THE CREATION A mythical story is told about the beginning of the islands known as Japan. Long ago the islands of Japan did not even exist, only ocean. A god and goddess looked down from the heavens upon the beautiful ocean and saw a long and colorful rainbow streaking over the ocean. The rainbow formed a splendid bridge and the god and goddess decided to walk across it. Pausing in the center of this stretch of color, the god lowered his jeweled spear into the ocean. He swirled the spear around and around and lifted it from the water. Tiny water drops fell from the tip of the spear, and as they hit the ocean they turned into land. This became the country known as Japan.

THE FIRST EMPEROR The god and goddess descended to their newly created land where the goddess gave birth to Amaterasu, the goddess of the sun and the first ruler of this land. The great-great grandson of Amaterasu is thought to be the great Jimmu, founder of Japan's imperial family. Every emperor of Japan, from Jimmu's time to present day, have been directly related to Jimmu and, therefore, a descendant of the gods.

THREE TREASURES Jimmu carried with him the proof he needed to verify his divine ancestry. Three treasures, handed down by the gods, were always to be kept in possession of Japan's emperors. The first was a mirror that belonged to the sun goddess, representing the emperor's relation to the gods. The next treasure was a special sword, representing the emperor's strength. The third treasure was a jewel, said to actually have been taken from the steps of heaven, representing the great wisdom the emperor possesses. With such powerful and convincing evidence, no one could ever doubt that Japan's emperors were truly related to the gods.

BATTLES WITH AINU Jimmu gained control of Japan about 660 BC. He successfully battled against a different race of people who originally inhabited Japan called the Ainu (pronounced I Knew). These people looked different than the present-day Japanese people. They were tall, white skinned, and many had beards. (A small number of Ainu still live in Japan today, mainly on the northern island of Hokkaido.) Jimmu defeated these people he called the white, hairy, barbarians and drove them primarily to the north, thus becoming emperor and sole ruler of Japan.

A LASTING HERITAGE Jimmu was, most likely, an actual person. The mythical beginnings of Japan is a story still enjoyed by the Japanese, though the actual relation of the emperor to the gods was renounced by the emperor of Japan, Hirohito, after World War II. Emperor Hirohito's heritage can, however, be traced directly back to Jimmu, the first emperor of Japan. Emperor Hirohito died in 1989, and today his son is emperor of Japan.
THE YOUNG PRINCE In 572, a boy with exceptional talents was born to a member of the royal family of Japan. He became known as Prince Shotoku. It is said that by the time he was four months old he was already speaking, and shortly after that he could read and write. While still a young boy, he had learned all the scriptures of a religion that had recently been introduced to Japan. As his many great talents developed, people looked to him for guidance and leadership.

BUDDHISM The new religion that interested the prince was Buddhism. Although it was new to Japan, it had originated in India more than 1,000 years earlier. The religion was started by a member of a royal family of India who became known as the Buddha. His teachings gradually spread through China and into Korea. Then, as a gift to the Japanese, the Korean leader sent the Buddhist scriptures and a gold and copper image of the Buddha to the royal family. Prince Shotoku was very impressed with the teachings of the Buddha, and he sought to spread the religion throughout the country.

SHINTO The Japanese religion of Shinto had existed throughout the country from the early times of Jimmu. The belief that spirits existed in all things, living or not, was part of the religion. Building a shrine, or leaving offerings for these spirits could help one in fishing, farming, or warfare. When the new religion of Buddhism was introduced into Japan, it was found to be compatible with the existing Shinto religion. The Japanese people happily could still practice their ancient Shinto and adopt the Buddhist religion that Prince Shotoku so admired.

BUDDHISM SPREADS Prince Shotoku set about erecting temples and statues to the new religion. One great complex of temples was said to hold something quite special. The story was told that when the prince was only a year old, while praying, the left eyeball of the Buddha appeared in his hands. Later, that eyeball was placed at the temples. Soon the scriptures of Buddhism spread across Japan. Monasteries were constructed where people could devote their lives to studying the religion.

