

Globalizing the Common Core

Title: **The Heian Period in Japan**

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History-Social Science Standards:

7.5.5-Study the ninth and tenth centuries' golden age of literature, art, and drama and its lasting effects on culture today, including Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji*.

Common Core State Standards:

ELA-Literacy RH. 6-8.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

ELA-Literacy RH. 6-8.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

ELA-Literacy RH.6-8.6

Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

ELA-Literacy RH6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, video, or maps) with other information in print or digital texts.

ELA-Literacy RH. 6-8

Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

Overview:

Using literature, diaries, and art, students will examine women's beliefs, observations, biases, and values during the Heian Period and compare it to women of today. Students will process each text and artwork using text-dependent and analysis questions, collaborative conversations, and charts. Students will write a five-paragraph essay in response to the inquiry question.

Inquiry Question: How did the lives of women, as reported by writers of the Heian Period, compare to the lives of women today?

Materials-See Pages 3-21

Hook and questions

Source A-Primary Source and scroll analysis

Background information and questions

Sources B-G-Primary Sources and questions

Preparation

1-Form groups of three students.

2-Duplicate one copy of the Hook page, one copy of the Background page, and as many copies of each source activity page as needed to give one set to each small group. Assign the two image interpretation activities in Source A to multiple groups, and have a single group do each of the other six source sets.

Activities

1. Read aloud the introductory paragraph from the Hook page. As you read each item on the three lists, tally the number of students who agree with Sei Shonagon's list. For example, how many of the students agree that the north side of a house or someone who is a "goody-goody" would be despised. Have each small group create their own lists of "Boring Things" and "Things That Give One Confidence" and answer the final question.

2. Read the Background page aloud. Have the small groups define the bolded vocabulary words, review the timeline, and answer the Background Questions.

3-Move the students into their small groups to analyze the primary sources and answer the questions which support purposeful reading and understanding.

4-Groups will present their conclusions to the class as a whole and post a summary chart to be used by their classmates in writing the final essay.

Assessment (assumes students have been taught how to write a five-paragraph essay with supporting evidence)

Students will complete a final essay using details and evidence from primary sources to answer the inquiry question.

Bibliography

Des Forges, Roger V., and John S. Major, *The Asian World 600-1500*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press; 2005.

Keene, Donald, ed. *Anthology of Japanese Literature from the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century*; New York, Grove Press, 1960.

Morris, Ivan, *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan*; New York, Kodansha, 1994.

Morris, Ivan, trans., *The Pillowbook of Sei Shônagon*, London, Penguin Books, 1971.

Murasaki Shikibu, (Seidensticker, Edward, trans.), *The Tale of Genji*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.

Singer, Kurt, ed., *The Life of Ancient Japan*, Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 1939.

Scroll-"Bamboo River II", *Tale of Genji*, Tokugawa Museum, Japan, c.1120-1140 C.E. in Ivan Morris, *The Tale of Genji*, Tokyo, Kodansha International Ltd., 1971.

- <http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/modules/lesson2/images/sources/genjibamboo.jpg>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murasaki_Shikibu#/media/File:Ch5_wakamurasaki.jpg

<https://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/modules/lesson2/pdfs/primarysourcepacket.pdf>

Hook/Into Activity

Sei Shônagon was a court lady (lady-in-waiting) serving Empress Sadako about one thousand years ago. She is the author of *The Pillow Book*, a witty diary collection of lists, poetry, observations, gossip and complaints. Her lists have given historians valuable insight into the culture of Heian-kyo Japan. She created such lists as:

THINGS THAT PEOPLE DESPISE

The north side of a house.

Someone with an excessive reputation for goodness.

An old man who has lived to be too old. A frivolous woman.

RARE THINGS

When people, whether they be men or women or priests, have promised each other eternal friendship, it is rare for them to stay on good terms until the end.

A servant who does not speak badly about his master. A person who is in no way eccentric or imperfect, who is superior in both mind and body, and who remains flawless in life.

A silver tweezer that is good at plucking out the hair.

