Sam Samurai

About the Show

An accidental haiku sends Sam, Joe, and Fred back to the beginnings of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 17th century Japan. Swords, samurai, and poetry contests challenge their talents.

Introduction

Learning about the culture and history of 17th century Japan through the study of the samurai, is an excellent way to enhance students' understanding of non-Western cultures and to compare and contrast world events during the time that Europeans were settling in America. This lesson also gives students the opportunity to explore different forms of poetry and storytelling, a tradition that many cultures share.

Historical Background

Samurai, "those who serve," were powerful members of the aristocracy who flourished between the 12th and mid–19th centuries. They were private soldiers who were hired to protect the property of powerful landowners.

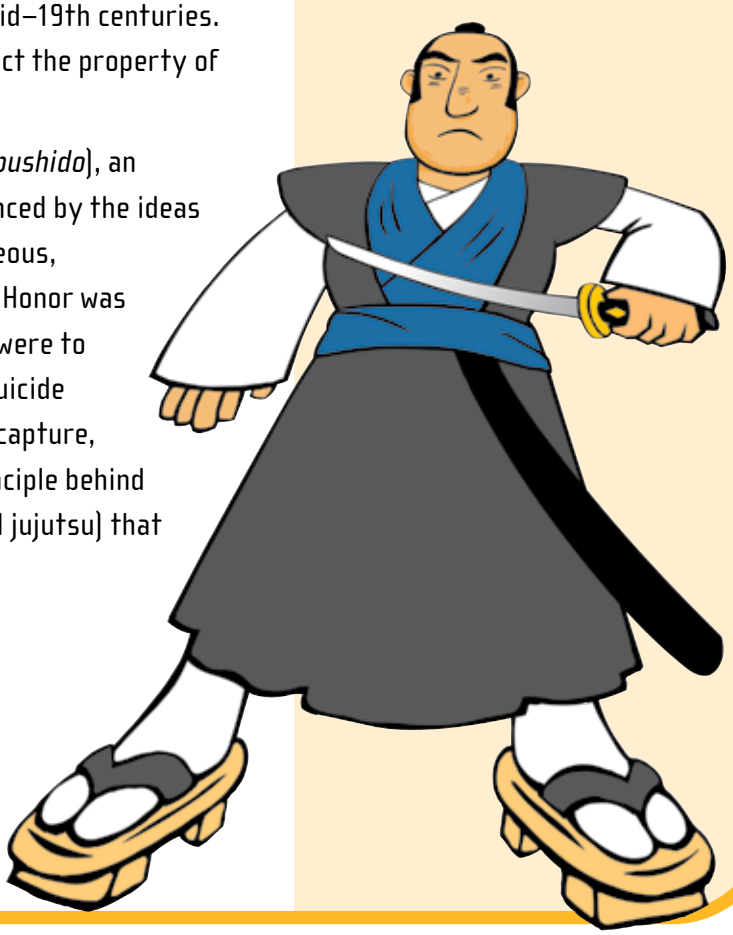
Samurai lived according to the way of the warrior (*bushido*), an unwritten samurai code of conduct. Strongly influenced by the ideas of Confucius, samurai were self-disciplined, courageous, compassionate, and fiercely loyal to their masters. Honor was a samurai's most valuable possession. If a samurai were to suffer a defeat, he was expected to commit ritual suicide (*seppuku*) rather than be dishonored by surrender, capture, or an ignoble death. Bushido is also the guiding principle behind kendo, one of several martial arts (such as judo and jujutsu) that originated in Japan.

Curriculum Connections

- art
- Japan
- world history

Subject Areas

- art
- drama
- language arts (poetry)
- social studies



Historical Background *continued*

The sword was the most famous weapon and symbol of the samurai. The true samurai was not only a trained warrior, but also an artist and philosopher. Samurai cultivated the spirit and the mind through writing, painting, and calligraphy. As Jo says in the book *Sam Samurai,* "Samurai practice with their swords . . . and brushes."

