

Evette Allen, San Jose Unified School District

LESSON SUMMARY

Year Long Focus Question: *How did distant regions of the world become more interconnected during the medieval and early modern period?*

Unit Focus Question: *How did Japan's position on the edge of the world give rise to its unique culture?*

Lesson Focus Question: *How might geography have influenced the development of Japan's culture and facilitated a need for exchange with the Asian mainland?*

Lesson Teaching Thesis: The natural resources of Japan created a distinct culture based on both isolation and regional connections. Japan, due to being an archipelago, is isolated by the surrounding oceans. Equally, the percentage of mountainous terrain created barriers within Japan, which hindered unification. The lack of some resources created a need for trade that promoted contact and exchange with the Asian mainland.

History-Social Science Framework Alignment:

How did the distant regions of the world become more interconnected through medieval and early modern times?

How did the environment and technological innovations affect the expansion of agriculture, cities, and human population? What impact did human expansion have on the environment?

Historical Thinking Concept and Guidepost:

- Evidence: We use evidence to make inferences. Evidence must be corroborated.
- Cause & Consequence: Causes and consequences result from an interconnected web of conditions and actions.

History-Social Science Content Standard:

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

7.5.1 Describe the significance of **Japan's proximity to China and Korea** and the intellectual, linguistic, religious, and philosophical influence of those countries on Japan.

Common Core Reading and Writing Standard(s):

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

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Writing Standards

1. Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson was created as part of summer institute on Medieval Japan, hosted by the [Asian Art Museum of San Francisco](#). This lesson consists of three distinct goals: 1) Build geographical awareness by identifying geographical features and resources that are specific to a location, 2) Analyze the impact on human development of the aforementioned geographical features and resources, and 3) Develop argumentative responses utilizing the analytical conclusions students have reached.

INCLUDED SOURCES AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

Assigned Artifacts: Artifacts from Asian Art Museum of San Francisco's Collection

- Image Set - [Japan's Geography through Art](#)

Learning Strategies:

- Cause & Consequence Handout - [Transition Word Wall](#)

Synthesis Activity/Assessment:

- [Role of a Geographer/Art Analysis Challenge Task](#)
- [Handout- Art Object Geography Analysis](#)

LESSON PROCEDURE

This lesson should follow a [Japan Map Activity](#), in which students use maps (either paper or with Google's MyMaps) to place Japan in the regional context and to explore the geographical characteristics of Japan.

The lesson is based on analysis of multiple examples of Japanese artwork that illustrate the geography of Japan and its impact on human development. The teacher projects images sequentially from the [Japan's Geography through Art Image Set](#). These images are organized into 3 parts.

Warm-up: Human Development and the Environment

The teacher brainstorms with the class about the role of geography in human development.

Questions to explore:

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- How does the environment shape available natural resources?
- How are those resources used to provide for the basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, tools, weapons, domesticated animals, art, religion, & organizational systems?
- In what ways does the availability (or lack of availability) of resources impact and influence a culture?, i.e. How does the scarcity of water impact the development of . . . ? Why does it do so? and How do you know (evidence)?
- Can the society being studied sustain their culture with only local resources?
- Do they interact with other cultures for resources?
 - How does that contact impact/change their culture?
 - Is this impact positive, i.e. trade, or negative, i.e. conflict?

Section 1: Analysis of Physical Geography and Resources

- These images help students identify the basic geography and available resources in Japan.
- The teacher leads the whole class through the analysis of the first image or two, eliciting feedback from the students while sharing her thinking.
- Student groups follow this approach for the remaining images in the first set.
- Students use the [Handout- Art Object Geography Analysis](#) graphic organizer to take notes responding to the prompts for each of the five images.
- After reviewing the images, teacher leads a discussion and shares her thinking to model filling in the Brainstorming box and begins constructing a written response in the “Paragraph” box

Section 2: Human Adaptations and Resources Analysis

- This set of images help students understand how humans have utilized the available resources to meet basic needs.
- The teacher may model the first image analysis as before, but students are encouraged to collaboratively explore and analyze this second image set.

Section 3: The Impact of Japan’s Geography on its Isolation vs. Interconnectedness

- This set of images helps students explore the ways Japanese society created connections internally and externally.

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- In this section, following group discussion of the images, students are expected to be able to independently brainstorm conclusions and write a written response that builds on the previous two sections and addresses the lesson focus question.