EMBARRASSING THINGS

Parents, convinced that their ugly child is adorable, pet him and repeat the things he has said, imitating his voice.

To have spoken about someone not knowing that he could overhear. This is embarrassing even if it be a servant or some other completely insignificant person.

Source: Singer, *The Life of Ancient Japan*

Directions: In your small group, complete the following lists.

Boring Things

1.

2.

3.

Things That Give One Confidence

1.

2.

3.

Question: What does your list suggest about you?

BACKGROUND

"In 795, after a decade living in temporary locations, the court finally established itself in the new capital of Heian-kyo, which means 'capital of peace and tranquility' and is modern-day Kyoto. Like Nara, the city was a smaller version of the Tang capital at Chang'an, built on a grid pattern with the imperial palace in the north. To the northeast of the city was a large mountain, Mount Hiei. In Japanese belief, north-east is an unlucky direction, so a large Buddhist temple was built on top of the mountain to protect the capital from evil spirits. Buddhism remained strong during the Heian period, and many Japanese monks traveled to China to study and bring back new information about Buddhism. But the temples did not dominate the new capital as they had at Nara."

Source: Des Forges and Major, The Asian World, 600-1500

China also influenced writing, government, scholarship, social structure, and culture in Japan. However, when Japanese scholars abruptly stopped sending **envoys** to China in 894, Japanese society began to find its own **autonomy** and its own identity. Some historians mark the full flowering of Heian culture about one hundred years after the official break with China. But "imported" Chinese and Korean goods continued to find their way into Japanese life, particularly the elite in Japan.

During the Heian period, the emperor lost some of his power and strong aristocratic families such as the **Fujiwara** became the real rulers of Heian-kyo. Most of the emperors' wives came from the Fujiwara family. In his book *The World of the Shining Prince*, Ivan Morris states that Japan's "golden age of cultural flowering during the Heian period would have taken place only with the **accumulation** of enormous wealth of one great aristocratic family" and the prevalence of peace and the absence of immediate external challenges".

Source: Ivan Morris, The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan

Define these terms:

envoy-

autonomy-

Fujiwara-

accumulation-

Timeline:

552 CE	Buddhist Religion officially introduced to Yamato court
645	Taika Reforms
596-622	Prince Shotoku reigns in Nara
794	Capital moved to Heian
900-1185	Late Heian Period
1185-1333	Kamakura Period

Background Essay Questions:

1. Why do you think Japan's culture began to "flower" after they stopped sending envoys to China?

2. Why did the elite still want "imports" from China?

3. Do you agree with Ivan Morris that cultural flowering requires concentrated wealth and peace without external challenges?

Source A



"Bamboo River II", *Tale of Genji Painting Scroll*, Image can be projected from:
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/modules/lesson2/images/sources/genjibamboo.jpg>

One of the greatest literary works produced during the Heian period was *The Tale of Genji* by Musasaki Shikibu, who was a lady-in-waiting to the court empress. It is believed she wrote the novel after the death of her husband around 1006. This scroll was painted about a century after the publication of her novel. Few scrolls have survived.

Source: "Bamboo River II, *Tale of Genji*, Tokugawa Museum, Japan, c.1120-1140 C.E. In Ivan Morris, *The Tale of Genji Scroll*

Scroll Analysis

OBSERVE:

1. What is the first thing that jumps out at you?

2. Make a check mark by the characteristics that describe the mood, tone, or emotion of the scroll. If more than one applies, check those that best describe what you see.

Quiet

Active

Humorous

Energetic

Noble, aristocratic

Dynamic

Common, mundane

Emotionally intense

3. Would the nobility, everyday people, Buddhists, and/or government officials enjoy looking at this emaki (illustrated story scroll)? Explain your answer

ANALYZE:

Study the panel from the scroll for a few minutes. Form an overall impression of the picture and then look at the details to see what you observe.

