Part One
Art and Literature in Ancient Japan: The Heian Period (794 to 1280)

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History

The Heian Period in Japan spans from the 790s to almost 1200. During this time period, the imperial court was moved to Heian-kyo, which is today called Kyoto. This period signaled the rise of a bureaucratic model of government.

The beginning of the period is referred to as the Age of Kingly Rule, in which Emperor Kanmu, the 50th emperor of Japan, looked to make a break with the old ways of life in the previous Nara periods. This period spans from 794 to 900. The emperor moved the capital and attempted to purge the court of old Nara administrators and infuse new life and a new style into the governance of Japan. It during this period that governmental efficiency is focused in on and honed to perfection, which has left a remaining influence on the Japanese people and their culture, even to present day.

The middle of the Heian Period, from 900 to 1050, marks the Fujiwara Era, in which the aristocratic elite flourished. This era marked a golden age of courtly decorum and culture. It was during this time period that some of the most well-known classical pieces of literature were produced by the powerful female literati. Specifically, The Tale of Genji, which is used in the lessons below, was created during this time period and reflect the courtly values of the ages. The formality and indirectness present in courtly manners is something that is also still present in modern Japanese culture, both in the ways in which the language is used and also in the interacts of respect and humility between the genders.

As the Heian period came to a close, the era of courtly rule began to quickly decline into lawlessness, conflict and eventually war to overtake the monarchy. The ending of this period marks the transition from ancient Japan to a more organized militaristic and political force during the Middle Ages of Japan, which would last from the 1300s up to the 1600s.

Heian Period Art

The Emperor’s court and aristocratic life was the focus of much of the Yamato-e style of painting, prevalent in Japan during the Heian period. This school of painting employed a specific style of painting, heavily influence by Chinese styles, using thick bands of color and literary subjects.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art provides an incredible interactive online resource with slideshows on both Heian Period art and also Yamato-e Painting. In addition to the slideshows, there are accessible entries explaining the hallmarks of the period and the style and thematic essays available. These art slideshows can ideally be shown to students as an anticipatory activity, to follow the historical context note taking.

**Literature**

The literary piece that will be examined by students are *The Tale of Genji*. Categorized as the first novel of Japan, this text is important historically and culturally to the ancient Japanese people. Even today, *Genji*, as it is affectionately called by contemporary educators, is taught in primary schools and studied more thoroughly in the upper levels. It is ingrained in the collective consciousness of the Japanese culture and is a common-place as any versions of The Brother’s Grimm fairy tales that are very much a part of a Western childhood. *The Tale of Genji* is an artifact that explores marriage practices and social issues of the time period. Because it was, and remains, an integral part of the culture, throughout time many pictorial representations have been created to illustrate the tale. This strong visual element makes the text even more valuable as a teaching tool.

**Lesson Planning Ideas**

*Lesson #1: The Tale of Genji and Japanese Scrolls: Exploration and Creation*

**Anticipatory Set:** The teacher will provide students with sample comic books and graphic novels to browse for the first 5 minutes of class. Students will then spend the next five minutes completing a freewrite, answering the following questions:

- What are some specific elements the artist uses to express the narrative in the comic book?
- How do pictures help the enhance your understanding of the story?
- What can you tell about the culture of the character based on the illustrations in the comic? What about the words?

**Activity One:** The teacher will then direct through a Heian Period Kloze Note activity to provide historical background and context of *The Tale of Genji*. (Kloze Activity and Key provided in Appendix A).

**Activity Two:** Students will explore *The Tale of Genji* through a Web Crawl activity. Students will be provided with the following links and be given on period (45 minutes) to explore the information on the sites provided. Links are provided in Appendix B.
The teacher will circulate and provide guidance and assistance as necessary. After exploring the sites, students will answer the following questions:

1. Who wrote *The Tale of Genji*?
2. Who is Genji?
3. When was it written?
4. What is the story about?
5. Why is the story an important part of Japanese culture and history?
6. How has the *Tale of Genji* been an influence to Japanese art through the ages?
7. Name and describe three to five characters from *The Tale of Genji*.
8. List and discuss some of the themes that are present in *The Tale of Genji*.
9. What class of people is *The Tale of Genji*? How does this consideration change your understanding of the Heian Period in Japan?
10. Read at least one chapter from each of the Parts, listed on the UNESCO site. Record your impressions, observations and thoughts on the chapters you have read (Three entries minimum)

At the beginning of the next class, students will share out their discoveries online in a group setting. Questions and misconceptions will be addressed.

