This chapter is about aspects of Japanese history in its classical and early feudal periods — from AD 794 to about AD 1600. During the classical and feudal periods, some features of Japanese life were similar to those of Europe during its medieval period. Many other aspects reflected the distinct nature of Japanese culture.

### Historical knowledge and understanding
- Learn about the concept of dynastic time and change and continuity in the context of classical and feudal Japan.
- Learn about the contribution of Murasaki Shikibu to classical Japan’s identity.
- Learn about cause and effect in relation to Kublai Khan’s actions and intentions in feudal Japan.

### Historical reasoning and interpretation
- Frame questions and investigations to extend your knowledge of classical and feudal Japan, recognising that people can interpret events in different ways.
- Develop skills in gathering and documenting evidence from a wide range of sources and make judgements about what they can reveal of the culture and values of classical and feudal Japan.
- Communicate your understanding through a variety of presentations.

### Timeline of significant events in Japan’s history

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan has contact with China</td>
<td>AD 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>710 The imperial court is established at Nara</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>794 The Heian period begins — a time of cultural and artistic development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1192 Yoritomo becomes shogun; Japan is ruled by a military style government; the Mongols under Kublai Khan invade Japan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1333 Japan is under imperial rule for a brief time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1336 Japan has its first contact with Europeans; Christianity arrives in Japan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1543 Portuguese traders arrive in Japan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1576 The shogunless period begins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1603 Japan closes its door to the West; the country is under military rule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
artisan: a skilled worker who produces handmade items
bakufu: a term meaning ‘tent government’ and referring to the alternative government that Minamoto no Yoritomo established at Kamakura (near Tokyo) in 1185. It became the basis of the first of Japan’s shogun-run governments.
bushi: the warrior class of Japan, which included shoguns, daimyo and samurai
bushido: the way of the warrior; the rules that prescribed the correct behaviour for all samurai
daimyo: the lord of a domain or han
dynasty: a family of rulers; the period of time a family remained in power
eta: an outcast group who, according to the Shinto and Buddhist faiths, did ‘impure work’ such as burial of the dead
feudal: describes the system where daimyos held their land and castles in return for loyalty to the shogun, and samurai owed their position through loyalty to their daimyo
hinin: (non-people) referred to beggars, travelling performers and scavengers
hiragana: set of about 50 phonetic symbols used, in combination with Chinese characters, for writing Japanese
kami: spirit beings; a Japanese word applied to anything beautiful or extraordinary — an exceptional tree, mountain, stone or person
koku: a measure of rice equal to about 23 litres of dry rice — enough to feed one person for a year
meditation: a quiet way of concentrating and emptying the mind of all thoughts
miso: thick paste used in Japanese cooking, made from fermented soya beans, salt and soy sauce
moral: a high understanding of good and acceptable behaviour
Nanban: a word meaning ‘southern barbarian’ that became the Japanese word for ‘Europeans’ from c.1543 until the late nineteenth century
nirvana: in Buddhism, the attainment of perfect peace and blessedness
ritual: a formal procedure
ronin: literally ‘wave-man’ — a person tossed about on the sea of life; used to describe a samurai without a daimyo lord
samurai: the warriors of Japan from about the eleventh century until 1876; samurai served their daimyo lords and lived in the castle towns
shogun: literally ‘barbarian-subduing-great-general’; the Japanese emperor’s chief military adviser with the duty to protect Japan from foreign invasion
shrine: a place of worship
THE ORIGINS OF CLASSICAL AND FEUDAL JAPAN

Japan is an island state to the east of the Asian mainland. It includes the four main islands of Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu and Shikoku and as many as 4000 small islands. The first people to live there were the Jomon, a stone-age people who arrived sometime before 10 000 BC. Over time, other groups joined them. They lived in small individual communities until the fourth century when groups began to join together to form small states. By the fifth century, the Yamato dynasty had established itself as the leading power in Japan and claimed the right to instate one of its members as emperor (or empress) of all Japan.

Source 3.1.1

A map showing the location of Japan — east of the Asian mainland — its four main islands and its key cities

The earliest written histories of Japan date to the early eighth century and are a mixture of fact, myth and legend. In these histories, the emperor is said to be descended from the sun goddess. A grandson of the goddess, Ninigi, settled in northern Kyushu and held three sacred objects:
- a mirror, a symbol of the sun
- a sword, discovered in the belly of an eight-headed serpent
- a jewel.
They became symbols of the monarchy.

Source 3.1.2

A shrine in Kobe, Japan

Often a regent took on the main business of government for the emperor. Prince Shotoku (AD 574–622) served as regent during the reign of his aunt, Empress Suiko (from AD 592). He admired many aspects of Chinese culture and government. He wrote Japan’s first constitution, basing it on the Chinese model with the Confucian emphasis on social harmony. Japan’s capital, Nara, was modelled on the Chinese city of Chang’an.

Prince Shotoku also established a system of twelve official ranks, based on systems used in China and Korea. People other than those of the most powerful families could gain a rank, and the privileges that went with it, through a combination of loyalty, talent and special service to the government.

Japan began to officially adopt many aspects of the Chinese way of life. This trend continued until the end of the classical period. Scholars began using the Chinese writing script and studying Chinese language and literature, and the Buddhist religion became popular. In AD 645 the Emperor Naka no Oe (AD 626–671) introduced the Taika Laws, which created a strong central government ruled by a Grand Council of State and supported by the governors of each of Japan’s 67 provinces.
In AD 794, the emperor Kammu moved the capital from Nara to Heian-Kyo (modern-day Kyoto), which was to remain the capital for over 1000 years. The emperors and their court lived in a luxury not seen in Western European courts until the eighteenth century.

The Heian period was Japan’s ‘classical age’, so-called because of the recognition it gave to art, poetry and literature and the importance of these to the creation of a national culture. Murasaki Shikibu described this in her famous novel *The Tale of Genji* (see spread 3.7). While Chinese culture still influenced Japanese life, people began to adapt it to suit Japanese culture. Many writers began to use hiragana, the new script that enabled people to write in everyday Japanese.