Samurai warriors were ruled by a leader called a shogun. Tokugawa Ieyasu was Shogun 400 years ago. Through both battles and diplomacy, he was able to bring stability to Japan after many years of war. When Tokugawa Ieyasu died in 1616—the same year as William Shakespeare—he left the Tokugawa family to rule over a peaceful Japan for the next 200 years.

Want students to get even more excited about history?



Check out the samurai adventure at

www.timewarptrio.com/adventures/samurai/

Put It Back, Jack! and other interactive games to play.

Plentifax 487—the ultimate time traveler's guide—to find out how the samurai lived and fought!

Cool Books that kids will love.

Activity 1



Write a Renga

In this activity, students review the format and content of haiku and learn about another traditional poetry form, the renga.

Instructions

1. Distribute examples of haiku to students, such as those of the poet Issa, found at **www.geocities.com/tokyo/island/5022/issa.html.** Ask volunteers to read the haiku aloud.
2. Review the form and the content of haiku. You may want to mention the following:
   - Haiku is a type of Japanese poetry that is 400 years old. It is more like a quick sketch than a completed drawing.
   - Traditional haiku is about nature.
   - In Japanese, the form is very structured. A haiku must contain exactly 17 syllables.
   - Traditional haiku is three lines long: the first line has five syllables, the second line has seven, and the third line has five.
   - In Japan, haiku are valued for lightness, simplicity, openness, and depth. They are also appreciated for their surprise endings.
   - Modern haiku may use additional themes, such as humor, satire, romance, and modern life.
3. Decide if you want your students to create the traditional haiku—with exact syllable count, featuring a word that names or suggests a season—or if you will accept variations.
4. As a class, write some sample haiku. Ask volunteers to read them aloud.
5. Explain to students the characteristics of the renga (see the end note in the book *Sam Samurai*). The renga is a long poem consisting of several connected short poems. The renga is generally created by two poets working together and building on each other's ideas.
   Some view the renga as a competitive word game. The first verse of a renga is the *hokku*, or opening verse. A traditional hokku sets the poem in nature and contains a "season word" that indicates the time of year the renga takes place.

Objectives

- to understand the form of haiku
- to work in small groups to create a cooperative poem (the renga)
- to read poetry with expression

Materials

- art and writing supplies
- "Time Warps" handout
- examples of Japanese watercolors (optional)

Curriculum Standards

- **NCSS**
  Culture: Students will give examples of how experiences may be interpreted differently by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.
- **NCTE/IRA**
  Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

Activity 1



6. Distribute the "Time Warps" handout to demonstrate the renga form.
7. Have students research life in 17th century Japan. Then divide the class into small groups—poetry societies—and have each group create a renga using a theme or topic related to what they have learned.
8. Ask each poetry society to read their renga. The group may want to choose a representative from the group or have each member read a verse.
9. Discuss the renga. Did the group successfully link the theme or topic? Did the verses fit the haiku form? You may want to award each group for their efforts with a prize, such as most vivid, most humorous, most informative.

Take It Further

Have students select a haiku they especially like—their own or a traditional haiku. Using their best handwriting and/or calligraphy, have students write their haiku with a marker or paintbrush. To enhance their work, they can create a watercolor border or illustration. You may want to display pictures of Japanese watercolors for inspiration.

You may also want to ask students to put their renga or haiku to music using percussion instruments. Students can also create dance movements. You may want to challenge the poetry societies to create renga using contemporary themes or topics. Compare and contrast renga with other forms of modern expression, such as rap.

Time Warps

by Joe, Sam, and Fred

Swords, banners, armor
On Sam's kitchen table.
1600 Japan.

Samurai
In the shadows.
Don't lose your head.

