

Lesson Plan: Japan

Topic: Feudal Japan's Power Structure

Grade Level: 7

Standard: Ohio Social Studies 7: Japan's system of feudalism persisted and, over time, led to an insular and isolated society that continued to the 19th century. (Content Statement 4)

Resources

- Bunraku YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qcBSAwQVpw>
- Website #1: <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2092.html>
- Website #2: <http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/explore/history/q8.html>
- (ideally) a projector, SmartBoard, or other method to display a YouTube video to the entire class
- Notebook paper (1 per student)
- Pen or pencil (1 per student)

Set-up (time required: 15 minutes)

1. Have YouTube Bunraku video ready; display video where all students can watch.
2. Have website open in a separate tab/window, where it can be seen by all students.
3. Make sure each student has access to Website #2 (link above), either by printing copies of the page, or ensuring students have access via computer/tablet.

Procedure (time required: two 45-minute class periods)

1. Begin class with a think-pair-share exercise:
 - a. On the board (or verbally) ask students to think about what comes to mind when they hear the word *theatre*. Give students a couple minutes to think about and write down their ideas. Teacher may want to write the word *theatre* on the board, or have students write the word on top of their paper.
 - b. Have students pair up with a nearby student and share ideas back and forth.
 - c. Call on volunteers to share what their pair talked about in step 1b.
2. Explain that in Japan, there are different kinds of theatre, one of which is called *bunraku*. Explain that bunraku theatre uses puppets and puppet masters to tell a story.
3. Bring up Website #1 (listed above) and read the description of bunraku to the class, or call on volunteers to read it aloud. Call on students to summarize key points.
4. Tell students they will be watching footage of an actual bunraku performance. Tell students to take notes on what they see, for example:
 - a. Describe the puppets.
 - a. How many people do you see?
 - b. What are the people doing?
 - c. How do the puppet's costumes compare to the people's costumes?

5. Play the bunraku YouTube video (link above).
6. After the performance, lead a whole group discussion as to what the students noticed. Write main ideas or recurring themes on the board.
7. After the discussion, draw particular attention to:
 - a. how the puppet was the most visible part of the show: people immediately notice the puppet because it has a colorful costume, is front-and-center, and is unique piece, but that the puppet had to do what the puppet master made it do.
 - b. how the people dressed in black and tended to blend in to the background, even though the people were the ones actually “running the show”.
 - c. the fact there are different people: one without a mask (the head puppet master) and others who are completely in black (the 2:34 mark of the video is a good place to pause while this discussion is happening).
8. Have students read the information from Website #2. Ask students to highlight or underline the answers to the following questions:
 - a. Who gave shoguns their power? (answer: the Emperor, power was transferred through heredity)
 - b. Who was Minamota Kamakura, and how did he get power? (answer: a powerful military leader who forced the Emperor to name him Shogun)
 - c. What are some examples of classes that were below the shogun? (answer: daimyo, samurai, farmers, artisans, merchants)
 - d. What is a daimyo? (answer: a lord who ruled part of Japan for a shogun)
 - e. What happened to the shoguns after Yoshinobu? (answer: the Emperor moved the capital city to Edo and did away with the shogun).
9. After students have read and highlighted their readings, lead a whole class discussion to answer the questions. Emphasize that the Emperor of Japan officially gave shoguns their power and title, but that some shoguns were powerful enough to make the Emperor do what the shogun wanted them to do (Kamakura, for example).
10. Emphasize the class structure of feudal Japan. The teacher may want to draw a pyramid on the board and have students copy it on their own paper.
11. Emphasize that the Emperor of Japan regained complete control from the shoguns after Yoshinobu.
12. Ask students to compare what they saw in the bunraku theatre performance and read about in the reading. Teacher can lead a whole-group discussion, or have students discuss key questions in small groups:
 - a. In the bunraku performance, who/what represents the Emperor? (answer: the puppet; it is the “head” of the performance, but is controlled by others)
 - b. The shogun? (answer: the head puppet master; he is easily visible and we all see that he is the one controlling the puppet; he is the most obvious person in the performance other than the puppet.)
 - c. Who or what might the puppeteers dressed totally in black represent? (answer: the daimyo; they are less important than the shogun (we can't see their faces in the bunraku) but they provide support to the shogun).
13. On their own papers, have students create their own summary of this analogy. Students might draw a chart or graphic organizer; students might make an

illustration of Emperors, Shogun, and Daimyo as performers in a bunraku play, etc.

Modifications & Extensions

- As written, this lesson will take about two class periods to complete. It could easily be extended in to a multi-day project though; teachers might ask students to create their own bunraku puppets from construction paper or other materials (felt, cloth, pipe cleaners, etc.), write a bunraku play that summarizes the Japanese feudal system (perhaps incorporating the characters read about earlier), and perform it for the class.
 - This could be a cross-content lesson, involving language arts, theatre, art, and music class.
- For students that have trouble with the analogy the teacher may want to create a graphic organizer that summarizes the role of the Emperor, Shogun, and Daimyo. Elements of the bunraku performance could be incorporated in to the graphic organizer.
- The teacher can extend this lesson by having students compare and contrast the feudal class of Japan with Europe's feudal classes.