

Spirit of the Samurai



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Dear Teacher,

Welcome to the Spirit of the Samurai school program at the Asian Art Museum! In this docent-led tour, your students will explore the legacy of the Japanese warrior. They will discover how the samurai cultivated a distinctive art and culture influenced by Buddhism, an appreciation of nature, and a strict warrior code. In this school program, our highly trained docents will be teaching your students innovative ways of looking at art. As in all of our tours, questions and inquisitive minds are encouraged!

Program Objectives

This school program is aligned with the 7th grade California Content Standards*. Students will:

- trace the rise and development of Japan's warrior class
- learn that samurai life combined military skill and discipline with an appreciation of art and culture
- learn how many forms of Buddhism were introduced to Japan and influenced the arts
- examine how Zen Buddhism found great popularity among the samurai and came to influence their daily lives as reflected in warrior ideals, visual arts, and the tea ceremony

Pre-Visit Packet

Included in this packet is a pre-visit activity designed to complement your existing classroom curriculum. We have found that such activities greatly enhances students' museum learning experience. Please find enclosed the following:

- I. Lesson: Traveling Along the Tokaido
- II. Vocabulary
- III. Map of Japan

Preparing Your Class for a Museum Tour

This program takes approximately 2 hours. It incorporates gallery activities, group work, and peer presentations. Please prepare your class in the following manner prior to coming to the museum.

1. Review the museum rules and procedures.
2. Divide your class into three groups.
3. Provide each student with a name tag (first name).

Please find enclosed the museum policies and procedures for school group visits. Carefully review these with your students. Your docent will be contacting you soon to confirm the visit and to provide an overview of the program. We look forward to taking your class on this exciting tour! If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please do not hesitate to call me at (415) 581-3662.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Kao
School Programs Coordinator
Education Department

*California Content Standards

History-Social Science: 7.5.1, 7.5.3, 7.5.4, 7.5.6
Chronological and Spatial Thinking: 1, 2
Research, Evidence, and Point of View: 1
Historical Interpretation: 1, 2, 3
Visual Arts, Grade 7: 1.1, 1.4, 2.6, 2.7, 3.1, 3.2, 4.2,
4.3, 4.4, 5.1, 5.3

The Samurai

The Japanese samurai (warrior class) has captivated the fascination of both traditional and contemporary audiences with their military feats immortalized in the arts and literary works of Japan. The term “samurai” originates from the verb “sabarau” or “to serve” and refers to the Japanese warrior’s historical beginnings as bodyguards to the court aristocracy during the Heian period (785-1185). Although the term is commonly used to encompass all levels of the warrior class, it is important to note that the Japanese make a distinction between the samurai (less trained warriors) and what is known as “bushi” (warrior elite or professional warriors). For the purposes of this school program, we have chosen to use the wider interpretation of samurai. This includes all ranks of the warrior class from the less trained retainers to the daimyo (feudal lord), and shogun (military leader).

Traveling Along the Tokaido

The Tokaido Road (or “Eastern Sea Road”) was the great highway that connected the imperial palace at Kyoto to the capital at Edo (Tokyo). There were fifty-three toll stations along this route where travelers were required to show their passports.

Travel reached its peak during the peaceful Tokugawa period (1600–1868). This was because the shogun or supreme military leader created a law called “alternate attendance.” All samurai lords were required to keep two homes; one in their province and the other in the capital of Edo. Every other year the samurai lords had to live in the capital. There they would be under the watchful eye of the shogun. Meanwhile, their wives and children were required to live year-round at the capital, in essence, as hostages. If a lord tried to rise against the shogun, he risked the lives of his family.



The Tokaido, by Felix Beato, 1867–1868.

There were strict rules on how one should behave when traveling, based on one’s status in society. When the samurai traveled to Edo, they rode in palanquins (carriages carried on the shoulders of men known as porters). Farmers, merchants, and artisans were required to stop and bow when a samurai was carried by in a palanquin—this is because samurai held the highest status in society.

The manner in which a samurai lord traveled was an important reflection of his status and power. Each lord was escorted by servants and officials. A wealthy lord could have as many as 20,000 individuals accompanying him.

Activity #1: The Palanquin



Palanquin (kago), 1800–1900, Japan, Late Edo Period (1615–1868), golden polychrome lacquer on wood, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jack Tomlinson, B85M7.

Look carefully at this image of a Japanese palanquin (kago) from the Asian Art Museum. It is shaped like a large box that can be lifted by a long pole that extends from either side.

1. Can you find the windows on the palanquin?

2. This palanquin is made of lacquered wood. How much do you think it weighs?

3. This palanquin was used to carry a samurai official or an aristocratic woman. Compare the photos of the palanquins shown below; one used by peasants and the other used by a high ranking samurai. What are some differences between the two?
4. Do you think it was comfortable to ride in a palanquin?



Woman in Kago, 1864–1865, by Felix Beato (from *Caught in Japan* by Hugh Cortazzi and Terry Bennett, 1995).



Norimono, by Felix Beato, 1864–1865 (from *Caught in Japan* by Hugh Cortazzi and Terry Bennett, 1995).

Activity #2: Traveling the Tokaido

Your group will be reenacting the fictional travels of a samurai woman traveling from Edo (Tokyo) to visit her hometown in Kyoto in the year 1742 during the Tokugawa period.

