

*The Media in U.S.-Japan Relations.* While the belligerent rhetoric has gone the way of Japan's "bubble economy," cultural commentary during the U.S. television coverage of the recent Nagano Olympics was marred by misunderstandings and apparently deliberate attempts to exoticize Japanese culture, indicating the continued need for cultural sensitivity studies. ■

Marcia Johnson

MARCIA JOHNSON is the Associate Director of the National Clearinghouse for U.S.-Japan Studies at Indiana University.

## Samurai Sisters

### Early Feudal Japan from *The Spindle Stories* Women's World History Series

BY LYN REESE  
WOMEN IN WORLD HISTORY CURRICULUM  
1030 SPRUCE ST.  
BERKELEY, CA 94707  
510-524-0304

This unit is an important addition to the other eight units of *The Spindle Stories Series*. It is devoted strictly to life during the feudal period in Japan. The following topics are covered through various written explanations, pictures, poems, and character sheets: Everyday Life in Early Feudal Japan; Conflict Between the Way of the Warrior and of the Courtier; Life-Styles of Women of the Court; Expectations on Samurai Families; Women's Relationship to Religion; Women Writers in Early Japan; and The Stages of a Woman's Life.

The first twenty pages are devoted to the story of two Samurai sisters at the time when Yoritomo of the Minamoto clan became the first shogun of Japan in 1192. Important words are highlighted through this section. The story, with some written dialogue, goes through the women's childhood to adulthood and ends with one of the women handing letters from her life to her niece to pass on. At the end of the story, there are five extensive questions about the story which tie in important information about feudalism, women's literature, work, and religion in Japan during this time period.

After the story, there are fifteen pages of activities on "Pilgrimage," two pages of activities on "The Stages of Life," and four pages of activities on "Poetry Pages." The "Pilgrimage" activity revolves around six characters that meet and travel with others on a religious pilgrimage. Their pilgrimage starts out in early Spring from Kamakura and finishes in the imperial capital of Kyōto. These characters are intended for student group work, with one character per group. Several follow-up suggestions for this interactive assignment are provided.

The "Stages of Life" involves studying the lives of the two women in the story. The four stages are childhood, becoming a woman, marriage and family, and retirement and death. It also includes follow-up activities.

Pages on poetry constitute the last part of the unit where, through reading poems from the Heian period, the mood, meaning, and themes of that particular age are studied. This section includes two full pages on the background of women in Heian and Feudal Japan.

The *Samurai Sisters* unit would serve as an excellent addition to a larger curriculum on Japan. It covers information about women, as well as Japanese feudalism. Most important, however, are the activities on poetry and the pilgrimage. Using the unit simply as a source of information on premodern Japanese history years is not advised, as there simply is not enough information on this time period. *Samurai Sisters* does work well as an addition to a unit on this time period and can be adapted for middle school to high school students. Since there seem to be limited teaching resources on women in Japanese history, this unit is much needed material for educators interested in Asian history. ■

Signe Jensen

SIGNE JENSEN teaches World History at Morristown-Beard School in Morristown, New Jersey. She spent the summer of 1996 in Northeast and Western China on an educational program with Bloomburg University. Currently she is working on a Masters of Education degree at Montclair State University.

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