and individuality can be harnessed in order to foster a collaborative and productive spirit in children at this stage. As students’ cognitive skills have developed and their inferential reasoning has advanced, they are now more successfully able to interpret others’ perspectives and emotions and to determine their own points of view on social matters (Eccles, 1999, p. 33). With this more advanced social cognition, sixth grade students are more skilled at using language to successfully navigate social and academic interactions. In this way, early middle school students are learning to relate to the world, other people, and experiences as the individuals they are quickly becoming and these newfound abilities can translate into curriculum that explore new worlds in increasingly advanced ways.

With this increased analytical thinking and social cognition, sixth grade is an ideal time for students to use literature and social studies concepts to understand societies that exist beyond their immediate experience of the world. They now have the cognitive abilities to grasp ancient civilizations on a timeline and relate more meaningfully to the differences presented by such time and distance. In particular, the society of Tokugawa era Japan, with its feudal structure defined by fealty duty, as
well as the intrigue of samurais and geishas, lends itself to sixth graders’ instinctive sense of loyalty as well as their constructions of group membership and the individual self.

**Concept-based Curriculum**

Rather than focusing on discrete skills or facts about social studies and history, this curriculum provides students with a framework for understanding history through a set of ideas. These concepts aim to give students a broader perspective with which to view the world around them. By using concepts, or big ideas, the aim is that students understand this unit as one way to examine social patterns as they have developed over time.

The concepts that focus this study are as follows:

1. The physical environment of an area significantly influences how and where communities are formed.
2. A society’s beliefs and ideals are often expressed in its art and literature.
3. Human beings develop belief systems that reflect their worldview and give meaning to their lives.
4. Human beings organize themselves into communities in order to survive.

This eight-week unit comes on the heels of an in-depth study of Ancient Egypt. During the students’ fall curriculum, they have used social studies text books, historical fiction novels, and museum artifacts to investigate how the society of Ancient Egypt developed and flourished. They have used the concepts to investigate
the geography of the region, engage in research projects and read historical fiction to connect more deeply to the daily life of Ancient Egyptian society. With this background, the students are well equipped to build on these concepts as they explore a new society.

With the base of a conceptual social studies framework as well as the use of historical fiction novels, this curriculum highlights a constructivist approach as a way for students to strengthen and deepen their understanding of the concepts. It is primarily through reading and discussion of historical fiction texts in conjunction with reading non-fiction texts and artifacts that students will construct their understanding of Tokugawa era Japan. Additionally, visits to the Metropolitan Museum of Art offers students the opportunity to interact with a variety of mediums, including historical artifacts and original works of Japanese art that supplement their classroom reading and learning. Collectively, these individual and group experiences coalesce to give students a rounded perspective of the Tokugawa era and provide the means to grasp the concepts that shape the study.

As a constructivist, concept-based approach, this curriculum includes authentic projects as evidence of understanding. A constructivist approach allows the students to manifest their learning through projects and assignments that do not simply prove a mastery of a certain set of facts, but rather demonstrate students’ reflections on their work and movement towards deeper knowledge about an idea. Through this study, students are able to make connections among the social studies concepts that are explored in the studies of Egypt and Japan as well as their own experiences. They are also able to connect what they learn in nonfiction texts to the
details that emerge from historical fiction texts and apply these texts and the information they have gathered to their own research, writing and reflection. By engaging in reflections on their learning and continuing to ask questions about the material before them, students move beyond the superficial facts in a study and make the learning a more personal process, resulting in deeper grasp of the material (Jia, 2010). Throughout the unit students are given a variety of opportunities to demonstrate their emerging and developing understanding. For example, during visits to the museum, each student chooses specific artifacts of interest to investigate further (See Appendix C). Additionally, in the unit’s culminating research project the students will choose a specific individual area of interest that came up earlier in the study that they would like to investigate further. These opportunities offer students the opening to exhibit their progress towards greater grasp of the content material as well as their developing skills in both English and social studies.

The ongoing and summative assessments of this curriculum focus on students developing their own questions and process of investigation. In social studies, the primary assessment will be the concluding research paper. The topic of this paper is decided by the student and will emerge from the background information they have gleaned from classroom reading of historical fiction and non-fiction texts. Once the students have developed their own topic, they will generate a set of questions around the topic that they would like to answer through their own research. In this way, the students’ questioning of the material will help them to shape their unique areas of interest and allow them to gather information in ways that are meaningful to them. Students will take notes from nonfiction sources (both print and online), create an
outline that organizes their findings, and finally compose a paper demonstrating their understanding of the topic they have chosen. Additionally, students will create an oral presentation that distills the main ideas of their topic to present to their peers. Some examples of these projects include: constructing an artifact related to their topic (a sword or kimono), presenting a tea ceremony, or creating a slide presentation detailing the role of the samurai in Japanese society. Each of these research projects provides opportunities for assessing students’ progress towards their understanding of Japanese society and the underlying social studies concepts.

