

History and Memory: The Mongol Invasions of Japan

By Catherine Mein with Anthony Robbins and David Culley

Introduction:

This lesson uses the Mongol invasions of Japan as a case study in historiography. Students develop and apply important historical thinking skills. In particular, they distinguish and examine secondary and primary sources, including written, visual, and archaeological sources, and recognize the benefits and challenges of each in forming a historical narrative.

The lesson can be used as part of (1) the first unit in a world history course to introduce students to reasons for studying history, to a comparison of history and memory, and to protocols/routines for studying, analyzing multiple sources, asking questions, writing, etc. throughout a world history course or (2) the study of East Asia in World History Era 5, 1000-1500 CE. This lesson is differentiated for middle and high school use.

Prior to this lesson, introduce students to and engage them in annotated reading. This strategy encourages close reading by having students identify main ideas, highlight/underline important details, and add comments on or questions about the reading.

Objectives: After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Use historical thinking skills—recognizing multiple perspectives, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, analyzing primary documents, and asking questions.
- Compare and evaluate a variety of sources.
- Assess historical interpretations of the Mongol invasions of Japan.

Guiding Questions:

- How and why is the past remembered?
- Whose past is remembered and whose is forgotten?
- What is the relationship between history and memory?
- Did typhoons save Japan from the Mongols?

Standards and Guidelines:

[World History Content Standards](#)

Era 5 (1000-1500 CE), Standard 3: The rise of the Mongol empire and its consequences for Eurasian peoples, 1200-1350.

Standard 3B: The student understands the significance of Mongol rule in China, Korea, Russia, and Southeast Asia.

7-12: Explain how Southeast Asia and Japanese successfully resisted incorporation into the Mongol empire.

Common Core State Standards: Grade 6-12 Literacy in History/Social Studies

Key Ideas and Details

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.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.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.3: Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Craft and Structure

CCSS.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).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.6: Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.8: Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.9: Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Text Types and Purposes, CCSS.ELA-Writing.WH.11-12.1: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

Production and Distribution of Writing, CCSS.ELA-Writing.WH.11-12.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Plan for Assessment:

The lesson organizer, timeline, and map can be used as a means of formative assessment over the course of the lesson, with checks of one or more of these assignments periodically throughout the lesson. If the lesson is occurring at the beginning of the year, when the goal is to develop students' habits of mind to be used throughout the year, most of the guided practice is intended to be done in small groups with reporting out to the whole group so that the teacher can make corrections immediately and all students can hear those corrections. If this lesson is taught later in the year, some of the guided practice could be collected as individual assignments.

At the conclusion of the lesson, students write a brief essay answering the lesson's central question—Did typhoons save Japan from the Mongols? Students will be assessed on their

ability to correctly organize an essay and to use the sources from the lesson to support their thesis and main points.

Time Required: Six 50-minute class periods or three 90-minute block periods, plus homework; middle school teachers will likely want to shorten the lesson by omitting some of the documents to be analyzed by students.

Materials:

<i>Materials Provided</i>	<i>Online Resources</i>	<i>Other Materials</i>
<p>Handouts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson Organizer • Textbook Accounts of the Mongol Invasions of Japan (reading level: 9.8) • Timeline of Mongol Invasions of Japan • Map of Kamakura Japan • Scrolls Organizer <p>PowerPoints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History and Memory: The Mongol Invasions of Japan • Mongol Wall in Hakata Bay <p>Assessment Tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mongol Invasions Essay Assignment • Mongol Invasions Essay Rubric 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u><i>Bridging World History: History and Memory</i></u>, Annenberg Learner video, 28 min. 23 sec. Full <u>transcript</u> also available. (optional) • <u><i>Medieval Japan: The Mongol Invasions, 1274 and 1281</i></u>, Asia for Educators video clip, 2 min. 52 sec. Full transcript available on the same webpage. • <u><i>“Japan’s Medieval Age,”</i></u> The Japan Society (reading level: 12.5) • <u><i>Takezaki Suenaga’s Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan</i></u>, Bowdoin College • <u><i>“Relics of the Kamikaze,”</i></u> <i>Archaeology</i> (reading level: 13.0) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies of your course textbook’s coverage of the Mongol invasions of Japan • Document projector (recommended) • Computer and projector, plus multiple computers with Internet access • Self-adhesive notes

