Lesson 2

MAIN IDEAS

1. **Religion** The Japanese adopted the forms of Buddhism that best met their needs.
2. **Culture** The Japanese developed unique forms of literature and drama.
3. **Culture** The Japanese arts reflected a love of natural beauty.

TAKING NOTES

Reading Skill: Categorizing
Sorting information into groups helps you understand patterns in history. In Lesson 2, look for three categories of Japanese culture and details about each one. Record the information on a web diagram like the one below.

![Web Diagram]

The Buddha This wooden sculpture from the 1100s shows the Buddha as a “healer,” with a medicine jar in his left hand.

CALIFORNIA STANDARDS

7.5.4 Trace the development of distinctive forms of Japanese Buddhism.
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*.
HI 2 Students understand and distinguish cause, effect, sequence, and correlation in historical events, including the long- and short-term causal relations.
Growth of Japanese Culture

Build on What You Know  As you learned, Japan was influenced by Chinese culture. But the genius of the Japanese was their ability to adapt foreign customs and ideas to meet their own needs. A very important Chinese influence was Buddhism.

Japanese Forms of Buddhism

ESSENTIAL QUESTION  How did the Japanese adapt Buddhism?

Buddhism began in India in the 500s B.C. It was based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama. (See Chapter 7.) Buddhism spread to China and then Korea. It arrived in Japan in the A.D. 500s.

Buddhism Spreads in Japan  Because Buddhism had the support of Prince Shotoku, it spread rapidly in Japan. It did not replace Japan’s ancient Shinto religion, but was practiced alongside it. Buddhism had a powerful influence on Japanese culture. It was popular first with the nobility and later with the common people. The Buddhist belief that peace and happiness could be gained by leading a life of virtue and wisdom appealed to many.

Different forms, or sects, of Buddhism developed in Japan over the centuries. Tendai Buddhism focused on the intensive study of texts. Shingon attracted followers who appreciated its complex rituals. Amida, or Pure Land, included a belief that people might have salvation in a pure land after their death. Zen held that something precious and divine exists in each person.

Connect to Today

Zen Garden  These gardens of rocks and gravel provide peaceful surroundings.
Zen Buddhism Some Buddhist sects flourished while others died out. The Japanese adopted the forms whose beliefs and practices best met their preferences and needs. Beginning in the 1100s, Zen became more and more common. It put emphasis on self-discipline, simplicity, and meditation. In fact, the word Zen means “meditation.” Followers believed that quiet reflection was more useful than performing ceremonies or studying scriptures. In some ways, Zen was very simple. It focused on the individual’s attempt to achieve inner peace rather than on the idea of salvation.

As a major school of Buddhism, Zen had a great influence on Japanese culture. Samurai favored it because they thought it would give them inner peace and help them in battle. Some artists liked its combination of simplicity and boldness. They reflected these qualities in drawings by using just black ink and making strong, dark lines. Zen later spread to other countries and became popular in the West.

How was Japanese society affected by Buddhism?

A Golden Age of Literature and Drama

Essential Question What is unique about Japanese literature and drama?

A great period of literature in Japanese history began in the 800s. People today still read diaries, essays, and novels written at this time.

Japanese Writing Systems Another aspect of China’s culture that Japan adopted was its writing system. By about 400, the Japanese had begun using Chinese characters to write Japanese words. Like the Chinese, the Japanese used characters to stand for specific objects, actions, or ideas. (See the illustration on page 260.) Later, they also used characters to stand for certain sounds. These characters worked like letters or syllables in English.

Today Japanese writing includes both letters and characters. While Japanese writing was influenced by China, its language is related to that of Korea. You will read about Korea in Lesson 4.

Japanese Drama Japan’s long tradition of drama dates back to the 600s. It began with people performing Shinto dances at religious shrines. Then, in the 1300s, actors developed a special type of drama called noh. Noh plays were often retellings of legends and folktales. Actors wore painted wooden
masks to show various emotions and used gestures, costumes, and music to tell the story. Most noh actors were men. The plays were performed for both upper classes and common people.

In the early 1600s, another style of drama called **kabuki** \(\text{kuh•BOO•kee}\) developed. It combined melodramatic singing and dancing with elaborate costumes and heavy makeup. This type of drama was more informal than noh. Its themes often dealt with common people. Kabuki was, and still is, performed by men. Both noh and kabuki remain popular today.