**Integration of Literature and Social Studies**

One essential tenet of this curriculum is its integration of English language arts and social studies. It is my belief that intertwining literature and social studies for middle school students can deepen the impact of the material for students. By providing students with accurate and well-written fiction texts that address the social studies content, students often forge deeper and more personal connections to the social studies material. Well-researched and thoughtfully written historical fiction texts have the potential to draw students closer to ancient societies, which can be difficult to grasp from the distance of hundreds, or even thousands, of years. These historical fiction texts can also offer a more in-depth and holistic view of the society than the survey of facts that is often included in traditional textbooks (Guzzetti, 1992).

The study of historical fiction texts also offers a constructivist approach as students immerse themselves in the ancient culture through character, setting and
plot. Historical fiction is often developed through accurate descriptions of setting, which have an important effect on the characters and plot of the novel. Rather than being inundated with historical facts from a teacher or textbook, students become immersed in the worlds of historical characters. By reading stories students can create their own understanding of ancient worlds as the factual historical details are contextualized in the narrative of fictional texts. Learning about Japanese society through literature enables students to become absorbed in various descriptions of Japanese countryside, ancient cities and royal palaces as these settings influence the characters in the stories in important and engaging ways.

The students will have the choice to read one of two historical fiction novels by Katherine Patterson, either *The Sign of the Chrysanthemum* or *Of Nightingales that Weep*. Each novel offers deep insight into the culture of ancient Japan, yet also offers literary analysis in terms of character, setting, theme and plot development. Students will write weekly reflections that not only demonstrate their emergent understanding of the text and its plot, themes, and literary devices, but also a developing grasp of some of the essential elements of Japanese culture at the time.
II. Goals and Objectives:

Social Studies Content Goals:

- Students will understand that Japan is an archipelago, and develop ideas about how this geographical feature affects the culture.
- Students will develop an understanding of how the belief systems (Buddhism and Shintoism) connect to Japan’s geography.
- Students will develop an understanding of both Buddhism and Shintoism.
- Students will develop an understanding of feudalism as a political structure and understand the role of the samurai and the Boshido code within this structure.
- Students will develop an understanding of the importance of arts as a means of expressing spirituality and status in a stratified social structure.
- Students will understand that folk tales and ceremonies are an essential component of cultures and can illustrate important goals and themes in societies.

Social Studies Skill Objectives:

- Students will use non-fiction books and websites to take notes on and write a research paper.
- Students will learn nonfiction reading strategies, including annotation.
- Students will conduct research using text from books and internet sources; students will learn to recognize credible and reliable internet sources.
- Students will use the primary sources in museums and art galleries to deepen understanding of particular areas of interest for further research.
Language Arts Goals:

- Students will understand that historical fiction is a hybrid genre that uses fictional characters to examine historical times and discover facts and ideas from specific times in history. This is pertinent to the nature of this study as an integration of English language arts and social studies classes.

- Students will analyze historical fiction texts as literature and investigate character development in literary texts.

- Students will understand and recognize the importance of setting and understand how setting impacts characters and plot.

- Students will understand and recognize the importance of descriptive language in literature. Students will be able to recognize various forms of descriptive language and how they impact plot and character. Noticing descriptive language in literature also allows students to develop such techniques in their own writing.
III. WEEKLY OUTLINE:

Ongoing: Historical Fiction for Historical Learning

Throughout the study, students will be reading one or more of the following historical novels by Katherine Patterson: *Of Nightingales that Weep* and *The Sign of the Chrysanthemum*. Each novel offers different areas of interest in Japanese culture. Katherine Patterson, the author of both novels, moved to Japan as a missionary and lived there for four years. In an interview, the author said, “I came to love Japan and feel very much at home there. I went to language school, and lived and worked in that country for four years. I had every intention of spending the rest of my life among the Japanese,” (Patterson, 2012) Though she did move back to the United States with her family, her experiences in Japan have a profound impact in developing the thoughtfully articulated settings and characters in these novels.

*Of Nightingales that Weep* tells the story of Takiko, an 11-year old girl whose warrior father was killed in battle. Her mother remarries a strange and ugly country potter. To escape this situation, Takiko takes on a position at the imperial Japanese court, where she quickly enchants the handsome young warrior, Hideo. Yet, Hideo has secrets too. As the Gempei war breaks out, Takiko flees the court and must choose between loyalty to her people and her love for Hideo. The novel focuses on Takiko’s story as she makes her way in the imperial court and later in exile. Yet, in addition to Takiko’s story, the book is filled with poetic language and description of the landscape and culture of Japanese society.
In the hero story *The Sign of the Chrysanthemum*, Muna, a young boy, travels to the capital of twelfth-century Japan, in search of the samurai father he has never known. At the time, two rival clans, the Heike and the Genji, are in a violent fight for power. Yet, Muna finds a haven in the capital – first with a ronin (a samurai without a master) named Takanobu and then with the great swordsmith, Fukuji. However, Muna longs to find his real father, a warrior marked with the sign of the chrysanthemum, and will not give up his search until he discovers his real father.

