

## **Component 3, Part 3**

# **Japan in World History: "The Bamboo Blind"—Early Modern Japan (1585-1868)**

Even though it is a myth that Japan was almost completely closed off from the rest of the world during the Tokugawa period, the government did strictly control which foreigners could interact with Japan and it was virtually impossible for Japanese who were not involved in approved trade or diplomatic missions to leave the archipelago. Students can gain a good foundation for understanding the [Seclusion Policies](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/main_pop/kpct/kp_tokugawa.htm) ([http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/main\\_pop/kpct/kp\\_tokugawa.htm](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/main_pop/kpct/kp_tokugawa.htm)) by working through a short classroom reading and accompanying primary sources and discussion questions.

The Tokugawa period was the era of Japanese history when Confucianism was most influential since a relatively strong central government made it state orthodoxy. Students can quickly develop a sense of Tokugawa neo-Confucianism through negotiating a brief but illuminating primary source excerpt that illustrates the era's theoretically rigid [Class System](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/at/tokugawa/tj06.html) (<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/at/tokugawa/tj06.html>).

Although the majority of Japanese lived in rural areas during the Tokugawa era, there were 250 cities whose population ranged from 3,000 to 20,000, and the much larger cities of Kyoto and Osaka. Edo (present-day Tokyo), which by the 1700s boasted a population of over a million people, was one of the world's largest cities. Students can learn much more about Edo through taking an entertaining yet educational "[virtual tour \(http://www.us-japan.org/edomatsu/\)](http://www.us-japan.org/edomatsu/)" of this vibrant urban center that takes the visitor through the various sections of the city and introduces users to culture, government, economics, and the arts.

Students can get a sense of the high level of creativity in the arts during this peaceful and generally prosperous period of Japanese history by becoming more familiar with three of the Tokugawa Period's most famous cultural products. "[The Pictures of the Floating World](http://www.viewingjapaneseprints.net/texts/ukiyoetexts/ukiyo_e_intro.html) ([http://www.viewingjapaneseprints.net/texts/ukiyoetexts/ukiyo\\_e\\_intro.html](http://www.viewingjapaneseprints.net/texts/ukiyoetexts/ukiyo_e_intro.html))" (ukiyo-e) were popular art at the time but are considered a classical Japanese art form today. Excellent [ukiyo-e](http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plan/life-floating-world-ukiyo-e-prints-and-rise-merchant-class-edo-period-japan) (<http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plan/life-floating-world-ukiyo-e-prints-and-rise-merchant-class-edo-period-japan>) lesson plans are also available.

Haiku poetry, which is now known throughout the world, came into its own during the Tokugawa period. Students can experience the Zen-influenced haiku of [Basho](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/at/basho/hbb01.html) (<http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/at/basho/hbb01.html>), its most famous practitioner, and then work through [The World of Haiku](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=305) ([http://edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?id=305](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=305)).

Although it would last almost two more decades, Tokugawa Japan would never be the same with the arrival of Commodore Perry's US Naval squadron in 1853. In "[Commodore Perry and Japan](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/japan_1750_perry.htm)" ([http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/japan\\_1750\\_perry.htm](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/japan_1750_perry.htm)) students both gain an overview of the events and work through primary source documents, such as two letters from President Milliard Fillmore and Commodore Perry to Japanese political leaders. Professors Shigeru Miyagawa and John Dower's "Visualizing Cultures", is a superb visual literacy curriculum.

"[Black Ships and Samurai \(http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027j/menu/index.html\)](http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027j/menu/index.html)" contains contrasting Japanese and American 19th century images of each other, lesson plans, a video tour of the "Perry Scrolls," and much more.

## References

### Part 3 Web sites

**TITLE:** Asia for Educators (AFE)

**URL:** <http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/>

**TITLE:** Freer and Sackler Gallery - Ukiyo-e

**URL:** <http://www.asia.si.edu/>

**TITLE:** National Endowment for the Humanities - Edsitement

**URL:** <http://edsitement.neh.gov/>

**TITLE:** Pictures of the Floating World

**URL:** <http://user.bahnhof.se/~secutor/ukiyo-e/>

**TITLE:** Virtual Tour of Edo

**URL:** <http://www.us-japan.org/edomatsu>

**TITLE:** Visualizing Cultures

**URL:** <http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027j/menu/index.html>

### Part 3 Recommended Sources

**The following sources are far from inclusive but do provide educators and students interested in this particular part of Japanese history with additional information.**

#### **Books**

Gordon, Andrew. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Jansen, Marius B. *The Making of Modern Japan*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, New Ed edition, 2002.

Shirokauer, Conrad. *A Brief History of Chinese and Japanese Civilizations*. Wadsworth Publishing, 3rd edition, 2005.

#### **Journal**

*Education About Asia*

The Association for Asian Studies, Inc.

1021 East Huron St.

Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104

[www.asian-studies.org/eea](http://www.asian-studies.org/eea)

**Videos**

Asian Educational Media Service: Center for East Asian & Pacific Studies

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

805 West Pennsylvania Avenue MC-025

Urbana, Illinois 61801

<http://www.aems.uiuc.edu/>

