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# **Ancient Japan**

*Fun Projects for World History*

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# History, Language Arts, Art - Ancient Japan

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# History, Language Arts, Art - Ancient Japan

## GENERAL OVERVIEW

*This collection of nine enrichment activities was designed to complement existing curricula and expand one's understanding of the ancient Japanese. Studies have confirmed that using our hands helps us retain information. So, if you are looking for creative, simple yet stimulating and exciting projects to spark learning, take the next step toward a highly engaging encounter.*

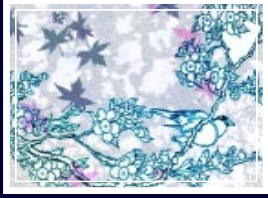
*There is truly nothing more stimulating than combining a hands-on activity with a subject being studied. Regardless of a learner's age, learning by doing will help maintain their interest, improve retention of information, and foster a desire to learn now and in the future.*

*In this collection, there are a total of nine hands-on projects and writing activities. To enhance the complete learning experience using this collection, character and setting development statements as well as extensive vocabulary lists are provided. A general materials list, detailed instructions, and extensive activity suggestions are provided for the nine projects that focus on the collection theme.*

*As an educator with 18 plus years of teaching and product development experience, it is my personal goal to encourage young people to be creative. Each of the activities included in this collection are based on actual artifacts representative of ancient Japan. A conscious effort was made to develop activities that are constructed from readily available materials, yet result in stunning end products. Although having a wonderful end product is desirable, an essential part of learning is the process of creating something. A young person will gain a greater appreciation for the skills required by the ancient Japanese when they accomplish an activity.*

*It is my heartfelt desire that both teacher and student will find the nine activities in this book a wonderful journey of creativity. Jean Henrich*

# History, Language Arts, Art - Ancient Japan



## Japanese SAMURAI in Focus



### *History* Japanese Samurai

# History, Language Arts, Art - Ancient Japan

## SAMURAI IN FOCUS

Samurai were Japanese warriors. They were part of the military class in Japanese society. Samurai were also referred to as *bushi*. They used many different weapons such as long bows and arrows, spears, and even guns, but it was the sword that symbolized them within Japanese culture.



The term *bushi* came from their code of ethics called *bushido*, meaning “the way of the warrior.” Based in Confucian thought, samurai were loyal to one master and practiced self-discipline and high moral behavior. They would rather commit suicide, *seppuku*, than accept surrender.

There were several cultural time periods where the samurai played an important role in Japanese society. The following is a brief listing and overview of each time period:

794-1185, Heian Period: This was the time when private and powerful Japanese landowners hired private soldiers to protect their lands. During this period warring clans fought each other for control over the country. The Taira and Minamoto clans were the largest and fought continuously for control.



# History, Language Arts, Art - Ancient Japan

## SAMURAI IN FOCUS

1192-1333, Kamakura Period: The Minamoto clan defeated the Taira in 1185. Minamoto Yoritomo, the shogun or greatest military commander, established their headquarters in Kamakura in 1192.

1333-1573, Era of Warring States: During these years Japan was in constant turmoil and conflict.

1573-1603, Azuchi-Momoyama Period: This time period saw the establishment of a caste system that made the samurai choose between working on a farm or living constantly as a warrior. If they decided to be warriors, they lived together. Only samurai were allowed to arm themselves during this time period.

1603-1868, Edo Period: This was the most important time period for the samurai. They were at the top of the Japanese social system. They lived in castle towns where they received wages from their shogun. At the defeat of Osaka Castle in 1615, the need for samurai began to decline and by 1868, the samurai class was eliminated.

The symbol of the samurai was the sword. It played such an important role in their lives both as a weapon and as a symbol that the remaining part of this overview will be dedicated to describing some of the primary features of the samurai swords.

Samurai generally carried two swords: a short sword called a *tanto* and a medium sword called a *daito*. Swords were measured according to the length of their cutting edge. In Japan, one *shaku* was equal to about 11.9 inches. The medium sword, *daito*, measured approximately 20-22 inches. The *tanto* measured less than one *shaku* or less than 11 inches. Sometimes these swords were called *hara-kiri* knives.





# History, Language Arts, Art - Ancient Japan

## SAMURAI IN FOCUS

Japanese swords are divided into two main parts: the blade and the mountings. They were ornately decorated and carefully made by exacting standards. There were a total of eight different types of sword blades.

The samurai's blade was divided further into specific sections as listed here:

**Kissaki** - the point

**Yokote** - dividing line between the point and surface

**Shinogi** - ridgeline

**Shinogi-ji** - ridge area

**Ji** - Decorations on the blade's surface. The decorations included "grooves" which were designed to keep the blade structurally sound and ornate carvings.

**Yaki-ba** - tempered line that ran the length of the blade

**Mune** - top ridge of the blade

**Nakago** - This is the section of the blade that fits into the hilt.

TO SEE A MULTIMEDIA PRESENTATION OF A PERFORMANCE AT THE KENNEDY CENTER ABOUT SAMURAI, PLEASE GO TO THE FOLLOWING WEB SITE:

<http://www.kennedy-center.org/multimedia/samurai/>

Life is like unto a long journey with a heavy burden. Let thy step be slow and steady, that thou stumble not. Persuade thyself that imperfection and inconvenience are the natural lot of mortals, and there will be no room for discontent, neither for despair. When ambitious desires arise in thy heart, recall the days of extremity thou has passed through. Forbearance is the root of quietness and assurance forever.