People	Actions
Objects	Symbols

1. What do you think the message of this picture is?

2. List at least three pieces of evidence to support your answer.

INFER:

1. Why did people want to paint pictures of her novel?

2. How does this source help you better understand your inquiry question (How did the lives of women writers of the Heian Period compare to the lives of women today?) and the role of women?

3. What questions does this image raise in your mind about culture during this period?



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murasaki_Shikibu#/media/File:Ch5_wakamurasaki.jpg

A [Tosa school](#) mid-to late 17th-century [yamato-e](#) of Heian [courtiers](#) by [Tosa Mitsuoki](#), shows women dressed in [jūnihitoe](#) and with floor-length hair.

Painting Analysis

OBSERVE:

1. What is the first thing that jumps out at you?

2. Make a check mark by the characteristics that describe the mood, tone, or emotion of the scroll. If more than one applies, check those that best describe what you see.

___ Quiet

___ Active

___ Humorous

___ Energetic

___ Noble, aristocratic

___ Dynamic

___ Common, mundane

___ Emotionally intense

3. Would the nobility, everyday people, Buddhists, and/or government officials enjoy looking at this picture? Explain your answer.

ANALYZE:

Study the painting for a few minutes. Form an overall impression of the picture and then look at the details to see what you observe.

People	Actions
Objects	Symbols

1. Describe what is happening in this picture.

2. List at least three pieces of evidence to support your answer.

3. How does this picture show an appreciation for nature? Give evidence for your answer.

4. Who are the people in this painting?

5. How does this contribute to your understanding of the Heian period?

6. How does this picture help you understand the role of women in this period?

6. What is the relationship between the people in this painting?

Complete the chart to compare and contrast the two images

Observations Specific to the Scroll	Observations Common to Both Images	Observations Specific to the Picture

Source B

Diary, Sei Shônagon - *The Pillow Book*

As you learned in the Hook, Sei Shônagon was a lady-in-waiting for Empress Sadako and left a diary filled with lists, comments, musings, and impressions of cultural life in the Heian court. This book is a valuable resource for historians. It is one of the most important legacies of Heian women's writing. In this excerpt, Sei's descriptions of the seasons are vivid and expressive. Think about living in wooden residences surrounded by verandas and nature. Each wall was a screen that opened up to the outside bringing sounds, images, and scents into the home.

Source: Morris, Ivan, trans., *The Pillowbook of Sei Shônagon*. London: Penguin Books. 1971.

The Beauty of the Seasons

'In Spring it is the dawn. As gradually the hills come to light, their outline is faintly dyed with red, wisps of purplish could trail over them.'

'In Summer, the nights. Not only when the moon shines down, but on dark nights, too, when the fireflies flit to and fro, and even, when it rains, how beautiful it is!'

'In Autumn, the evenings-evenings when one is moved to see the brilliant sun sink close to the edge of the hills and the crows fly back to their nests in threes and fours and twos; or, more charming still, a file of wild geese, tiny in the distant sky. And when finally the sun has set, how moving to hear the sound of the wind and the cry of the insects!'

'In Winter, the early morning. Beautiful indeed when it has snowed during the night, but delightful, too, when the ground is white with frost; or even when it is simply very cold, and the attendants hurry from room to room, stirring up the fires and bringing charcoal, how well it fits the season's mood!'

Source: Morris, Ivan, trans., *The Pillowbook of Sei Shônagon*. London: Penguin Books. 1971.

1. What is the overall theme in this diary entry?

2. What evidence can you find that seasons affect people's feelings?

3. How does this diary entry help you understand Japan's culture during the Heian period?

4. Why would this be important in answering your inquiry question—How did the lives of women writers of the Heian Period compare to the lives of women today??

5. Which season do you think is Sei Shônagon's favorite? Support your statement.

Draw the four seasons as Sei Shônagon describes them.

Spring

Summer

Winter

Autumn

Source C

Diary-Sei Shônagon-*The Pillow Book*

Females in Japan had traditionally held honor in society. All emperors were descended from Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess. Gender parity [equality] that existed in ancient times was giving way to a system of male domination due primarily with the adoption of Chinese bureaucratic government. Women, like Sei Shônagon, began to speak of this inequality and expressed concern and even envy towards the respect men gained through government promotions.