For each novel, students will complete either a set of comprehension questions and write journal entries (*See Appendix A*) that track their understanding of plot and character as well as their increasing knowledge about specific areas of Japanese culture that are relevant to the novel and of interest to the students.

**Week 1: Introducing Japan, Geography as Starting Point**

**Lesson 1: Gathering Information and Questions: What do we know about Japan and what do we want to find out?**

To begin the study, the teacher will refer back to the disciplines of social studies introduced in the Ancient Egypt unit, which include: geography, history, culture (introducing the term *anthropology*), belief systems, and politics and government. Students will share background information about what they believe they already know about Japan, both the historical society and the contemporary country. Next, they will chart their questions and wonderings about Japan.
A completed chart of gathered information and questions might appear as follows (based on 2016 class work):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Things We Think We Know</th>
<th>Questions/Things We Wonder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>• Japan is in Asia&lt;br&gt;• Japan’s capital is Tokyo&lt;br&gt;• Japan is an archipelago&lt;br&gt;• Edo was the previous name of Japan, it meant the fishing village.&lt;br&gt;• There are many Tsunamis in Japan&lt;br&gt;• Sakura is the name of the well-known cherry blossom flower, early on Japan donated many cherry blossom trees to Washington DC.&lt;br&gt;• Mount Fuji is located in Japan.</td>
<td>• Why does Japan have so many have Tsunamis?&lt;br&gt;• Is Japan friendly with its neighbors?&lt;br&gt;• How many islands are in the archipelago of Japan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>• Japan existed at least since the 1600s&lt;br&gt;• Japan fought for the Axis in WWII</td>
<td>• How long has Japan been a country?&lt;br&gt;• How did Japan come to be a country?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture/Anthropology</td>
<td>• Sushi is a popular food in Japan&lt;br&gt;• The native language is Japanese&lt;br&gt;• One traditional garment is kimonos and a woman might wear chopsticks in her hair&lt;br&gt;• Harajuku is the shopping capital of Japan&lt;br&gt;• They do not have trash cans on the street&lt;br&gt;• There were geishas in Japan</td>
<td>• Why do people wear kimonos?&lt;br&gt;• What kind of clothes do they were?&lt;br&gt;• What holidays do they celebrate and when?&lt;br&gt;• What did geishas do in this culture?&lt;br&gt;• Do the Japanese still have a very traditional view of what women should do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief Systems</td>
<td>• Buddhism is a way of life and belief system in Japan&lt;br&gt;• People in Japan respect the truth</td>
<td>• What is the main religion?&lt;br&gt;• What’s their lifestyle?&lt;br&gt;• What is a common culture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics and Government</td>
<td>• Samurai used to rule&lt;br&gt;• There was a samurai named Yoshitsune&lt;br&gt;• They used to have an emperor and a Shogun</td>
<td>• Who is the leader in Japan? Do they have a king or a president?&lt;br&gt;• Is there a pharaoh in Japan?&lt;br&gt;• How could you become a samurai?&lt;br&gt;• Is the government the same now as it was in the Tokugawa era?&lt;br&gt;• What foreign policies do they have now?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lessons 2-3: Further Exploration of Geography

During the first week of the study, students will also begin their study of the geography of Japan. Students will begin by looking at a map of Japan, noticing, with teacher guidance, that the country is a group of islands. Teacher will introduce pertinent geographical terms, including: archipelago, volcanoes, seismic faults. Using the Internet and classroom atlases, students will complete a glossary of terms to gain a deeper understanding of the geographic nuances of Japan (See Appendix B).

In a follow up lesson, students will first read from a nonfiction text (See Resources) about the specific geographic features of Japan. With this information, students can chart the features and make inferences about the effects these features might have on the society. Next, students can compare what they have discovered about the geography of Japan to the geography of Egypt. The teacher might ask students to consider how these differences and similarities might impact the culture and society of Japan in different ways. The class can chart features and effects as follows (based on 2016 class work):

