Lesson 1  Land of the Rising Sun

MAIN IDEAS

Geography  Japan’s development was influenced by its landforms, its climate, and its closeness to China and Korea.

Government  Prince Shotoku wrote Japan’s first constitution and also brought Chinese culture to Japan.

Culture  The Japanese developed distinctive family and social structures.

The Effect of Geography on Japan

ESSENTIAL QUESTION  How was Japan’s development influenced by its landforms, its climate, and its closeness to China and Korea?

Landforms and Climate

• Japan located 120 miles off Asian coast
  - only 15% of land flat, good for farming; few natural resources
• Subject to volcanoes, earthquakes, tidal waves, hurricanes
• Rice grows well in mild, rainy climate; ocean offers fish
• Island location provided natural defense from invasion
• East Asians settled Japan in 300s B.C.; isolation drew few immigrants

Nature Inspires Japanese Culture

• Mild climate, frequent rainfall created lush lands, vegetation
• Shinto (“way of the gods”) religion respects nature, ancestors
  - says rocks, trees, rivers are often home to divine spirits

Japan’s Influential Neighbors—China and Korea

• Korea, China influenced Japan; China has had the strongest impact
  - China named islands “Nippon”—the land of the rising sun
• Japanese still call their country “Nippon”

REVIEW QUESTION

What areas of Japanese culture were influenced by China?
Early Japanese Society

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION** What was the structure of early Japanese Society?

**Structure of Japanese Society**
- Organized around large, powerful clans led by nobles
  - clans battled over scarce farmland; land was source of wealth, power
- Most Japanese lived in villages, worked, farmed, fished
  - some were skilled potters, weavers; some were household slaves
- Shinto religion was unifying force among all levels of society

**Japan’s Emperors**
- In 400s, powerful Yamato clan produced first Japanese emperors
  - emperors were considered human, but also seen as divine
- Emperors reigned, but military held true power
- Prince Shotoku was one of Japan’s most important regents
  - a regent is an official appointed to rule temporarily for an emperor

**REVIEW QUESTION**
Who held real power in early Japanese society?
The Reign of Prince Shotoku

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION** What role did Prince Shotoku play in Japanese history?

**Shotoku Introduces Chinese Culture**
- Shotoku asked by empress aunt to be regent
  - held power 593-622
- Impressed by Chinese culture; urged Japanese to learn from China
- Opened embassy in China
  - embassy — office of a government in another country
- Created guidelines for leaders based on Confucian principles
  - guidelines known as Seventeen Article Constitution

**Shotoku Promotes Buddhism**
- Shotoku supported spread of Buddhism in Japan; met with opposition
  - Shinto was a Japanese religion; Buddhism was of Indian origin
- Eventually many Japanese blended Shinto and Buddhism
  - shaped Buddhism according to traditional Japanese customs
- As Buddhism spread, Japanese became more aware of Chinese culture

**REVIEW QUESTION**
What was the most lasting effect of Shotoku’s reign?

**Lesson Summary**
- Japan’s island location and its proximity to China and Korea affected its development.
- Japanese emperors reigned but had little power.
- Prince Shotoku introduced Chinese culture to Japan.

**Why It Matters Now . . .**
Japanese society continues to adapt influences from other cultures. This type of creative borrowing is a common theme in history.