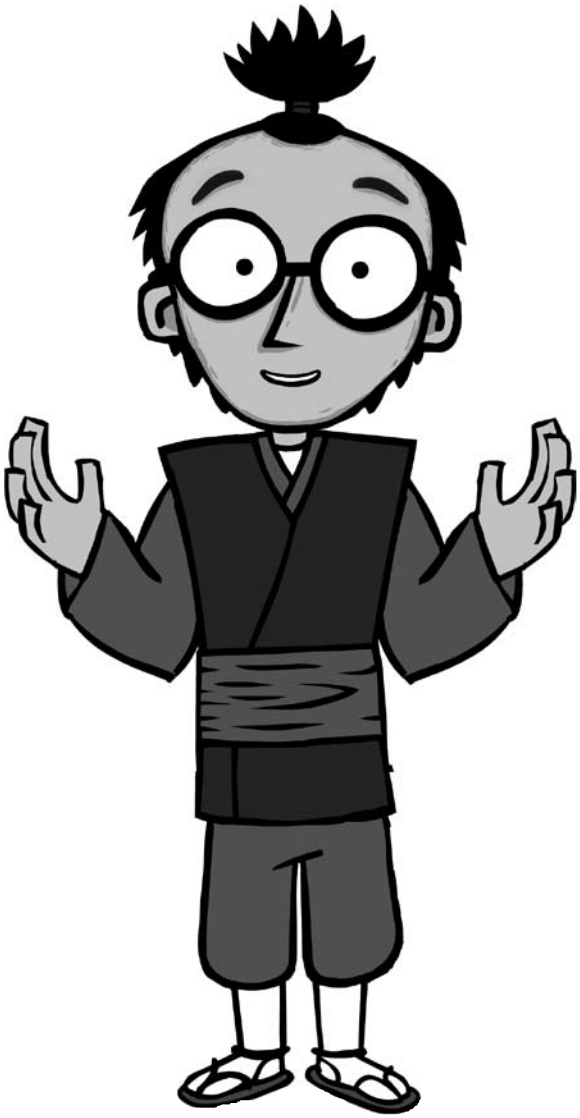
Real samurai
Wear two swords.
Read comic books.

A smiling old woman
Flaps her wings.
Three girls land.

Hot steaming
Noodles
Are delicious.

Kimonos, castles,
Flag, wind,
Mind flapping.

Half-shaved head
with ponytail.
Sam samurai.



Source: *Sam Samurai* by Jon Scieszka. Illustrated by Adam McCauley. (Puffin 2002)

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Activity 2

Japanese Storytelling Cards

Kamishibai is a wonderful way to retell a story or to organize a report. It can be used by individuals, pairs, or small groups. Kamishibai works in social studies and in science as well. For instance, students can create endangered species kamishibai or use kamishibai to describe the respiratory system. Kamishibai can also be used to enhance reading comprehension by requiring students to retell story elements such as character, setting, conflict, and resolution.

In this activity the students use Kamishibai to present information about 17th century Japan.

Instructions

1. Organize students into pairs or small groups. Have them research life in 17th century Japan, and identify five significant facts they have learned.
2. Ask students to draw a picture of one "fact" (the essential information) on each of five sheets of construction paper. These will become the kamishibai cards. Explain that Kamishibai (kaa-me-she-by) is a Japanese form of storytelling that uses large cards to tell a story. Kamishibai storytellers used to travel from village to village on their bicycles. In addition to storytelling, they also sold candy and acted as reporters, spreading the happenings of the region from place to place.

   When entering a village, the storyteller would clap wooden blocks, signaling his arrival. Villagers, young and old, would hurry to hear the story and the news. First, however, candy would be sold. Those who bought candy were given front row seats. The kamishibai were very popular from the 1920s through the early 1950s. After television was introduced, kamishibai gradually disappeared. Today, Japanese teachers and librarians are reviving kamishibai.
3. Have students write captions for each picture on a separate piece of paper. The captions will form a script that tells the story of the cards.
4. Have students arrange the cards in a stack, with the first card in the story on top. The caption of the first card will go on the back of the last or bottom card. The caption for the second card will go on the back of the first card, and so on. This enables the storyteller to tell the story more smoothly. Have students paste their captions on the back of the pictures.

