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Japan Lesson Plan “Tradition versus Change: The Meiji Restoration”
Life Skills Center of Hamilton County
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This lesson plan is designed for 10-12 social studies students at the Life Skills Center of Hamilton County. These students are enrolled in a credit recovery program, so their backgrounds are not all the same. Therefore they will need to be reintroduced to the material so that they are all on the same page when we start the lesson. The lesson will introduce the topic of the Meiji Restoration, a time period in beginning in 1868, when Japan opened its doors to Western influence and modernized rapidly.

The objectives of this lesson is that students will be able to recognize how the precursors influenced the initial changes that lead to the Meiji Restoration, the differences between Japan before and after the Meiji Restoration and the purpose of the Meiji Restoration.

Students will be grouped in a large group setting for the main lecture, and in partners for the end activities.

This lesson is based of the Ohio Academic Content Standard for Social Studies Grade 9:
6. Explain the global affect of imperialism including:
a. Modernization of Japan.

The materials required for this lesson include a computer and projector for the teacher, materials for the students to take notes and maps of Japan to be passed out to the students.

The lesson:

To hook students into the material, start with a conversation about old vs. new, what are the benefits of change versus the benefits of tradition?

Meiji Restoration: The lesson will start with an introduction on Japan during the Tokugawa period, explaining that the Tokugawa Shogun was not the emperor, more like the prime minister. The Shogun emerged from a period of war as the strong ruling family. 1603-1868. Using the map of Japan, the teacher will show where the Tokugawa Shogun’s capital was, in Edo, now known as Tokyo, and where the emperor’s court was, in Kyoto. During the shogunate, most of Japan was closed off to the other countries, minus 4 southern ports that were open to limited trade.

In 1853, US Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into Edo Bay with his ‘black ships’ of the US Naval Fleet, and wasn’t going to leave until his letter of introduction and wish for trade was accepted. He then sailed away with the promise to return for a formal answer of acceptance to trade with the United States. The weaker shogun agreed, despite a ruling from the emperor to nullify the agreement. Amidst a swirl of political scheming, assassinations and intrigue, a group emerges in the southern cities of Japan that have decided the Shogun needs to be eliminated for disobeying the emperor. This group believes in “sonno joi” or, “to revere the Emperor and repel

the barbarians". Key members of this group also believe that in order to keep up with the West, the Western languages, cultures, military styles and economic systems should be learned and adapted. But mostly, these men were fierce nationalists, and only wanted to learn these things to benefit Japan. Eventually, they worked their way into a position politically in the imperial court to demand a withdrawal of the treaty signed with the US, and the treaties made with other European nations. It was agreed, and extremists celebrated by firing on Western ships, who in turn, destroyed several ports, forts and cities. Movements came around to return Japan to a secluded state, per the emperor, but others realized a strong central authority would be needed to withstand the foreign inundation. The leading believers in this theory are from the Southern city of Satsuma, the second biggest city in Japan, and one of the strongest concerning the samurai, one samurai for every 3 commoners.

The young shogun Keiki was urged by leaders of the anti-shogun factions to restore the powers of government to the young Emperor Meiji. He agreed, citing that the restoration of power was crucial to Japan surviving this national crises.

However he peaceably agreed to hand over power, Keiki expected to still be heavily involved in government. When that didn't happen, he and his supporters found themselves fighting a much more organized, militarized and flexible force led by the Satsumas, and were defeated.

in 1868, Tokyo was named the capital and a new government was formed, with the Meiji Emperor as a grand figurehead. True power was held in the hands of a few men who ruled as a collective and whose first tasks seemed insurmountable. All of the Western countries were watching closely, and would have exploited any visible weakness. First, the still autonomous "han" or feudal states, had to submit to the Emperor. At this point, they began to enrich the country using various Western ideas: western-style factories, western-styles industries, technologies such as railroads, telegraphs and steamships, Western training and education.

A constitution, also known as a Council of State, was established in 1868, but the government was eventually separated out into the Central Board-which made all of the final decisions, the Left Board-an advisory body and the Right Board-made up of heads of departments and their deputies.

The class system established by the feudal Tokugawa was eliminated, allowing intermarriages between the upper and lower classes for the first time. It also outlawed legal bias of the outcastes, but social discrimination continues to this day.

A new legal system emerged, based on the French system, with courts and penal, civil and commercial code was completed in 1898.

Economic reform took place in 4 stages: application of modern scientific technology, raising the per capita GDP, redesigning the industrial structures (agriculture to industry) , and international contacts.

The education system was also based on the American model, ignoring the return to imperial education which was based on Confucius or Shinto and based it on locally elected school boards and compulsory education.

Efforts were made at the beginning of the Meiji Restoration to establish Shinto as an official religion in order to strengthen the imperial claim to power. That started an anti-Buddhist trend, but Buddhism was so popular it could not be rid of. By 1873, religious freedom was adopted.

All of this material will be discussed in a loose lecture format, with the students able to interrupt with questions and comments as they come. For the next part of the lesson, students should be paired up and given a blank map of Japan, available online

(<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/asia/japan/outlinemap/map.GIF>). Students will then be asked to identify several places on the map, based off of what they remember from the lecture: Kyoto, Edo/Tokyo, Satsuma, Tokugawa and Edo Bay. When they have finished this part, they will form groups of 4 to compare maps and answer the following questions together.

1. How did geography play a role in the growing disparity between the imperial court and the Shogunate?
2. What were the major differences between the Western countries that came to Japan, and Japan society?
3. Why were some Japanese supporting the end of seclusion and others protesting it?
4. What were the major areas of reform after the Meiji Emperor came to power?

These questions will help evaluate the students' understanding of the lesson. If time permits and the students are finished with the assignment, the teacher should reflect back on the opening questions: when is change a good thing and when is it bad? What difference do intentions make regarding change? When is it important to let go of the past? What would have happened if the Meiji Restoration had been a complete failure-where would Japan be now?

Other images could be used: of the Meiji Emperor

(http://old.japanfocus.org/images/UserFiles/Image/2566.takayashi%20normafield.phil%20as%20activism/Meiji_Emperor.jpg)

Of Commodore Perry's black ships (http://visualizingcultures.com:8080/narravision-web/col_im/06_065_ship_AmericanWa14176.jpg)

Other sources include

Hane, Mutsaers, and Louis G. Perez. *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey*. 4th. Philadelphia: Westview Press, 2009. Print.