



# JAPAN

Prepare for the Summer Olympic Games Tokyo 2020

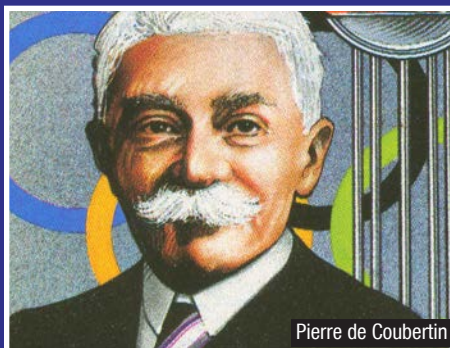
Printable Unit Study

July 23 - August 8, 2021



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Pierre de Coubertin



Tokyo, Japan

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# Introduction

## History of The Olympic Games

The Olympic Games began in Ancient Greece and occurred every four years for centuries. All wars ceased during the contest. The oldest recorded competition was a 183 m (200 yd) footrace. Later the Olympics expanded to include activities such as wrestling, jumping, spear throwing, discus throwing, and chariot racing. In 394 AD, the Games were ended by the Roman emperor Theodosius I.

The modern day Olympics were revived in 1896 through the persistence of a young French nobleman, Pierre de Coubertin. He believed the Olympics would be part of a great educational program that incorporated the Ancient Greek notion of a balanced development of mind and body. The Union des Sports Athlétiques agreed that the first Olympics would take place in Greece but would then move to other cities in the world every four years. The Summer Olympics were created in 1924. The Summer and Winter Games were traditionally held in the same year, but because of the increasing size of both Olympics, the Winter Games were shifted to a different schedule after 1992. The Summer Games, with its wide array of events, are still the focal point of the modern Olympics and take place every four years.<sup>1</sup> The 2020 Summer Olympics will take place in Tokyo, Japan July 23 - August 8, 2021.

## Why learn about Japan?

Did you know the Japanese name for their country, Nippon or Nihon, means *source of the sun*? Can your children locate Japan on a map? How much Japanese history do you know? This season's Summer Olympic game commentators will include many interesting facts, but may lack more detailed information about the beautiful nation of Japan. This study is a great way to take current events and turn them into learning opportunities so your family will better understand the world. This 9-day study of Japan is designed to fill in the gaps so you can appreciate this unique country.

## Instructions

1. Look at the **Schedule** and read the assigned **excerpts** from *Journey to the Eastern Hemisphere* (included in Appendix 1).<sup>2</sup>
2. Complete the scheduled **Notebook Pages** after reading each excerpt.
3. Finally, see the **Notes** for parental guidance and answers.

## Enjoy!

<sup>1</sup> Benagh, Jim. "The History of the Olympic Games." Scholastic. Accessed January 15, 2020. <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/history-olympic-games/>.

<sup>2</sup> The complete *Journey to the Eastern Hemisphere* book can be purchased at [sonlight.com/FH15](https://sonlight.com/FH15).



## Schedule

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
<b><i>Journey to the Eastern Hemisphere</i></b> See Appendix 1 (p. 20)	<b>Japan: The Big Picture</b>	<b>Meet the People of Japan &amp; Land, Water, and Climate in Japan</b>	<b>Everyday Life in Japan &amp; Shinto</b>	<b>Japan's Government &amp; Japanese Culture</b>	<b>Japan's Wildlife &amp; The Economy of Japan</b>
<b>Notebook Pages (p. 8)</b>	The Big Picture & Map It	Meet the People of Japan & Land, Water and Climate in Japan	Everyday Life in Japan & Shintoism	Japan's Government–Japanese Culture	Japan's Wildlife–The Economy of Japan

	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
<b><i>Journey to the Eastern Hemisphere</i></b> See Appendix 1 (p. 20)	<b>Japan's History</b> through "Tokugawa House (1603)"	"Seclusion Edicts (1630's)" through "Imperialism Begins (1895)"	"Japan Enters World War I (1914)" through "Modern Challenges"		<b>You're all Done!</b> Enjoy watching the Summer Olympics!
<b>Notebook Pages (p. 8)</b>	Japan Timeline (#1–5)	Japan Timeline (#6–9)	Japan Timeline (#10–13)	Choose Your Adventure	

## Notes

### Day 1

#### Day 1 The Big Picture

Read the section in *Journey to the Eastern Hemisphere* titled **Japan: The Big Picture** (pp. 21–22). Next fill in the section of the Notebook Pages titled **Japan The Big Picture** (p. 9).

#### **The Big Picture**

Possible answers:

1. Ruled by an emperor
2. Made up of volcanic islands
3. Embraces traditional and western cultures
4. High standard of living

#### Day 1 Map It

See pp. 10–11 for the Notebook Pages to fill in. See the map on p. 24 in the *Journey to the Eastern Hemisphere* excerpt to use as a reference.

#### **Map It**

The map answer key is on p. 7.

### Day 2

#### Day 2 Meet the People of Japan

Read **Meet the People of Japan** (p. 23) and fill in the section of the Notebook Page with the same title (p. 12, top, left).

#### **Meet the People of Japan**

Possible answers:

1. Low ethnic diversity
2. Discrimination against Korean immigrants

3. *People live in crowded urban areas*
4. *Has a low birth rate*
5. *Uses characters to write*

Day  
2

### Land, Water, and Climate in Japan

Read **Land, Water, and Climate in Japan** (pp. 25-27) and fill in the section of the Notebook Page with the same title (p. 12, bottom of page).

Possible answers:

1. *Made up of four key islands*
2. *Mountainous terrain, with numerous volcanoes*
3. *Weather influenced by monsoons*
4. *Has no shared borders*

Day 3

Day  
3

### Everyday Life in Japan

Read **Everyday Life in Japan** (pp. 27-33) and fill in the section of the Notebook Page with the same title (p. 12, top, right).

**Everyday Life in Japan**

Possible answers:

1. *Has a class system*
2. *Have a high standard of living, uses cooperative agriculture*
3. *Have high academic standards*
4. *Overall good health*
5. *Most Japanese practice Shintoism*

Day  
3

### Shintoism

Read **Shintoism** (pp. 31-32) and fill in the section of the Notebook Page with the same title (p. 13, top of page).

**Shintoism**

Possible answers:

*Beliefs: No god, no founder, no official texts, just a set of guiding, ethical beliefs and rituals. Polytheistic "kami" spirits provide the driving force behind life. Because there are no specific beliefs, Shintoism may coexist with other religions such as Buddhism. Devotion towards the kami will inspire the kami to help you. Festivals are thrown for particular kami. The Japanese used to believe that the emperor was divine.*

Day 4

Day  
4

### Japan's Government

Read **Japan's Government** (pp. 33-34) and fill in the section of the Notebook Page with the same title (p. 13, middle of page).

**Japan's Government**

*Answer: democratic, with a powerful parliament and constitutional monarchy.*

Day  
4

### Japanese Culture

Read **Japanese Culture** (pp. 34-37) and fill in the section of the Notebook Page with the same title (p. 13, middle of page).

**Japanese Culture**

*Possible answers: tea ceremony, gardening, flower arranging, architecture, painting, sculpture, calligraphy, clay figures, music, dance, drama, large puppets, folk or rock music, karaoke, The Tale of Genji, haiku, western or traditional clothing, sushi, restaurants, or tea.*

Day 5

Day  
5

### Japan's Wildlife

Read **Japan's Wildlife** (pp. 37-38) and fill in the section of the Notebook Page with the same title (p. 13, middle of page).

**Japan's Wildlife**

*Possible answers: cedars, cherry blossoms, koi, etc.*

Day  
5

### The Economy of Japan

Read **The Economy of Japan** (pp. 38-41) and fill in the section of the Notebook Page with the same title (p. 13, bottom of page).

**The Economy of Japan**

*Possible answers: Japan has grown into a large economic power after recovering from World War II. Strengths are low unemployment rates, growing rice, fishing, large manufacturing industry that actually can cause surpluses in Japan, or many jobs in the service industry. Weaknesses are high national debt, aging population, small area of farmland, restriction to lumbering, and lack of mineral and energy resources.*



## Day 6

Day  
6

## Japan's History through "Tokugawa House (1603)"

**Japan's History**

Read *part* of **Japan's History** (pp. 41-44). Stop after reading the section titled "Tokugawa House (1603)."

Day  
6

## Japan Timeline (#1-5)

**Japan Timeline #1-5**

Fill in the section of the Notebook Pages titled **Japan Timeline**. Just fill in the boxes labeled 1-5. (p. 14).

Possible answers:

1. Pottery, polished tools, types of clothing
2. Developed in Kyushu, rice paddies, fired clay wheels, used bronze and iron tools, weaved cloth, had class divisions.
3. Citizens could not own private land, but worked on government land and paid taxes, the emperor established capital cities and a unified military.
4. A shogun is a military leader, originally in charge just under the emperor. Shoguns provided an unstable form of government and resulted in warring clans with no central authority.
5. The shogun shared power with the daimyo; the shogun handled foreign trade, mining, major cities, maintenance of military, issue currency, and control over much farmland.

## Day 7

Day  
7

## "Seclusion Edicts" – "Imperialism Begins (1895)"

**Japan's History**

Read *part* of **Japan's History**: "Seclusion Edicts (1630's)" through "Imperialism Begins (1895)" (pp. 45-49).

Day  
7

## Japan Timeline (#6-9)

**Japan Timeline #6-9**

Fill in the section of the Notebook Pages titled **Japan Timeline**. Just fill in the boxes labeled 6-9. (p. 15).

Possible answers:

6. The seclusion edicts expelled most foreigners, limited interaction with the European world until mid-1800's, led to internal growth with practicing trades and developing art, but a rigid feudal system led to unrest.

7. A trade treaty between the U.S. and Japan was signed in 1858, opened five ports to international trade, U.S. citizens followed U.S. law while in Japan, samurai and daimyo held divided opinions about the treaty.
8. Samurai leaders encouraged the shogun to resign and they ruled in the emperor's name; they changed Edo's name to Tokyo, developed mines, shipyards, and factories to build the economy; sold to private business groups, regained control of land given to the emperor; many daimyos and samurai were dismissed; they grew military power, established a constitution with new government structure, created public school system; and encouraged Buddhism and Shintoism.  
  
*Slogan: Enriching the nation and strengthening the military.*
9. Japan took control of Taiwan from China in 1895 to use as an agricultural colony. In 1905, they gained control of Korea and parts of Manchuria.

## Day 8

Day  
8

## "Japan Enters World War I" – "Modern Challenges"

**Japan's History**

Read the rest of **Japan's History**: "Japan Enters World War I (1914)" through "Modern Challenges" (pp. 49-53).

Day  
8

## Japan Timeline (#10-13)

**Japan Timeline #10-13**

Fill in the rest of the section of the Notebook Pages titled **Japan Timeline**. Fill in the boxes labeled 10-13. (pp. 15-16).

Possible answers:

10. Western attention was drawn to the war, giving Japan the opportunity to grow in trade in the East, and the zaibatsu grew as well.
11. The centralized government could not handle the loss of trade opportunities; the economic depression hurt; damage caused by an earthquake in Tokyo, and China's forces reclaimed Manchuria.
12. Japan's troops began to move south, so the U.S. cut off exports to Japan. Japan retaliated by attacking Pearl Harbor, Guam, and the Philippines, drawing the U.S. into WWII. Evenly matched battles occurred all over the Pacific until the Japan lost at the Battle of Midway, and then was bombed at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
13. It restructured government, expanded rights of citizens especially women's and children's, redistributed farmlands, changed educational system, and legalized labor unions.

**Choose Your Adventure**

Now that you have finished reading about Japan, complete the **Choose Your Adventure** section of the Notebook Pages (pp. 17-18). You can choose to do one, two or all seven optional activities.