Source: Morris, Ivan, trans., *The Pillowbook of Sei Shônagon*. London: Penguin Books, 1971

Women and High Office

At long last a man has received the governorship for which he has been waiting. He looks radiantly happy. In the past everyone treated him with rudeness and **disdain**; but painful as it was, he bore it all patiently, realizing that he had no choice. Now even his superiors respect the man and play up to him with remarks like, "I am entirely at Your Excellency's service." He is attended by women and surrounded by elegant furnishings and clothing that he has never known before. Seeing all this, one wonders whether he can really be the same man whom even simple servants used to **scorn**. Then this fortunate governor is appointed Middle Captain in the Inner Palace Guards. Oh, what a triumphant look he has on his face! To be captain of the Guards seems far grander to him than it would to a young nobleman who received the same appointment.

High office is, after all, a most splendid thing. A man who holds the Fifth **Rank** of who serves as Gentlemen-in-Waiting is liable to be despised; but when this same man becomes a Major Counsellor, Great Minister, or the like, one is overawed by him and feels that nothing in the world could be as impressive. Of course even a provincial governor has a position that should impress one; for after serving in several provinces, he may be appointed Senior Assistant Governor-General and promoted to Fourth Rank, and when this happens the High Court Nobles themselves appear to regard him with respect.

After all, women really have the worse time of it. There are, to be sure, cases where the nurse of an Emperor is appointed Assistant Attendant of given the Third Rank and thus acquires great **dignity**. Yet it does her little good since she is already an old woman. Besides, how many women ever attain such honours? Those who are reasonably well born consider themselves lucky if they can marry a governor and go down to the provinces. Of course it does sometimes happen that the daughter of a commoner becomes the principal consort of a High Court Noble and that the daughter of a High Court Noble becomes an Empress. Yet even this is not as splendid as when a man rises by means of promotions. How pleased such a man looks with himself!

<https://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/modules/lesson2/pdfs/primarysourcepacket.pdf>

1. Vocabulary:

disdain:

scorn:

rank:

dignity:

1. Why do you think Sei Shônagon wrote this?

2. What seems important in this diary entry?

3. Is the author trying to convince you of something? How do you know?

4. How does this help you gain insight into Japan's culture during the Heian period?

Source D

Novel-Murasaki Shikibu-*The Tale of Genji*

The greatest work produced during the Heian period was the *Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu who was a lady-in-waiting. Even though a fictional work, historians view this literary masterpiece as a portrait of Heian court life filled with the splendors of rituals, politics, religion, culture, and, of course, love. Little has survived through the years that has given us such a mesmerizing and absorbing look into the aristocracy of court life. *The Tale of Genji* has been a source for visual illustration, dramatization, full length films, and even anime.

Genji is the hero of the fifty-four chapter tale. He is an exquisitely handsome and gifted man, who is the son of an emperor and a lower-ranking woman. Because of his mother's rank, Genji is unable to inherit certain positions in the court so in some respects, this allows him more freedoms than other court officials. Murasaki's tale follows Genji from boyhood to his death. Lady Murasaki is also a character in the book; however, she is fictional.

Source: Seidensticker, Edward, trans, Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.

This is the scene where Prince Genji is going into exile and makes arrangements for his landholdings.

"To Lady Murasaki he handed over all the title deeds of his Manors (mi-sho), pasture land (mi-maki) and other estates in different parts of the country. His rows of warehouses (kuramachi) and his storerooms (osamedono) he put in charge of his nurse Shônagon, in whose reliability he had full trust. And he assigned a few of his closest Family Officials (keishi) to help her in these duties."

Morris, Ivan. *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan*; New York: Kodansha. 1994.

1. Why would Prince Genji give all of his landholdings to these two women? Neither is his wife.

2. What could this new wealth mean for women of the Heian court?

3. If you were going into exile, to whom would you leave your belongings and why?

Source E

Diary-Sei Shônagon - *The Pillow Book*

Sei Shônagon wrote a diary filled with lists. We do not know much about the lower class since they couldn't read or write, but we get a glimpse into the feelings of the aristocracy (or at least Sei) about the lower class.

