
Classes and Social Structure

Goals & Objectives

Students will learn about the way classes were structured within society during the feudal period of Medieval Japan. Students will examine what roles each class played in society and how the values of the period influenced the importance of each class. Students will also discuss what effect the constant warfare of the period had on each class.

California State Content and Common Core Standards

7.5 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the civilizations of Medieval Japan.

- **7.5.3** 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.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1](#) Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.4](#) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.9](#) Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Lesson Introduction

The teacher will have an image of a blank hierarchy triangle up on the projector along with the words "samurai, merchant, daimyo, peasant, emperor, artisan and shogun" listed underneath. The teacher will ask the students to draw the blank triangle in their journals and then ask the students to make an educated guess as to what class they think belongs in each tier of the triangle and to fill it in in their journals. The teacher will call on a few students to share their responses with the class.

Vocabulary

Students will continue adding key terms, their definitions, and example sentences/pictures to their vocabulary journals. The vocabulary for this lesson will be used in context by students when they engage in discussions during the Cafe Conversations activity. Key terms for this lesson include:

- Daimyo
- Confucian
- vassal
- peasant
- artisan
- merchant
- hierarchy
- ronin

Content Delivery

The teacher will give a short overview of the details of the class structure of feudal Japan in order to give the students the background knowledge they require to participate in the Cafe Conversations activity. This presentation goes over 5 major classes (merchants, peasants, samurai, daimyo, and shogun) and their hierarchical positions within society. It also briefly touches upon some reasons why one class is above another based on the values of the time.

Student Engagement

In order to have students practice perspective-taking to have a more empathetic view of history, the students will participate in a Cafe Conversations activity. In preparation, the teacher has created a character information sheet containing short backgrounds on 5 characters -- 1 from each social class presented in the overview (merchant, peasant, samurai, daimyo, and shogun). The teacher will then number the students off 1 - 5 and this will determine which character they are assigned (#1 = shogun, #2 = daimyo, #3 = samurai, #4 = peasant, and #5 = merchant). The teacher will explain that the students are to consider the questions "how is the constant warring between clans affecting your life? What do you think of the situation? Do you have a positive or negative outlook?" from their character's point of view. Then the teacher will give the students an appropriate amount of time (about 5 minutes or so) to read their character's background and formulate their responses in their minds. The teacher will also go over proper discussion protocols and behaviors and give the students examples on how to disagree respectfully and stay on topic.

When it's time for the discussion to begin, the teacher will break the students into groups (the first 5 students are a group, the next 5 are a group, so on and so forth) in order to do a jigsaw cafe conversation. Each group will have members representing a character from each different class, no one will be the same character in a group. Finally, the conversations can begin. The students will start by introducing themselves as their character and then 1 group member will announce the start of the discussion by saying something to the effect of "So all these clans keep fighting, what do you think about it?" The discussion should take about 15 - 20 minutes. If a group finishes early they may each visit another group (no more than 1 extra member at each group, though) to listen to how their discussion is progressing.

After the discussion is over, students will return to their desks and write a reflection of the activity in their journals focusing on the following prompt: "What do you think it may have felt like for your character to hear these different perspectives? How do you think it might have changed his/her point of view, if at all?"

Lesson Closure

In order to debrief the students following the discussion activity, the teacher will ask the students share some of their journal responses with the class.

Assessment

Formative: The teacher will move from group to group listening to their discussions in order to gauge how well students have understood the concepts of each level of the class system.

Summative: Students' journal responses at the end of class will also serve to gauge student comprehension and the effectiveness of the discussion activity.

Accommodations for English Learners, Striving Readers and Students with Special Needs

A graphic organizer will be provided for ELs, Striving Readers, and Students with Special Needs for the overview of the feudal Japanese class structure. They can also use the graphic organizer during the discussion activity as a supplement to help them formulate their responses and their reasons for them. Strategically placing these students in heterogeneous groups with native speakers or more academically advanced students can provide them with good support during the discussion activity as well.

Lesson Resources

[Feudal Hierarchy of Japan](#)