**Towards Feudal Japan**

To maintain his rule, the emperor needed support from nobles who were sent out to manage the provinces. The nobles were allowed to have their own armed guards for protection and these came to be known as bushi (warriors) or samurai (retainers). Over time, the nobles became rich from crops grown on their private estates and taxes they collected, and loyalty developed between the nobleman and his samurai. During the twelfth century, the nobles increased their power and the emperor lost his authority. The nobles then fought one another.

The second half of the twelfth century was marked by fighting throughout Japan, as well as natural disasters such as floods, typhoons and earthquakes. The final victor in 1185 was Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199).

After his victory, Yoritomo made a decision that was to influence Japan’s history up to the present day. Instead of making himself emperor, he asked the Imperial Court to recognise his power with the title *sei i tai-shogun* (barbarian-subduing-great-general). At the same time the emperor was to keep his symbolic position. Both men gained by this. The shogun appeared as a genuine ruler, not just someone in power because of his military strength. The emperor was allowed to retain some of his prestige and given a degree of protection. This also meant that there was a line of divine authority from the emperor through the shogun to the nobles who were beneath him.

Minamoto no Yoritomo’s victory in 1185 marked the beginning of Japan’s feudal era. This was an important turning point in Japanese history. It showed that, from now on, it would be the samurai warrior class who would be the real rulers of Japan and not the court and aristocracy.

**Activities**

**Understand**

1. According to legend, what were the three sacred objects that were passed from the sun goddess to the emperor?
2. Create and illustrate a flow chart to show the different periods in Japan’s history from c.10 000 BC to AD 1185.
3. What did the term *sei i tai-shogun* mean and why did Yoritomo feel that he deserved this title?
4. What was the significance of Yoritomo’s victory?

**Use sources**

5. Study the map in source 3.1.1.
   (a) What are the four main islands of Japan?
   (b) On which island have the capitals since AD 710 been located?
   (c) Why do you think Korean culture would have influenced Japan?
   (d) Which other country strongly influenced Japan’s culture?
6. Examine the picture of the shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo (source 3.1.3). What clue does the artist give us that this is a person of high rank?

**Worksheets**

3.1 Getting to know Japan
Social and political structures during Japan’s classical and feudal eras saw people strictly divided into classes, with virtually no chance of moving to a higher group.

### The Emperor and the Nobility

From about AD 500, the emperor was the most powerful person in Japan. He commanded the armed forces, made laws and controlled Japan’s wealth and food resources. The people thought of him as a god.

The emperor gave power to others as members of the nobility, in return for their service and loyalty. In the feudal period, he also appointed (in writing) the shogun, a position he usually gave to the most powerful warlord. The shogun supplied the funds that supported the emperor. Some of the male members of the emperor’s family took on roles within the government or the army, although they did not gain positions that would make them a threat to the power of either the emperor or the shogun.

Japan’s noble class were powerful families with high social status. Members of these families might serve as ministers within the government. A noble’s wealth came largely from the taxes gained from the land under his control.

### The Shogun, the Warlords and the Samurai

From the time of Yoritomo’s victory in 1185, the shogun had the highest status within this group. He was ‘the great general’ who would lead the emperor’s army in time of need and who also took charge of the day-to-day management of the government.

The shogun could take action only with the written approval of the emperor. It was his duty to protect the emperor and his family and also the capital, Kyoto. If the shogun betrayed the emperor’s wishes, the other daimyo or warlords, each with their own lands, finances and armies, had a duty to overthrow him.

The warlord’s wealth came from taxes paid to him by those of lower status, whom he controlled, and by what he had gained in war. He had to give part of these ‘earnings’ to the shogun or to an overlord — someone not yet shogun who was more powerful than the average warlord.

Beneath this group was the warrior class, the bushi or samurai. The samurai had high social status within the warrior class. The warlords often

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**Source 3.2.1** An artist’s representation of some of the levels of Japanese society

The shogun was the most powerful warlord. He commanded military and economic power and effectively ruled the country, controlling laws and taxes.

Merchants were almost the lowest class in feudal Japan. They sold the goods and lent the finance needed by many to fund the constant civil wars.
They paid their salaries as only some of them had large landholdings from which they could gain taxes to support themselves. They followed a code of behaviour called **bushido**. In the classical period, they were part-time soldiers and gained their income from farming. In the sixteenth century, the daimyo ordered them to live in castle towns, where they could be quickly called on to protect the daimyo's property.

Ranked below the samurai were the average soldiers. They had higher social status than the farmers of their villages. Some soldiers were **ronin**, a word meaning ‘wave man’. These men would work for anyone who would pay them and were not in the service of a particular warlord.

**OTHER GROUPS**

Doctors, painters, poets, priests and teachers came next in the social scale. After these, came the farmers. They were valued because they produced the rice that kept the country going. Rice was also a way of measuring a warlord’s wealth and people usually used **kokuj**, the basic measure of rice, instead of money.

**Artisans** and craftspeople and then urban workers in service roles (such as tea-house attendants) were lower again on the social scale. Finally came merchants and traders. Those in power despised them because they did not work to produce anything. Merchants and traders could become quite wealthy but could not buy their way into a position of higher status.

**THE NON-CLASSED PEOPLE**

These were outcasts, labelled **hinin**, meaning ‘non-human’ or **eta** meaning ‘unclean’. This latter group included butchers, jailers and executioners.
The World of Work

Farming

Ninety per cent of the population worked in farming. Farmers provided the food that kept society going. Not surprisingly, the upper classes valued this and regarded farmers as being more important than artisans and merchants on the social scale, although less important than the samurai. This did not mean that they treated them well or showed them any real consideration.

Farming and growing rice — Japan’s main crop — was a hard life. Farmers planted rice in fields flooded with water and also reared fish there as an extra source of food and income. It was back-breaking work. Farmers had to overcome the difficulties of a poor water supply and limited amounts of flat land to produce the large quantities of rice needed in a country with a population of several million and very limited supplies of meat. To create more farming land, they cut terraces into the hillsides.