**Geographic Features of Japan and their Effects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Feature</th>
<th>Effect of this Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan is an archipelago of over 4,000 volcanic islands</td>
<td>The society might have been isolated or it might have been hard to communicate. They might have had lots of trade and developed boats to trade more easily.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Most of Japan’s land is mountainous | This makes agriculture difficult  
Mountain climbing might be a popular hobby  
Earthquakes might be dramatic because rubble from mountains could be destructive  
Mountains could have resources that would be beneficial  
Also could make it difficult to inhabit some parts of Japan |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan’s mountains have been terraced to be able to farm</td>
<td>They can get more money and food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Surrounded by water | Flooding happens frequently  
Harder to connect other countries-- isolated  
Also have a huge natural buffer to protect from others--protected from foreign crime  
Many tsunamis and typhoons  
Boats were very helpful  
Fishing was a job-- fish big part of the diet  
Don’t have to worry about land borders, helps the society  
Sea travel makes things easier |
| Many seismic faults, Japan has frequent earth tremors and earthquakes | Houses might collapse, people could die  
Might cause tsunamis as well  
Change architecture to accommodate the natural surroundings  
Have to adapt their architecture, but it could still be tall  
Might not live in the areas where there were seismic faults |
| Best soil existed on the coast lowlands | Easiest to grow there-- these areas will have lots of crops and food-- cities might develop in those areas  
Population would grow in those places  
Like the Nile River-- this is where people would settle  
More money to add to agriculture |
| In the summer, west winds come from Pacific | There might be a lot of rain in one area of Japan  
Summer would be affected by typhoons, which could be destructive  
There might be a lot of snow in some areas |
| Only 16% of the land is arable (able to grow crops) | Population will flourish where land is arable  
Will be difficult to grow food for other areas, so they would  
Have to find other ways to get food  
This might be why they are good at fishing and have sushi |
<p>| There are large islands: Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu. These make up 98% of | Everything might be separate and spread out-- life and the people might be separated |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Japan’s land mass</th>
<th>Many different/diverse cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Might try to figure out different methods of transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volcanic soil isn’t suitable for growing crops</td>
<td>Avoid living and farming in those areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colder in the North and warmer in the South</td>
<td>People might live in the South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different crops would grow in different areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivers are short and fast moving</td>
<td>Rivers might be cleaner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Might be hard to catch fish, make a living around it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Week 2: Art as Understanding**

**Lesson 1: Trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art**

In the second week of the study, the students will work from the foundational understanding of Japan’s geography to understand how the geography affected the culture. Students will go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to investigate primary source artifacts detailing the landscape of Japan. Students should use this opportunity to make observations of the art, consider what the art might further reveal about Japanese geography and then consider what this art might reveal about this society. Students might also make comparisons to the art of ancient Egypt. The students’ work for this trip is based on guiding questions that allow the students to explore the art with an eye towards the belief systems and cultural ideals of the time. *(See Appendix C).*

**Lessons 2-3: Reflection and Art in the Classroom**

Upon returning from the trip, the students might work in groups to discuss their observations. This also offers a time for the students to reflect on their learning and consider how the art at the museum confirmed or disproved ideas they might
have had about this society. In a follow-up lesson, the teacher can also show students selections from Hokusai’s images of Mount Fuji, including “The Great Wave.” Students can use these images to further identify geographic features they know about and use the images to see how people interacted with their geographic environment.

During this time, it is also important for the teacher to situate the time period of Tokugawa Japan in reference to Ancient Egypt and modern times. It is imperative that students understand the relative modernity of the society compared to the ancient era of Egyptian society that they previously investigated. The teacher should articulate that the Tokugawa period of Japan existed far later than that of ancient Egyptian society they studied.

**Week 3: Learning About Societies from Stories**

**Lessons 1-3 Japanese Folktales**

At this point, students will move from the geographic study and begin to investigate the culture and belief systems of this society. Teacher might read aloud or students can independently read a selection of Japanese folktales from *Japanese Children’s Favorite Stories* by Florence Sakade or *Tales of Old Japan* by A.B. Mitford. The aim of these readings is for students to investigate how the stories connect to the geography of the region and then explore what the stories illuminate about the beliefs and cultural values of this society.

These readings and/or read-alouds will be guided by the concept: *A society’s beliefs are often expressed in its art and literature.* The teacher should introduce the concept before reading. In this way, students are primed to listen for details about the
society’s beliefs, which will allow them to use historical resources to construct their own understanding of the beliefs and practices that were prominent in the Tokugawa era. The teacher can read aloud “The Tea-Kettle,” an especially appropriate story for gathering information about Japanese belief systems, or another story from *Japanese Children’s Favorite Stories* by Florence Sakade or *Tales of Old Japan* by A.B. Mitford.

After reading, the teacher might lead a discussion or have smaller student-led discussions based on the following questions: What beliefs and values are shown in these stories? What does this story make us wonder about the beliefs in Japan? How do you think these beliefs emerged and developed in this society? How is this story different from what you know about the beliefs and ideas in Egypt or folktales you might have heard growing up?