Look upon the wrath of the enemy. If thou knowest only what it is to conquer, and knowest not what it is to be defeated, woe unto thee; it will fare ill with thee. Find fault with thyself rather than with others.

*Ieyasu Tokugawa (1543-1616)*



# History, Language Arts, Art - Ancient Japan

## SAMURAI IN FOCUS

Another interesting feature of Samurai sword blades was the treatment on the surface of the blade. Samurai swords were made strong through the heating, stretching, and folding of the metal. Some Japanese sword makers folded the metal used to make the blades upwards of twenty times. The folding created layers and surface grains which were called *hada*. The grains were divided into five main types:



**Muji** - plain grain

**Masame-hada** - straight grain

**Itame-hada** - wood grain

**Mokume-hada** - burl grain

**Ayasugi-hada** - curved grain

The samurai sword featured detailed mountings. They included all the woven and metal work that helped to secure the blade in place.

**Saya** - This is the wooden scabbard that protected the blade. Japanese sword makers would often decorate the scabbards with inlaid designs and lacquer.

**Tsuba (hand guards)** - These were made of metal and were used to protect the hand. They were commonly made of silver, copper, and steel. They were often decorated with ornate designs.

**Tsuka (the hilt)** - Tsuka were the handles of the sword. They were made of wood and wrapped in stingray skin. The next layer was flat tape or cording that was interwoven into a decorative manner. The hilt was covered in silk, cotton, or leather cording.

**Seppa** - These were spaces set into the mountings.

**Habaki** - The collar was used to stop the blade from moving around in the scabbard.

**Fuchi** - The metal cap at the end of the sword handle.

**Menuki (hilt decorations)** - These were decorative metal pieces that included tigers, bamboo, running horses, bats, peacocks, cranes, dragons, and flowers, plus many other styles. They were often made of silver or gold.

# History, Language Arts, Art - Ancient Japan

## SAMURAI IN FOCUS

### CREED OF A SAMURAI

I have no parents - I make the heavens and earth my parents.  
I have no home - I make awareness my home.  
I have no life or death - I make the tides of breathing my life and death.  
I have no divine power - I make honesty my divine power.  
I have no means - I make understanding my means.  
I have no magic secrets - I make character my magic secret.  
I have no body - I make endurance my body.  
I have no eyes - I make the flash of lightning my eyes.  
I have no ears - I make sensibility my ears.  
I have no limbs - I make promptness my limbs.  
I have no strategy - I make "unshadowed by thought" my strategy.  
I have no designs - I make "seizing the opportunity by the forelock" my design.  
I have no miracles - I make right action my miracles.  
I have no principles - I make adaptability to all circumstances my principles.  
I have no tactics - I make emptiness and fullness my tactics.  
I have no talents - I make ready wit my talent.  
I have no friends - I make my mind my friend.  
I have no enemy - I make carelessness my enemy.  
I have no armor - I make benevolence and righteousness my armor.  
I have no castle - I make immovable mind my castle.  
I have no sword - I make absence of self my sword.

Anonymous samurai, 14th century



TO SEE A LIST AND DESCRIPTION OF FAMOUS SAMURAI,  
PLEASE GO TO THE FOLLOWING WEB SITE:

[http://www.kiku.com/electric\\_samurai/cobweb\\_castle/samurai\\_gallery.html](http://www.kiku.com/electric_samurai/cobweb_castle/samurai_gallery.html)

# History, Language Arts, Art - Ancient Japan

## SAMURAI WRITING RECIPE



**DIRECTIONS:** Follow the steps listed at the bottom of this page in order. Use the words provided under the different categories to help you write your paragraph. If you would like, add your own words to the categories. If appropriate, you may use more than one word from each column. Additional character development statements and details for characterization can be found on pages 133 - 139.

### CLOTHING

*dotera* - (thick kimono coat)  
*fundo shi* - (loin cloth)  
*furoshiki* - (wrapping cloth)  
*geta* - (wooden clogs)  
*hachimaki* - (headband)  
*happi* - (short, kimono-styled jacket)  
*haramaki* - (stomach band)  
*ho-ate* - (mask)  
*juban* - (undershirt)  
*kabuto* - (helmet)

### EARS

Hidden beneath hair  
Large  
Misshapen  
Missing one  
Pointed  
Protruding

### EYES

Serious  
Dangerous  
Glaring  
Knowing  
Determined

### APPEARANCE

Dangerous  
Gentle  
Rough  
Rugged  
Tough

### TYPE OF WEAPON

*jutsu* - (star shaped metal disk with sharp points)  
*tachi* - (long sword)  
*wakizashi* - (short sword)

### FACIAL TEXTURE

Gnarled  
Groomed  
Wrinkled  
Smooth  
Long beard

### INTELLIGENCE

Able to solve problems  
Average  
Brilliant  
Good memory  
Resourceful

### STEPS

1. Indent and write one sentence introducing your character by name and where he is located. (Use your own words for this step)
2. Write one or more sentences describing his clothing.
3. Write one or more sentences describing his weapons.
4. Write one sentence describing his appearance.
5. Write one sentence describing his facial texture.
6. Write several sentences describing his eyes.
7. Write several sentences describing his intelligence.