Source: Morris, Ivan, trans., *The Pillowbook of Sei Shônagon*. London: Penguin Books, 1971

THINGS THAT SHOULD BE SHORT

The hair of a woman of the lower classes should be neat and short.

THINGS THAT ARE UNPLEASANT TO HEAR

A common-place person who talks while eating.

ANNOYING THINGS

It is a mistake to choose slim, elegant youths on purpose that they may look well as footmen, and then let them wear trousers that are grimy at the ends and hunting-cloaks or the like that have seen too much wear. The best that can be hoped is that people will think they are walking beside your carriage by chance and have nothing to do with you. Whether a gentleman is at home or on an official mission or staying with friends he ought always to have round him quantities of handsome page-boys.

TABLE MANNERS

The way that carpenters eat is really odd. When the roof of the eastern wing was being built, there were several carpenters squatting in a row and having their meal; I went out to have a look. The moment the food was brought, they fell on the soup bowls and gulped down the contents. Then they pushed the bowls aside and polished off all the vegetables. I was wondering whether they were going to leave their rice; a second later there wasn't a grain left in their bowls. They all behaved in exactly the same way and I suppose this must be the nature of carpenters. I should not call it a very charming one.

Source: Singer, Kurt, ed.; *The Life of Ancient Japan*; Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo-Kanda; 1939.

1. How do these sources show bias against a lower class?

2. How are these lists connected?

3. What is your viewpoint about the author?

Source F

Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*

“Genji, the handsome prince who is the hero of Murasaki Shikibu’s novel *The Tale of Genji* is believed by many to be based on the real-life aristocrat Fujiwara Michinaga. In the novel, he is an idealized figure, a model of perfect behavior as well as a master of poetry, music, and other arts. Like many aristocrats of the time, Genji was romantically involved with many women, and

his love affairs make up a large part of the novel’s plot.

Source: Des Forges, Roger V., and John S. Major, *The Asian World, 600-1500*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2005.

“I do not think we need worry too much about her education [he remarks one day when discussing the young Princess Akashi.] Women should have a general knowledge of several subjects, but it gives a bad impression if they show themselves to be attached to a particular branch of learning. I would not have her completely ignorant in any field. The important thing is that she should appear to have a gentle, easy-going approach even to those subjects that she takes most seriously.”

Source: Morris, Ivan. *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan*; New York: Kodansha. 1994.

1. What is Genji’s belief about women and education?

2. What is the belief in our country today about women and education?

Source G

Novel- Murasaki Shikibu-*The Tale of Genji*

In this excerpt, Genji and friends are discussing how they divide women into classes.

“I divide women into 3 classes. Those of high rank and birth are made such a fuss of and their weak points are so completely concealed that we are certain to be told that they are **paragons**. About those of the middle class everyone is allowed to express his own opinions, and we shall have much conflicting evidence to sift. As for the lower classes, they do not concern us.”

“It will not always be easy to know in which of the three classes a woman ought to be put. For sometimes people of high rank sink to the most abject positions...”

“Their success has generally been due to their having a lot of money.”

“ No doubt the perfect woman in whom none of these essentials is lacking must somewhere exist and it would not startle me to find her. But she would certainly be beyond the reach of a humble person like myself, and for that reason I should like to put her in a category of her own and not to count her in our present classification”

Source: Singer, Kurt, ed.; *The Life of Ancient Japan*; Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo-Kanda; 1939.

1. What are the classes Genji and friends put women in and why?

2. Why was it not easy to know which class “a woman ought to be put”?

3. What connections can you make between women of the Heian Period and women today?

Final Assessment Essay

Use the standard five-paragraph essay form to respond to the inquiry question below. Before you begin writing, decide what aspects of women's lives you will compare in the body paragraphs.

How did the lives of women writers of the Heian Period compare to the lives of women today?