**Weeks 4-5: Exploring and Understanding Belief Systems**

**Lesson 1: Connecting Geography and Beliefs**

Using the previous week’s investigation of folktales, students will have a hook into the belief systems of Tokugawa era Japanese culture. At this point, students will use the knowledge they have constructed thus far in the study, as well as their previous knowledge of Egyptian belief systems, in order to investigate how the natural environment of Japan might have impacted the society’s belief systems. These lessons are based on the concept: *human beings develop belief systems that reflect their understanding of the world around them and help them explain their world.*

Students will begin by activating prior knowledge and will recall how this concept was true of Egypt. They might consider the Nile River, the building of pyramids to connect to higher powers and the power of the pharaoh to explain geographic occurrences. Next,
students will investigate how this concept might hold true for Tokugawa Japan as well. First, students will recall knowledge about the geographic features of Japan, including ideas about seismic plates leading to volcanoes/earthquakes, the archipelago resulting in dangerous tsunamis and missing ships and the heavy snowfall in the north causing dangerous avalanches and natural disasters. In small group discussions, students can consider how the ancient Japanese might have explained these occurrences and how this might have then shaped their belief systems.

Students can then watch a video describing Japan’s creation myth or read a version of the creation myth (see resources). Following students’ introduction to the creation story, they can discuss in small groups or as a class what this myth reflects about Japanese society’s understanding of their world and what it might reveal about this culture. This myth will also serve as an entry point to understanding Shinto.

Lesson 2: Exploring Shinto

With the basis of the creation story, students will read a nonfiction text about Shinto, the primary belief system of Japan during the Tokugawa era. *The Kids’ Book of World Religions* by Jennifer Glossop (2013) offers a clear starting point and covers key elements of the belief system. Following a preliminary overview of Shinto, students will choose one element of the belief system to investigate further. Elements for students to explore might include: kami, shrines, torii gates, and religious festivals. Individually students will use classroom resources or Internet sites (the BBC website is especially strong) to gather more information on their specific element Shinto. Next, in jigsaw fashion, students will meet first with their own groups to combine all research about the element they chose to investigate. Next, students will
reconvene into groups so that one member of each element is represented. Students will share the information their initial group gathered with members who studied different elements. Ultimately, each student will have shared information on their area of expertise and heard from their classmates about the other elements of Shinto.

A completed group chart might appear as follows (based on 2016 class work):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element of Shintoism</th>
<th>Information I Gathered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Kami**             | • There are millions and millions of kami  
                        • Kami are the like the gods of Shinto, but are more than just gods and can be elements of the landscape or forces of nature.  
                        • Kami can include gods, such as the gods that created the universe, but they are also other kinds of spirits and ideas  
                        • Kami can be thought of as spirits within living things  
                        • Kami can be in different parts of nature, like mountains, storms and earthquakes  
                        • Influence human events and occurrences  
                        • Not all kami are good, some can be very evil  
                        • Kami are powerful, but they are not perfect and can make mistakes  
                        • Human beings can become kami after death  
                        • Amaterasu was the most important kami  
                        • Izanami and Izanagi were the kami who started Japan |
| **Shrines**          | • A shrine is called a jinja in Japanese.  
                        • This is where people would pray to kami and is thought to be a sacred place where kami lived  
                        • Shinto shrines are usually in very peaceful and calm places, including gardens |
| **Torii Gates**      | • Torii gates are the entrances to Shinto shrines  
                        • The torii are important because they symbolize a separation between everyday life and the spiritual world  
                        • Most torii are made of wood and are usually painted orange or black |
| **Shinto festivals** | • Shinto festivals combine solemn prayers with joyous celebrations  
                        • Festivals could be vulgar and people might drink alcohol during festivals  
                        • Most festivals are tied to farming seasons  
                        • Matsuri: This festival is any time you offer prayer or thanks at a |
After gathering this information, either in small groups or as a class, students should look over their findings and consider how what they learned about the Shinto belief system connects to the concept. The teacher should lead students to see how these beliefs might have evolved from the natural world around Japan. The class can then consider how these beliefs might have impacted the culture of their society. Students might also use this discussion as an opportunity to connect the practices and beliefs of Shinto to other belief systems they know or practice.

Lesson 3: Exploring Buddhism

The teacher should introduce that although Shinto was the initial belief system in Japan and was most prominent during the Tokugawa era, Buddhism also began to flourish in the region during this time period. Students will begin their study of Buddhism by reading from a non-fiction text outlining the key elements of the belief system. Glossop’s (2013) text also offers a clear and strong starting point for kids to understand Buddhism. In order to further understand Buddhism, the teacher might read a story about Siddhartha Gautama or show a video (see resources) about Buddha’s life and the origin of Buddhism.

Next, students can again choose individual areas of Buddhism to investigate and engage in a similar jigsaw activity. As in their exploration of Shinto, this allows...
them to practice their individual non-fiction reading and note-taking skills, collaborate in peer-learning and become both experts and generalists in their understanding of this belief system. Areas of Buddhism students might explore include: Siddhartha Gautama, the three jewels, the four noble truths, the eight-fold path, meditation, Buddhist temples and the different branches of Buddhism. Buddhism is a far more comprehensive belief system than Shinto, so this jigsaw can be more involved and can go into far greater depth, if time and interest allow.