**You're All Done! Enjoy watching the Olympics!**

If you loved learning about Japan, learn about the rest of the Eastern Hemisphere in Sonlight's Level F program. [sonlight.com/hblf](https://sonlight.com/hblf)

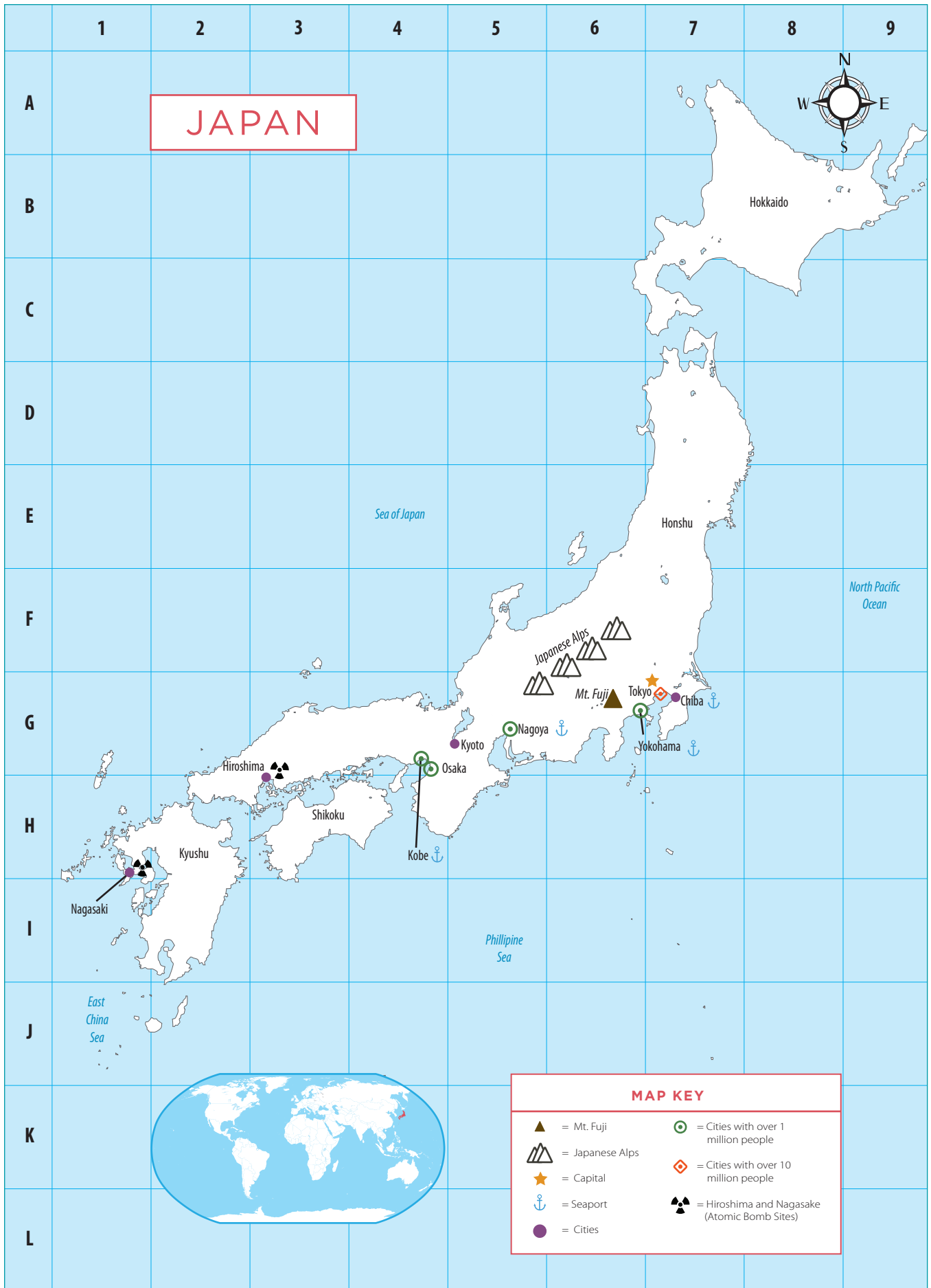


# Continue YOUR ADVENTURE INTO THE EASTERN HEMISPHERE.

If you loved learning about the Land of the Rising Sun as your family watched the 2020 Summer Olympics, you can learn more about the Eastern Hemisphere in Sonlight's History / Bible / Literature F program.

[sonlight.com/hblf](https://sonlight.com/hblf)



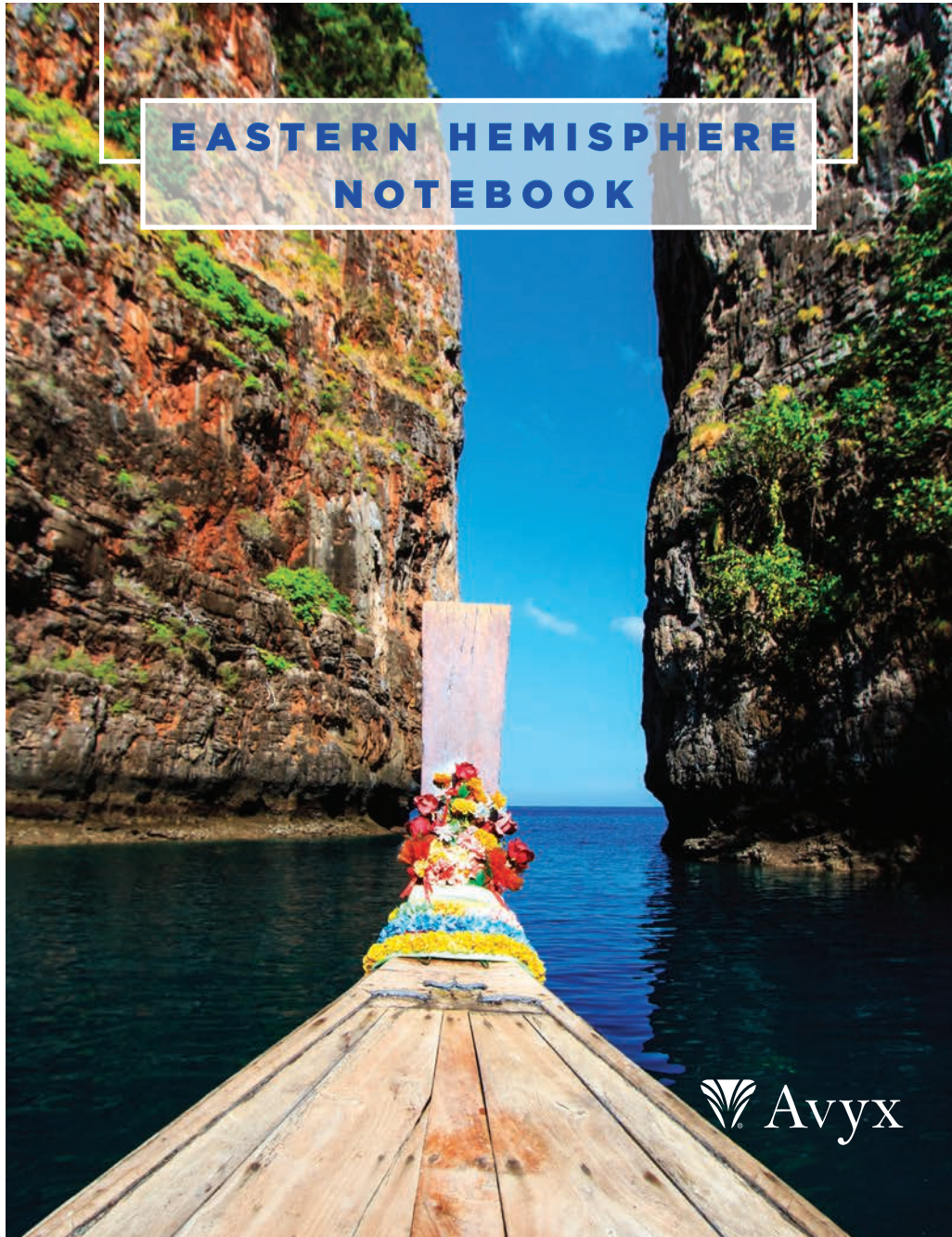


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**MAP KEY**

	= Mt. Fuji		= Cities with over 1 million people
	= Japanese Alps		= Cities with over 10 million people
	= Capital		= Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Atomic Bomb Sites)
	= Seaport		
	= Cities		





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*Enjoy* these Notebook  
pages for Japan

## THE BIG PICTURE

Write three facts that caught your attention:

1.

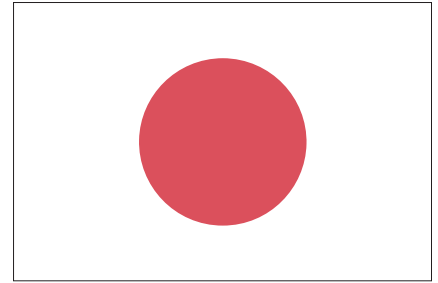
2.

3.



ASIA

JAPAN



# JAPAN



## MAP IT

Label the following locations on your **Japan** map on the following page. Use the coordinates provided to help you easily locate the cities, bodies of water, or point of interest. To correctly label your map, remember to use the symbols on the map key provided.

### LABEL THE CITY

Kyoto (ancient capital) (G5)

### LABEL THE CAPITAL CITY

Tokyo (G7)

### LABEL THE TWO CITIES WITH A SYMBOL WHERE THE ATOMIC BOMBS WERE USED.

Hiroshima (H3)

Nagasaki (H1)

### MOUNTAIN/MOUNTAIN RANGE

Japanese Alps  
(G5–F6)

Mount Fuji or  
Fujiyama (G6)

### FOUR MAIN ISLANDS OF JAPAN

Honshu (E7)

Hokkaido (B8)

Shikoku (H3)

Kyushu (H2)


### LABEL CITIES WITH OVER A MILLION INHABITANTS WITH THE SYMBOL:

Osaka (G4)

Nagoya (G5)

Kobe (G4)

Yokohama (G6)

\* Tokyo is the most highly populated city in the world. Label it with a  for having a population over 10+ million.

### SEAPORTS

Use the map key to label the four chief Japanese ports.

Chiba (G7)

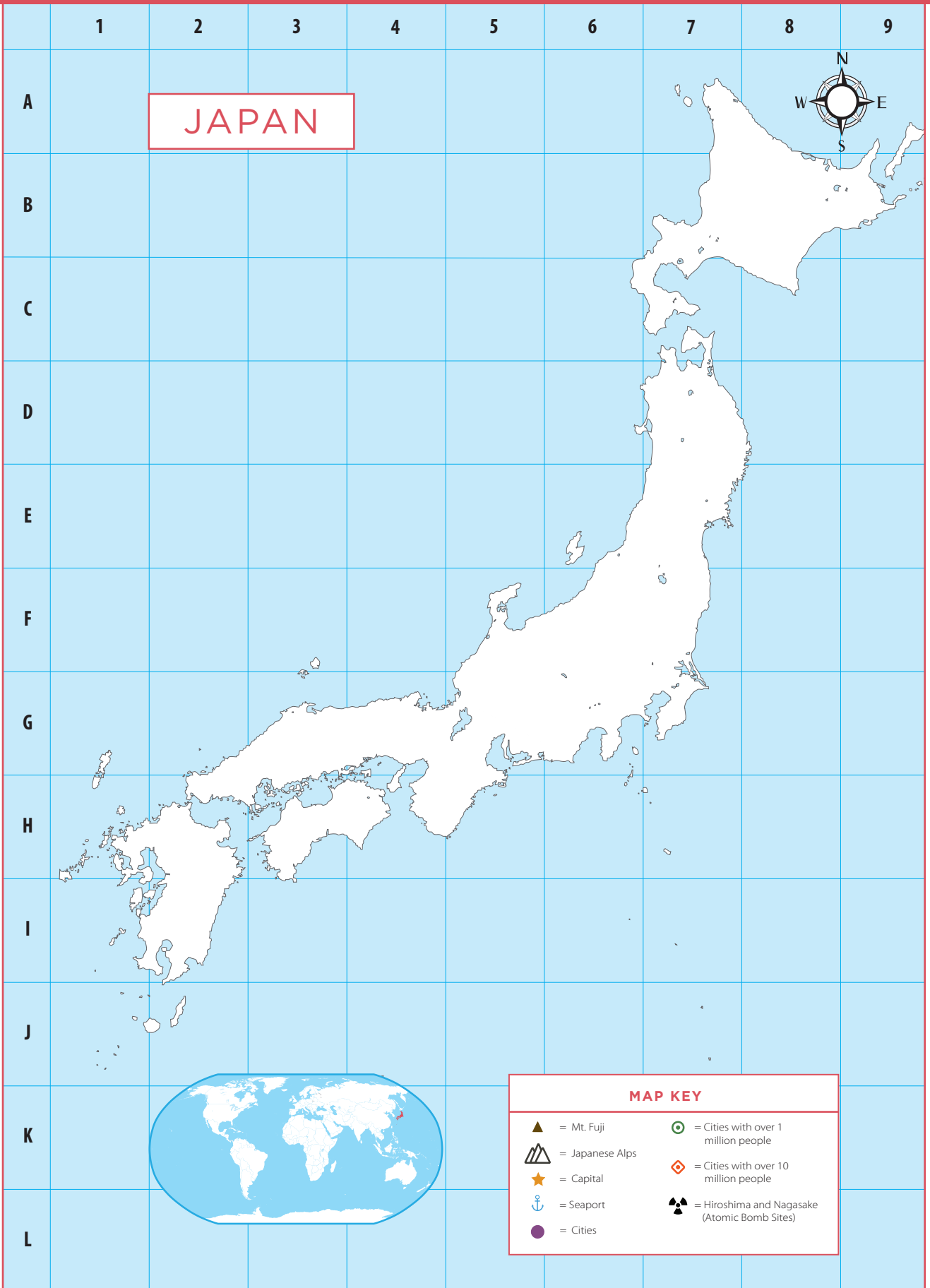
Nagoya (G5)