STATESMAN The prince became more than just a religious leader. He also had talents as a great statesman. His aunt was the empress when the prince was growing up. When Shotoku was 21 years old, she made him her regent, giving Shotoku her full confidence and total control over the government. The prince brought many teachers to Japan from Korea and China. He awarded teachers high social ranks in order to attract experts in astronomy, calendars, geography, medicine, and the sciences. The country awoke from the dark ages with this wealth of new information.
ACCOMPLISHMENTS  The prince introduced the Chinese style of centralized government. But he based his government on virtues of sincerity, love, and goodness, and he used Buddhism as a peaceful, unifying, religious force. Prince Shotoku wrote a code of law in his own hand using principles of philosophy learned from the Chinese. It provided guidelines of moral conduct for statesmen to follow, providing for an amazing degree of justice for such early times. He created a lasting peace from a civilization use to continuous warfare. Prince Shotoku commanded such great confidence in the people of his country that there was very little resistance to his many changes he introduced to produce an age of enlightenment for Japan. The nation was saddened at his death from illness in 622.

CHINESE INFLUENCE  For the next century, the Japanese continued to be fascinated with the much older Chinese culture. A type of university for Japanese royalty and friends was created. Chinese speech and writing was taught, and soon Chinese character writing was the preferred form of communication, often written in the form of poetry. The Japanese emperors and empresses became more impressed with the grand scale that Chinese royalty enjoyed. It was said that when the Chinese emperor built a capital, 2,000,000 men were set to work, and that his fleet of pleasure boats on the Yellow River was towed by 80,000 men. When he traveled on land, his caravan was 300 miles long. The Japanese royalty sought to live in a similar way. Rich art in the form of paintings, bronzes, silks, stones, and woods were commissioned from artists taught in the Chinese influence.

WOMEN IN JAPAN  Women held an honorable place in early Japanese society. Though not considered an equal to men, women had many freedoms not extended to women of other early societies. Japanese women could be educated, own property, and inherit property. Some of the best books written in early Japan were from female authors writing in traditional Japanese language, not in Chinese as the male authors preferred. The 54-book series, The Tale of Genji, written by Lady Murasaki, tells of what life was like as a member of the royal family in early Japan. Women were also known for their bravery. Once a general, while fighting the white, hairy barbarians, was about to be overrun. He had climbed over a stockade to make his getaway when his wife grabbed him and taunted him to stay. Then she gathered the other women together and they all made plucking noises like bow strings. The barbarians, thinking there was a waiting army behind the stockade, decided to withdraw. Later, the general reorganized his troops and lead them back to victory.
EMPERORS LOSE POWER  Jimmu, the first emperor of Japan, ruled around 660 BC. Over the next 2,500 years, many of his relatives served as emperor; some with strength and ability. But some were not so able, especially in political leadership and military planning.

FAMILIES OF WARRIORS  Many emperors concerned themselves only with the gentler matters of practicing their Buddhist religion, writing poetry, and appreciating items of peace and beauty. The more difficult matters of war and power were frequently left to other families. For serving the emperor, these families were often rewarded with the rights to control and tax the peasant farmers and landowners. A few families achieved tremendous wealth and power. To maintain their power, families frequently fought wars with each other. Needing to be continuously ready to do battle, family members trained daily at the use of all types of weapons, knives, bows, spears, but especially the sword—the favorite weapon of these times. The swordsmanship of the Japanese warriors was perhaps the best in the world.

SAMURAI  These warriors came to be known as “samurai,” which means “one who serves.” The code of the samurai required that he always would be ready to serve his leader, unquestioningly, even if it meant his own death. A good samurai would consider it quite honorable to die in battle at the request of his leader, but preferably not before chopping off the heads of a few enemy warriors.

WOMEN SAMURAI  Being samurai didn’t mean simply one was a warrior, but rather it meant being a member of one of the powerful warring clans. Women, too, could be samurai, but they did not participate in battle. They were expected to serve their husbands and their family leader, taking their own lives if requested to do so. Occasionally a woman of the royal family would become empress; only rarely did a woman become a military leader of a warring clan.

FAMILY FEUD  Around 1160 two powerful families feuded. The Taira family controlled much of the important land around Kyoto, home of the imperial family. The Tairas, by force, had the favor of the emperor. Their rivals, the Minamoto family, controlled lands farther from the emperor’s home and greedily desired to take over the Taira’s territory in order to force their influence on the emperor. The Minamotos won an important battle, temporarily taking control of the Kyoto area. The Tairas battled back, crushing the Minamotos and later assassinating their leader. The leader’s entire family was also to be executed; however, the leader’s widow was so beautiful that the leader of the Taira family sought to make a deal with her.
THE DEAL If Lady Minamoto would agree to become the Taira leader's wife, he would not only allow her to live but would also allow her sons to continue living. In order to avoid having them grow up and seek revenge against the Tairas, however, they had to become monks and live their lives in the confines of separate monasteries, never to see each other. Though she hated the Tairas for the death of her husband, she agreed to the deal to save the lives of her sons.

