

# Age of the Samurai

A Thematic Lesson Plan Unit Created for 6th Grade  
by Susan Dillinger

**Background Information:** In 1185, Japan began to be ruled by a class of warriors called samurai . Up to this time the government had been controlled by the aristocracy. This military leadership remained in control until 1868. Refer to Introduction from *Life Among the Samurai* by Eleanor J. Hall, Lucent Books Inc., 1999. Refer also to Chapter 14, Lesson 6, page 410, “*The Big Picture*” for additional background information located in the text *World Adventures in Time and Place*.

**Note:** *This* two-three week lesson is intended to be used in conjunction with the current 6th grade text book and enhance the students’ understanding of the feudal era in Japanese history. Underlined words throughout the texts used in these lessons will be given additional attention in class to increase the students’ vocabulary and understanding. Additionally a detailed vocabulary list will be utilized. During this time the students will be reading a novel (*Of Nightingales that Weep* or *The Sign Of the Chrysanthemum*) as a part of their literature/reading class that will further their understanding of the period. I believe that curricular integration is the key to in-depth understanding and student motivation.

**Introductory Paragraph:** It has become abundantly clear as I have participated in the Institute how uncomfortable most of my co-workers are teaching about East Asia. As my confidence and understanding has grown, I believe that I will be the one in our K-12 building that will be called upon to teach the many lessons about East Asia. I have now been approached by the high school world history class to work with her when these topics are presented. I am so grateful that I have had this additional training to share with my fellow teachers and students. My appreciation for the diverse region has grown greatly and I am developing a deeper appreciation for this culturally rich area. I have located the text books, web-sites, links, and other resources to be extremely helpful to me in my planning and presentation to a variety of grade levels. This unit on Medieval Japan was chosen because of its obviously interesting content. The links and curriculum resources offered have made its planning a reality. Not to be dismissed is the wonderful opportunity to collaborate with fellow teachers from around the state. The text books received as a part of this Institute will serve as my foundation for developing further lessons.

## **Goals, Objectives, and Desired Lesson Outcomes:**

The student will be able to

- describe life in Japan during the Medieval Period
- explain the code of the samurai (bushido)
- compare and contrast life for a son and a daughter of a samurai
- explain the training necessary to become a samurai
- compare Medieval Japan to the \*Age of Chivalry in Europe (\*previously taught)
- describe the clothing worn and armor used by the Samurai
- describe the importance of samurai castles
- explain the differences and similarities in the power of the shoguns and the emperors
- create a flip book to demonstrate their understanding of the 5 class ranks

## **Resources Used:**

*Calliope: Samurai*, January-February 1993-Volume 3, Number 3. Available from Cobblestone Publishing Company (800)821-0115

*The Samurai*: Anthony J. Bryant. Osprey Publishing, LTD, Elms Court, Chapel Way, Botley, Oxford OX2, 9LP, United Kingdom. 1989.

*World Adventures in Time and Place*. MacMillan/McGraw Hill, 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York, 10020.

*Of Nightingales That Weep*-a novel by Katherine Paterson. (Harper & Row) Set in Medieval Japan this book intended for middle school readers details the life of the daughter of a samurai. Available from Labyrinth Books (212) 865-1588.

*The Sign of the Chrysanthemum*-a novel by Katherine Paterson. (Harper & Row) Set in Medieval Japan this book intended for middle school readers details the life of the son of a samurai. Available from Labyrinth Books (212) 865-1588

*A Samurai Castle*-Fiona MacDonald, John James, and David Antram. Peter Bedrick Books, New York. 1995. ISBN 0--87226-381-9

*Life Among the Samurai*-Eleanor J. Hall. Lucent Books, Inc. P.O. Box 289011, San Diego, California, 92198-9011.

*What Your Fifth Grader Needs to Know*-E. D. Hirsch, Jr. Dell Publishing, 1991. ISBN 0-385-31464-7

**Web Resource:**

[http://www.kiku.com/electric\\_samurai\\_cobweb\\_castle/samurai\\_gallery.html](http://www.kiku.com/electric_samurai_cobweb_castle/samurai_gallery.html)

This site has over 50 visuals painted by Ebine Shundo without textual explanation. Additionally there is a link to a site entitled *Samurai Master*. This site has text and links to additional information.