**The Tale of Genji** In the early 800s, Japan ended diplomatic relations with China. Some Japanese leaders felt they had learned enough from the Chinese. China's influence remained, but Japan developed its own cultural traditions. This was especially true in literature. One of Japan's finest writers was **Lady Murasaki Shikibu** \(\text{MOO•rah•SAH•kee SHEE•kee•BOO}\). She lived at the emperor's court in the early 1000s.

Murasaki wrote *The Tale of Genji*, a book about the life of a prince in the imperial court. Her book is important in the development of literature. Earlier books in Japan and elsewhere either retold old myths or were collections of stories. *Genji* is a long, realistic story focused on one individual. These characteristics make it the world's first important novel.

---

**DOCUMENT–BASED QUESTION**

How can you tell from this excerpt that Japan was influenced by other cultures?
Japanese Poetry  Japanese poets often wrote about the sadness of rejected love or the beauty of nature. Some of the most popular Japanese poems are very short compared with the poetry of other countries. One shorter form of poetry is called haiku. It has just 17 syllables—three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables. Matsuo Basho, who lived in the 1600s, was a great haiku poet. He wrote poems that had the quiet, reflective spirit of Zen, such as this one about a pond.

An old silent pond . . .
Into the pond a frog jumps,
splash! Silence again.

What new forms of literature and drama did the Japanese develop?

Distinctive Japanese Arts

ESSENTIAL QUESTION  What themes are reflected in Japanese arts?

Two themes often expressed in Japanese literature and drama are simplicity and a love of natural beauty. These themes also appear in many forms of Japanese art.

Calligraphy and Painting  Like the Chinese, the Japanese wrote with brushes and ink on paper. They considered writing a way to express beauty. Calligraphy is the art of beautiful writing. Each character is painted in a set order of brush strokes. But calligraphers vary the shapes and sizes of characters to suggest different meanings.

Brush painting with ink on paper scrolls and silk began in the 600s. Typical Japanese designs are very detailed. They depict landscapes, historical events, and daily life. Sometimes a short description is written on the art itself. (See painting on page 267.)

Visual Vocabulary

Japanese calligraphy:
Numbers show the order of strokes for the character eternal.

The Scholarly Arts

These Japanese gentlemen are practicing what the Chinese called the four scholarly arts—chess, lute playing, calligraphy, and painting.
Flower Arranging and Gardening  The art of flower arranging was another tradition that Buddhists brought to Japan. People emphasized simple arrangements. They tried to highlight the natural beauty of flowers. Bonsai is the art of growing miniature trees or shrubs in small pots or trays.

Landscape gardeners also tried to create places that would show the beauty of nature. Zen-inspired gardens (shown on page 257) are designed to help people think quietly. These gardens are arranged with rocks and pathways and few flowers or trees. Gardening and flower arranging remain important art forms in Japan today.

REVIEW How did Japanese culture reflect an interest in natural beauty?

Lesson Summary

- Several forms of Buddhism were adopted in Japan, and Zen became one of the most popular.
- Noh, kabuki, and haiku are distinctive forms of drama and literature that developed in Japan.
- Japanese art shows a love of natural beauty.

Why It Matters Now . . .

The Japanese adopted ideas and developed distinctive cultural practices that are an important part of Japanese life today.

Terms & Names

1. Explain the importance of
   - Zen
   - kabuki
   - haiku
   - noh
   - Lady Murasaki Shikibu

Using Your Notes

Categorizing  Use your completed web diagram to answer the following question:

2. What is one statement that characterizes the development of Japanese culture? (7.5.5)

Main Ideas

3. Why did the Japanese adapt different forms of Buddhism? (7.5.4)
4. How was Japanese literature unlike that of other countries? (7.5.5)
5. How does Japanese art reflect a love of natural beauty? (7.5.5)

Critical Thinking

6. Making Generalizations  Why did Zen Buddhism appeal to many Japanese? (7.5.4)
7. Understanding Cause and Effect  How might Japan’s culture have developed differently without Chinese influence? (HI 2)

Activity  Writing Poetry  Write a haiku about a topic in nature. Use the pattern of syllables described on page 260. (7.5.5)