TWO SONS The elder son's name was Yoritomo; his younger brother was Yoshitsune. They grew up with a hatred for the Taira family and a desire for revenge. Yoshitsune, at age 15, escaped from the monastery where he was held. While in hiding, he trained daily to become a great samurai warrior. Meanwhile, Yoritomo, who had been sent to a remote province, planned his revenge. Yoritomo began meeting with old Minamoto clan members and loyal friends of his father's. The Tairas also had many enemies. Yoritomo united all these people to form a small army and set up his own government.

YOSHITSUNE Young Yoshitsune had now joined with his older brother and had taken on the role of military commander. He proved to be an expert at battle strategy and, though frequently outnumbered, Yoshitsune lead the Minamoto armies to several surprise victories over the Taira forces.

FINAL BATTLE Pushed toward the sea by advancing Minamotos, the Tairas took with them the emperor, Antoku, who was just a young boy. Antoku kept with him many of his important imperial belongings. The final, decisive battle took place at sea. Though again outnumbered, Yoshitsune cleverly used the tides and currents to his advantage. The Minamoto victory caused such despair among the surviving Taira army that many of the samurai took their own lives by jumping into the water and drowning. The boy emperor also drowned during the fierce battle, and the famous mirror, sword, and jewel, proof of the emperor's divine ancestry, were lost at sea. Yoshitsune sent divers to search for the priceless treasures. Eventually, the mirror and the gem were recovered, but the sword was never found.

FIRST SHOGUN The Minamotos now had complete military control of Japan, and Yoritomo, as the eldest son, was supreme ruler. A new emperor from the imperial family was installed. This emperor named Yoritomo to be the first shogun, chief military ruler of all Japan. To assure himself complete and unthreatening power, Yoritomo forced his devoted younger brother, Yoshitsune, to commit suicide.

GHOST OF YOSHITSUNE Yoritomo ruled Japan efficiently until 1199. It is said that, while riding on his horse one day, Yoritomo confronted the ghost of Yoshitsune. In shock and terror, Yoritomo fell from his horse and died.
SAMURAI CODE  The code of the samurai warrior was based on honor, respect, obedience, and total loyalty to those superior. As with Yoshitsune, a younger brother showed honor, respect, and obedience to an older brother, a wife to her husband, children to their father, and samurai warriors to their leaders, with the highest position in Japan being shogun, total military ruler. The emperor, too, shared the very highest level of respect, but his role was as a religious and spiritual leader and as a symbolic figure representing the divine heritage of Japan. Though the emperors lived in splendor, their powers were rarely a threat to the shoguns' power.

KUBLAI KHAN  About 70 years after the death of Yoritomo, Japan's first shogun, the strength of the samurai code and the bravery of the samurai warriors was tested. Kublai Khan, the cruel and powerful leader in Mongolia, had conquered many lands, maintaining his power through sheer terror. He looked upon Japan as yet another unconquered prize. Stories of the ruthless Khan's destruction of entire villages, killing all men, women, and children, spread such fear that many people felt it safest to simply surrender to the dreaded Mongol army than to fight against it and suffer its wrath. Therefore, when Kublai Khan sent messengers to Japan in 1268, stating that Japan was to surrender to him or face the consequences, the great leader felt that Japan would surely negotiate.

INVASION PLANS  But the military leaders of Japan were unshaken and sent the messengers back to Mongolia, making it quite clear they would never surrender. This message infuriated Kublai Khan, and he put together his invasion plan that would crush Japan. He formulated a fleet of 800 Korean ships to transport 30,000 Chinese, Korean, and Mongolian soldiers. In 1274 he sent them out to conquer Japan.

FIRST ATTEMPT  Brave samurai, well trained and eager to fight, met the massive Mongol fleet on the island of Kyushu. The samurai's individual style of combat confused the Mongol's plan of attack and forced them to retreat to their ships after a day of fighting. On the following day, a storm came up and forced the fleet to withdraw to sea to avoid the danger of being smashed against the rocky shore.