Similarly to the exploration of Shinto, following the jigsaw activity, students can create a t-chart organizing their data about Buddhism. In groups, students can reflect on what Buddhism might illuminate about Tokugawa society and consider how this belief system connects to Shinto and other religions they might know about or practice.

*It is also worth exploring whether any students practice Buddhism or have connections to people who practice. In the past I have been fortunate to have students’ grandparents join the class to give personal reflections on their own Buddhist practice and have the other students interview the visitor about the belief system.

Lesson 4: Comparing and Contrasting Shinto and Buddhism

After gathering and reflecting on the information they have gathered, students in small groups can work together to compare and contrast the information they have gathered about the two belief systems. Students might consider the similarities in the main ideas of the belief systems or how they were practiced.
Using t-charts and group notes, students can then individually write a nonfiction paragraph comparing one element of the two belief systems. For instance, a student might compare and contrast Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples or examine the importance of meditation and tranquility in both belief systems. Following this writing assignment, students should be able to understand how both belief systems could exist simultaneously in Japan and how many individuals believed in and practiced both Shinto and Buddhism.

**Week 5: Political Structures and Parallels**

**Lesson 1: Known Power Structures**

Students will begin by activating background knowledge about systems of power. The teacher can begin by asking students to consider what systems of power exist in students’ own lives, eliciting ideas about schools, government, families and also link back into students’ prior knowledge of systems of power in Egypt. Students should discuss these systems of power in relation to the concept: *human beings organize themselves into communities in order to survive*. In pairs or small group discussions students should discuss why these different methods of organization and power structures exist in so many different places in their lives. Students should share their inferences and ideas with the class in order to gather a set of ideas about the power structures students know about and a consideration of what purpose they serve.

**Lesson 2: Power Structures in Japan**

At this point in their historical novel reading, students will have been introduced to the role of the Shogun in Japanese society and thus have a preliminary understanding of the power of the Shogun, emperor and samurai in Japan. With this
background information, the students should look at a class structure pyramid of 
Tokugawa Japan with the Shogun at the top of the hierarchy (See Appendix D).

Students can consider how this hierarchy is different from or similar to the social 
structures they know about in their own lives or have been exposed to in other 
studies, which were discussed previously. Finally, students will compare this with the 
social hierarchy of ancient Egypt (See Appendix E). Students should focus on what 
differences exist between the pyramids and make inferences about what this shows us 
about the values in the two communities. In pairs or small groups, students can make 
inferences about what the Japanese valued in their culture. Next, they can consider 
why this social structure might have emerged.

Comparing these two social structure pyramids can also provide another 
expository writing opportunity, where the students can choose one level in the 
pyramid to compare and contrast in writing, using specific details form the pyramid to 
make inferences about Tokugawa Japan.

**Weeks 6 and 7: Research as Cumulative Construction of Understanding**

**Individual Research Projects**

The concluding weeks of the study are the primary weeks for assessment, 
wherein students can delve into areas of personal interest and questioning. During this 
time, having developed a solid foundation in the geography, history, aesthetic and 
social structure of the society, as well as insight into daily life through the historical 
fiction novels, students will undertake a research project of personal interest. Some 
potential areas of interest might include: sword making, samurai warriors, the Gempei 
war (based on The Sign of the Chrysanthemum); calligraphy, music, the culture of the
Japanese imperial court, and the standards of beauty, makeup and fashion (based on Of Nightingales that Weep).

During this time students will use classroom resources as well as the Internet to take notes on their topic. After deciding on a topic, students must develop research questions that they will investigate in their study. Then students can use the various non-fiction texts, print and electronic, to take notes on index cards that answer each research question. Students conducted a research project during the Egypt study and thus, the methods should be well established (See Appendix F). This is also an opportune time to return to The Metropolitan Museum of Art to explore the primary sources there in order to supplement the nonfiction research texts in the classroom. This personal investigation time allows the students to return to the questions they developed and the beginning of the study and revisit these ideas through the research and nonfiction reading skills they have worked on throughout the year.

After accumulating sufficient notes to answer each research question, students will organize their findings into a cohesive outline. The outline should have a logical order and present the students’ data clearly. If time allows, students can then write a research paper with a complete introduction and conclusion (as they did for their Egyptian research project), or simply move on to the presentation portion of the research project, using the outline as a guide.

**Week 8: Presenting to Consolidate and Demonstrate Understanding**

Following this final research inquiry, students will come up with a unique way to present their research topic to their classmates. The form of the presentation can be creative and should allow students to move beyond a PowerPoint presentation of facts
in order to demonstrate how the student interprets his/her topic and synthesizes the information s/he has gathered. These individual projects allow the student to draw on various abilities and areas of interest and personal skill while still presenting their knowledge in a comprehensive way.