Kobe (G4)

Yokohama (G6)



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### MEET THE PEOPLE OF JAPAN

Write three facts that caught your attention:

1.

2.

3.

Write one fact about each:

LAND

WATER

CLIMATE

### EVERYDAY LIFE IN JAPAN

List four facts about life in Japan that differ from your home country:

1.

2.

3.

4.

## SHINTOISM

What are Shintoism's basic beliefs?

## JAPAN'S GOVERNMENT

Japan's form of government is:

---

## JAPANESE CULTURE

Describe one form of Japanese culture

## JAPAN'S WILDLIFE

Name one plant or animal that reminds you of Japan:

---

## THE ECONOMY OF JAPAN

Describe it in two sentences:





## JAPAN TIMELINE

### JOMON PERIOD

List two things you found interesting about this period:

10,000-300 BCE

1

### FIRST JAPANESE EMPEROR, KOTOKU, COMES TO POWER

Write one interesting fact about Taika Reform.

645

3

### FIRST SHOGON COMES TO POWER

Write one thing you learned about the shogun.

LATE 1100s

4

300 BCE-300 CE

10,000-300 BCE

645 CE

LATE 1100s

1603

### YAYOI ERA

Write a fact.

300 BCE-300 CE

2

### TOKUGAWA HOUSE BEGINS 265-YEAR RULE OF JAPAN

Write one of the responsibilities of the shogun during this period.

1603

5

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**1630s**

**SECLUSION EDICTS**

Write two things you learned about the Seclusion Edicts in Japan.

6

**1868-1912**

**MEIJI ERA**

Describe one of the strategies the Meiji leadership undertook to enrich the nation of Japan.

Write their slogan here:

8

**1895**

**IMPERIALISM BEGINS**

Write an interesting thing about imperialism:

9



**1854**

**COMMODORE PERRY OPENS JAPAN**

One fact about Matthew Commodore Perry or the US/Japan Treaty of Commerce:

7

**1914**

**JAPAN ENTERS WORLD WAR I**

Name one benefit that Japan enjoyed as a result of involvement in World War I.

10

**1930s**

**THE MILITARY TAKES CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT**

Write one reason why the military took over the government.

11

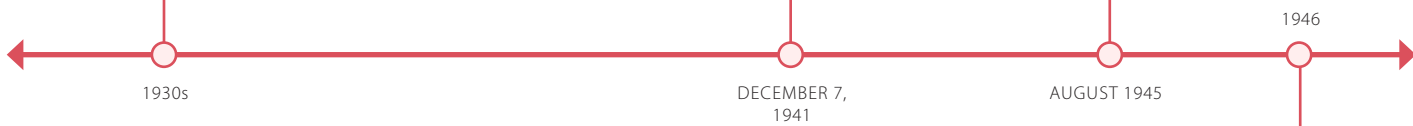
**DECEMBER 7, 1941**

**WORLD WAR II**

Write one fact you learned about Japan's involvement in World War II.

12

**AUGUST 1945  
AMERICA DROPS  
ATOMIC BOMBS  
ON NAGASAKI &  
HIROSHIMA**



**NEW JAPANESE CONSTITUTION**

Write one thing that changed for the people of Japan with this new constitution and American involvement.

**1946**

13

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## CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE



### Write an essay

Would you rather be a member of the working class or the ruling class during the Taika Reform? Write an essay explaining three reasons for your decision.



### Create a calendar marking various Japanese holidays.

Research and explain some of your favorites. Create index cards listing the name of the holiday (in English and Japanese if possible), approximate date the holiday was started, what event the holiday celebrates, and traditional activities and food that accompanies the holiday.

For helpful website suggestions, visit your IG links page (keyword "Calendar").



### Use the list of words below, along with their definitions, to create a Japanese-English dictionary!

Use a regular dictionary as a model. Your dictionary should look like a book, complete with a decorative cover, and there should be guide words at the top of each page.

Terms to add to your dictionary:

biwa	koto	samisen
bunraku	kabuki	kofun
haniwa	zaibatsu	burakumin
kendo	ikebana	tatami
ukiyo	kimono	Kanji
karaoke	baiu	



### Research the art of bonsai and grow your own tree.

This should be an ongoing project for a number of weeks. You can find bonsai starter kits at your IG links page (keyword "Bonsai" or you can usually find bonsai trees in the plant departments of Target® and Walmart®.) At the end of a specified amount of time, be prepared to give a presentation explaining what the art of bonsai is, where it came from, how it was traditionally viewed and how it is viewed, today. Also, your presentation should include an explanation and demonstration of what is involved in caring for your bonsai tree.



### Reread *Imperialism Begins through World War II*.

Write a short essay explaining how the Japanese might have justified their alliance with Nazi Germany as opposed to the Allies (the U.S., the United Kingdom, China, and the Soviet Union).



### Put on a puppet show

Act out one of your favorite short stories or fairy tales. You will need to write a script for a narrator to read and either design your own puppets (embellished socks could work) or use some you already have. (Possible story suggestion: *Tikki Tikki Tembo* by Arlene Mosel, available in most libraries online.)

For an extra challenge, obtain a recording of traditional Japanese music to accompany your performance.

Continued on the next page

## CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE

### TEA CEREMONY

A Japanese tea ceremony is a traditional activity that focuses on the presentation of matcha—a powdered green tea whisked into hot water.

The ceremony consists of very structured and precise movements revolving around confections and tea for the purpose of hospitality.

#### The ceremony begins...

1. The **guests** bow deeply (with their hands on their knees) outside the threshold before stepping into the room.
2. **Guests** come in silently, take their places, and sit on mats.

#### The Sweets...

3. The person serving tea kneels, placing a small sweet on a plate or the floor in front of the guests, outside the mat.
4. Both server and guests place their hands on the ground so they form a triangle (i.e. making a triangle with their hands and thumbs), bowing deeply to each other.
5. The **guests** take the plate with their right hand, placing it in front of themselves on the mat.
6. A short blessing is said before the plate is picked up and the sweet eaten.
7. The plate is placed down, then moved back outside the mat.
8. The guests and server bow again as the plate is taken away.

#### Tea Time...

9. The **server** then brings the tea, with the cup facing inward. (S)he turns the cup in three moves so that it faces the **guests** before placing it on the mat.
10. The **guests** follow the same process as with the sweet—bow, cup moves to mat, blessing, then the cup is picked up with the right hand while being supported with the left.
11. The right hand then gives the cup 3 one-sixth turns so that any design on the cup faces out into the room.
12. The **guests** drink the tea in 3 sips before gently wiping the rim of the cup with their fingers.
13. The cup is turned again—in 3 movements—away this time, and placed so the design faces inward.
14. At this point the **guests** admire the cup by bending forward, looking closely from right to left.
15. Picking up the cup one last time, the **guests** turn it in 3 moves, this time so the design faces outward, and places it just outside the mat.

#### The Ceremony Ends...

16. There is often another short blessing before...
17. ...the **guests** file silently out, turning to bow at the door and stepping backwards out of the room.

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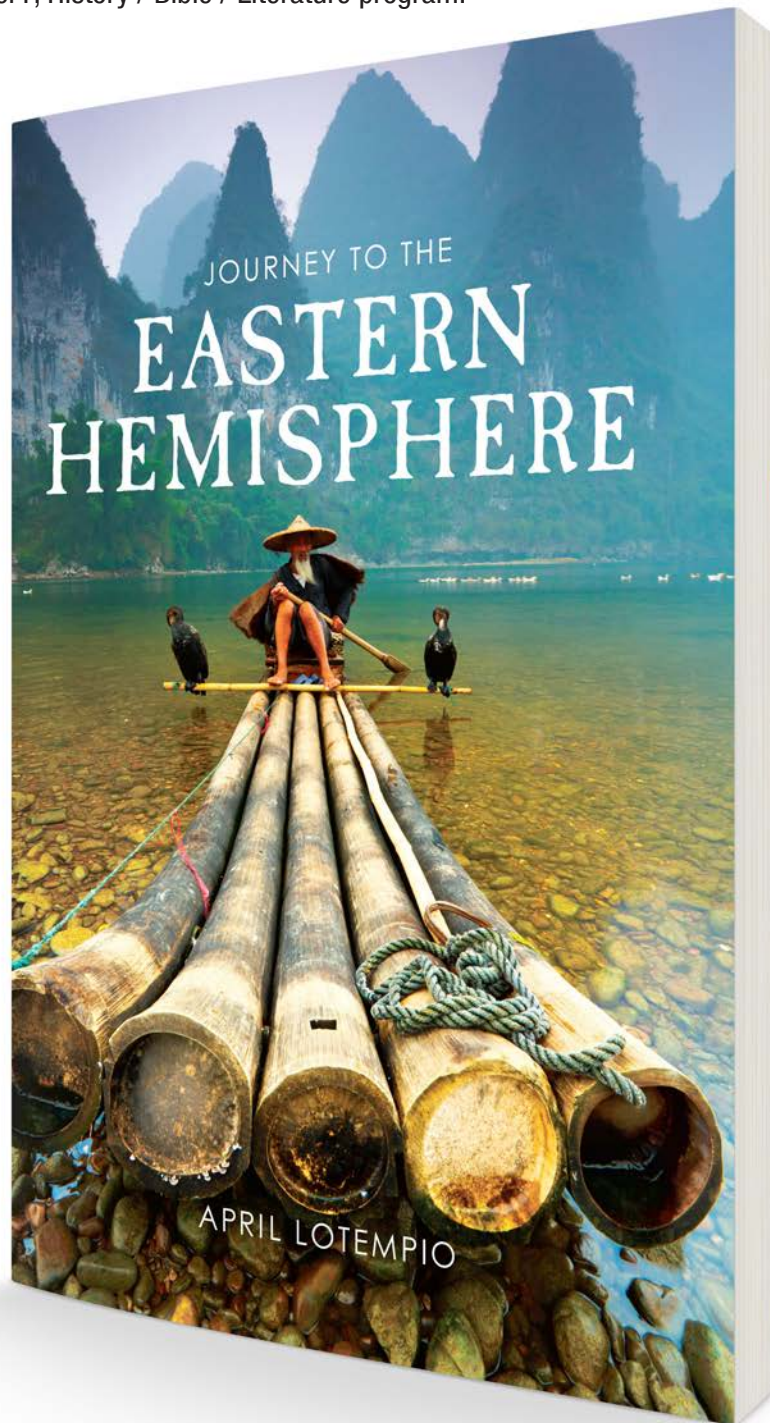
Get even more notebook pages to help your student interact with the Eastern Hemisphere. Help your student to understand and appreciate various cultures. Includes hand-on activities too!