KHAN'S ANGER  When the fleet returned to Korea, Kublai Khan was infuriated at his army's failure. Again the tyrant sent messengers to Japan and demanded surrender or be prepared to pay the price. But this time the Japanese simply put the messengers to death, making it clear that Japan still had no intention of surrender. Kublai Khan had never been madder and vowed to severely punish Japan. He ordered mountains to be stripped of trees to build the largest armada ever assembled on earth, even to this day. More than 3,500 ships were constructed. An army of 140,000 men prepared for what they hoped would be a decisive invasion of Japan.
SECOND ATTEMPT The second attack came in 1281. The Japanese had spent the intervening seven years training and preparing for the Mongol army's inevitable return. The brave samurai were anxious and ready to defend their country. Japanese pirate ships menaced the advancing armada. The pirates would quietly swim to the Mongol ships at night. Then, cutting off the heads of the ship's crew members, the pirates would secretly return to their boats leaving the Mongol crafts floundering with inexperienced replacements.

THE BATTLE When the Mongol army landed, the massive mixture of Chinese, Korean, and Mongolian soldiers took to the shore again on the island of Kyushu. But the samurai battled bravely to defend their divinely created land. Weeks of furious fighting kept Kublai Khan's forces from establishing a solid foothold on Japanese shores.

HELPFUL STORM Then one day, strong winds began to blow. A dangerous storm was threatening, and the Mongol army feared that their ships could be driven against the shore. Troops retreated to the ships. But unlike the storm that had forced an end to the previous invasion, this storm quickly became more violent. Before they could reach the relative safety of the open seas, the ships were smashed and sunk, scattering the Mongol warriors into the angry waters. Most all were drowned. Those that managed to swim to the shore were swiftly chopped into fish food by the awaiting samurai.

DIVINE WINDS Thanks to the tremendous storm and the bravery of the samurai, Japan was successfully defended from the most powerful and frightening of invading forces. Kublai Khan's great army was crushed. His resources and morale drained, Kublai Khan made no further attempts to capture Japan. The Japanese were certain the great storm had been sent by the gods to help the samurai defend their sacred land from outsiders. They called the wind "kamikaze" or "divine wind," a term later adapted by World War II fighter pilots. This was still further proof that Japan was not only created by the gods, but was still watched over and protected by the deities. All Japan had much to be proud of. Instead of fighting among themselves, it was a time that Japan fought as a nation, preserving its purity and independence, and remaining unconquered.

Footnote In 1982, Japanese divers discovered the remains of the Mongolian armada off the shores of Kyushu. Though the ships had long since disintegrated, many relics were brought up still as they were in 1281.
PERIOD OF THE WARRING STATES In the 200 years following the great Japanese victory over Kublai Khan's invading forces, the shoguns of Japan allowed their absolute military power to slip away to the regional generals. When some shoguns lost interest in being military leader and pursued other areas of interest, their generals began fighting among themselves to defend or expand their areas of power and control. The Period of the Warring States, between 1490 and 1600, was a time of much bloodshed, uncertainty, civil fighting, and instability. It was also a time when any regional chieftain with great skill and a little luck could seize power and become shogun of Japan.

THE RISE OF HIDEYOSHI One regional leader, Oda Nobunaga, attempted to do just that. Among his officers was a common man, not samurai, named Hideyoshi. A man of great talent, he had become one of Nobunaga's most favored and trusted generals. Many times he had proven his skill on the battlefield. During one battle, he had a river diverted to flood out the defenses of his enemy. His cleverness led him to become a popular general among Nobunaga's troops.

MUSKETS IN JAPAN A new discovery came to Japan in 1542 when a trading ship, caught in a storm, washed ashore. Three Portuguese sailors managed to salvage their muskets and gunpowder from the shipwreck. They demonstrated their firearms, much to the astonishment of the Japanese. One observer reported, "Light like lightning was seen and noise like thunder was heard. Bystanders closed their ears with their hands, and flying birds and running beasts fell before them." Hideyoshi quickly understood the importance of using muskets in warfare. Soon he developed battle plans utilizing the new weapons. In one battle, with only 3,000 troops of his own, Hideyoshi defeated an army of 25,000 by using musketeers protected behind movable stockades. The enemy could not fight against the steady gunfire and was forced to retreat. In the following years, Hideyoshi won many battles and conquered much land for Nobunaga.

NOBUNAGA ASSASSINATED Although Nobunaga was named deputy shogun by the emperor, the fighting continued. Resistance came from other warlords and even from sects of warrior Buddhist priests who wanted to control trade in their region. Nobunaga eventually defeated most of his enemies, but in 1582 he was assassinated by one of his own men. When Hideyoshi killed the assassin, his power and popularity allowed him to become leader of Nobunaga's army.