Peasants struggled to pay their debts. If they couldn’t pay them, they risked becoming enslaved to the person from whom they had borrowed. Some ten per cent of them became slaves.

Laws limited farmers’ freedom so that they would not waste time on non-farming tasks. For example, at one stage the emperor ordered farmers’ wives to take their husbands’ meals out to the fields so that the men could be kept working to the maximum. As in medieval Europe, the daimyo (lord) controlled farming and farmers paid him a tax in kind based on the amount of rice grown.

Farmers had to be self-sufficient. They grew or caught their own food, made clothing from materials such as cotton, hemp and flax, and in cooking made use of soy in products such as miso.

Source 3.3.1

A painting from the series Famous views of the fifty-three stations c.1840, by the renowned Japanese artist, Hiroshige. It shows peasants working rice paddies as they had done for centuries.
The Japanese obtained a variety of fish and other sea products. They used baited lines rather than nets and so the process was time-consuming and did not return large catches. Deep-sea fishing brought in mackerel, shark, squid, and tuna. Closer to the beach, men and women collected crabs, prawns, and shellfish. Women often dived for highly prized items such as pearls and coral.

Japan had many skilled artisans and craftspeople. They produced finely crafted swords and metal tools, as well as prized items for the household such as furniture, pottery, and fine cloth. They also produced paper and magnificent woodblock prints as well as beautifully painted scrolls and screens.

Merchants worked as money-lenders, importers and exporters, and transporters of goods. They earned interest on the money they loaned to those in need and sent rice and other goods to market either by river or by sea.

Activities

Use sources
1. What different activities can you identify in source 3.3.1? What does the source indicate about working methods, clothing, and tools?
2. What types of information could a historian gain from source 3.3.2?

Teamwork
3. Work in groups of four or five to research and script imaginary interviews with workers from classical and/or feudal Japan. Have members of each group develop questions to ask group members who have taken on key roles. The interviewer's questions and workers' replies should inform the audience of:
   • the specific nature of the work each person did
   • the materials, tools, and techniques they used
   • any other information relevant to understanding what life was like for them.

Source 3.3.2 A woodblock colour print c.1830 by Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849). The picture shows people collecting shellfish, a practice dating back centuries.
HOME AND FAMILY

HOUSING

China had a strong influence on building styles in Japan; however, Japanese architecture was not as ornate and placed more emphasis on designing buildings that were sympathetic to the environment.

Japanese houses were usually one storey high and made of paper, straw and wood. These materials caused minimal damage to people and property if the house collapsed during an earthquake.

CASTLE DESIGN AND DEFENCES

Early Japanese castles (around AD 1300) were simply temporary fortresses used only in times of war. These first castles were modelled on the warrior chiefs’ own homes, with the addition of a watchtower. They were built on mountain ridges to provide a good lookout and to prevent enemies attacking easily. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, wars between rival lords became more common, so strong permanent buildings were needed.

The golden age of castle construction came between 1568 and 1616. The castles of this time were very elaborate buildings. Many were on plains rather than mountains. They had an outer moat, solid stone foundations, huge stone walls and several watchtowers. Most also had a steeply sloping road leading to the main gateway and several other gates to act as escape routes. Through slits in the castles’ interior walls samurai could fire arrows or muskets at any invaders.

Family Ties and Obligations

People had very firm ideas about roles within a family and ways to behave towards other family members. They believed that they should always think of the needs of the family before their own personal needs or wants. The young gave great respect to their elders, who had gained wisdom through their life experiences. This sometimes meant that individuals made great personal sacrifices in order to live up to family expectations and those of family elders.

The male was the head of the household. This role passed from father to eldest son down through the generations. Women lived traditional ‘female’ roles — as wives, mothers, daughters and, only rarely and in small ways, as individuals in their own right.

Families lived and worked together. In farming communities, this meant children worked from as early an age as possible, moving from simple to more complicated tasks as they gained in age, ability, strength and experience.
The Shinto religion emphasised ancestor worship. This meant that people believed that the spirits of their dead ancestors could influence their lives. Therefore, they showed honour and respect for their dead ancestors by making shrines to them within the family home, and through prayers, offerings and festivals.

Buddhists encourage their family spirits to return to earth at the festival of Obon (also known as Bon), a three-day festival that has been held each summer for over 500 years. During this time, people remember the past seven generations of their ancestors and provide special food to welcome ancestors back to their homes and help release them from any suffering. The festival ends when people float lanterns on the rivers, lakes and seas to guide their ancestors back to the spirit world.

**Activities**

**Understand**

1. What values were important in traditional Japanese family life?
2. What were the advantages of this?
3. What aspects of this structure might a twenty-first century Australian find difficult to adhere to?

**Source 3.4.2**

Image showing Himeji Castle and its defences

**ANCESTOR WORSHIP**

The Shinto religion emphasised ancestor worship. This meant that people believed that the spirits of their dead ancestors could influence their lives. Therefore, they showed honour and respect for their dead ancestors by making shrines to them within the family home, and through prayers, offerings and festivals.

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**Activities**

**Understand**

1. What values were important in traditional Japanese family life?
2. What were the advantages of this?
3. What aspects of this structure might a twenty-first century Australian find difficult to adhere to?

**Use sources**

4. What do sources 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 show you about how housing design reflected the owner’s needs and income.
5. Copy and complete the following table using information from the text and source 3.4.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Castle feature</th>
<th>Use in defence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dry moat</td>
<td>Would tempt invaders and could then be flooded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dig deeper**

6. Find out more about how the Bon or Obon Festival is celebrated today and write a short word-processed article reporting on its celebration in one area of Japan in the past twelve months.

**Research and communicate**

7. Through research and discussion in small groups, write a report comparing European castles of the Middle Ages and Japanese castles. Research in the library or on the Internet. Refer to pages 36–9 for some information on European castles. To explore Himeji Castle through photographs, visit the website for this book and click on the Himeji Castle weblink for this chapter (see ‘Weblinks’, page xii).