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# Appendix 1

JOURNEY TO THE EASTERN HEMISPHERE

The following excerpts come from the history spine used in Sonlight's Level F, History / Bible / Literature program.



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## JAPAN: THE BIG PICTURE

The Japanese name for their nation, Nippon or Nihon, means source of the sun. According to legend, the sun goddess created Nippon and the emperors were her descendants. The tradition of an emperor, or imperial house, continues to this day, though official doctrine no longer claims that the emperor is deity. The name Japan likely comes from a mispronunciation of Zipangu, the name given to the country in the late 1200's by Italian explorer Marco Polo, who only heard about the country from the Chinese, but never visited himself.

Japan consists of a string of volcanic islands in the North Pacific Ocean. Most of the population lives crowded into cities on the main islands of Hokkaido, Honshu, Kyushu, and Shikoku, though thousands of

smaller islands also make up Japan. With no immediate neighbors, Japan is closest to Russia, Korea, and China.

The extensive mountains and forests of Japan's interior make for beautiful scenery, but difficult habitation and farming. As a result, most people live along narrow strips of coastal plains where they have developed farms and built huge cities. Today, these cities, including the capital of Tokyo, are modern, bustling centers of culture, commerce, and industry.

Despite having few natural resources, Japan has become one of the world's top economic powers. Its manufacturing centers import raw materials to convert into finished goods such as automobiles, computers, electronics, processed foods, chemicals, and textiles. Japan is one of the largest importers and exporters in the world.



Combining Japan’s long history of developing its own traditions in isolation from other countries with a recent embrace of all things Western, Japan enjoys a rich culture. Chinese culture heavily influenced Japanese art, government, language, religion, and technology from about 400 to 800 CE. Another wave of influence came from Europe beginning in the mid-1500’s. Soon after, however, Japanese leaders cut ties with foreign nations and sought to isolate Japan from outside influence. This isolation continued until 1853, when the United States encouraged Japan to open its ports to foreign trade.

Nowadays, evidence of modern and traditional culture abound. The Japanese people wear modern Western clothing, but don traditional kimonos for festivals and special occasions. Sports fans enjoy baseball as well as the ancient form of Japanese wrestling called sumo. People watch modern movies and listen to rock music, but also continue to enjoy centuries-old noh and kabuki theater.

Japan’s incredible economic and military growth of the late 1800’s and early 1900’s was cut short by the devastation of World War II. Despite some early victories, Japan surrendered to the United States and Allied nations after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and

Nagasaki in 1945. The war left Japan in a state of economic, social, and political ruin. However, the nation rebuilt itself quickly under the guidance and help of occupying Allied forces.

Today, Japan has returned to its status as a great industrial nation. Under a new Constitution, a democratic form of government has flourished. The standard of living of the Japanese people is one of the highest in the world.

## Fast Facts

**Capital:**  
Tokyo

**Size:**  
62<sup>nd</sup> in the world

**Area:**  
234,825 sq miles  
(608,000 sq km)

**Coastline:**  
18,486 miles (29,750 km)

**Highest Point:**  
Mount Fuji 12,388 feet  
(3,776 m)

**Lowest Point:**  
Hachiro-gata -13 feet  
(-4 m)

**Population:**  
127 million

**Official Language:**  
Japanese

**Currency:**  
yen  
¥

**National Anthem:**  
“Kimigayo”  
(The Emperor’s Reign)

**National Symbol:**  
red sun disc

## MEET THE PEOPLE OF JAPAN

With over 127 million people, Japan is the 11th most populous nation in the world. Almost 100% of its citizens are ethnically Japanese, with small populations of Koreans, Chinese, and Brazilians. In the northernmost islands live the indigenous Ainu, who have a unique ethnicity and culture. The Japanese descended from mainly northeastern Asian immigrants who traveled to the Japanese islands sometime around 10,000 BCE. These early people, called *Jomon* (meaning *cord-marked*), made pottery bearing the impressions of ropes or cords. By about 300 BCE, the *Yayoi* people replaced the Jomon, settling in the area around modern-day Tokyo. They developed villages, agriculture, and cast bronze into tools and weapons. The Yayoi closely resembled today's Japanese in appearance and language.

Many of the Koreans in Japan descend from the hundreds of thousands who were forced to migrate to Japan under imperial rule in the early 1900's. They lack full citizenship to this day and face discrimination. Other ethnic groups considered "resident aliens" in Japan are the indigenous Ainu people of Hokkaido and the people of Okinawa.

About 80% of the Japanese people live on the largest island, Honshu. Settlement throughout the mountains has always been sparse, with most of the population settling along the coastal lowlands. In fact, about 90% of

Japanese live on just 20% of the land, making these areas among the world's most crowded. Japan's largest urban area, Tokyo, is the most populous in the world with over 37 million people. Osaka-Kobe, Nagoya, and three other cities have populations over 2.5 million.

Since the industrialization of the late 1800's and beyond, Japan's population grew and moved into urban centers. After 100 years of explosive population growth, Japan's birth rate dropped to almost the lowest in the world. Combined with high life expectancy, the result is a shrinking and aging Japanese population.

The Japanese language has various dialects, including the major ones of Hondo and Nantō, as well as the one spoken by Okinawans. While most local dialects are not understood among different people groups, all Japanese people understand standard Japanese that is spoken in Tokyo and used in schools, television, and radio. Many people also speak English. The native language once spoken by the indigenous Ainu people has become nearly extinct. Spoken Japanese is akin to Korean, but the writing system is based on Chinese characters along with Japanese phonetic symbols. Before the mid 1900's, this system of writing used 5,000 different characters, called *kanji*. It has since been reduced to about 2,000 simpler characters. Japanese students learn this complex writing system, along with a system of spelling Japanese words using the Roman alphabet.

# Map of Japan



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## LAND, WATER, AND CLIMATE IN JAPAN

The nation of Japan is an archipelago, or island chain, located in Eastern Asia. It stretches in an arc over 1,491 miles (2,400 km) long from northeast to southwest. The four main islands, from largest to smallest, are Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu, and Shikoku. Japan does not share land borders with any other countries. Its nearest neighbor is South Korea, across the Korea Strait, as well as North Korea and Russia across the Sea of Japan to the west.

### Land

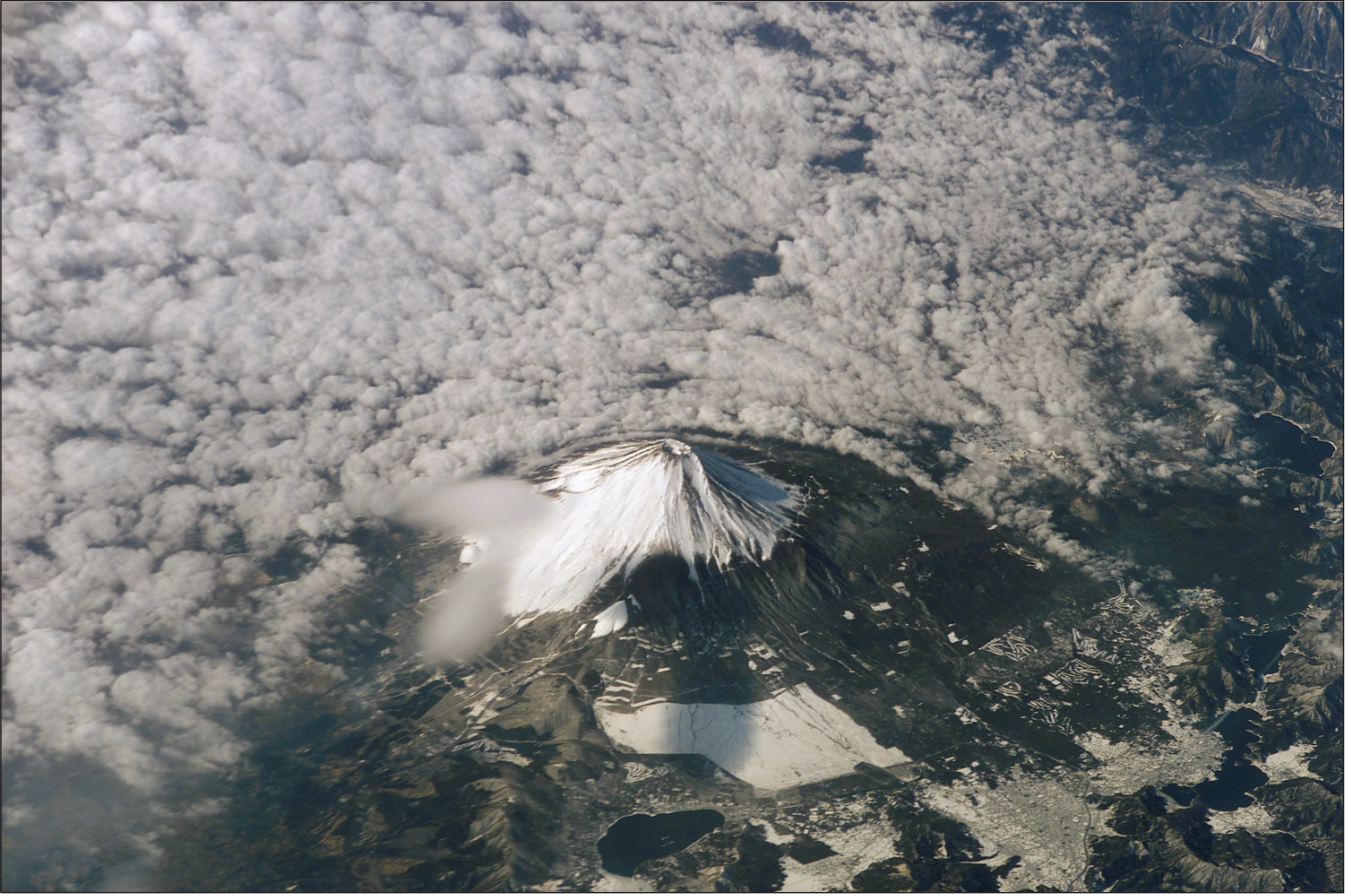
A great underwater mountain range rises out of the Pacific Ocean to create the islands of Japan. As a result, the land is mostly rugged, with over 70% covered in mountains. Hills, valleys, gorges, waterfalls, and dense forests all add to the natural beauty. In addition to the four largest islands, Japan consists of several smaller island groups, including the Ryukyu Islands, the Izu Islands, the Bonin Islands, and the Volcano Islands. The large island of Honshu has three main mountain ranges, including the Japanese Alps, which are the country's tallest mountains. The largest flat lowland in Japan, the Kanto Plain, lies along the east coast of Honshu, where Tokyo is located.



Japan is roughly the size of California

Japan is home to over 150 volcanoes, of which 60 are active. This includes Mount Fuji, or Fujiyama, Japan's highest peak at 12,388 feet (3,776 meters), an active volcano which last erupted in 1707. More recent eruptions include Mount O in 1983, Mount Mihara in 1986, and the Izu Islands and Mount Unzen in 1991. Scientists keep a close watch on Unzen and Sakurajima, as these volcanoes are located close to densely populated areas. Every year, Japan experiences over a thousand seismic events—mainly tremors but occasionally severe earthquakes. Japan's volcano and earthquake activity is due to its location along the Ring of Fire—an area circling the Pacific Ocean where Earth's shifting crust causes violent changes. This activity results in many hot springs throughout Japan. Violent





Mount Fuji as seen from the space shuttle

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earthquakes can also produce destructive tsunamis—huge waves caused by underwater earthquakes.

## Water

Surrounded by water in all directions, Japan has 18,641 miles (30,000 km) of coastline. To the west, the Sea of Japan separates the nation from North and South Korea and Russia. The La Perouse Strait to the north separates it from the Russian island Sakhalin. To the east lies the North Pacific Ocean and to the south

the Philippine Sea. Japan is separated from China by the East China Sea to the southwest.