**Activity Three**: Teacher will project or provide students with printed copies of the scroll for the first chapter from the Dartmouth Website, listed in the Web Crawl above. As a class, the teacher will guide students through analysis of the first scroll. Examples of guiding questions include:

- Is there a theme to this scroll?
- What significant stylistic elements does this scroll have? (Colors, Perspective, Line, Use of Space - negative and positive)
- What is being depicted in the scene?
- What social class do you believe the people depicted are a part of?
- How can you tell their social standing?
- What do you think the painter wanted to communicate?
- What can we infer about court life in the Heian period?

After the teacher has guided students through the first scroll, they will perform the analysis independently on two to five additional scrolls, as time permits.

**Lesson #2: Women in Heian Japan: Using Primary Source Documents and DBQ**

**Anticipatory Set or as Homework**: Have students read the “ Writers of the Heian Era: Introduction”. Available at: [http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/modules/lesson2/lesson2.php? s=0](http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/modules/lesson2/lesson2.php? s=0)
Activity One: Students will explore the primary source documents provided, either via computer and weblinks or printed and distributed handouts. These documents are available at: [http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/modules/lesson2/lesson2.php?s=1](http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/modules/lesson2/lesson2.php?s=1)

While students are exploring the diary entries of Heian women writers, they should answer the following questions about each source:

1. Who is the intended audience for this document? Was this intended to be published?
2. What do you know about the Heian period and the roles of women during that time period that informs your understanding of this document?
3. How does this source help you better understand the roles of women in this time period?
4. What question do you have or things do you wonder about women during this time period after reading this document?

After students have complete their exploration of the primary source documents, they will provide a constructed response to the document based question (DBQ):

**What do the sources in this module reveal about Japanese court life and the limitations placed upon women? How did Japanese women from the Heian period overcome these limitations?**

The teacher can provide graphic organizers for outlining skills as assist students in writing through modeling and practice as necessary for their individual classroom needs.

This lesson is liberally adapted lesson plan on the Women in World History Website. Link provided in Resources section.

**Assessment:** Documentary Advertisement Scroll Creation

Student groups will create an advertisement scroll for a documentary on the Arts during the Heian Period. Students will imagine that the scrolls from they analyzed earlier in the unit are being used in a documentary film about Literature and Art in the Heian Period. The student groups are charged with the task of creating an “advertisement scroll”. This poster must express to the general public main ideas and themes about the Heian Period.

An exemplary poster should:

- Be in color on a reasonably sized piece of paper
- Include four illustrations that highlight specific features of the scrolls
- Provide four characteristics of Heian Japan during the period
- List significant dates to the Heian period
- Include an interpretation paragraph of Japan in the Heian Period. What took place? Why did it occur? Why is it important or distinctive?
- Create a name, date and time for the documentary to be screened
- Be free of grammatical or spelling errors
After the posters are finished, students will complete a Gallery Walk of each others work. Students will be provided with Post-It Notes to write comments and critiques for each of the other groups work. A group rating exit ticket can be distributed and collected to factor into students grades.

Resources

**Heian Art**
*The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*
  - Heian Period
    - [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/heia/hd_heia.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/heia/hd_heia.htm)
  - Illustrated Handscrolls
    - [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jilh/hd_jilh.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jilh/hd_jilh.htm)
  - Yamato-e Style
    - [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hi/hi_yamatoe.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hi/hi_yamatoe.htm)

*Online Museum Resources of Asian Art*
  - [http://afemuseums.easia.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/museums/search.cgi](http://afemuseums.easia.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/museums/search.cgi)

**Heian Literature**
*Extensive List of Resources and Strategies for Teaching The Tale of Genji*
  - [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/tps/600ce_jp.htm#genji](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/tps/600ce_jp.htm#genji)

*Women in World History: Writers in the Heian Period*

*Dartmouth University: Tale of Genji Illustrated Scrolls*
  - [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~arth17/Genji.index.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~arth17/Genji.index.html)