HIDEYOSHI CONQUERS JAPAN In the following 10 years, Hideyoshi set out to conquer the remainder of Japan. His army of 170,000 soldiers dealt cruelly with those that resisted. One obstacle was a powerful warlord named Ieyasu Tokugawa, who could not be defeated. Hideyoshi agreed to make peace with Tokugawa and assured the deal with an interfamily marriage. Tokugawa was allowed to keep
control of his region. Hideyoshi then severely crushed all other armies and became the absolute military ruler of Japan.

RULER, BUT NOT SHOGUN Although Hideyoshi was now the ultimate military ruler of Japan, he could not become shogun because he was a common man and not born samurai. In order to make himself seem more important, he persuaded members of the royal Fujiwara family to adopt him. He told a story that before his birth, his mother saw a brilliant sunlight fill her room, though it was late at night. She then heard a prophecy telling that she would have a son who would lead a glorious life. Hideyoshi kept secret the true facts of his birth. No one was sure of the exact date of his birth or who his father was.

HIDEYOSHI'S WEALTH Perhaps to overcome his humble past, Hideyoshi set out to increase his wealth and power to levels greater than any ruler before him. Prospectors were ordered to search for new gold and silver mines. Hideyoshi personally claimed much of the new discoveries of wealth. In one of his homes in Kyoto, everything Hideyoshi touched had to be made of gold. Even the roof was gold. Rooms were filled with bars of gold and silver and bales of fine silk. Hideyoshi also built the largest and strongest fortress ever constructed in Japan, the castle at Osaka. Tens of thousands of workmen were needed to build the 187-acre castle, which Hideyoshi made the center of his government. Double walls, deep moats, and a 100-foot-high tower protected Hideyoshi and his family within.

HEIR TO POWER Hideyoshi hoped that his son would become ruler. However, when his son died in 1590, new plans were made. Hideyoshi appointed his nephew to become the next ruler after his death. To everyone's surprise, in 1593, another son was born. Because Hideyoshi preferred his son to inherit the throne, he ordered his nephew to commit suicide, and all the nephew's children killed, which was done. This cleared away any argument of who would succeed Hideyoshi.

KOREA INVADED To increase his power further, Hideyoshi's ambition was to conquer China. Using his military skills, he organized a crushing invasion of Korea. Though successful in Korea, his army was unable to advance to China. Disease and a loss of many convoy ships to Korean pirates forced the Japanese armies to return home. A second invasion was launched. Again the Japanese armies quickly conquered Korea. But before any invasion into China could take place, Hideyoshi's generals received word that he had died. The invasion attempt ended; the army returned. Japan had been strengthened and enriched by Hideyoshi's rule. The period of the warring states had ended, but a peaceful future for Japan was left uncertain.
HIDEYOSHI’S TRUST IN TOKUGAWA A few years before Hideyoshi died, he met with his former rival, Ieyasu Tokugawa, on the hills above what is now Tokyo. Hideyoshi slowly and silently drew his sword. But instead of using it to remove the head of Tokugawa, Hideyoshi handed the sword to him, a symbol that Hideyoshi placed great trust in this strong and clever warlord. Plans for the future of Japan were discussed, but one matter especially worried Hideyoshi. His son, who he wanted to be the next military leader of Japan, was only a young boy. In those days when children were sometimes killed to clear a path to power for another, Hideyoshi planned for his son’s safety after his eventual death. Hideyoshi asked Tokugawa to be the leader of a five-regent council entrusted to care for the boy and run the government until Hideyoshi’s son was old enough to take charge. Although this was like assigning a fox to watch the chickens, Hideyoshi had tremendous trust in Tokugawa’s wisdom and abilities.

RISE TO POWER When Hideyoshi died in 1592, his son was six years old. The regents took control of the government, but it wasn’t long before they were feuding. Two sides emerged, with Tokugawa and his allies going to battle against another regent and his allies. Tokugawa’s army won a major battle in 1600, forcing the other regent to flee to the castle at Osaka. With his enemies now contained, Tokugawa requested that the emperor name him shogun of Japan, which was granted in 1603.