**Worksheets**

3.4 Intruder at Himeji Castle
RITUALS, VALUES AND BELIEFS

SHINTO — ‘WAY OF THE GODS’

Nature had a special place in the lives of the first inhabitants of Japan. Inspired by magnificent rivers, snow-covered mountains and mysterious forests, people began to believe in the kami (spirit beings) of these places. These beliefs grew into a religion called Shinto or ‘the way of the gods’. The Shinto shrine was a vital place where village communities celebrated the change of seasons, prayed for good harvests or participated in a ceremony to purify themselves and wash away physical and moral pollution.

The basic beliefs of Shinto are as follows:

- **Tradition and the family:** Birth, marriage and other ceremonies related to family life are especially significant.
- **Love of nature:** Being in contact with nature means being in contact with the gods.
- **Physical cleanliness:** Bathing, washing the hands and rinsing the mouth are part of daily life and are observed in visits to Shinto shrines.
- **Religious festivals:** Honouring the spirits is an opportunity for people to come together to enjoy life and each other’s company.

Source 3.5.1

The Shinto religion emphasises the importance of family. These traditional values are still important in Japan today as can be seen in this photograph of a grandmother, mother and daughter at a Shinto shrine.

Source 3.5.2

Itsukushima Shrine and torii gate, Miyajima Island, Japan. Torii gates are a feature of the Shinto religion and are a common sight in Japan. They symbolise the separation of the ‘real world’ from the spirit world. They are built near shrines as well as in places of natural beauty.

BUDDHA AND CONFUCIUS

Between the sixth and ninth centuries, Buddhism and Confucianism reached Japan by way of China and Korea. Both these beliefs had a profound influence on Japanese society.

Buddhism began in northern India about 2500 years ago when Prince Siddhartha Gautama realised a way to find nirvana or perfect peace. He became known as the ‘Buddha’, which means ‘enlightened one’. His teachings spread gradually from India to most other parts of East Asia.
In Japan, members of the emperor’s court were among the first Buddhist converts, but after the twelfth century, ordinary people increasingly accepted the new faith. Many Japanese became both Shinto and Buddhist. Shinto was a religion for everyday events like birth and weddings while Buddhism offered spiritual understandings of death and the world beyond.

Buddhism teaches that humans can achieve nirvana by truly knowing ‘Four Noble Truths’:
1. All life involves suffering.
2. Suffering is caused by desire.
3. Desire can be overcome.
4. The way to overcome desire is to follow the ‘Eightfold Path’ (see source 3.5.5).

Zen is a special form of Buddhism that came to Japan during the 1100s and 1200s. Zen Buddhists practise meditation to gain a better understanding of life and the universe. A personal teacher or ‘master’ plays an important role in helping followers to achieve new ways of thinking.

Confucianism is not usually regarded as a religion. It is more a set of rules based on the ideas of the Chinese scholar and teacher Confucius.

Confucianism contributed greatly to the development of social institutions, political organisation and education in Japan. Its ideas included the principles of loyalty and ‘filial piety’, the belief that children owe a duty to their parents and must always obey them. Filial piety also applied to the dutiful relationship between the samurai warriors and their Japanese lords.

**Activities**

**Understand**

1. Match up each of the following statements with one of the four main religions mentioned in this section:
   (a) the earliest religion of Japan
   (b) the religion that stressed the role of a ‘master’
   (c) the religion that came from northern India
   (d) a set of rules for life rather than a religion.

**Use sources**

2. Look at source 3.5.5 and read the eight points on the Noble Eightfold Path.
   (a) Which three of these points refer to how you should live in your normal day-to-day existence?
   (b) Which three points have a focus on meditation and the way you use your mind?

**Worksheets**

3.5 Japanese religions
The Japanese have a long tradition of cultural expression in literature, arts, crafts and ceremonies in which people follow rituals.

While many traditions originated in mainland Asia, refinements over many centuries have made them distinctively Japanese. Buddhism has made major contributions to Japanese arts and culture: e.g. richly illustrated books and the ornate architecture of pagodas, gates and cloisters. Many of these cultural traditions continue to be practised in Japan today.

### TEA CEREMONIES

Buddhist monks first practised ritual tea drinking in the fourteenth century to keep them awake during meditation, and later the ceremony spread to other members of society. A Portuguese priest, Father João Rodrigues (1563–1633), who spent thirty years in Japan, described the purpose of the tea ceremony as ‘to produce courtesy, politeness, modesty, exterior moderation, calmness, peace of body and soul, without any pride or arrogance’.

### Source 3.6.2

Photograph of a Noh play

Attending plays became a popular pastime in the imperial court. Many distinctive forms of Japanese drama in the feudal era — noh, kabuki and bunraku — are still popular today.
Noh drama was the creation of a fourteenth-century Shinto priest. It began as a dramatic way of presenting Shinto and Buddhist beliefs but came to be used for non-religious themes as well. Actors come onto the stage by walking through the audience along a raised passageway. Three small pine trees and a row of pebbles at the front of the stage indicate that the plays were originally performed outdoors. Apart from this, the stage is usually bare. The actors and chorus are all male, even when playing the parts of women. Some actors wear fine masks and represent emotions by the way they move their heads and bodies.

Kabuki was the popular form of theatre with spectacular scenery, extravagant costumes and violent and exciting actions. As in the noh plays, men played women’s roles and the greatest actors were, and still are, those who can perfect the posture, gestures and voices of women.

Bunraku used stories similar to those in kabuki but the ‘actors’ were half life-size puppets. Unlike human actors, puppets could be beheaded on stage, or make leaps impossible for humans. The dramatic action was accompanied by a shamisen, a three-stringed instrument. Japanese puppets were moved by hand, not strings, and the performers, who manipulated the puppets and spoke the lines, became celebrated figures in society.