Previous examples of student work include: A poster with handwritten Japanese characters, which the student drew in the different styles of Japanese calligraphy. The student explained the techniques and materials used in this art form. Another student used pieces from the modern board game *Risk* in order to demonstrate the battle tactics of the Genji warriors during the Gempei war. A student who is an accomplished pianist studied Japanese music and listened to recordings of koto music during his research. He then played his own renditions of these melodies on the piano. A final example was a student who researched fashion in Tokugawa era and used part of a silk tablecloth to re-dress her old doll in a traditional Japanese kimono. These final presentations demonstrate how the students have internalized various aspects of the curriculum while constructing their own unique collection of information and areas of expertise.
IV. Resources

Japan:


Belief Systems:


V. References


VI. Appendices

Appendix A: Historical Novel Work
Appendix B: Geographic Terms Worksheet
Appendix C: Metropolitan Museum of Art Trip Sheet
Appendix D: Japanese Social Hierarchy Pyramid
Appendix E: Comparative Social Pyramids
Appendix F: Note Taking Research Method
Appendix A

Name: 
Date: 
Class: 
Humanities

The Sign of the Chrysanthemum by Katherine Paterson

Reading Guide and Assignments

Over the next few weeks you will be reading The Sign of the Chrysanthemum by Katherine Paterson.

• You will be reading the book independently, so you can read as quickly as you like. We will be discussing the book along the way and then completing a series of projects when we are done. Based on your interest we will discuss similar literary ideas that we discussed in our other readings: setting, characterization, motivation, foreshadowing and theme.

Comprehension Questions and Journal Entries

• For chapters 1-10, you will complete the chapter comprehension questions each night after you read. Be sure to write in complete sentences and check your work for clarity, spelling and punctuation.

• After chapter 10, you will be writing one journal entry per chapter. In these entries you will use the ideas you have generated earlier in the novel to track your
thinking about how the characters in the story are changing and developing. Your journal entries should also consider what you are learning from the story about this time period in Japan.

**Comprehension Questions**

**Chapters 1-2:**

1. What does the name Muna mean?

2. What is Muna’s plan?

3. Who is Takanobu? Describe him using a character trait and a quote to support your answer.

**Chapters 3-4:**

1. Why do you think Muna follows Takanobu’s instructions to meet him at Rashomon Gate?

2. Why does Muna enjoy his stay with Kawaki and Akiko?

3. Why does Muna go back to look for Takanobu when he sees the fire?

**Chapters 5-6:**

1. Why do the Genji and Heiki clans hate each other so much?

2. What does Fukuji mean when he says that his swords are his sons, his disciples and his epitaph?

3. What does Muna keep talking in his mind about to Takanobu? Why do you think he does this?

**Chapters 7-8:**

1. On page 62, Muna says, “But not until today had he been able to look up from his own troubled portion of it long enough to see that he was not alone. It was a new feeling and although Muna could not say why, it was not an unhappy one.” Explain what you think this new feeling is and why Muna isn’t unhappy when he is experiencing it.
2. On page 63 why does Muna finally decide to tell Fukuji about his past?

3. What does Muna ultimately learn about Takanobu? How does he learn this?

**Chapters 9-10:**

1. Research the Japanese festival of Gion and write a few sentences describing what would happen during this festival. Make an inference about why this festival might have been important.

2. Look up the Japanese storm god Susano and write a three facts you learn about this god.

3. On page 78, Muna has an internal conflict. Describe both sides of this conflict.

4. In chapter 10 what does Muna learn about where Akiko has gone?
Over the next few weeks you will be reading *Of Nightingales that Weep* by Katherine Paterson.

- You will be reading the book independently, so you can read as quickly as you like. We will be discussing the book along the way and then completing a series of projects when we are done.
- Based on your interest we will discuss similar literary ideas that we discussed in our other readings: setting, characterization, motivation, foreshadowing and theme.
• In addition, we will be investigating the novel’s themes of art and beauty and exploring the significance of these elements in Japanese culture and history.

Comprehension Questions, Vocabulary and Language Notes

• For chapters 1-7, you will complete the chapter comprehension questions each night after you read. Be sure to write in complete sentences and check your work for clarity, spelling and punctuation.

• After chapter 7, you will be writing one journal entry per chapter. In these entries you will use the ideas you have generated earlier in the novel to track your thinking about how the characters in the story are changing and developing. Your journal entries should also consider what you are learning from the story about this time period in Japan.

Comprehension Questions

Chapter 1:

1. What are the expectations of a samurai’s daughter? Provide at least one quotation that demonstrates how you know this.