SIEGE OF OSAKA CASTLE Although he was now the supreme military ruler of Japan, Tokugawa could not rest knowing that his enemy still lived securely in the huge castle at Osaka with Hideyoshi’s son and his mother. The castle was built so solidly that it was thought impossible to capture. However, Tokugawa attempted to overrun it with a direct attack and a constant bombardment with his cannons. When this failed, the wise Tokugawa had a better idea. Knowing which part of the castle Hideyoshi’s son and his mother lived, Tokugawa ordered his cannons to fire only on that area. The continual barrage of cannonballs frightened the family enough that they eventually surrendered. Tokugawa assured the safety of the family, but took the opportunity to tear down some of the walls while he secretly planned a second attack on the weakened castle. The second attack came in 1615 and brought the death of Hideyoshi’s son and those who threatened the supreme power of the Shogun Tokugawa.

SOCIETY ORGANIZED During the period that Ieyasu Tokugawa was shogun, a system known as feudalism was used to organize the country. Land was given to daimyos, who were usually family, friends, or loyal generals of the shogun. The daimyos allowed peasants to farm the land, giving the peasants half of what they grew and keeping the rest to increase their own wealth. The richest farmland was a prize awarded to the shogun’s most trusted friends. In this system of
feudalism, peasant farmers were loyal to their daimyos, and the daimyos pledged their loyalty and full military support to the shogun.

**THREE CLASSES** All people belonged to a certain class, and their class was not allowed to change. Three major classes existed in feudal Japan. The highest ranking class was royalty, which included the emperor and his family. Second was the military class known as samurai. Shogun was the highest military rank, daimyos below him, and foot soldiers below the daimyos. The third class of people were the commoners, or peasants. Even they had a social ranking. Farmers and artisans were the highest ranked common people, merchants ranked below them, and eta, or bone pickers, were the lowest social level. Into whatever level a person was born, that was generally where he remained for life.

**ENTERTAINMENT** During the leyasu Tokugawa period, a favorite form of entertainment was to attend a play. Two types of plays existed. One style was known as No. It was entertainment specifically for royalty and the highest ranking military families. No actors wore wooden masks. Because the actors could not change facial expressions, their costumes and body movements were important in telling the stories, usually of gods and military heroes. A second, livelier form of theater, developed to entertain the common people. Known as Kabuki, these plays contained more action, music, and generally were more fun to watch. Since women were forbidden to be Kabuki actors, men played the roles of women, adding to the humor of the event. Colorful costumes and exciting stories made Kabuki a popular form of entertainment.

**TOKUGAWA'S POWERFUL SHOGUNATE** Although Tokugawa possessed wealth beyond imagination, he did not share the same fascination with gold and silver as did Hideyoshi. Total power and control were the main interests of Tokugawa. Keeping the peasants at poverty level kept them under control. "Give the peasants neither life nor death," he said, meaning feed them only enough to keep them from starving to death, but no more. The daimyos were kept under control by requiring that their families live near Tokugawa's government at Edo. This way they could easily be captured as hostages should a daimyo decide to turn against his leader. Tokugawa also banned the recently introduced religion of Christianity in favor of the Chinese philosophy of Confucius. Confucius taught that all people should obey their superiors. Children should obey their parents; soldiers should obey their military leaders. Tokugawa saw this as an additional means of control.
CLOSES JAPAN  Finally, as a means to eliminate any outside influence, Tokugawa closed Japan to all foreigners and trade outside the country. Only the harbor at Nagasaki was left open to limited trade with the Dutch and Chinese. When some sailors from Portugal asked if they too could trade in Nagasaki, Tokugawa had them beheaded, sending a clear message to sailors of other countries to stay away from Japan. Tokugawa carefully planned all parts of Japanese society and also planned to control the future of Japan after his death. His son was allowed to become shogun before leyasu died, so he could assure a stable transfer of power. The title of shogun remained in the Tokugawa family for more than 250 years, and Japan remained closed to the rest of the world during the entire time.
TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE  Japan enjoyed more than 250 years of
relative peace and stability between 1600 and 1850. The country had
been well organized by the shogun, leyasu Tokugawa, whose family
continued to control the government, generation after generation. But
many of the Tokugawas that followed leyasu were not strong leaders.
They gave many responsibilities of government to administrators and
daimyos. Now, they could spend more time enjoying their wealth and
privilege. But the Tokugawas lost the respect and fear that leyasu had
once commanded.

JAPAN REMAINS CLOSED  During the Tokugawa shogunate,
Japan remained closed to foreign trade and influences. Except for the
port at Nagasaki, Japan had no way to know about progress in the rest
of the world. Japanese citizens were forbidden to leave the country.
The Tokugawa government ordered that no ocean-going ships were
to be built. Foreigners attempting to land on Japanese soil, even if by
accident, were often punished by death. The Japanese favored and
developed those things that were Japanese, such as the tea cere-
mony, and the Kabuki and No theater. But the government discar-
gaged and outlawed those things introduced by foreigners. Muskets,
once introduced by the Portuguese, were now banned. The sword
was once again the weapon of choice for the samurai. The Christian
religion also remained banned in favor of Buddhism, Shinto, and
Confucianism. Japan progressed little in the 250 years of Tokugawa
rule, preserving a society like no other on earth.