In medieval Japan, rich men and women lived a life quite separate from that of ordinary men and women. It was referred to as the ‘floating world’ and was best shown in the prints of the period. These were called ukiyo-e, which meant ‘pictures of the floating world’.

The images were first carved into wooden blocks (with the image reversed). Areas that were to remain white were cut away. Ink was then spread over the raised sections of the block and thin paper was laid face-down across it. The back of the paper was rubbed to transfer all the colour. By the eighteenth century, techniques for printing four colours were developed, by making a separate block for each colour.

These small containers of lacquerware were probably first used around the twelfth century to carry seals and seal paste to stamp on documents. However, by the late medieval period they had been adapted for carrying medicines. The beautiful decoration of inro (often with gold or silver foil) showed the owners’ status and wealth.

**Source 3.6.3**

Two finely lacquered inro from the Edo period (1601–1868)

**Activities**

**Understand**

1. What elements of the tea ceremony are related to:  
   (a) Shintoism  
   (b) Buddhism?

2. What were the three main forms of drama? 
   Describe the differences between each form.

3. What actions could be done on stage using puppets that would be impossible with human actors?

4. Give examples where modern film techniques have made many of these things appear possible for human actors.

**Communicate**

5. Look at source 3.6.2. With a partner, take turns in wearing a simple mask that covers your face. Try to convey different emotions just by moving your body.

**Use sources**

6. Provide 10 to 15 lines of text on one of the pictures shown in sources 3.6.1 to 3.6.3. Your text should indicate the significance of the picture to Japanese cultural expression and the techniques and skills associated with it. Use the Internet to help you with your research.

**Design and create**

7. Making a proper woodcut print requires special timber and sharp tools. However, you can try the same process using a potato cut in half. Using the cut edge of the potato, cut out the shape (reversed) of a letter of the alphabet, paint over the flat surface then print it onto paper.
A KEY INDIVIDUAL: MURASAKI SHIKIBU

Murasaki Shikibu was the author of Japan’s first novel, The Tale of Genji (Genji-monogatari), considered one of the greatest contributions to Japanese and world literature. In a relatively short life, she produced a work that has entertained people throughout the following centuries.

Murasaki Shikibu was born into a minor branch of the aristocratic and very influential Fujiwara family in Heian-Kyo (now Kyoto) somewhere between AD 973 and AD 978. She died there somewhere between AD 1014 and AD 1025. No-one knows her real name — historians think it might have been Takako. She used the name Murasaki (pronounced moo-rah-sah-kee), meaning ‘purple’, or Lady Murasaki after the heroine of her book. The name ‘Shikibu’ is a word describing the work her father did as a court official.

Murasaki’s father was a well-educated man, a poet and also governor of his province. When her mother died, her father took charge of Murasaki’s upbringing. She received a good education and her father even allowed her to undertake study of Chinese and the classics of Chinese literature — part of the traditional education of the upper class Japanese male and something generally considered unsuitable for a female. She wrote in the hiragana script, which was included in the education of upper-class girls. It was a simpler script and more easily read than the Chinese characters that men used.

Murasaki married young, gave birth to a daughter in AD 999 and was widowed in AD 1001. Her friends enjoyed her story-telling abilities and over the next few years her stories became more and more in demand at the Japanese court. Court officials encouraged Murasaki to accept a position there. She served as lady-in-waiting to the Empress Shoshi and was known not only for her entertaining stories but also for her ability as a writer and especially for the beauty of her poetry.

Murasaki wrote her novel over a ten-year period from AD 1001 to AD 1010. It tells the story of the imaginary prince, Genji, nicknamed ‘the Shining Prince’. Women admire him greatly for his charm and the story tells of his success in attracting them. The Tale of Genji also provides an insight into the life of the aristocracy during the Heian era (AD 794–1191) and the grandeur and luxury of life at court.

Source 3.7.1 Ishiyama Moon, a painting by the artist Yoshitoshi, 1889. It shows Lady Murasaki on a moonlight night at the Ishiyama Monastery near Kyoto, a place where it is thought she wrote parts of The Tale of Genji.

Source 3.7.2 It was late in the Third Month. Murasaki’s spring garden was coming ever more to life with blossoms and singing birds. Elsewhere spring had departed, said the other ladies, and why did it remain here? Genji thought it a pity that the young women should have only distant glimpses of the moss on the island, a deeper green each day. He had carpenters at work on Chinese pleasure boats, and on the day they were launched he summoned palace musicians for water music. Princes and high courtiers came crowding to hear.

While at court, the Lady Murasaki kept a diary in which she recorded her observations of the events of court life in the years 1008 to 1010 and her feelings of frustration at what she saw as the trivial interests and lifestyle of many of the courtiers. The second section of the diary is interesting for the comments she makes about the characters of some of the other ladies at court. For example she described her fellow writer, Sei Shonagon, author of *The Pillow Book*, as ‘dreadfully conceited’ and also expressed her concern that women did not live up to her expectations of what a lady-in-waiting should be (see source 3.7.3).

**Source 3.7.3**

We all have our quirks and no-one is ever all bad. Then again, it is not possible for everyone to be all things all of the time: attractive, restrained, intelligent, tasteful and trustworthy.

An extract from *The Diary of Lady Murasaki*

**Source 3.7.4**

It is hateful when a well-bred young man who is visiting a woman of lower rank calls out her name in such a way as to make everyone realize that he is on familiar terms with her. However well he may know her name, he should slur it slightly as though he had forgotten it.

[Sei Shonagon disliked:]
- Ugly handwriting on red paper.
- Snow on the houses of common people. This is especially regrettable when the moonlight shines down on it.

[She liked:]
- A letter written on fine green paper . . . attached to a budding willow branch.
- A slim, handsome young nobleman in a Court cloak.
- A pretty girl casually dressed in a trouser-skirt, over which she wears only a loosely sewn coat.


An extract from *The Pillow Book* by Sei Shonagon, showing the attitudes of ladies-in-waiting towards both the nobility and commoners

*The Tale of Genji* gave celebrity status to the Lady Murasaki. She lived in a society that considered women insignificant in comparison to men. In keeping with this value, not much is known of her life apart from what she expressed through her books.