Japan's rivers are mostly short and swift-running, due to the mountainous terrain. This makes many of them impossible to navigate by boat. However, they are useful for irrigation and hydroelectric power. Some rivers in volcanic areas are too acidic to use for drinking or irrigation. The major rivers are the Teshio, Ishikari, Kitakami, and Chikugo. Some of Japan's lakes, such as Kutcharo, Towada, and Ashi, are actually calderas (large, basin-shaped depressions in the peak of volcanoes) filled with water. Others



are valleys that filled with water when the mouth of a river became dammed by sand. The largest lake, Lake Biwa, covers 416 square miles (1077 square km) of central Honshu.

## Climate

Many factors greatly affect the climate in Japan. The Pacific Ocean and the large Asian landmass create monsoons (seasonal winds) that bring wet or dry weather depending on the season. Strong Pacific currents—the warm Kuroshio and the cold Oyashio—influence the climate. The vast latitudinal stretch from north to south creates differences in temperature, and the mountainous terrain creates local variations in climate.

Overall, the climate is tropical in the south and cool to temperate in the north. Average winter temperatures range from 18-46 °F and average summer temperatures range from 70-82 °F. The coasts are warmer and wetter than the mountainous interior. Typhoons (tropical cyclones that form over the ocean) and tsunamis occur frequently, especially in the southwest.

Rainfall is heaviest in the summer and exceeds 40 inches (101 cm) per year in most areas. Central Honshu can receive more than 160 inches (406 cm) annually. The Japanese call the rainy season the *baiu*, or plum rain, because it occurs during the time when plums are ripe. Many areas, especially the Sea of Japan coast, receive snowfall in the winter.

## EVERYDAY LIFE IN JAPAN

### Family Life

Hundreds of years ago, Japanese society was divided into social classes. The most prestigious group was the peer class, followed by the four working classes—warrior, farmer, craftsman, and merchant. The lowest social class, called the outcast class or *burakumin*, handled tasks considered “unclean,” such as slaughtering cattle and executing criminals. They lived in slum areas of cities or specially segregated villages. Their descendants, who make up about 2% of the population, still face discrimination to some extent today.

Today, Japanese home life revolves around work and school. The traditional roles of men as breadwinners and women as homemakers are slowly changing. However, women still earn lower wages than men and have fewer employment benefits. Many women work outside the home before marriage and, to a lesser degree, while raising children. In general, society expects women to marry, have children, and stay home to care for their families. Meanwhile, men work to support the family and are paid a “family allowance” by employers. In the past, marriages were arranged by families, but now love matches have become more popular. A Japanese wedding may consist of a traditional Shinto ceremony followed by a Christian- or Western-style observance.

The Japanese love to celebrate. In addition to 15 national holidays, they also celebrate many festivals throughout the year. December 23<sup>rd</sup> marks the birthday of Emperor Akihito, followed by a large New Year's celebration beginning December 31<sup>st</sup>. For this event, families spend three days visiting shrines, temples, and homes of friends and family. In general, however, the Japanese rarely entertain guests in their homes because the homes are small and many of the meetings are business-like.

## City Life

Approximately 90% of the Japanese live in Japan's crowded urban areas. The large cities reflect Japan's economic success with expensive cars, fashionable stores, and expensive apartments. Most people enjoy a high standard of living and have good jobs. They have access to many restaurants, stores, and types of entertainment. They live mainly in high-rise apartment buildings, but small single homes are also scattered throughout the cities. Land prices in Tokyo are among the highest in the world. Therefore, it makes more sense to build a tall apartment building on a plot of land rather than a single house. This way, the high cost of living is divided among many families rather than just one.

Despite the many benefits of city life, the nation has struggled to keep pace with the growing urban

population. In addition to housing, large cities need infrastructure such as roads, public transportation, utilities, and sewers to meet the needs of the people. Housing in Japan is quite expensive, which has forced people further and further from city centers. As a result, many Japanese workers have very long commutes. The lack of zoning laws in Japanese cities results in a unique mix of stores, homes, factories, and even agricultural land in some urban districts. While overcrowding in cities has led to pollution, crime and poverty are generally low in Japan.

More and more people now live in apartments or homes they own themselves, rather than units owned by corporations or the government. In addition, the amount of living space per person has increased. A traditional Japanese home uses sliding paper screens to separate rooms. People sit on floor cushions rather than chairs and sleep on a padded quilt called a *futon*. Modern homes may contain some Western-style furniture as well as carpets instead of *tatami* (straw mats) on the floors.

## Country Life

A small number of Japanese, about 10–15% of the population, live in rural areas. They earn their living by farming, fishing, and harvesting edible seaweed. Many rural villages have maintained the traditional system of

cooperative agriculture called *aza* or *mura*, which consists of 30 to 50 households that work together and assist one another to form an independent unit. They combine traditional practices along with modern equipment and farming techniques.

Wooden homes are similar to those in the cities. Rural land is less expensive than that in urban areas, but it is still high compared to other nations. Most rural villages have close ties to nearby cities, with workers often traveling to the city for seasonal work in the winter. In fact, very few rural families live on farming income alone. By working two or even three jobs, farmers average a slightly higher income than those working in cities. However, rural populations are declining as many people leave the countryside permanently to live and work in the cities.

## Recreation

The Japanese love sports. As Western culture influenced Japan in the early 1900's, sports such as basketball, soccer, golf, and tennis became popular. Baseball, introduced to Japan in the 1870's, has become a favorite national sport. Professional baseball players are well-known celebrities and many have found success playing Major League Baseball in the United States. Since 1993, Japan has had a popular professional football league.

Both schools and the military emphasize participation in sports.

The practice of martial arts in Japan can be traced to the 8th century. It includes competitive *kendo*, *judo*, and *karate* as well as non-competitive *jujitsu* and *aikido*. *Sumo* wrestling is perhaps the oldest and most popular national sport in Japan.

Japan hosted the Summer Olympic Games of 1964 in Tokyo and the Winter Games in Sapporo (1972) and Nagano (1998). The nation's most dominant Olympic sports are gymnastics and *judo*.

In addition to sports, the Japanese love travel. The country's many parks and institutions support the enjoyment of nature. In the spring, travelers follow the progression of the cherry blossoms from south to north. In the fall, this trend reverses as they follow the coloring leaves of maple trees from north to south. Japanese also enjoy visiting temples, shrines, hot springs, and historical sites. Wealthier families travel abroad to major cities in Europe, the west coast of the United States, South Korea, and Australia.

At home, the Japanese enjoy card games and board games. *Shogi* and *go* both resemble chess. *Mah-jongg* is a popular game played with rectangular tiles. Women in particular participate in a traditional tea-serving ceremony, chant ballads, or practice the art of flower arranging, called *ikebana*. Men often meet up together after

work to enjoy a drink of *sake* (wine made from rice) or beer at a local restaurant or bar.

## Education

The Japanese value education so highly that fierce academic competition results in problems like bullying. From a very young age, students are screened and selected for schools based on academic achievement. Schools are ranked strictly and students work very hard to be accepted into the “best” ones.

All Japanese children must attend school for at least nine years, but almost everyone completes more schooling. Kindergarten, which is optional, can last one to three years. It is followed by a six-year elementary school, three-year middle school, and three-year high school. Extracurricular “cram” schools, called *juku*, exist for children as young as preschool. There, students spend several hours each day after school preparing for exams. Until the 1990’s, schools held classes on Saturdays, a practice which is slowly fading out.

In Japan, public elementary and middle schools are free but high school requires tuition. Students attend from April through March with a vacation break in August. They study typical subjects such as language, math, art, music, physical education, science, and social studies. The Japanese also study homemaking, moral education, and English. Although the Japanese language

is particularly difficult to learn, almost all adults are literate. Japanese students score very well on exams compared with other nations, but many complain that the educational system is too demanding. They believe students should do less memorization, spend less time in school, and learn in a more creative fashion.

University education is highly desirable and serves as the means to achieve social status and income potential. Males in particular measure their success by the reputation of the university they attend. The two most prestigious and competitive universities are Tokyo and Kyōto. Once a year, students take very difficult entrance examinations to determine their eligibility for the universities. The rigorous high school curriculum, combined with extracurricular “cram” schools, attempt to prepare students for the examinations. Once they get past this hurdle, almost all students succeed in universities, which are more lenient than high schools. Male students are more likely to attend universities, while females are more likely to attend junior colleges or technical schools.

Education beyond a university occurs regularly throughout Japan. Adults can take classes in technology, arts, vocational training, homemaking, physical education, and other areas. Many adults take foreign language classes.

## Religion

Japan does not have an official religion. Most of the people observe a combination of spiritual practices without intense religious beliefs. About 80% of Japanese observe Shintoism, overlapping with 67% who observe Buddhism. Christianity, ancient shamanism, and some new religions also have some followers. Families do not formally train children in religion, but often observe religious practices in the home.

At one time, Shintoism was a state-supported religion, with the Japanese emperor considered a divine being. Although that support ended after World War II, Shintoism remains Japan's most popular religion. The word Shinto means *the way of the gods*. Shintoism is polytheistic, meaning it includes many gods (called *kami*) including people, natural objects like rocks and trees, Hindu gods, and Chinese spirits. It also involves

the practice of ancestor worship. Shrines are popular Shinto structures throughout the nation.

Buddhism, which came from Korea and China in the 500's, was also adopted as the national religion at one point. Several sects remain influential throughout Japan today and Buddhist temples exist throughout the country. Buddhism is a more structured belief system than Shintoism. It focuses on living a virtuous life in order to obtain perfect peace and happiness.

In the late 1500's, Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries brought Christianity to Japan. At first, it was well-received and seen as a symbol of European culture. However, in the 1600's it was banned and Christians were persecuted. Many continued to practice Christianity in hiding until the ban was lifted in 1873. Today, the Japanese widely celebrate Christmas, though more as a folk tradition than a religious observation.

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A small temple near Mount Fuji

## SHINTO

Indigenous Japanese developed the Shinto religion thousands of years ago. Unlike many other religious belief systems, Shinto has no single god, no founder, and no official texts. Rather, it is a set of guiding beliefs that has shaped Japanese thought throughout the ages. In the sixth century CE, this set of beliefs was given the name Shinto to distinguish it from the increasingly popular Buddhist religion.



The word Shinto means “the way of kami,” with kami meaning “the gods” or “spirits.” This polytheistic religion includes many deities in the form of people, natural objects like rocks and trees, and gods and spirits borrowed from Buddhism and Chinese beliefs. The spirits provide the driving force behind growth, creativity, and healing. Shinto is wholly focused on life in this world, rather than an afterlife. It lays out ethical principles for life, but does not include a set of commandments or laws. Because Shintoism is based more on ritual than specific spiritual beliefs, it readily coexists with other religions, such as Buddhism. Since Shinto is fully an ethnic or cultural way of life, the Japanese do not attempt to spread Shintoism to other countries and few people outside Japan practice it.

The practice of Shintoism, to which about 80% of Japanese adhere, involves devotion to shrines and rituals that allow people to communicate with kami. Followers of Shinto believe that spirits enjoy attention from them and, if made happy, will intervene in their lives to bring love, happiness, and success. Shrines can be found in almost every Japanese community as well as in private homes. Devotees focus on their own local shrine more than on a unified religion as a whole. Such local shrines have become popular tourist destinations throughout the country.



Shinto shrine in Kyoto

Shinto festivals, called matsuri, combine solemn worship and joyful reverie. Each festival celebrates a particular kami as guest of honor and might include a parade, theatrical performance, or sumo wrestling match along with feasting. Worshippers offer flowers, money, or food at the shrine. Most festivals follow the ancient farming calendar and major life events. The more private rituals at home might consist of prayers for blessings or thanksgiving.

According to Shinto belief, Japan was created by the sun goddess, from whom the emperors descended. Therefore, the emperor was long considered a divine being. Eventually, the Japanese government made Shintoism official policy, called State Shinto, placing more emphasis on national goals such as patriotism and Japanese nationalism. Japan’s new Constitution, developed after World War II, abolished State Shinto and denied the deity of the emperor. However, the personal practice of Shintoism continues to permeate Japanese culture.