PERRY ARRIVES  A time for surprise and awakening for the Japa-
nese occurred in 1853. Late that year, Commodore Matthew Perry, an
American, sailed into a Japanese harbor with his four steam-powered
warships. These modern vessels were equipped with massive guns
of the latest design. The Japanese had developed no new weapons
in the past 250 years, and they knew they were powerless to resist
these modern weapons of war. Although Perry had no authority to use
the guns against the Japanese, the show of power shocked the
Tokugawa government. Perry's warships frightened the Japanese,
but his mission was actually one of peace. He wanted Japan to once
again open its doors, at least to American sailors. Perry brought a
friendly letter from the president of the United States and presented
it to the Tokugawa government along with Western gifts that demon-
strated the progress of the outside world. The Japanese were espe-
cially fascinated with a sewing machine and a miniature railroad.
Commodore Perry stayed only 10 days, then sailed off, promising to
return in the spring.
PERRY'S SECOND VISIT  Commodore Perry returned to Japan early in 1854, this time with 10 steam-powered warships. But Perry's return was once again friendly, and the Japanese were courteous to him. They had spent the past few months thinking about how far behind many other nations Japan had fallen. Plans to open Japan to ideas of the Western world were discussed by the shogun and the emperor. The Japanese, proud of their past, never being conquered by another country, knew that a change had to come. A treaty was signed by Japan with the United States. It provided that shipwrecked U. S. sailors would be treated kindly, and not be beheaded, that U. S. ships could dock and purchase provisions in Japan, and that a representative of the United States government could live in Japan. With this treaty, Perry had successfully opened the doors between Japan and the modern world.

FALL OF THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE  The powerful foreign nations had experienced an amazing degree of development in the past 250 years, while Japan, with its doors closed to the outside world, had changed very little. The Japanese knew that something had to be done. For the past 2,000 years Japan had never been conquered by another nation. The proud Japanese recalled the divine beginnings of their country with Jimmu, descendent of the gods. All the emperors of Japan had been relatives of Jimmu, and no one wanted the line of royalty to end now. The Tokugawa government could not decide what should be done. Finally, Emperor Meiji took control of the government, ending the Tokugawa reign of power.
RAPID CHANGES  Commodore Perry’s visit to Japan in 1854 brought about rapid changes. After living in the old, traditional fashion of a feudal society, Japan made it a national priority to catch up to the rest of the modern world as quickly as possible. Practically all aspects of society were modernized. Because of the excitement and fascination with all things modern, the Japanese were eager to introduce many items of western culture into their own culture, just as Prince Shotoku had adapted many qualities from the Chinese culture centuries earlier. Now, everything western was studied and copied, from railroads and telegraphs, to the postal service and schools. Modern factories were built, copied from the factories of the western world. It was the ambition of the Japanese people to be recognized as an equal by the world’s most powerful nations.

OPPORTUNITY FOR AN EMERGING NATION  As Japan entered the 20th century, the military had gained the upper hand in controlling the government. Wars with Russia and China had been fought as Japan attempted to use force to expand its influence. By 1940, war was also raging in Europe, and Japan saw opportunities developing. Because some European countries had taken control of resources in Asia, Japan saw the possibility of capturing these resources from the Europeans. By aligning itself with Germany and Italy, Japan would be able to take over the Dutch-held oil reserves and the valuable British-held ports throughout Asia and the Pacific. Japan’s large population, and its desire to expand created a need for more resources. By going to war against America, Japan would be able to keep America out of Asia, allowing Japan to conquer all of the Asian and Pacific resources.

JAPAN’S WAR PLAN  By 1941, military leaders developed a bold plan where Japan could conquer Asia and keep America out. Many officers saw America as a “sleeping giant,” not yet ready to fight, but potentially dangerous. If they could pull off a sneak attack to destroy America’s Pacific fleet, and keep the Pacific war fairly short, they could succeed with their goals for expansion. According to the plan, a weakened America would concede and allow Japan the rich prize of Asia. The majority of America’s naval fleet was stationed in Hawaii at Pearl Harbor; the Japanese chose this site for their sneak attack.

