SAMURAI



Statue of Kusunoki Masashige, famed Japanese samurai (Tokyo Imperial Palace, Japan)

1. When did the samurai originate in Japan?

late 11th century | 12th century | 19th century | lecturer doesn't say

2. What does the word "samurai" mean in Japanese?

to serve | to fight | to lead | to rule

3. What was the code of ethics followed by the samurai?

Bushido | Zen | Shinto | Taoism

4. The samurai acted as military commanders for which the following?

the emperor | the shogun | the imperial government | the daimyos

5. What was the most distinctive weapon used by the samurai?

spear | bow | katana | wakizashi

6. What is the legacy of the samurai in modern times?

They are forgotten and overlooked. | They are symbols of bravery and honor. | They are criticized for their militarism. | They are viewed as outdated.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Discuss these questions.

1. What information from the lecture did you find the most interesting? Why?
2. What might be the advantages / disadvantages of having a samurai warrior as a neighbor?
3. Why do many people continue to have an interest in samurai culture?
4. Have you ever seen the movie, *The Last Samurai* starring Tom Cruise and Ken Watanabe?
5. What questions would you like to ask a samurai warrior?

Transcript

The Samurai were a warrior class in feudal Japan who served as the military nobility and officer caste of the country from the 12th to the 19th centuries. The word "samurai" is derived from the Japanese word "saburau," which means "to serve." During the feudal period of Japan, the samurai held significant political and social power and were considered the epitome of bravery and honor.

The samurai traced their origins to the late 12th century, when the Japanese emperor bestowed land and privileges upon certain warrior clans in exchange for their loyalty and military service. Over time, these warriors became known as the samurai and developed a code of ethics known as bushido, which emphasized the values of honor, courage, loyalty, and respect. The samurai were expected to live by these principles both on and off the battlefield, and they were held in high esteem by the Japanese people.

The samurai were not just warriors, however. They were also members of the ruling class and held significant political power. They served as the military commanders of the daimyos, the powerful lords who ruled over their respective territories in Japan. The samurai also served as the guardians of the shogun, the military dictator who held ultimate power in Japan. The samurai were a vital part of the social and political fabric of feudal Japan, and their influence and status remained largely unchallenged until the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when the imperial government dissolved the samurai class and abolished the feudal system.

One of the most distinctive aspects of the samurai was their weapons and armor. The samurai were trained in the use of the katana, a curved, single-edged sword that was designed for quick, decisive strikes. They also carried a shorter sword, called a wakizashi, which was used for close-quarters combat or as a backup weapon. The samurai wore elaborate armor, which was both functional and decorative. The armor was made of multiple layers of leather and metal plates, and was designed to protect the samurai from both arrows and swords.

The samurai were also renowned for their horsemanship and archery skills. They were trained from a young age to ride horses and use a bow, and these skills were essential to their success in battle. The samurai were often depicted in Japanese art and literature as brave and honorable warriors, who were willing to sacrifice their own lives for the greater good.

The legacy of the samurai continues to this day. They are revered in Japan as symbols of bravery and honor, and their code of ethics, bushido, is still studied and respected. The samurai are also widely recognized outside of Japan, and have become a symbol of Japanese culture and history. They have been depicted in countless books, movies, and television shows, and their weapons and armor continue to be popular collectors' items.

LIVEWORKSHEETS