**Activities**

Use sources
1. Use source 3.7.2 to describe the picture of the nobility’s way of life revealed by Lady Murasaki in *The Tale of Genji*.
2. What does source 3.7.3 tell us about Lady Murasaki’s attitudes?
3. What evidence is there in source 3.7.4 to indicate that Sei Shonagon has different values?
4. What similarities can you observe between the content of source 3.7.5 and the content of *The Tale of Genji*?

Teamwork
5. Work in pairs to either
   (a) create a speech suitable for use as a eulogy for the Lady Murasaki or
   (b) script an interview between (a resurrected) Lady Murasaki and a twenty-first century Australian journalist.

Dig deeper
6. Conduct some Internet research to find images giving impressions of the world of Murasaki and Prince Genji. Choose five that you think are helpful in telling the story of her life, give each a suitable caption and arrange them in a noticeboard display for other people to enjoy and learn from.
Kublai Khan (1214–1294), the grandson of the famous Genghis (or Chingis) Khan, was the emperor of China from 1279 until his death. Kublai Khan was born in Mongolia and he was the first foreigner to rule China. He was energetic in encouraging Chinese civilisation and in extending the area of land under his control.

His campaign began with a letter. In it he demanded that Japan's rulers either agree to pay taxes to him or get ready to face an invasion. Considering Kublai Khan's reputation, it was not surprising that Japan's emperor and his advisers were tempted to surrender to this threat. It was the shogunate, under the leadership of Hojo Tikimune, that had the final say. It decided to call Kublai Khan's bluff and ignore this letter and a number of others that followed. The military prepared to meet an invasion force and the court officials took to their prayers.

The Mongolians had become a powerful force in Asia and Europe, establishing a vast Mongol empire in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Genghis Khan (1162–1227) gained control first of eastern and western Mongolia, then moved into Russia and Iran and then went on to take control of a large part of China. Kublai Khan completed this task and also gained control of Korea and Burma. In 1268, he was ready to turn his attention to Japan.

In November 1274, Kublai Khan sent an invasion fleet of 300 ships and 400–500 smaller vessels, along with an army of 40 000 Koreans, Chinese and Mongols. On 19 November, Kublai Khan's troops met the Japanese army on the land near Hakata Bay. The invaders had superior tactics and weaponry and the Japanese troops retreated to the fortress at Dazaifu. That night, when the invaders were asleep aboard their ships, there was a severe storm. The wind was so forceful that 200 ships sank and nearly one-third of Kublai Khan's army drowned. The fleet returned home in disgrace.
The Japanese believed that the gods had sent this *kamikaze* (divine wind) to save them. At the same time, they realised that Kublai Khan would send his forces back to try again. They prepared for this by strengthening and improving the organisation of their samurai warriors, by building a 20-kilometre stone wall along the coast at Hakata Bay, the likely landing spot, and constructing a number of forts along the coastline. Kublai Khan faced a number of problems in putting together the supplies and soldiers needed for a second attack. Finally, in 1281, a new armada set out and attempted to take the island of Kyushu. The Japanese succeeded in forcing it to retreat from a number of attempts. Again, they faced a massive typhoon. It lasted two days and caused the loss of many ships.

**RESULTS**

Over the next five years, Kublai Khan continued with his plans to gain control of Japan. He was no longer able to put together the resources he needed. This saved Japan from coming under Mongol rule but not from the increased strength and power of military forces within Japanese society and government. The *bakufu* retained control of Japan and kept it under military rule for many years to come.

**Activities**

**Understand**

1. What position did Kublai Khan have in China?
2. Who was Kublai Khan’s grandfather and what areas of land did he control?
3. What events preceded Kublai Khan’s decision to invade Japan?
4. How did the Japanese respond to this threat?
5. Why was Kublai Khan unsuccessful?
6. Who were the bakufu and how did Kublai Khan’s actions help make them more powerful?

**Design and create**

7. Choose one event related to Kublai Khan’s attempts to gain control of Japan. Devise a suitable headline for it and support this with a short news article explaining what has happened. Use the questions who? what? when? where? how? and why? to guide your decisions about what to include.

**Use sources**

8. What impression of Kublai Khan do you get from source 3.8.1? What do you know about Kublai Khan that would support this impression?
9. Use your knowledge of Kublai Khan’s attempted invasions of Japan to explain what is being shown in source 3.8.3.
10. Compare source 3.8.2 with source 3.8.3. Without the information given in the captions, how would you know which source was created by a Japanese artist and which was created by a European artist? Why do you think the medieval European artist has represented Kublai Khan’s invasion in this way?
EARLY CULTURAL CONTACT

Japan’s rich culture benefited from both Chinese and Korean influences. Korean immigrants came to Japan between 300 and 400 BC. They taught the Japanese how to cast bronze spearheads and belts, better methods of iron work, sword-making and creating armour, how to produce fine quality ceramics, and techniques for making saddles and other riding equipment.

Korean immigrants also influenced Japan indirectly. They introduced Buddhism and Confucianism to Japan and brought with them the Chinese writing system. The Japanese court officially adopted it in around AD 405.

In the seventh century AD, Japan’s rulers began to include many of the traditions and values of China’s Confucian-based government. Under the Taika Reform Edicts in AD 645, the Japanese government reorganised its administration following the Chinese model. This strengthened the impact of Confucianism, the philosophy that underpinned China’s administration, and also the practice of many aspects of China’s culture inside Japan.

Chinese culture had a particularly strong influence on Japan from the eighth to the twelfth centuries. Chinese language and characters became part of Japanese. Japanese’s basic ideographs — kanji — came from China. The Japanese used Chinese characters in their official record keeping and made Chinese language a part of a boy’s education. Educated Japanese also studied and enjoyed Chinese literature and the ideas of Chinese philosophers.

China also influenced clothing for both wealthy men and women. Both sexes wore Chinese-style long silk robes tied with a sash. Men wore long wide-legged pants under their robes.

