

Life of the Samurai

Goals & Objectives

Students will learn about the various aspects of the lives of the samurai during Medieval Japan. Students will identify the unique characteristics of samurai life, such as culture, military tactics, and beliefs. Students will evaluate warrior tactics through an online simulation game.

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.
- **7.5.6** Analyze the rise of a military society in the late twelfth century and the role of the samurai in that society.

[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.RH.6-8.7](#) Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

Lesson Introduction

The teacher will show the class the short video clip below to draw students into the day's lesson. It will give them interesting visuals and information to pique their interest. The teacher will have a quick class discussion afterward asking students to share some things they learned from the video clip.

Vocabulary

Students will continue adding key terms, their definitions, and example sentences/pictures to their vocabulary journals. Key terms for this lesson include:

- shugo
- bushido
- seppuku
- Muromachi Period
- Noh theater

- yari
- naginata
- katana
- wakizashi

Content Delivery

In order to build background on the lives of samurai, the students will read a short essay on important elements relating to their culture, religion, and military tactics. The teacher will activate prior knowledge and provide context for learning new information by pre-reading the section with the students. The students will read each heading and will be asked what they already know about each topic and what they expect to learn based on the titles of the headings. The teacher will also explain the new vocabulary that's introduced in the reading.

Students will read the essay individually and record notes as they go along. Students will also examine the image of the various parts of the samurai's armor. Once the reading/note taking is finished, the teacher will toss a plush ball to a student and ask them to state something they learned from one of the sections of the essay and the teacher will write it on the board (facts will be recorded under proper headings: i.e. culture, military life, etc.). The student will toss the ball to another student and they will state a fact which the teacher will record, so on and so forth. This will allow students to see and copy down a good organization of the text's information and will help those students who may have not yet mastered effective note-taking skills.

Student Engagement

Reiner Knizia's Samurai is a strategy game set in medieval Japan that turns players into samurai tasked with the mission of gaining control of their island, done so by capturing as many caste figures (the three castes being the peasantry, clergy, and military) as possible. The app is a digital adaptation, available on an iPad or iPhone, of the popular board game Samurai that allows players to compete against the computer (or multiple computer players), other players present, or players in an online community. The app version also includes three built-in tutorials (recommended for quick comprehension of gameplay) and upgrades the physical board game with beautiful graphics. Students become samurai, working with and against their fellow players to develop negotiation and strategy-building skills in medieval Japan.

The teacher will go through the game with the class all at once, using a document camera/projector to show the iPad, in order to take everyone through gameplay and give students the opportunity to ask questions. Afterward, the teacher will hand out the class assigned iPads (many schools now have a class set of iPads or issue individual student iPads)

and have students get into groups of 4. Students will play against their group members to try to win the game.

Lesson Closure

The teacher will have the students do a quickwrite in their journals reflecting on the experiences they had during the simulation game. Did they feel like samurai while battling with their classmates over power and territory? Did they get a sense of what it might have been like to be an actual samurai in Medieval Japan? The teacher will have a few students share their responses with the class.

Assessment

Formative: The teacher will monitor student comprehension during the whip-around and recording activity after students read the essay and take notes. Student responses will inform the teacher of areas of misunderstanding that need of re-teaching.

Summative: The teacher will gauge how well students grasped the reasons and concepts behind the simulation through the responses given during the quickwrite.

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

The teacher will provide guided notes, a graphic organizer, and/or a modified version of the Samurai Life in Medieval Japan essay for students who require them. The video in the introduction and the interactive samurai game utilize lots of easily comprehensible visuals to aid in understanding. The game will also allow these students to easily and fully participate and interact with the content and their classmates.

Lesson Resources

[Program for Teaching East Asia](#)