2. What do you believe Takiko thinks about these expectations? Why?

3. How does Takiko react to the news of her father’s death?
Chapter 2

1. How does Takiko react to first seeing Goro? What do you think of her reaction?

Chapter 3:

1. How does Takiko think her mother is different now compared to when she was married to Moriyuki?

2. How does Takiko’s opinion of Goro begin to change at the end of chapter 3? Why do you think it changes?

Chapters 4 and 5

1. How does Takiko react to her mother’s pregnancy? Why do you think she feels this way about the baby?

2. How does Takiko’s relationship with Goro begin to change? How does this change affect Takiko?

3. Why is it important that Goro’s family is neither Heike or Genji?

4. How does Princess Aoi treat Takiko? How does this compare to Takiko’s treatment of the servants in her father’s court at the beginning of the story?

Chapters 6 and 7

1. Whom does Takiko meet after the concert? Why is this person a dangerous lover for her?

2. Why do you think Takiko sings the ballad of the jellyfish (pp. 55-58)? What do you think the moral or lesson of this ballad is?

3. Why was it important that Lady Kiyomori took the royal treasures when they fled the capital?
Appendix B

Name: [Name]

Date: [Date]

Japan Geography Study

Directions

1. Using the classroom atlases, dictionaries, or the Internet, write complete definitions for the following geographic terms. Pages 6-7 in the classroom atlas will help you define some of the words and illustrate what particular landforms look like.

2. Then, draw a picture (or find one on-line) of the landform next to the definition.

3. Finally, for some of the landforms, using only the map of the ASIA locate an example of the term and write down your example. (Not all definitions require examples). Your example must be from ASIA.

Geographic Terms

1. Archipelago:
   Example:

2. Arable Land:

3. Mountain:
   Example:

4. Temperate Climate:

5. Volcano:

6. Seismic Faults:

7. Earthquake:

8. Typhoon:

9. Island:
   Example:

10. Peninsula:
    Example:

11. Strait:

12. Tsunami:
Appendix C

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Japanese Exhibit Investigation

Directions:

Before you write anything down, walk through the gallery and notice how the Japanese paintings and artifacts are different or similar to what you might expect. After you walk through the gallery, notice the specific details and materials of certain elements of Japanese screens, paintings and artifacts.
Part I: Investigating Japanese Screens

Choose two screen paintings, make sure at least one is from the Tokugawa period (1700s).
First, record the title and date of the screen. Then, record three details you notice about the design and details of the screen.

Finally, create a sketch of ONE of the screens. Include the details and patterns you notice and recorded.

Title:

________________________________________________________________

Date: ______________________

1. ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

2. ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

3. ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
Title:

____________________________________

Date: ______________________

1. ____________________________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________________________

Sketch ONE of the screens:
Compare the two screens. What do you notice that’s similar between the two. What colors or patterns are consistent? How are they different?

Part II: Japanese Portraits

Choose two portraits from the last room in the gallery. Make sure at least one is from the Tokugawa period (1700s).

- First, record the title and date of the portrait.
- Then, record three inferences you can make about the person in the portrait.
  - Who do you think this person might be?
What do you think their role in Japanese society was?

What details help you to make this inference?

• Finally, sketch **ONE** of the portraits. Include the details you notice throughout the portrait.

---

**Title:**

______________________________________________________________

**Date:** ______________________

1. ____________________________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________________________

---

**Title:**

______________________________________________________________

**Date:** ______________________

1. ____________________________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________________________
Sketch ONE of the portraits:
A. Find a suit of armor. First, record when this suit of armor was used. Then, record three details you notice about the materials and design

Date: _______________

1. __________________________________________________________________________
2. __________________________________________________________________________
3. __________________________________________________________________________
B. Find a *sword*. First record the date the sword was used. What do you notice about it? Record three details you notice about the material, designs and symbols of the sword.

Date: ________________

1. _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

2. _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

3. _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________

C. Sketch **EITHER** the sword **OR** the suit of armor:
Part IV: Reflection

In a paragraph, reflect on what you saw in the Japanese art and weaponry exhibits. What patterns stood out to you? What did you like about the art or weapons? What did you find surprising? What might you be able to infer about Japanese culture from the art and weapons you saw?

Finally, compare the art and weapons of Japan to that of ancient Egypt. In what ways is the art of Japan similar to that of Egypt? How is it different?
Appendix D

Image from: [http://japenesesocialclasses.weebly.com/](http://japenesesocialclasses.weebly.com/)
Appendix E

[Diagram of ancient Egyptian social hierarchy]

www.ancient-egypt-online.com
Appendix F
How Do I Write Note Cards

Writing note cards will help you organize your questions and keep track of information you find.

Please use a different note card every time you:

• use a new source
• find a new fact about a certain question
• are answering a different question

Your note cards should contain the following information. Look at the sample note card below if you are unsure of how to do this.

• Your name
• The source number
• The letter of the question you are answering on this particular card
• Your notes: use your strategies on summarizing and paraphrasing to record key details and ideas from the source.
• The page number of the source

You can use the same source to answer more than one question, but you need to use a new note card.

Name
Question A, p. #
Your notes on the topic………………………………………………………………………………