EUROPEANS IN JAPAN

The great sixteenth- and seventeenth-century voyages of discovery sparked European interest in Japan. Europeans wanted to find out more about Japan’s mineral resources, its beautiful buildings, its Buddhist universities (larger than any in Europe at the time) and the skill and sophistication of Japanese metal work.

Spanish and Portuguese missionaries arrived in Japan in the thirteenth century and 300 000 Japanese converted to Christianity. In 1543, Portuguese trading ships arrived. Trade grew between
the Japanese and the Europeans, nicknamed ‘Nanban’. The Japanese began to import Portuguese guns, which were lighter and had a better aim than the Chinese ones they had used previously. They soon began making their own version of the weapon.

In 1557, the Portuguese began to sell the rights to captain a large ship to Japan each year. Japanese shipbuilders began building ships known as ‘Red Seals’, which had some features of Nanban ship design. They used these to trade throughout south-east Asia.

Apart from Chinese and Korean influences, Japanese leaders tried to prevent other cultural influences on Japanese society. Foreigners could travel to only some areas of Japan and had to follow strict rules about contact with Japanese people. Government officials had to accompany any traders who wanted to go beyond the port area. The Japanese themselves risked death if they attempted to travel outside Japanese territory without permission.

The Japanese considered European culture and manners to be inferior to their own. They criticised the Europeans for their lack of control in showing their feelings and for eating with their fingers.

By the early seventeenth century, Japan’s leaders had begun to suspect that trade and missionary activity might be an excuse to cover the Europeans’ real intention — to take over Japan. In 1639, the shogun banned Christianity and expelled most foreigners from Japan. For almost two hundred years after that, Japan followed a policy of severely limiting its already minimal contact with the outside world.

Activities

Understand
1. What were the main features of Japan’s cultural links with the outside world?
2. How and why did the Japanese leaders limit contact with the outside world?

Use sources
3. What can you recognise in source 3.9.1 that relates to your knowledge of Japan’s contact with Europe in the sixteenth century?
4. What does source 3.9.2 tell us about how the Japanese viewed Europeans?
5. Carefully read source 3.9.3 and answer the following questions.
   (a) What is the object being discussed?
   (b) What are two pieces of evidence that show the Japanese could learn quickly from the foreigners?
   (c) What problem remained and how was this problem solved?
JAPAN’S LEGACY FOR CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Many artistic and cultural achievements of feudal and classical Japan are recognised and admired worldwide. In particular, Japanese styles of art, interior design and garden design have proved to be particularly popular across the modern world. From the late twentieth century onwards, Australians have become more interested in Japan and closer ties have developed between the two countries.

The reasons for this include the following:
• Australia and Japan have worked to establish good business relationships with one another.
• Overseas migration to Australia from the late 1940s onwards has made Australians more aware of cultures and traditions other than the Anglo-Celtic traditions that had previously dominated many aspects of mainstream Australian life.
• Travel to other areas of the world has become cheaper, quicker and easier and many Australians take advantage of the opportunities this provides for them to visit places such as Japan.
• The Australian Government in the early 1990s placed a great emphasis on ‘engaging with Asia’.

Few Australians know much about the different periods of Japanese history that you have studied. However, the legacy of these eras is enjoyed by many.

LITERATURE

Japan produced what are probably the first novels in the world (see pages 64–5). The Japanese also created distinctive forms of poetry. One of the oldest forms of Japanese poetry is a 31-syllable poem called a tanka. It is based on five lines in the pattern 5-7-5-7-7. From the tanka tradition, two other forms grew, called renga and haiku. Renga, or linked verse poetry, was very popular from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. Some of the poems ran to a hundred stanzas and were composed by groups of seven or eight people working together. Haiku, or starting verse poetry, was becoming very popular by the sixteenth century. Inspired by his travels in remote parts of Honshu, the poet Matsuo Basho wrote many haiku, two of which are included in source 3.10.1.

Source 3.10.1 Two haiku by Matsuo Basho

Shizukasa ya
Iwa ni shimi iru
Semi no koe

Calm and serene
the sound of a cicada
penetrates the rock

Netsu kusa ya
Tsuwara mono domo ga
Yume no ato

In summer grasses
are now buried
glorious dreams of ancient warriors

BONSAI

Bonsai or ‘tray planting’ came to Japan from China around 800 years ago, about the same time as Zen, and has continued in Japan over many centuries. Bonsai trees as old as seven or eight hundred years still exist. They are grown in small pots or shallow ceramic trays and ideally look as natural as possible. Techniques of trimming roots and branches keep the trees between one-thirtieth and one-sixtieth of their natural size. For example, a beech tree which might grow to 30 metres in the wild can be kept as small as 32 centimetres.

Source 3.10.2 Bonsai juniper tree
KITES

Kites are another Japanese art form associated with religion. It is possible that they originated in ancient times as a way of making offerings to the gods or sending prayers to heaven. There are also stories about them being used for sending messages in time of war. By the late Middle Ages, kites decorated with dragons, warriors and Chinese lions were flown for fun. Kite battles became a popular form of public entertainment.

ORIGAMI

Origami is Japanese paper folding. In ancient times, Shinto shrines provided special paper for paper cutouts of human figures that were used in purification ceremonies. However, as paper became more widely available, origami also became an entertainment, which is its main purpose in Japan today. The paper is rarely cut, only folded. Origami’s other uses include wrapping for gifts and folding traditional ornaments.

Activities

Understand

1. Why have Australians become more interested in Japan and how have the two nations developed closer ties with one another?
2. What are the names and features of three traditional forms of Japanese poetry?
3. What is bonsai and how do the Japanese achieve this art?
4. What uses have kites had in different periods of Japanese history?
5. What is origami? Where is it found and what are its main features?