*Pacific University Asian Studies: Tale of Genji*
  - [http://mcel.pacificu.edu/as/students/genji/homepage.html](http://mcel.pacificu.edu/as/students/genji/homepage.html)

*UNESCO Global Heritage Pavilion: Tale of Genji*

*Genji Monogatari Anime Film with Subtitles*
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYwJaO88mm4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYwJaO88mm4)

*Tale of Genji Summary by Royall Tyler*
The Heian Period in Japan spans from the (1)___________ to almost (2)___________. During this time period, the (3)______________ ___________ was moved to Heian-kyo, which is today called (4)_____________. This period signaled the rise of a (5)______________ ___________ ___________.

The beginning of the period is referred to as the (6) ________ ___ __________ __________, in which Emperor Kanmu, the 50th emperor of Japan, looked to make a break with the old ways of life in the previous Nara periods. This period spans from (7) __________ to (8)__________. The emperor moved the capital and attempted to purge the court of old Nara administrators and (9)___________ new life and a new style into the governance of Japan. It during this period that governmental (10)______________ is focused in on and honed to perfection, which has left a (11)______________ ______________ on the Japanese people and their culture, even to present day.

The middle of the Heian Period, from (12)________ to ______________, marks (13)______________ ___________ ___________, in which the (14)______________ ___________ flourished. This era marked a golden age of (15)______________ ______________ and ___________. It was during this time period that some of the most well-known classical pieces of literature were produced by the (16)______________ ______________ literati.

As the Heian period came to a close, the (17) ____________ of ______________ __________ began to quickly decline into (18)______________ ___________ (19)______________ __________ and eventually (20)______________ to overthrow the (21)_____________. The ending of this period marks the transition from (22)______________ Japan to a more (23)______________ ____________, militaristic and (24)______________ force during the (25)______________ ______________ of Japan, which would last from the 1300s up to the 1600s.
The Heian Period in Japan spans from the (1) 790s to almost (2) 1200. During this time period, the (3) imperial court was moved to Heian-kyo, which is today called (4) Kyoto. This period signaled the rise of a (5) bureaucratic model of government.

The beginning of the period is referred to as the (6) Age of Kingly Rule, in which Emperor Kanmu, the 50th emperor of Japan, looked to make a break with the old ways of life in the previous Nara periods. This period spans from (7) 794 to (8) 900. The emperor moved the capital and attempted to purge the court of old Nara administrators and (9) infuse new life and a new style into the governance of Japan. It during this period that governmental (10) efficiency is focused in on and honed to perfection, which has left a (11) remaining influence on the Japanese people and their culture, even to present day.

The middle of the Heian Period, from (12) 900 to 1050, marks (13) Fujiwara Era, in which the (14) aristocratic elite flourished. This era marked a golden age of (15) courtly decorum and culture. It was during this time period that some of the most well-known classical pieces of literature were produced by the (16) powerful female literati.

As the Heian period came to a close, the (17) era of courtly rule began to quickly decline into (18) lawlessness (19) conflict and eventually (20) war to overthrow the (21) monarchy. The ending of this period marks the transition from (22) ancient Japan to a more (23) organized, militaristic and (24) political force during the (25) Middle Ages of Japan, which would last from the 1300s up to the 1600s.

Appendix B

*Tale of Genji Web Crawl Links*

1) Dartmouth University: Tale of Genji Illustrated Scrolls
   [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~arth17/Genji.index.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~arth17/Genji.index.html)

2) Pacific University Asian Studies: Tale of Genji
   [http://mcel.pacificu.edu/as/students/genji/homepage.html](http://mcel.pacificu.edu/as/students/genji/homepage.html)

3) UNESCO Global Heritage Pavillion: Tale of Genji

4) Genji Monogatari Anime Film with Subtitles
   [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYwJaO88mm4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYwJaO88mm4)

5) Tale of Genji Summary by Royall Tyler

6) The Tale of Murasaki - Authorial Historical Fiction

*Note: If your school does not have internet-enabled devices available to students, the teacher can print out information from the website and make a packet of information for students to peruse. If possible, the YouTube Anime can be viewed as a class as part of the Anticipatory Set.*