Lesson 1

MAIN IDEAS

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

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

3. **Culture**  The Japanese developed distinctive family and social structures.

TAKING NOTES

**Reading Skill: Summarizing**

When you summarize, you restate a paragraph, passage, or chapter in fewer words. In Lesson 1, summarize each of the main sections using the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The effect of geography on Japan</td>
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<td>Early Japanese society</td>
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<td>The reign of Prince Shotoku</td>
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**Skillbuilder Handbook, page R3**

**CALIFORNIA STANDARDS**

7.5.1 Describe the significance of Japan’s proximity to China and Korea and the intellectual, linguistic, religious, and philosophical influence of those countries on Japan.

7.5.2 Discuss the reign of Prince Shotoku of Japan and the characteristics of Japanese society and family life during his reign.

HI 2 Students understand and distinguish cause, effect, sequence, and correlation in historical events, including the long- and short-term causal relations.
Land of the Rising Sun

Build on What You Know  How would you be affected by a bigger and stronger neighbor? Japan, the much smaller island neighbor of China, would feel Chinese influence for centuries.

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?

According to legend, Japan was formed from drops of water. The drops fell from a jeweled spear that a god had dipped into the ocean. Each drop formed one of the four large and more than 4,000 small mountainous islands that make up Japan.

Landforms and Climate  Japan is located 120 miles off the coast of Asia. In some ways, it is a difficult place in which to live. Only 15 percent of the land is flat enough for farming. Volcanoes, earthquakes, tidal waves, and hurricanes are a constant danger. Also, the islands have few natural fuels such as coal and oil.

But Japan has advantages too. It has a mild climate with plenty of rain. So, rice grows well there. Because Japan is an island, the ocean provides abundant fish for food. It also provides protection from invasion. This is a form of defense that mainland civilizations of East Asia, like China and Korea, did not have.

The ancestors of most Japanese came from East Asia in the 300s B.C. Because of Japan’s separation from the mainland, fewer immigrants moved there than to other places.
Nature Inspires Japanese Culture  Japan’s many mountains and frequent rainfall have resulted in lush green lands. Japanese culture often expresses a love of this natural beauty. One form of expression is the traditional religion known as Shinto. Shinto means “way of the gods.” It is based on respect for nature and ancestors. According to Shinto, rocks, trees, rivers, and other natural objects are often home to divine spirits. One of Japan’s most honored objects is Mount Fuji, its tallest mountain, shown on the previous page.

Japan’s Influential Neighbors—China and Korea  Japan’s closest neighbors are China and Korea. Both countries influenced Japan, but the powerful Chinese civilization had the strongest impact. (See chart at right and map on page 276.) China, in fact, gave Japan its name. The Chinese referred to the islands to the east as “the land of the rising sun,” which is Nippon in Japanese. Nippon is what the Japanese call their country.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Areas of Influence</th>
<th>How Japan Adapted Chinese Influences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Combined Buddhism with traditional Shinto rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Adopted principles of Confucianism for Japanese government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing System</td>
<td>Used Chinese characters to stand for additional ideas and sounds in language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>Employed Chinese techniques and themes, especially in landscape painting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Adapted Chinese wet-field rice cultivation to Japan’s island environment</td>
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What areas of Japanese culture were influenced by China?

Early Japanese Society  

ESSENTIAL QUESTION  What was the structure of early Japanese society?

Early Japan was divided into clans. These were families of people who were related by blood or marriage. Clans often fought one another for land. Land was the main source of wealth and power because so little of it was available for cultivation.

Structure of Japanese Society  Japanese society remained organized around large and powerful clans for centuries. Each clan was led by a few powerful nobles. They were the only people in Japan known by both a family name and an individual name. Most Japanese were common workers. They usually lived in villages and farmed or fished. Some had special skills, such as making pottery or weaving cloth. Some people in Japan were enslaved. Slaves were usually forced to cook, clean, or take care of the house of a noble.

The Shinto religion was a strong unifying force in Japanese society. For example, noble families and their workers and slaves all honored the same divine spirits and ancestors.
Japan’s Emperors In the 400s, the Yamato clan of central Japan established itself as the most powerful clan. Japan’s first emperors came from Yamato families. According to tradition, members of the Yamato clan were descendants of the sun goddess. Emperors are considered to be human, but because of this tradition, the Japanese also treat them as divine, which means godlike. The emperor claimed to rule, but military leaders usually held the real power. Rivals within the Yamato clan fought one another to gain this power.

Since Japan rarely changed emperors, the country appeared very stable. If a child succeeded to the throne, a regent was appointed. This official would rule until the child was old enough. One of Japan’s most important regents was **Prince Shotoku** (SHOH•toh•kOU).

**REVIEW** Who held real power in early Japanese society?

The Reign of Prince Shotoku

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

Prince Shotoku was asked by his aunt, Empress Suiko (SWEE•koh) the first woman to be ruler, to act as her regent. Shotoku held power from 593 to 622.

**Shotoku Introduces Chinese Culture**

Prince Shotoku was impressed by Chinese culture. He encouraged the Japanese to learn from their powerful neighbor. Shotoku sent Japanese scholars and artists to China to study Chinese society. He also welcomed skilled workers from China to Japan.

Shotoku opened a Japanese embassy in China. An embassy is an office of a government in another country. He created guidelines for Japanese leaders that were based on Confucian principles, such as hard work and obedience to authority. (See Chapter 7, Lesson 1.) These guidelines are known as the Seventeen Article Constitution.

**Prince Shotoku** The seventh-century Japanese regent is shown with his two sons.
Shotoku Promotes Buddhism  An aspect of Chinese culture that impressed Shotoku was Buddhism. With his support, it began to spread quickly in Japan. At first, Buddhism challenged Shinto, the traditional Japanese belief system. But Buddhism was based on the teachings of the Buddha, who was born in India, not Japan. So Shotoku’s support of Buddhism met opposition. Eventually, most Japanese blended the religions. They accepted Buddhism but shaped it according to traditional Japanese customs. They also continued to practice Shinto. As people adopted Buddhism, they became more aware of other aspects of Chinese culture.

REVIEW 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.

1. Explain the importance of
   Shinto  Prince Shotoku
   regent  embassy

Using Your Notes
Summarizing Use your completed chart to answer the following question:
2. What is important about the geography of Japan? (7.5.1)

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Main Ideas
3. Why was Japan influenced by its closeness to China? (7.5.1)
4. How did Prince Shotoku change Japan? (7.5.2)
5. What was the structure of society like during Prince Shotoku’s reign? (7.5.2)

Critical Thinking
6. Understanding Cause and Effect How did geography affect the diet of people in Japan? (HI 2)
7. Making Inferences Why would the Yamato clan’s claim to be descended from the sun goddess affect its power? (HI 2)

Activity Writing a Letter Imagine you are living in Japan under the rule of Prince Shotoku. Write a letter to him describing your reaction to the influence of China on Japanese culture. (7.5.1)