Step 1: Assign everyone in your group a role.

Characters:

Samurai Woman
Farmer and Toll guard
“Invisible” Director
Porter #1
Porter #2

Step 2: Setting. Read out loud.

The samurai woman is notified that her mother has fallen ill in Kyoto. The shogun grants her special permission to leave the capital. She immediately begins her 300-mile journey along the Tokaido Road. She rides a beautifully decorated palanquin accompanied by servants, porters, and samurai guards. She must be careful to show her passport at each toll station. Government officials rarely allowed samurai women to travel from the capital and they will be especially watchful of her.

Step 3: Together read the script. Act out the play with the “Invisible Director” reading out loud the script. He/She will be directing the scene as you act out the parts. Once you have practiced the play, try acting it out without the help from the “Invisible Director.”

Porter #1 and #2: Carefully pick up and carry the samurai woman in an imaginary palanquin. Follow the illustration below. Begin carrying her to the other side of the classroom. Be careful not to rock or bump her as you travel.



Porter #1: See farmer up ahead coming down the road. Say to the farmer, "Down! Down!"

Farmer: Bow your head and look toward the ground as the samurai woman passes.

Porter #1 and #2: Continue walking until you reach the toll station (the other side of the classroom). Gently place the palanquin down. Assist the samurai woman in standing.

There is a long line of travelers at the toll station waiting for permission to pass.

Samurai woman: Take out your passport.

Toll guard: "Good afternoon. May I see your passport?"

Samurai woman: Give the toll guard your passport.

Toll guard: Examine her travel documents. "From where are you traveling?"

Samurai woman: "I come from the capitol. The shogun has given me permission to travel to Kyoto. It states this in my passport."

Toll guard: "Thank you. You may continue on your journey. It will be dark soon. There is an inn where you may rest the night."

Samurai woman: "Thank you. *Domo arigato.*"

Activity #3: Reflection

1. Was it comfortable being carried by porters?
2. Look at the photo “Women in Kago.” Describe how the porters are dressed.
3. Do you think it was harder or easier for samurai women to travel than peasant women? Why?
4. Why would a farmer need to bow down to a samurai?

Activity #4: Examining Art

Look at the following wood block prints by Ando Hiroshige (1797–1858) and Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849). Both artists were fascinated by the dramatic Japanese landscape and adventures of travelers along the Tokaido Road. As a group, answer the following questions about the artworks.



Hodogaya on the Tokaido Road, from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, approx. 1830, by Katsushika Hokusai, woodblock print, *Honolulu Academy of Arts*, 21959.



Driving Rain at Shono (Station 46), from the series *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road*, approx. 1833, by Ando Hiroshige, woodblock print, *Honolulu Academy of Arts*, 16619.



Night Snow at Kambara (Station 16), from the series *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaido Road*, approx. 1833, by Ando Hiroshige, woodblock print, *Honolulu Academy of Arts*, 15927.

Vocabulary

samurai	(lit. “one who serves”) Japan’s warrior class that emerged in the 900s during the Heian period. While the term originally applied solely to retainers, it has come to refer to all members of the warrior class.
Bushido	(lit. “Way of the Warrior”) The code of honor formally established in the Edo period practiced by the samurai stressing Confucian virtues such as loyalty to one’s lord, and Zen Buddhist teachings including self-discipline, meditation, and an appreciation for the impermanent, transitory nature of one’s existence. Samurai were expected to adhere to this code of honor on the battlefield as well as in their personal relationships.
daimyo	(lit. “great names”) Provincial feudal lords who governed their own vassals and samurai army under the oversight of the shogun.
shogun	(abbreviation of Sei-i-tai-shogun or Barbarian-Subduing Generalissimo”) The imperial title originally given to military commanders in the 700s to military leaders who fought against outlying northern tribes. It took on new meaning in 1100s when Minamoto Yoritomo was granted the title and became the first military leader of the country.
tea ceremony	The tradition of serving powdered tea with hot water, which was introduced to Japan from China by Zen monks in the 1100s. It consists of a ritual serving of tea in a formal context based on the philosophy and religion of Zen Buddhism. It was especially popular among the samurai who found the ceremony expressed the same ideals they valued on the battlefield—self-discipline, moral conduct, and reflection.

Buddhist Terms

Buddhism	The religion based on the teachings of Prince Siddhartha Gautama who lived in northern India about 2500 years ago. As a young prince, he gave up his royal life in search of a way to end suffering in the world and find release from the cycle of death and rebirth. After years of searching he achieved perfect understanding and became the Buddha, the “Enlightened One.” His teachings were brought to Japan in 525, when the ruler of the Korean kingdom of Baekje sent a missionary to the country with gifts including an image of the Buddha, several ritual objects, and sacred texts. There are many forms of Buddhism.
bodhisattva	A divine being who assists other in their search for enlightenment.
enlightenment	Full awakening to one’s true inner self, also known in Zen Buddhism as realizing one’s true Buddha-nature. Through self-realization, the true nature of existence is revealed.
Zen	(lit. meditation) A form of Mahayana Buddhism that stresses self-realization, self-discipline, and deep meditation as a path to enlightenment. It gained a large following among the samurai (warrior class).