Use sources

6. Use Basho’s poetry (source 3.10.1) as a model for some of your own haiku. The rules below will help you understand the haiku form:
   • Write only three lines for each poem; they don’t have to rhyme.
   • The first line should have five syllables, the second line seven syllables and the third line five syllables.
   • Be imaginative and include fresh, interesting images from nature.
7. What does source 3.10.3 show about the ongoing legacy of the samurai?
8. What does source 3.10.4 show about how samurai kept fit?

Worksheets

3.6 Origami jumping frogs
TEST YOURSELF

1. For each of the following words, find the description (a) to (l) that matches it.

- eta
- Shinto
- daimyo
- Pillow Book
- woodcut
- bunraku
- shogun
- Buddhism
- rice
- bushido
- kamikaze
- haiku

(a) The religion that means ‘way of the gods’
(b) A more common form of currency than coins
(c) The book written by Sei Shonagon
(d) A form of printing from wood
(e) Japanese three-line poem
(f) A form of puppet theatre
(g) The name given to the class of people below the merchants
(h) The lord whom the samurai served
(i) The religion that originally came from India
(j) The rules of correct behaviour for a samurai
(k) Word meaning ‘divine wind’
(l) The leading warrior, just below the emperor

2. Choose one of the following assignments:

(a) Use your local or school library to find the text of a noh play to perform in class. A good book is *Anthology of Japanese literature* (Penguin Classic, 1978) edited by Donald Keene. Good encyclopedias and CD-ROMs are also useful resources about noh.

Make a poster of the noh stage showing where the actors stand. Research the characters and movements of the actors. Find out about noh masks, and make some to use in your presentation.

(b) Make an illustrated poster about shrines, temples or castles in Japan. Use your library or the Internet to find details. The following search terms may help: Himeji, Shinto, Zen.

3. Japanese paper folding or origami is a popular pastime and many elaborate designs can be created. Try making an origami bird by following the guidelines in source 3.11.2. Display your finished creations in the classroom.

![An origami pattern for a bird](source 3.11.2)

4. *The Tale of the Heike* tells the story of the struggle for power at the end of the twelfth century between the Taira family (Heike) and the Minamoto family (Genji). Read source 3.11.3, which tells part of this famous story and then answer the questions that follow.

(a) Why do you think Naozane wanted to fight a great enemy commander?
(b) Why was Naozane at first disgusted with the boy’s behaviour in war?
(c) Why did he decide to spare the boy’s life? What made him change his mind?
(d) What was the boy’s attitude when faced with death and why did he react this way?

![A photograph of a Japanese temple](source 3.11.1)
(e) The powder and blackened teeth of the boy seem unusual to us. What other things can you think of that were once considered fashionable or beautiful but are now no longer regarded in that way?

(f) Why did the flute make such an impression on all the people who saw it?

(g) Why do you think Naozane no longer wished to be a soldier and instead ‘turned his thoughts towards the spiritual life’?

(h) What has this story taught you about traditional Japanese values?

Source 3.11.3

The death of Atsumori

After the defeat of the Heike clan at Ichi-no-tani, Kumagai Naozane, a Genji soldier, was walking his horse toward the beach. He was hoping to come across a Heike noble or courtier fleeing to the ships. As he was thinking about how much he would like to take on some great enemy commander, Naozane noticed a solitary horseman making his way through the sea towards the ships. The Heike soldier rode a dappled horse whose saddle gleamed with gold, and he wore an embroidered silk hitatare jacket, a suit of armour and a horned helmet.

Naozane called out to the Heike soldier: ‘Shame on you turning your back on an enemy. Turn back and face me, coward!’

The soldier wheeled his horse around in the sea and rode back to fight. Naozane galloped to meet him and, as he came alongside his enemy’s horse, Naozane reached out, threw him to the ground and pulled off the other man’s helmet in readiness for cutting off his head. But what he saw was the face of a mere youth of no more than seventeen years. His beautiful face was powdered and his teeth blackened*. He was about the same age as Naozane’s own son.

‘Who are you?’ Naozane demanded. ‘If you tell me your name, I will not take your life.’

‘No. Give me your name first,’ said the boy.

‘I am not important in the greater scheme of things. My name is Kumagai Naozane of Musashi.’

‘Well, you have found a worthy opponent in me. Once you cut off my head and show it to others, you will soon find out who you have killed,’ said the boy.

Naozane pondered this. He must be a leader of the Heike. Whether I kill him or save him, it will not change the outcome of this battle. And think of my own son, Kojiro: when he was injured even slightly this morning, my heart was sore. Think how this boy’s father will feel if his son is killed! No, I will not take his life.

However, at that very moment, Naozane looked behind him to see fifty horsemen riding towards them. He held back his tears. ‘Alas, even if I spared your life, the place is still swarming with my fellow Genji, your enemies. You cannot escape. If you must die, I will take this burden on myself. I promise that prayers will be said for your rebirth in heaven,’ said Naozane.

‘I could not live honourably if you did not,’ said the youth. ‘You must take my life at once!’

Naozane was so distraught with pity that he could scarcely lift his sword, and his eyes were blinded by tears. But there was no other way. Weeping, he brought the sword down and beheaded the boy.

‘Alas! Who would be a soldier? It is a hard and bitter life. Only one born to a warrior family could carry out such an act.’ He raised his sleeve to his face and wept. Then, needing something to wrap the head in, he began to remove the boy’s hitatare jacket. As he did so, he noticed a flute in a small cloth bag tucked in the boy’s waistband. ‘This was the flute we heard playing this morning! It must have been this boy with his friends inside the castle walls, distracting themselves before the battle. I doubt that any of our men brought such an instrument with them. Truly, these courtiers and nobles are refined people.’

Naozane returned to his commander and fellow soldiers, and told them what he had done. When he showed them the flute, everyone present was moved to tears. Only then did Naozane discover that the boy was Atsumori, the youngest son of Tsunemori, a senior Heike courtier. The boy had lived seventeen years.

From that moment, Naozane’s thoughts increasingly turned towards the spiritual life and the idea of becoming a monk.

[To blacken one’s teeth was thought beautiful at that time in Japan.]