Implementation:

Pre-Lesson Activities (Optional)

1. As homework the night before you begin this lesson, assign students to watch the half-hour video, *Bridging World History: History and Memory*, online at Annenberg Learner: http://www.learner.org/courses/worldhistory/unit_main_2.html#. If access to computers is problematic for some students, you can print out a full transcript at http://www.learner.org/courses/worldhistory/support/videotranscript_2.pdf. In the video, which discusses the connections between history and memory through segments on Columbus, Mayan glyphs, oral histories of West Africa, and South Korea’s National Museum, scholars raise questions similar to this lesson’s guiding questions. Each segment

highlights a different way in which memory and history interact and the ways in which history can change due to new evidence or interpretations. One of the main points of the video is that our understanding of history can and does change.

2. *For middle school:* Discuss (review) the benefits and challenges of using history textbooks (secondary sources) versus primary sources when investigating history. On the board, make two T-charts to display the pros and cons of both textbooks and primary sources. Ask for volunteers to share insights; add benefits and challenges students do not raise. Possible answers:

Textbooks (Secondary Sources)		Primary Sources	
<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>	<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>
Brief	May leave out key information	Present multiple perspectives and different interpretations	Narrow view of events
Usually well-researched	Presents one author's interpretation	Requires background knowledge to interpret	Bias
Draws on and presents numerous sources	Bias	Descriptive	Trap of relativity, "Who can say what is 'right'?"
	Authors not witnesses to time period or events	Created during time period of events, firsthand account	Can be difficult to read

Day 1

3. Use the **History and Memory: The Mongol Invasions of Japan** PowerPoint to share the following quote by Historian Peter Winn from the video, *Bridging World History: History and Memory*:

"All history, even ancient history is contemporary history because each generation and group rewrites that history in the light of their own values, perspectives, experiences and concerns....Memory can be a slippery source...The question for the historian is: What is the value of...a historical source? It is a question that different historians will answer differently. Those answers will shape their histories in different molds, creating a clash of historical interpretations...."—Historian Peter Winn (Annenberg Learner 2013)

Discuss the ideas expressed by Winn with students and explain the lesson's guiding questions. Explain to students that they will study the history of the Mongol invasions of Japan to understand how history is rewritten over time and by different groups; the values and challenges of primary sources (memory); and how historians assess and evaluate sources to interpret history.

4. Use the **History and Memory: The Mongol Invasions of Japan** PowerPoint to pose the question, "What do you know about the Mongol invasions of Japan?" to students. Students

should think silently to themselves about how they would respond to the question. They may categorize their responses as what they know, what they think they know, or questions they have. After thinking silently, students should share their thoughts in small groups (3-4) and then with the whole group. Record student responses so they can be referred to at the end of the lesson.

5. As a class, watch the *Medieval Japan: The Mongol Invasions, 1274 and 1281* video clip at http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/at/md_japan/mj07.html. This video presents historian Paul Varley's overview of the invasions. In small groups and then sharing out to the whole group, have students identify what details they now have about the invasions and Varley's main point about the invasions—the typhoons saved Japan.
6. Introduce the central question of the unit—Did typhoons save Japan from the Mongol invasions?
 - *Option 1:* For high school students, distribute the **Lesson Organizer** handout and have students complete the first row using the information from Varley's video.
 - *Option 2:* For middle school students, introduce the **Lesson Organizer** handout and, as a whole class, complete the first row using the information from Varley's video.

