

Japan: Land of Contrasts

by Joanne Young



Book Summary

This text reviews the history, resources, culture, and people of Japan by exploring some of its contrasts.

Features of the Book

- Cultural and generational comparisons
- Chart with complex captions
- Aerial, historical, and action photographs
- Maps requiring interpretation

Purpose

Japan: Land of Contrasts can be used to introduce and reinforce the following skills and understandings:

- S** comparing and contrasting;
- S** determining importance;
- S** analysing cause and effect;
- S** exploring how people create places that reflect their culture.

Investigation Tools

- Looking Closer – Living on the Coast, page 6
- What's the Background? – The Portuguese, page 12
- **Making Connections – East Germany, page 17**
- Step by Step – Manufacturing Cars, pages 20–21
- Digging Deeper – Asimo, page 23
- Weighing Both Sides – Working Too Hard?, page 25

The Guided Reading Lesson

- S** Comparing and contrasting
- S** Determining importance

You may want to have a globe or world map for this lesson.

Introducing the text

Invite the students to share their knowledge of Japan.

- *What do you know about Japan?*
- *What is some evidence of Japanese culture in your life? (cartoons, food, technology)*
- *What questions do you have about Japan?*

Encourage the students to locate Japan on the map or globe and discuss how the following factors might affect it:

- *It's an island nation.*
- *It's located on the "Ring of Fire". (volcanic zone in the Pacific)*
- *It's close to China.*
- *It's small, but many people live there. (127 million)*

Distribute the books. Read the title.

- *Why might Japan be called a land of contrasts?*

Ask the students to interpret the design on the cover.

- *What looks Japanese about the cover to you?*
- *What does Asimo remind you of?*

Look at the contents page together. Ask the students to make a prediction about the contents of each chapter.

Reading and discussing the text

Ask the students to read the introduction and look for how the author expresses contrasting information (by separating ideas with “but” or “yet”).

Invite the students to generate some contrasting sentences of their own. (Students in my school work hard but still find time for many hobbies.)

Encourage the students to compare the Japanese way of life with their own as they read.

Set the following purpose, then ask the students to read pages 4 to 9.

- As you read, ask yourself how Japan’s geography affects its people.

Discuss how Japan’s geography, climate, and history of earthquakes might affect the people’s way of life. (concentrated population, dependent on the ocean, destruction from earthquakes, and farming possible only in limited areas)

Ask the students to prioritise the facts from chapter 1.

- Which factors affect Japan the most? Why?
- What other influences are discussed in the chapter?

Explain that the next chapter outlines the history of Japan.

- As you read to page 17, think about the differences between the history of Japan and your own country.

Discuss how missionaries and traders brought change to Japan.

- Why did the shogun force foreigners to leave?
- How might this have helped Japanese culture? (not as much outside influence)
- Why do you think Japan opened its doors again?
- What changes might this have brought?
- Which do you think is more like your own country – an isolated Japan or one open to outside influences? Why?

Discuss the strategy of determining importance (differentiating between main ideas and interesting details). Explain that determining the most important ideas is a useful way to understand and remember what you read.

- How can you tell the difference between important ideas and interesting details?

Invite the students to skim through chapter 3 and locate examples of each.

Ask the students to read the rest of the story and look for why Japan is successful.

- What are some reasons for Japan’s success?
- Which is most important? Why?
- How did the information about Japan’s geography and history help you to understand the reasons for Japan’s success?
- What questions do you still have about Japan? How could you find the answers?

Revisiting the Text

The activities below can be used immediately after the guided reading lesson, during later reading sessions as mini-lessons, or as independent activities.

S Analysing cause and effect

Explain that changes in culture can occur slowly and be the result of various influences. Discuss cause and effect as a chain where one thing influences another. Explain how causes can have more than one effect and effects can have more than one cause. Invite the students to think of examples from their own life (the use of the Internet and its influence on culture).

Ask the students to use information from the text to complete the blackline master on page 73. Remind them that some of the causes and effects may be repeated.

S Exploring how people create places that reflect their culture

Create an enlarged Venn diagram with the headings “Japan in the Past” and “Japan Today”.

- Which facts belong in the “Past” circle? (civil wars, isolation, poverty)
- Which facts belong in the “Today” circle? (technology, protein-rich foods, exports)
- Which facts belong in the intersection of the two circles? (traditional food, ikebana, judo, hard work)

Students can now complete the Making Connections investigation tool on page 93 to show the connections between Japan in the past and Japan today.