Objectives

- to read and research information on life in 17th century Japan
- to edit and organize research

Materials

- six pieces of 12" x 12" white construction paper for each pair or small group
- markers, colored crayons or pencils

Curriculum Standards

- **NCSS**
  Culture: Students will explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.
- **NCTE/IRA**
  Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of literacy communities.

Activity 2

5. Use the sixth piece of construction paper to create a title page. Encourage students to make this page attractive and memorable. Include the names of the writer(s) on this page.
6. Hold a Kamishibai Day and ask each pair or group to tell their story to the class. You may also want to present the stories to another class or to parents.

Take It Further

Have students read novels about samurai and about Japan. Have students create a kamishibai to retell the story in five to eight cards instead of writing a book report.



Resources

Recommended Books

For Teachers

The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Daily Life, Volume 4
edited by Joyce E. Salisbury.
(Greenwood Press, 2004)
A comprehensive look at the lives of ordinary people—their clothes, food, culture, customs, beliefs, etc.

In Search of the Spirit: The Living National Treasures of Japan
by Sheila Hamanaka and Ayano Ohmi.
(HarperCollins, 1999)
Photographs, illustrations, and text combine to bring to life the gifted craftsmen of traditional Japan.

Japan: Its History and Culture
by W. Scott Morton, 4th edition.
(McGraw-Hill, 2004)
A comprehensive look at Japan, from prehistory to the present.

Premodern Japan: A Historical Survey
by Mikiso Hane. (Westview Press, 1990)
This book traces the history of Japan up to their contact with the West.

Samurai: 1550–1600
by Anthony J. Bryant.
(Osprey Publishing, 1994)
This book explores the culture, weapons, armor, and training of the samurai warrior class.

Samurai: The Story of Japan's Great Warriors by Stephen Turnbull.
(PRC Publishing, 2004)
Detailed information about the legendary warriors, with see-through sections to illustrate the text. See also other books about the samurai by the author.

For Students

Fiction

Blue Fingers, A Ninja's Tale
by Cheryl Aylward Whitesel.
(Houghton Mifflin, 2004)
Koji is kidnapped and forced to become a ninja in 16th century Japan. For older readers.

The Boy Who Drew Cats adapted by Margaret Hodges.
(Holiday House, 2002)
Based on a legend about the famous 15th century Japanese artist Sesshu Toyo, this is the story of a boy who could not stop drawing cats.

The Crane Wife
by Odds Bodkin. (Gulliver, 1998)
A retelling of a Japanese folktale about a poor fisherman who gains a beautiful and talented wife. Audiotape available.

The Demon in the Teahouse
by Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler.
(Philomel, 2001)
In this suspenseful sequel to *The Ghost in the Tokaido Inn,* 14-year-old Seikei poses as a teahouse attendant to discover who is murdering geishas.

Kazunomiya, Prisoner of Heaven
by Kathryn Lasky. (Scholastic, 2004)
The Royal Diaries series. A fictional account of Princess Kazunomiya and the constraints and intrigues of the Japanese royal court.

Kamishibai Man by Allen Say.
(Houghton Mifflin, 2005) An elderly kimishibai, long retired, returns to the city for one last performance.

Kogi's Mysterious Journey adapted by Elizabeth Partridge. (Dutton, 2003)
Kogi captures a fish in order to draw it, but he finds peace and great beauty when he sets the fish free.

Revenge of the Forty-seven Samurai by Erik Christian Haugaard.
(Houghton Mifflin, 1995)
Jiro, a servant to one of the samurai planning to avenge an unjust death, must act as his master's spy in feudal Japan.

Sam Samurai
by Jon Scieszka. Illustrated by Adam McCauley. (Puffin, 2002)
While doing a homework assignment on haiku, the Trio find themselves in 17th century Japan—and in danger.

Sword of the Samurai: Adventure Stories from Japan
by Eric A. Kimmel. (Harcourt, 1999)
Eleven stories of Japan's knights, the samurai, include action, drama, humor, and wisdom.