NATIONS AT WAR  On December 7, 1941, Japan launched its attack on Pearl Harbor. The unsuspecting Americans were bombed and torpedoed by waves of Japanese planes. The Americans were unable to respond, while their ships, planes, air and naval bases were pounded and destroyed. In less that two hours the attack was over; 2,403 Americans were dead and 1,178 were injured. The Japanese had destroyed 188 American planes and damaged or destroyed 18 U.S. war ships, while losing only 29 of their own planes. The attack was considered a great success by the Japanese, but it awoke and angered the “sleeping giant.” On December 8, President Franklin
Roosevelt announced to a shocked nation that congress had declared war on Japan. Three days later, the U. S. declared war on Germany and Italy. With the world at war, Japan's plan to dominate Asia was underway, and the Japanese felt confident of victory.

**AMERICA FIGHTS BACK**  Japan's crippling attack at Pearl Harbor left America weak and slow to respond to Japan's war in the Pacific. The Japanese military won victory after victory, capturing Hong Kong, Malaya, the oil-rich Dutch East Indies, Singapore, and the Philippines. Japan hoped that the U. S. would concentrate its war efforts in Europe. But equal priority was given to the Pacific war, and the American Pacific fleet was soon rebuilt and back in action. The momentum of the war turned against Japan with American victories at Midway Island and the Coral Sea. American and other allied forces under General Douglas MacArthur fought back capturing one island after another. The Japanese proved to be a difficult foe, often preferring death to being captured, in the tradition of the samurai warriors. By 1945, the U. S. was prepared to deal the final blow. Rather than American troops invading Japan, the decision to use America's newest weapon, the atomic bomb, was made. On August 6, 1945, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima instantly destroying more than 60% of the city. On August 9, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki with an equal amount of death and destruction. The Japanese knew they had no hope left of winning the war. On September 2, 1945, the Japanese emperor did something never before done in the entire history of Japan. He informed his country that Japan had surrendered to another country.

**MAC ARTHUR AND THE OCCUPATION**  Most of Japan lay in ruins. Not only were Hiroshima and Nagasaki destroyed by atomic bombs, but most other Japanese cities and industries were devastated by conventional bombs. As part of the terms of surrender, Japanese Emperor Hirohito had to go before the people and declare that he was only a human being, and not really related to the gods. The spirit of the Japanese people had been crushed. But rather than continue to punish Japan further, America, under the leadership of General MacArthur, set out to rebuild the nation. Schools, industries, and homes were reconstructed. A new democratic form of government was set up, eventually giving every citizen over the age of 20 the right to vote. Emperor Hirohito was allowed to continue as emperor, acting only as a figurehead and a spiritual leader. But Japan was not allowed to rebuild its military. The occupation of Japan by America lasted from 1945 to 1952. Under MacArthur's direction, Japan began its recovery from the war and rapidly rebuilt as a friend and ally of America.
RAPID RISE Japan's ability to quickly rebuild after World War II came only partially with American aid. The Japanese people throughout history have had a strong national pride and work ethic. Although crushed and defeated, this very pride and hard work allowed Japan to rapidly rebuild into a powerful nation. Only now their power was not military, but rather economic. Japanese business began to flourish. The entire country needed to be rebuilt, and Japanese factories supplied the goods. Originally, Japanese products were of poor quality, but very inexpensive. Soon markets for these goods were developed in other countries, though much resentment was encountered from countries which had fought against Japan. Gradually, the quality of Japanese goods improved and resentment diminished. The new Japan was peacefully achieving the desire which had led it originally into war, to become a respected nation and an equal to the other world powers.

JAPAN'S ECONOMY Today, no home in the U. S. is without some Japanese products. Brand names such as Sony, Honda, Sanyo, Mitsubishi, Hitachi, Nissan, and many others have become common in the United States and throughout the world.

Even many Western companies use Japanese manufactured parts in their products. The list of Japanese exports is long. For years, Japan was known for its production of silk, cultured pearls, as well as its shipbuilding. More recently, Japan has excelled in the production of cameras, automobiles, and electronics. But Japan is a small nation with many people and few natural resources. It relies on imports of these resources to feed its people and operate its factories. Oil, lumber, and food are the main needs of Japan. Now Japan is among the wealthiest nations. Its banks are the world's largest, supplying money for projects all around the globe. Japan now provides foreign aid to poorer countries who would like to peacefully become emerging nations, too.