## Health Care

The high standard of living in Japan, along with national health insurance for all citizens, contributes to the good health of its people. Japan's obesity rate is one of the lowest in the industrialized world. The leading cause of death is cancer, which has increased significantly in the past 50 years.

Employers and workers contribute to the costs of health care and pensions, while government entities pay for other social welfare programs. Japan's health costs are rising due to health complications from a more Westernized diet and the aging population. To compensate for the low birth rate and long life expectancy that created this elderly population, Japan's government has changed nursing-care laws and raised the age for full pension benefits.

## JAPAN'S GOVERNMENT

The nation of Japan has a parliamentary government with a constitutional monarchy. That means it is a democracy in which the legislative branch holds the most power and an emperor serves as a figurehead.

Several dates mark important advancements in establishing Japan's government. The traditional date of the nation's founding by Emperor Jimmu is 660 BCE. In 1890, the Meiji Constitution established a constitutional monarchy. The current Constitution was adopted

in 1946 as an amendment to the Meiji Constitution, downgrading the emperor from the supreme sovereign authority to a figurehead who represents the unity of the people. Sovereignty, along with fundamental human rights, now legally belongs to the people. Japanese enjoy freedom of religion, speech, and the press. All citizens 20 years of age and older can vote in elections.

The Japanese modeled their legal system after Germany's, with influences from England, the United States, and Japanese traditions. The government separates power between legislative, executive, and judicial branches. In addition to an emperor who mainly performs formalities, Japan's prime minister is head of the executive branch and Cabinet. The legislative branch of the government, called the Diet, consists of a House of Councillors and a House of Representatives, each with a few hundred seats. Candidates from several different political parties vie for seats in the government. The judicial branch consists of a chief justice, a Supreme Court, and several lower courts.

The country is divided into eight regions called *chihō* that run from northeast to southwest. They are further divided into 47 prefectures. The prefectures vary greatly in size and serve as an intermediate governing body between towns and the central government. Japan's capital city is Tokyo, whose Kasumigaseki district houses most government offices.

## JAPANESE CULTURE



Tokyo's Metropolitan Government Building

Japan's constitution "forever renounces war." Therefore, the country can only maintain military forces for the purpose of defense. From 1945 to 1950, this meant that Japan only had a police force. However, after the Korean War began, Japan started to rebuild its armed forces in order to preserve peace and security. Service in Japan's army, navy, and air force is voluntary. The Ministry of Defense maintains close ties with the United States military, which has many military bases in Japan. Japan's first deployment of troops outside the country, in 2009, took action against Somalian pirates who interfered with Japanese shipping.

Japanese culture has been strongly influenced by China (in ancient times) and the West (in modern times). However, Japan has been able to maintain its own unique culture while embracing foreign influence. Modern Japanese culture is very urban, Westernized, and trendy. Teenagers in particular follow fads in clothing, hairstyles, and music. American and European styles also show up in architecture, art, education, literature, and recreation. The characteristic Japanese fingerprint on many of these cultural expressions is a clean simplicity.

Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs supports artists and attempts to preserve traditional Japanese art forms. It preserves and promotes historical sites and works with modern museums and research institutes. The agency identifies talented artists and performers as "living national treasures" for practicing traditional art forms. By providing them with stipends, the agency helps these artists continue their craft and train apprentices. Without this work of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, these art forms could be lost forever.





Traditional Japanese architecture

## The Arts

Japanese taste in art tends to be more subtle than the lavish Chinese style and more refined than the cumbersome style of the West. Japanese believe that good art expresses the conflicts among individuals, families, and communities. Traditional forms of art include the tea ceremony, gardening and flower arranging, architecture, painting, sculpture, and the artistic handwriting form calligraphy. Artisans work with bamboo, paper, silk, ceramics, ivory, and lacquer.

Small clay figures called *haniwa* date back to the 200's BCE. These sculptures of animals, servants, and

everyday objects adorned the graves of important people. Buddhist temples also contain ancient sculptures made of wood, clay, or bronze. The Great Buddha at Kamakura is the most famous of these.



A laughing Buddha sculpture



## Theater

Theater in Japan combines music, dance, and drama. The oldest form of theater, the *noh* play, presents serious subjects, such as history, through movement, masks, and chanting. In the 1600's, *bunraku* became popular. Performances involve a narrator and large puppets controlled by silent handlers. The more lighthearted *kabuki* is famous for its distinct makeup and costumes. The many large cities of Japan have several symphony orchestras, museums, art galleries, and gardens. Cinemas show popular Western movies as well as Japanese films.

## Music

Traditional Japanese music relies on drums, flutes, gongs, and stringed instruments such as the *biwa*, *koto*, and *samisen*. Folk music has become rare, but performances are still well-attended. Popular Western music such as jazz, rock, and pop is widespread. Many Japanese songs combine Western instruments, style, and topics with Japanese lyrics. In the 1970's, the Japanese invented *karaoke*, which means “empty orchestra,” a popular form of musical entertainment in which people sing along to a backing track and read lyrics from a screen.

## Literature

Japan may lay claim to the world's first novel—*The Tale of Genji*, written by Murasaki Shikibu in the early

1000's. This classic is considered by many to be Japan's greatest work of fiction. The ancient poetry form *haiku* also remains popular.

## Fashion

Modern Japanese clothing resembles that worn in the United States and Western Europe. Men wear suits and ties to work. Older men stick to dark, conservative colors while younger men might wear brighter colors and patterns. Women wear skirts, blouses, slacks, or dresses. Silk scarves are a favorite accessory. Some people wear expensive designer clothes and many younger people wear trendier fashions. For school, children wear a uniform consisting of a dark jacket with matching pants, shorts, or skirt.

Traditional Japanese clothing can still be seen on special occasions such as weddings, funerals, or holidays. For women, this includes a long silk *kimono*, which is like a robe. A sash called an *obi* ties around the waist to hold it closed. Sandals called *zori* are the traditional footwear.



Women wear traditional, colorful kimonos

## Food and Drink

Japanese cuisine is famous for many raw or lightly cooked dishes, such as sushi—a combination of cooked rice, raw seafood, vegetables, and eggs served in various shapes. Tempura is a similar combination of foods served battered and deep-fried. Most meals include some form of rice, tofu (curd made from soybeans), or noodles, such as soba or udon. Fish is traditionally the main form of protein.

Japanese families eat out at restaurants regularly. In addition to typical Japanese food, they can choose from a variety of foreign restaurants, including Denny's and McDonald's. In fact, Japan's rice production has decreased about 50% in the past 50 years because younger people eat a less traditional diet than their elders. In addition to fish, they eat more beef, chicken, and pork. They also consume more fruit, dairy, and breads. As a result of this changing diet, Japanese youth are growing three to four inches (8 to 10 cm) taller than their grandparents did.

The Japanese typically serve tea at every meal. People around the world drink green tea from the region around Mount Fuji. Typical Japanese drinks also include sake (a rice-based alcohol), beer, and whiskey.

## JAPAN'S WILDLIFE

Japan's abundant rain and mild temperatures have created lush forests and plant growth throughout the country. The Ryukyu and Bonin Islands contain semi-tropical rainforests of oaks, ferns, camphor, and mulberries. Kyushu's southern coast is home to mangrove swamps. Vast forests of evergreens stretch throughout the mountains of the central and northern lands. On the high peaks of Yaku Island grow Japanese cedars more than 2,000 years old. Japan is famous for its colorful maple trees in fall and pink cherry blossoms in spring.

The remote forests provide a habitat for a wide variety of animals including bears, wild boars, foxes, deer, antelope, and wild monkeys called macaque. The reptile and amphibian populations include sea turtles, snakes, frogs, toads, and a Japanese giant salamander that can grow to four feet (1.2 meters) or longer. Over 600 bird species live in or migrate through Japan. The



Lotus blossom.

abundant waters are home to whales, dolphins, porpoises, and an extensive range of fish and crustaceans. Freshwater fish live in rivers and lakes throughout the country. Koi ponds, home to brightly-colored carp, are popular decorations.

## THE ECONOMY OF JAPAN

Since the end of World War II, Japan has made great strides economically. After complete devastation due to the war, Japan rebuilt its economy with help from Allied occupation forces. Land reforms led to more productive agriculture, and the growth of industry created a demand for consumer products. Japan has developed into a top economic power due to the cooperation between government and industry, its mastery of technology, and the strong work ethic among the labor force.

Japan now has the 5th largest economy in the world based on Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a measurement of goods and services produced. It boasts one of the world's lowest unemployment rates. Japan has the 9th largest labor force in the world, with over 65 million workers. It is a world leader (ranked 5th) in both imports and exports, with major ports in Chiba, Kobe, Nagoya, and Yokohama. Japanese families have higher incomes, more assets, and more savings than those in most other countries.

Despite these advantages, Japan faces some serious economic struggles. The national debt is the highest of any country in the world. The aging population, combined with a low birth rate, creates economic concerns—as more people reach old age, there are fewer young workers to support them. Japan has scarce natural resources, which makes it dependent on imports of raw materials. The 2001 earthquake and tsunami disaster increased this need by shutting down Japan's nuclear reactors.

### Agriculture

Japan's farmlands, though highly productive, account for a small portion of the economy. Only 12% of the land is useful for agriculture, so the Japanese import almost half of their food needs. Though the mountainous terrain is a disadvantage for farmers, the abundant rain and freshwater rivers make growing rice in wet paddies possible. Farmers increase their crop yields by using advanced seeds, fertilizers, and machinery along with the technique of terraced farming, which involves growing crops along strips of land cut into hillsides. Only 3% of Japan's huge labor force works in agriculture, down from 45% in 1950. As younger people leave farms for jobs in the city, the average age of Japan's farmers is increasing.

The primary crops are rice, barley, vegetables, tea, fruit, flowers, sugar cane, and wheat. Farmers also raise poultry, pork, and beef. Until 1999, Japan banned the import of rice in order to encourage self-sufficiency. However, consumers now want less government interference in food prices and import taxes in order to make food less expensive.

### Forestry and Fishing

Although forests cover 69% of Japan's land, much of these lumber resources grow in mountainous areas that can't be reached. In addition, logging in Japan is expensive and inefficient. As a result, the country imports lumber to meet most of its needs.

With its extensive coastline, Japan has abundant fishing resources. Fishing provides much of the nation's food as well as exports. Fishing workers engage in deep-sea fishing, raising clams and oysters, and farming freshwater pearls. Although many species of whales are endangered, Japan continues to practice whaling. As with agriculture, the age of fishing workers is increasing as younger workers seek jobs in cities.

Japan's waters suffer from over-fishing as well as pollution.

### Mineral and Energy Resources

Japan severely lacks mineral resources and has almost no energy resources of its own. Therefore, Japan

is the world's largest importer of coal and natural gas and the second-largest importer of oil. The many factories, businesses, and homes require a vast amount of energy that mainly comes from coal, natural gas, and petroleum. Until 2011, Japan got about 25% of its power from nuclear plants. However, an earthquake and tsunami in March of that year caused extensive damage to a nuclear power plant, releasing dangerous radioactivity into the environment. Since then, Japan has shut down all nuclear power plants.

Japan has only small reserves of coal, iron ore, zinc, lead, copper, and other minerals. Its infrastructure does not allow for efficient large-scale mining, so Japan imports these resources more cheaply than mining them.

### Manufacturing

Japan's great economic growth comes through its manufacturing. Since World War II, Japan has produced greater numbers, better quality, and more variety of goods, and has done so more and more efficiently than before. Japan's industrial plants rank among the world's largest and most advanced. Japan is home to major brands like Honda, Nissan, and Toyota (all automobiles), Panasonic, and Sony. Japan manufactures technologically advanced motor vehicles, electronics, and tools, as well as ships, chemicals, textiles, and processed

foods. A large portion of these goods are exported to other countries. Manufacturing plants typically import components, or pieces, and then assemble them into cars, computers, cameras, televisions, and other goods to sell at a large mark-up.