**Video Resources:**

*Living Treasures of Japan*-A National Geographic video. Teacher's Video Company, P.O. Box ELV-455, Scottsdale, Arizona, 85261.1-800-262-8837

*The Age of the Shoguns (1600-1868)* Films for the Humanities and Sciences, Inc., Princeton, New Jersey.

**Kansas Curriculum Standards:**

**Reading:** Standard 1: Learners will demonstrate skills in reading a variety of materials for a variety of purposes. Benchmark 1:8.1.1.11. The students will compare and contrast ideas and concepts from multiple sources. Standard 3: Learners will demonstrate knowledge of literature from a variety of cultures, genres, and time periods. Benchmark 2: 8.3.1.1. The students will recognize the impact of culture on a character.

**Social Studies: History**Standard: The student using a working knowledge and understanding of significant individuals, groups, ideas, events, eras, and developments in the history of Kansas, the United States, and the world, utilizing essential analytical and research skills. Benchmark 2: The student uses a working knowledge and understanding of individuals, groups, ideas, eras, developments, and turning points in the history of the world during the period of the rising new civilization 500-1450. Benchmark 4: The student uses a working knowledge and understanding of individuals, groups, ideas, eras, developments, and turning points in the history of the world during the global age (1400-1600).

Benchmark 5:The student engages in historical thinking skills.

**Additional Vocabulary to be Taught:**

ashigaru  
bakufu  
bushi  
bushido  
daimyo  
do-maru  
feudal system  
Edo  
genbuku  
geta  
hakama  
haori  
hara-kiri  
kamikaze  
kamishimo  
katana  
kimono  
mons  
naginata  
obi  
ronin  
samurai  
sashimono  
seppuku  
shogun  
tabi  
Tales of the Heike  
wakizashi  
yoroi

**Definitions from**

*The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Japan* edited by Richard Bowring and Peter Kornicki and student text and *Life Among the Samurai*.

**Lesson Procedure:**

- 1) The day before beginning the Ancient Japan unit in the Social Studies class, do a book talk on the 2 selected novels in Literature class and have a random selection as to which novel each student will read. There will be 2 literature circles formed and the reading of these novels will be overseen by myself and the classroom teacher. Students will be asked to keep journals on a chapter by chapter basis with students coming together for discussion every other day to check understanding and promote discussion. Students will receive a copy of the lessons' outcomes for social studies and literature. Graphic organizers and technical writing in the form of note taking will be emphasized. (These skills are building level QPA outcomes)
- 2) Begin Unit found in social studies text to develop background necessary for the understanding of this unit. Introduce vocabulary specific to the understanding of this unit.
- 3) Introduce the unit on Feudal Japan, by introducing the key concepts found under outcomes and by defining the specific vocabulary necessary for the unit. Book Talk the various resources that will be available in the classroom to encourage individual exploration of the topic. Students will also receive a copy of the specific outcomes and requirements of the various assignments as a reference to be referred to throughout the unit.

**4) Take one half of the class to computer lab and have them begin to explore the *Electric Samurai* site. Bookmark in advance to expedite the location of this site.**

**5) Students that remain in class will begin to read and discuss the Calliope magazine on Samurai. Note taking on the desired outcomes will begin.**

**6) Next day the students will switch and these activities will be repeated.**

**7) The social studies lessons will continue with additional research and information gathering on the part of the students with teachers assisting the process. It is intended that these lessons be ones of discovery on the part of the students. Teachers will assign the work to be completed on a one to one basis. For those who finish early, there will be activities and opportunities such as the construction of dioramas, further individual research projects, or acrostic writing and poetry.**

**8) The literature component will continue daily until the books are read and discussed by the individual literature circles. There will be one session devoted to each circle sharing the information with the other with a group venn diagram will be developed at this time. The final activity will be a compare/contrast writing assignment to be graded on the 6 Trait Model.**

**9) The final activities will involve a “Share Fair” presented by the students and displays of the completed work to be shown at the school’s annual Academic Fair which is held each February in conjunction with a school wide open house and book fair.**