

CURRICULUM MATERIALS REVIEWS

U.S.-Japan Relations

The View From Both Sides of the Pacific, Part II *The Media in U.S.-Japan Relations:* *A Look at Stereotypes*

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The cultural dimension of U.S.-Japan relations has been the subject of fruitful academic studies by Akira Iriye, John Dower, and others. Unfortunately, until recently it has been difficult to find good materials on cultural relations appropriate for use in precollegiate classrooms. To address this need, Gary Mukai and his team at SPICE have produced *The Media in U.S.-Japan Relations: A Look at Stereotypes*, the second of three innovative sets of curriculum materials in their series, *U.S.-Japan Relations: The View From Both Sides of the Pacific*.

The Media in U.S.-Japan Relations offers five well-designed and well-balanced lessons: "Images of the United States in Japan," "Stereotypes of Blacks in Japan," "Images of Japan in the United States," "Japan in Hollywood," and "Analyzing the Media." The specific impetus for this series of lessons was mutual recriminations of the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period which saw trade friction, the rise of the yen to historic levels, and conspicuous Japanese investment in the U.S. Americans who were teaching in Japan at the time remember it as a trying period for race relations. While attempting to help students see beyond the war of insults waged in the media between U.S. and Japanese politicians, teachers also struggled



to explain to them events like the Rodney King beating and the killing of a Japanese exchange student in Louisiana. Although touching upon many events of the past decade, the lessons in *The Media in U.S.-Japan Relations* remain relevant and interesting today. They include historical examples that predate this period, as well as lesser-known but significant events, such as the founding of an anti-racist organization by a Japanese family in Sakai.

The five lessons in *The Media in U.S.-Japan Relations* are usefully designed for practical implementation. Each lesson comes with a set of organizing questions, a concise introduction, a list of cognitive, affective, and skill objectives, a list of necessary materials, clear explanations of teaching procedures, and a set of primary and secondary materials to be used in the lesson. Higher order thinking skills are emphasized throughout, and group work predominates. Perhaps the most attractive component of these lessons, from a student's perspective, is the use of a variety of engaging primary sources, which include short articles, color slides (on an accompanying video cassette), numerous cartoons, and photocopies of movie posters.

All of this is provided in a relatively low tech format. One looks forward to the prospect of high tech offerings from SPICE in the future—CD ROMs, perhaps. However, since the vast majority of secondary teachers still have limited access to technology, current SPICE materials fill an immediate educational need.

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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

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Samurai Sisters

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

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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. ■

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