For a long time, Japan experienced trade surpluses with many other nations. That means the other nations bought more goods from Japan than Japan bought in return. Mainly wealthy countries in North America, Western Europe, and East Asia purchased consumer goods like cars and electronics. When these wealthy nations experienced economic slowdowns, they became uneasy with Japan's surpluses. As a result, the Japanese government eased restrictions on imported goods.

## Construction

As Japan rebuilt after the devastation of World War II, construction became an important sector of the economy. Roads, bridges, homes, factories, and buildings needed to be rebuilt. As the population soared, the demand for apartment buildings, offices, and shops increased. By the 1990's, Japan's large construction companies began to expand into other parts of the world, building large projects throughout Asia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

## Services

Over 70% of Japanese workers are employed in the service industry, and this sector accounts for about 70% of the economy. Japan's large population relies on many service workers such as bankers, accountants, teachers, doctors, lawyers, and managers. Many service jobs that require higher education provide good pay and benefits. Workers in small retail shops, theaters, and restaurants earn lower pay and have less job security.

## Transportation

Traditionally, the Japanese people traveled mainly on foot, sometimes using small wagons to transport goods. Beginning in the late 1800's, however, railways and iron ships became important means for transporting people and goods. In fact, the development of roads lagged behind car production and resulted in confusing and congested traffic patterns in the growing cities. Today, the huge number of automobiles clogging Japan's urban areas causes problems with pollution, noise, and traffic.

Tunnels and bridges connect all of Japan's major islands, and every major metropolitan area has an airport. The world's first undersea railway tunnel runs between Kyushu and Honshu. Japan is also home to the world's longest suspension bridge—the Akashi Kaikyo



Bridge that spans 6,529 feet (1,990 meters) between Honshu and Awaji Island.

## Communication

Japan's postal and communication networks are among the best in the world. Almost all citizens have access to the Internet, satellite television and radio, and cellular phones. Every day, Japan publishes about 120 newspapers and every year it publishes tens of thousands of new books. *Manga*, popular comic books for adults and children, have even become popular in the United States. Japanese families that own television sets pay a yearly license fee to the government, which controls broadcasting.

## JAPAN'S HISTORY

Japan's long history is quite decisively split into "before" and "after" World War II. For thousands of years before the war, Japan was a very isolated and politically turbulent nation, experiencing periods of war and social stagnation punctuated by periods of peaceful cultural growth. Since the end of the war, Japan has made significant political, social, and economic reforms and has strengthened ties with other nations.

### Jomon Period (10,000–300 BCE)

Until fairly recently, historians and archaeologists knew almost nothing about prehistoric Japan. Since

World War II, however, thousands of archeological sites have revealed stone tools crafted by the nation's earliest occupants. These people most likely migrated from mainland Asia across land straits that once connected Japan to the Korean peninsula. Around 10,000 BCE this ancient civilization used fire, hunted, and lived in pits or caves in villages of about 50 people. Without any evidence of pottery use, this period has been dubbed the Pre-Ceramic era.

From this early civilization arose the Jomon culture, which left more thorough records of their existence. Their use of pottery and creation of polished tools resemble typical cultures from around the world during this same era. However, the Jomon did not adopt the common practices of agriculture, weaving, or erecting stone monuments. Their highly developed pottery bore the impressions of ropes, giving rise to the name *jomon*, meaning "cord-marked." The Jomon wore clothing made mainly of bark, and jewelry made of seashells, stones, bones, horns, and clay.

### Yayoi Era (300 BCE–300 CE)

While the Jomon culture continued to develop, another culture called the Yayoi arose in Kyushu. The more advanced Yayoi spread eastward and eventually overtook the Jomon. Incorporating new technologies from China and Korea, the Yayoi learned to cultivate

and irrigate rice in wet paddies. They also used clay, fired at higher temperatures to increase strength, to make wheels. Bronze and iron tools and weapons also came into use during this period. The Yayoi used looms to weave vegetable fibers into cloth for clothing. Ancient burial sites indicate that Yayoi society included class divisions, as some graves are set apart from the others and surrounded by swords, beads, and mirrors.

### Kofun Era (300 CE–622 CE)

After the decline of the Yayoi culture around 300 CE, a centuries-long period called the Tumulus, or Tomb, period began. During this time, the Yamato culture arose and united the nation under a king. Their influence spread throughout the Yamato Plain, located southeast of modern Kyoto. They engaged in warfare with Korean kingdoms, erected religious shrines, and exchanged ideas with the Chinese. The Yamato built huge keyhole-shaped tombs, some over 1,000 feet (305 meters) tall, called *kofun* in which to bury their dead. As a result, the era is often known as the Kofun era. Swords, armor, arrowheads, and small clay sculptures called *haniwa* often surround the tombs.

During the 6th century, Yamato royalty began to lose power to various clans. As part of the struggle to reform the government, Prince Shotoku worked to spread Confucian and Buddhist ideals. However, his

reforms did not last. After Prince Shotoku's death in 622, a rival family killed his son and the nation fell into a period of turmoil. Reports of the powerful new Tang dynasty in China caused many Japanese to desire a similar powerful central government.

### Taika Reforms (645)

This desire was fulfilled in 645 when Japan experienced a complete coup d'état—a violent overthrow of the government. The head of the new imperial household, Kotoku, established himself as emperor and wiped out any forces that opposed the imperial family. Under the emperor, Japanese citizens could no longer own private land. Instead, most people worked as farmers on government land and paid taxes to the government. The emperor also established capital cities and a unified military. These reforms are called the Taika Reforms and they marked a new era of Japan as an independent nation. Most of the influence behind these reforms came from China, which had established systems for organizing society, managing land, and running the government.

Under various emperors, Japan's capital city shifted from Asuka to Nara, with a few other cities in between. Buddhism became more and more important in government and culture. Emperor Shomu, in particular, worked to spread Buddhism throughout the

nation and incorporate its ideals into the government. He founded several Buddhist temples, called *kokubunji*, to house monks and nuns who would attend to people's spiritual needs. However, the monks became more wealthy and powerful than anticipated, causing problems for the government. Later emperors cut ties with the temples and lessened the influence of Buddhism in matters of state.

### Heian Period (794)

In 794, Emperor Kammu again moved the capital to Heian-kyo, modern day Kyoto, giving rise to a period called the Heian Period that lasted several hundred years. A male head of the imperial family ruled as emperor while male heads of noble families filled other government roles. Noble women, who could not hold government positions, often spent time observing nature and writing poetry. This was a largely peaceful time of cultural growth and also indulgence by the wealthy imperial family. Japanese writing developed during this time and the warrior class known as *samurai* also arose. Toward the end of this era, powerful noble families, some of whom intermarried with the imperial family, weakened the emperor and his government.

The crumbling imperial government allowed for the creation of private estates. At first, these were Buddhist temples that functioned independently of the

government. Later, they grew to include private citizens who owned land without paying taxes or submitting to government interference. Some estates grew to be huge, requiring the employment of samurai to protect them and maintain order.

### First Shogun (Late 1100's)

In the late 1100's, two rival clans, both descended from noble families, clashed over control of the nation. Emperor Kiyomori, of the Taira clan, ruled in a particularly domi-



A statue of famous samurai  
Kusunoki Masashige

nant manner. Enemies of his, led by passed-over prince Yoritomo of the Minamoto clan, mounted an uprising. This Gempei War erupted into the largest conflict in Japan to date. After years of fighting, Japan's monarchy ended in the 1180's. In its place, a military government called a *shogunate* began. The capital was relocated to Kamakura in eastern Japan. Yoritomo became the first *shogun*, or military leader, under the emperor. He put his younger brothers in charge of suppressing the Taira while

he increased his own power by taking control of both private estates and public lands. He awarded positions over these estates to nobles who swore their loyalty to him.

The shogunate, however, was an unstable form of government. Over the next 200 years, the imperial government lost influence while private estate owners lost property and power to the shogun's supporters. The Minamoto family lost control to a clan called Hojo and the government in Kamakura fell to the Ashikaga clan. The Ashikaga established a new central government in Kyoto that lasted just over 100 years.

By the 1460's, Japan was reduced to a collection of warring clans with no central authority. Peasant farmers, private estate owners, and Buddhist monks all had to provide for their own protection. Some hired traveling samurai to form small private armies. Other samurai became powerful lords, called *daimyo*, controlling large areas of farmland and armies of warriors. The daimyo fought one another, leading to a long period of civil war in Japan.

During this time in the 1500's, a Christian missionary, Saint Francis Xavier, came to Japan from Portugal. In addition to sharing Christianity, he introduced the Japanese to luxury goods from Portuguese traders. The Japanese had little interest in converting to Christianity, but they eagerly bought European goods. The daimyo, especially, took interest in the advanced weapons and added firearms to aid them in war.

With the new advantage of European guns, a regional lord named Nobunaga brought the capital of Kyoto under his control. By commanding a large military force, he began to bring order to other areas of Japan. After Nobunaga's murder in 1582, Toyotomi Hideyoshi continued his efforts. Hideyoshi made several effective reforms to return order to the nation. He disarmed the peasant farmers, restored control to the disorderly samurai, and reorganized farmlands. With conditions improving in Japan, Hideyoshi even tried twice to invade Korea, but was unsuccessful.

### **Tokugawa House (1603)**

Another noble who had served under Nobunaga, Tokugawa Ieyasu, succeeded Hideyoshi in governing Japan. Given the title of shogun by the emperor, Tokugawa and his family ruled for the next 265 years. Under this system, the shogun carefully shared authority with the daimyo. The shogun controlled about one-fourth of the farmland and oversaw foreign trade, mining, and major cities, including his capital of Edo (now Tokyo). He also maintained a large military and the sole right to issue currency. Approximately 270 daimyo controlled the other three-fourths of the farmland. They ruled over their own domains, known as *han*, where they established laws and collected taxes.



## Seclusion Edicts (1630's)

During this time, groups of foreigners began to grow in Japan. Immigrants from Portugal, Spain, England, the Netherlands, and China brought with them their own religious beliefs and economic needs. The shogun saw their presence as a threat, both due to their largely Christian religion and their potential to trade and make individual daimyo more wealthy and powerful. Ieyasu thought that Christians would take sides with Hideyoshi's heir against him, and so took steps to prohibit Christianity.

The policy of outlawing Christianity continued under the following shoguns, even to the point of sacrificing foreign trade. In order to prevent foreign influence from toppling the delicate power structure in Japan, the shogun issued *seclusion edicts* - orders that expelled most foreigners. This policy of *sakoku* (or "closed country") allowed only a few Dutch and Chinese traders to remain, but they were confined to the city of Nagasaki. From this remote location, Japan maintained limited interaction with the European world until the mid-1800's. Even Japanese traders were prohibited from traveling overseas.

A period of isolation and internal growth followed. Japan had cut off most contact with the rest of the world and entered a time of peace after so many centuries of civil war. Japan's economy developed as workers focused

on their trades rather than fighting. Farmers and merchants alike learned to save and invest money. Financial firms developed and conducted trade and management operations. In the cities, arts and culture flourished. This period saw the development of distinctly new Japanese art and theater forms, such as *kabuki* (stage drama) and *bunraku* (puppet theater). Edo grew to become one of the largest cities in the world. As urban centers developed, communication and transportation also improved.

The Tokugawa era was not without its problems, however. The strict government discouraged individual freedoms. Its financial problems led to slow development of commercial entities. The feudal system that developed in Japan during this period was among the most rigid in world history. Society was divided into strict classes of warriors, farmers, artisans, and merchants. Women had especially low status, even within their own households. Peasant farmers, suffering poor harvests and harsh lords, joined together to protest. Meanwhile, the samurai became dissatisfied with declining incomes and the inability to improve their social standing.

## Japan Opened (1854)

Around 1845, British traders began putting pressure on Japan to open its ports for trade. The Dutch merchants, Japan's only European trading partner at

that point, became nervous that the British would cut into their profits. In response, diplomats from the Netherlands made efforts to control the opening of Japanese trade ports. However, the Japanese rulers refused. Over the next few years, British and French warships visited Japan to request trade relationships. Japan increased its defenses, but did not drive away the foreign ships as it had done in the past.