Tanuki's Gift by Tim Myers.
(Marshall Cavendish, 2003)
A Buddhist priest and a *tanuki* find the gift of their friendship to be more valuable than they realize.

The Valley of the Broken Cherry Trees
by Lensey Namioka. (Delacorte, 1980)
Zenta and Matsuzo, two wandering *ronin*, decide to stop at a small inn and enjoy the spring cherry blossoms, but they soon find themselves embroiled in intrigue and mystery.

Note: Teachers can purchase authentic kamishibai in English and Japanese from: Kamishibai for Kids, Cathedral Station, P.O. Box 629, New York, NY 10025, Telephone 1-800-772-1228.

Resources

Nonfiction

Calligraphy for Kids
by Eleanor Winters. (Sterling, 2004)
Assemble the appropriate tools and follow the step-by-step instructions for making the letters for four different alphabets.

China and Japan
by Paula Hammond. (Mason Crest, 2002)
Cultures and Costumes series. Shows the traditional dress for all segments of Japanese society, from the royal court to a traveling priest.

Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun by Rhoda Blumberg. (Lothrop, 1985)
When Commodore Matthew C. Perry sailed into Edo Bay in 1853, he and his men found a society that had changed little in almost 250 years.

Grass Sandals: The Travels of Basho
by Dawnine Spivak. (Atheneum, 1997)
The best-loved poet of Japan walked throughout the country observing nature and composing poems.

Hokusai: The Man Who Painted a Mountain
by Deborah Kogan Ray. (Farrar, 2001)
This is a picture book biography of one of Japan's most prolific painters whose paintings of Mount Fuji are famous the world over.

I Live in Tokyo by Mari Takabayashi. (Houghton Mifflin, 2001)
Mimiko describes life in modern-day Tokyo, including daily activities, customs, holidays, and food.

Japan in the Days of the Samurai
by Virginia Schomp. (Marshall Cavendish, 2002)
Describes the beginning of the samurai, their artistic achievements, their religion, how they shaped society, and their present-day legacy.

Modern Japan: A History in Documents by James L. Huffman. (Oxford University Press, 2004)
Japan's history, from the time of the shogun to the present day, is explored using primary sources.

Samurai by Paul Collins. (Chelsea House, 2002)
Photographs, drawings, maps, and timelines show the history, armor, and weapons of samurai, including the famous swordsman Miyamoto Musashi.

Poetry

Cool Melons—Turn to Frogs! The Life and Poems of Issa by Matthew Gollub. (Lee & Low, 1998)
Delicate pencil and watercolor illustrations complement this poetic biography of Issa, Japan's beloved author of haiku.

One Leaf Rides the Wind: Counting in a Japanese Garden by Celeste Davidson Mannis. (Viking, 2002)
The author uses haiku poems to count objects in a traditional Japanese garden and provides facts about Japanese history and life.

Resources

Web Sites

BASHO'S LIFE
darkwing.uoregon.edu/~kohl/basho/life.html
A description of master haiku poet Matsuo Basho's life and poetry.

HAIKU IN WESTERN LANGUAGES
terebess.hu/english/haiku/haiku.html
This index offers links to specific authors and to general commentary on this form of poetry.

AN INTRODUCTION TO HAIKU
www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Island/5022/
This site explains the structure of traditional haiku and includes the biographies and poetry of Basho, Buson, and Issa.

SAMURAI
www.japan-guide.com/e/e2127.html
This brief overview of the history of the samurai offers links to more information.

SAMURAI CULTURE
www.samurai-archives.com/cultcat.html
This site offers short descriptions of famous figures in the samurai culture, as well as links to samurai food, clothing, philosophy, and more.

TIME WARP TRIO
www.timewarptrio.com
This site for kids includes interactive games, fascinating facts, and booklists that help make the past come alive.

Please note:
Although these sites were verified at the time of publication, Web site addresses and content are frequently subject to change.

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