Pressure to open Japan's ports to foreign trade increased with the arrival of U.S. ships in 1846 and 1853. On the latter of these visits, Commodore Matthew C. Perry of the U.S. navy was rebuffed by the shogun. When he returned a year later, negotiations for trade began. By 1858, they succeeded in signing a trade treaty between Japan and the U.S. that opened five Japanese ports to international trade. In addition, it allowed for American citizens to fall under U.S. law while on Japanese soil.

Throughout Japan, the samurai and daimyo held divided opinions about the treaty. Many felt that the agreement was unfair because it granted Americans rights that the Japanese did not receive in return. Some became so enraged that they attacked and killed foreign officials. Others plotted, but failed, to overthrow the shogun government.

## Meiji Era (1868–1912)

Sweeping political changes came to Japan in 1868 when imperial rule again replaced the shogunate government. That year, a group of samurai convinced the shogun to resign and restored power to the imperial house. Without the consent of the Japanese people, they acted on the belief that Japan needed to become more secure and competitive with Western powers. A boy emperor named Meiji, or “Enlightened Rule,” became the head of the government in a revolution known as the Meiji Restoration. In reality, the leaders who masterminded the revolution ruled the country more so than the young emperor.

As the feudal system of the Tokugawa house crumbled under the combined stresses of foreign influence and internal strife, the new emperor shifted the nation's focus from isolation to unification. He moved into the Tokugawa castle in Edo and changed the city's name to Tokyo. Powerful nations of the West served as Japan's new model for constitutional unity, industrial power, and military strength. The slogan “Enriching the Nation and Strengthening the Military” became Japan's new motto. The government invested in economic development of the nation, including the development of mines, shipyards, and factories. Eventually, the government was unable to run these industries efficiently. It sold many ventures to private groups typically owned and run by a



Narita's Gaku-do Hall, erected in 1861

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family. These *zaibatsu*, as they became known, grew to be very large and wealthy while helping the government reach its goals of enriching the nation.

The imperial government persuaded lords to return their extensive lands to control under the throne. The daimyo became governors over newly established prefectures, or were removed from political positions entirely. The samurai were reduced to commoners, and their distinct hairstyle and privilege of carrying swords were abolished. At first, the government paid former

samurai an annual pension, but this practice ended in 1876 due to financial strains.

Some samurai found work leading the newly enriched military force. As part of the nation's strategy to increase defenses, the Meiji leadership recruited former farmers to serve as soldiers. It also invested in shipbuilding and weapons. After just two decades, Japan became the top military power in East Asia.

Political changes occurred as a result of the Meiji Restoration. Government leaders established the nation's first Constitution. It set the emperor as the



official head of government along with prime ministers, Cabinet members, and a legislature with two houses. It also organized the court system and identified the rights of citizens. While Japanese people gained more freedom to pursue an occupation of their own choosing, they had little power or influence in government. By law, males became head of the household and women's rights were even more limited than they had been in the past.

The final facet of Japan's enrichment was the development of national pride. Toward this end, the government established a public school system, which allowed people to improve their social and economic status. It

also served to build a sense of superiority among the people. The government also used religious ideology to build national unity, replacing Buddhism as the top religion with Shinto—a system of beliefs that supported the throne.

### Imperialism Begins (1895)

After the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese became strong enough to expand their influence into Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria by military force. Following the example of other powerful empires, such as Britain, Japan's sense of superiority and desire for growth led to

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The Imperial Palace in Tokyo



war and imperialism—the rule over a foreign land by force.

Their first victory came against China in 1895, when Japan won a short war to take control of Taiwan. They used this new land acquisition as an agricultural colony, providing the nation with rice and sugar. Then, in 1905, Japan entered into a five-year war against Russia to gain control of Korea. During this time, they also gained ground in Manchuria. Once again, they exploited the new conquest for rice, industry, and workers. The Japanese treated the Koreans poorly and the Koreans resented their colonization.

### Japan Enters World War I (1914)

World War I provided further opportunities for Japan to extend its influence. In 1914, Japan took sides with Britain and the Allies against Germany. As the war effort drew the attention of Western nations away from trade and investment in the East, Japan capitalized on new opportunities. Exporters and manufacturers moved into newly deserted markets in India and other parts of Asia. As Japan's economy boomed, the *zaibatsu* (family businesses) became even larger.

### Military Takes Control of Government (1930)

The boom times were short lived. The end of the war brought a renewal of Western trade in India and

Asia, cutting into Japan's commercial ventures. Combined with the worldwide economic depression of the late 1920's, Japan's economy suffered. The situation became worse when a massive earthquake struck Tokyo, killing over 140,000 people and causing extensive damage. Meanwhile, strengthened Chinese forces threatened Japan's holdings in Manchuria.

By the 1930's, Japan's leaders could no longer handle the many problems facing the nation. As the prime minister and other officials struggled to maintain control, the military became more powerful and aggressive. In 1931, they took back control of Manchuria. Officials who opposed the army faced threats from nationalist groups—those who sought to build up the nation again. The following year, a group of nationalists assassinated the prime minister and the military took control of the government.

Under new military leadership, Japan sought to increase its territory and influence. As Japanese armies marched through China and Southeast Asia, world powers became concerned. At that time, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy were causing trouble in the West. Japan's pacts with these two countries set them squarely against the United States and other Allied nations.

## World War II (1941–1945)

Japan did not immediately enter into World War II at its start in 1939. Instead, it slowly sent troops into French Indochina. By 1941, Japanese troops had moved further south, causing the United States to take action. When the U.S. cut off exports to Japan, newly instituted Prime Minister General Hideki Tojo prepared for war.

War came suddenly and by surprise in the form of an air strike against U.S. military bases at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The Japanese also bombed U.S. bases in other areas of the Pacific, including Guam and the Philippines. Spurred into action by these attacks, the United States entered into war against Japan and its allies, Germany and Italy.

At first, the war with Japan seemed evenly matched. Japan gained ground with victories in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. The Battle of the Coral Sea, which pitted U.S. and Australian navies against Japan, resulted in somewhat of a draw. Then the U.S. won a decisive victory at the Battle of Midway. Suffering a string of defeats, the Japanese government began to crumble in 1944.

At that point, the United States went after the Japanese homeland, bombing cities and industrial targets, and blocking imports of vital supplies. On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, causing complete devastation. Days later, the United States bombed Nagasaki with an even

larger atomic bomb. Meanwhile, Russia jumped on the weakened nation by invading Manchuria and Korea.

Facing inevitable defeat, Emperor Hirohito agreed to surrender on August 14. As the sole condition, he requested that the Allies respect the wishes of the Japanese people to preserve the imperial position of emperor. With that settled, Japanese officials boarded an American battleship and agreed to the terms set forth by the Allies. This included surrender of all Japanese territory in mainland Asia and islands in the Pacific. It reduced Japan to just four main islands and a few smaller surrounding ones. It wasn't until decades later that the United States turned over control of the Bonin Islands, Iwo Jima, and the Ryukyu Islands to Japan. Russia still occupies the Kuril Islands, once Japan's territory.

## Japanese Constitution (1946)

After the war, U.S. forces, under the direction of General Douglas MacArthur, occupied Japan to oversee its reforms. The Japanese government remained, but only to carry out the ideals of the American-inspired changes. As part of these changes, more than 5 million Japanese troops were disarmed. Thousands of military leaders and soldiers were tried for war crimes and more than 900 were executed. Others were imprisoned.

MacArthur and his advisors established a new Constitution for Japan. It removed power from the

emperor, maintaining him only as a figurehead. A new two-part legislature became the new lawmaking body, and a prime minister, elected by the legislature, became the head of the government. The Constitution also expanded the rights of citizens, especially those of women and children. Occupying forces worked to reorganize and rebuild Japan's social and economic structures. They redistributed farmlands, changed the educational system, and legalized labor unions. With the support of the emperor, the new Constitution was well-received by most Japanese.

Allied occupation continued until April 28, 1952, when Japan signed a peace treaty with 48 nations.

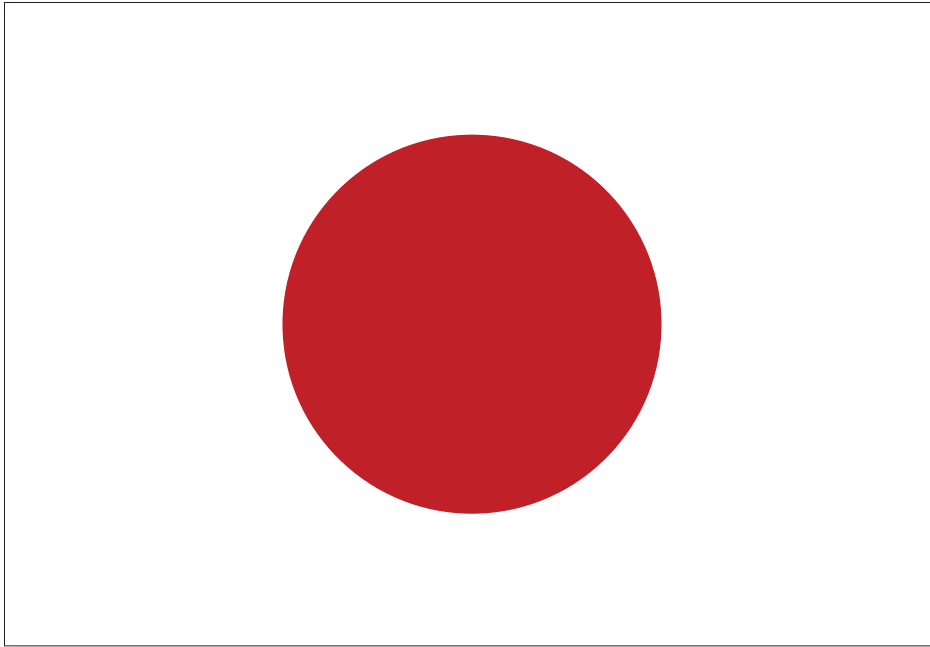
## Postwar Period

Despite optimistic reforms, Japan was in bad shape after the war. Bombing had destroyed most large cities and many industrial resources. Most Japanese lost their jobs and lived in poverty. They faced inflation and famine, living in poor conditions in rural villages. With so many trading ships destroyed, Japan was unable to renew trade with foreign partners. In addition, the

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Gardens surround Tokyo's Imperial Palace



Flag of Japan

currency was worth so little it couldn't purchase as much from other nations.

After about a decade of concentrated effort and financial assistance from the United States, Japan began to recover. The nation's strong work ethic, along with wise money management, helped it return to prewar economic levels by the mid-1950's. People began moving back to cities, leaving farming for service and industry jobs. Even the imperial house eased into modern times with Crown Prince Akihito marrying a commoner in 1959 and Emperor Hirohito leaving the country in 1971 for a first-ever royal visit to Western Europe.

## Modern Challenges

In 1989, Emperor Akihito began his reign in a time of political and economic turmoil. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had been the ruling political party since the 1950's, became corrupt. The next decade saw several changes with respect to party influence and coalitions.

Meanwhile, Japan's strong currency, high labor costs, and high real estate values made its manufactured goods expensive for foreign trade partners. Consumers began to favor low-priced goods from developing nations over Japan's exports. In addition, the banking system suffered from loans that defaulted due to a drop in real estate prices in the 1990's. Like



many other nations at the time, Japan entered an economic recession. Unemployment rose, spending declined, and incomes stopped growing.

In 2001, dynamic leader Junichiro Koizumi became prime minister, promising economic reforms that would revive the nation. He was succeeded by Shinzo Abe in 2006, who resigned shortly thereafter due to a series of scandals. After several changes in leadership, including 11 different prime ministers in 13 years, Abe again rose to the position of prime minister in 2012. He has continued working for economic reform in Japan.

In March of 2011, Japan suffered the devastating effects of the most powerful earthquake to ever hit the nation, just off the coast of Honshu. It triggered a tsunami—a 23-foot ocean wave—that flooded cities and rural areas. It swept away homes, trains, cars, and people, leaving a path of complete destruction. As a result of the tsunami, a nuclear power plant leaked dangerous radioactivity into the environment. In addition, some 16,000 people were killed and thousands of others went missing.

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