Day 2

7. As a whole class, read your course's textbook account of the Mongol invasions of Japan (or use one of the excerpts in the **Textbook Accounts of the Mongol Invasions of Japan** handout). With contributions from the students, model annotated reading. Underline or highlight key information to identify details of the invasions. Also circle words that affect how the reader interprets the information presented. Share the example: Source 5 on the handout says the Japanese "resisted fiercely" while Source 2 uses the phrase "fought desperately." As a whole class, complete the lesson organizer for your course textbook.
8. If you have not already done so, distribute the **Textbook Accounts of the Mongol Invasions of Japan** handout and use one of the following approaches for engaging students in the analysis.
 - *Option 1:* As a whole class, read the textbook accounts of the Mongol invasions of Japan. After reading each account, have students, individually or with a partner, annotate the accounts as modeled in Step 7 (underline/highlight key information and circle words). Randomly call on students or pairs to report out to the whole class what they underlined/highlighted and circled. If possible, have students display the reading using a document projector. Have students comment on how the word choices they circled affected their understanding of how the Japanese fought against the Mongols. After each source, students should complete the lesson organizer for that source. They may want to include any phrases or quotes that could be useful in their essay at the end of the unit.
 - *Option 2:* Individually have students read one of the textbook accounts of the Mongol invasions of Japan and annotate the accounts as modeled in Step 7 (underline/highlight key information and circle words). Students should complete the lesson organizer for that source and include any phrases or quotes that could be useful in their essay at the end of the unit. When students have completed this individual work, create jigsaw groups consisting of seven students (six, if you modeled an excerpt from the handout in Step 5), each of whom read a different account. In their groups, each student should

share the account read, including his/her annotations and help group members complete the lesson organizer with information, phrases, or quotes that could be useful in their essay at the end of the unit. You may want to establish a set time, such as 25 minutes, for groups to complete their work so they will know how long each student has to report.

- *Option 3:* Have middle school students work with a partner to read one of the textbook accounts of the Mongol invasions of Japan and annotate it as modeled in Step 7 (underline/highlight key information and circle words); you may want to have the class focus on a limited number of excerpts. Group students with others who read and annotated the same excerpt. Give the groups five minutes to discuss, compare notes, and choose a group representative to share out. Have group representatives report out to the whole class what they underlined/highlighted and circled. If possible, have students display the annotated reading using a document projector. Have students comment on how the word choices they circled affected their understanding of how the Japanese fought against the Mongols. While students present each source, have the class complete the related rows in the lesson organizer with useful phrases or quotes for the essay assignment. You might find it useful to do this on a projected copy of the organizer.
9. *For high school:* As homework, have students read and annotate the two paragraphs regarding the Mongol invasions under “Political History” in “**Japan’s Medieval Age**” by Martin Colcutt (the last two paragraphs before the heading “Kamakura Period: Economy” (http://aboutjapan.japansociety.org/content.cfm/japans_medieval_age_the_kamakura_mur_omachi_periods)). Students should update their lesson organizer with information from this source. If your class is doing an in-depth study of Kamakura, you may want to have students read the entire article.

Day 3

10. *For high school:* At the beginning of class, have students share briefly with a partner and then with the whole class what information in “**Japan’s Medieval Age**” was new and/or conflicting and what information agreed with the other sources.
11. Give each student a copy of the **Timeline of Mongol Invasions of Japan** and **Map of Kamakura Japan**. Have students complete the handouts individually or as a class:
- *Option 1:* High school students should review the information from all sources thus far and add events to the timeline. They should also add notations to the map regarding the significance of specific places for the Mongol invasions. Tell students they will need to continue to update their timelines and maps whenever they add information to their lesson organizer.
 - *Option 2:* For middle school, with contributions from the students, review the information from all sources thus far to complete a class copy of the **Timeline of Mongol Invasions of Japan** and **Map of Kamakura Japan**.

Days 4 and 5

12. Use the **History and Memory: The Mongol Invasions of Japan** PowerPoint to show the image from Takezaki Suenaga’s *Scrolls of the Mongol Invasion of Japan*. Have students conduct a See, Think, Wonder routine. In this method, students first look silently at the object to see what is there. In pairs or small groups, students share what they see. Students

then discuss what they think is going on and possible interpretations of what they see. Finally, students discuss the questions that occurred to them while examining the object. The intent of this step is to have students ask broader questions raised by their wonderings. Each pair or small group will report out their “thinks” and “wonders” to the class. For more information about the See, Think, Wonder routine, visit the Visible Thinking website (http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03c_Core_routines/SeeThinkWonder/SeeThinkWonder_Routine.html).

13. Tell students they are going to be looking at more of Takezaki Suenaga’s Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan.
 - *Option 1:* For high school students, demonstrate the Bowdoin College site displaying the scrolls, focusing on the 19th-century version, which includes translations of the text that accompanies the images. Be sure to show students how to make the translations “pop-up” on the screen. Distribute the **Scrolls Organizer** handout and divide the class into five groups corresponding to the five parts of the 19th-century scrolls. Assign each group responsibility for examining and analyzing the images and texts in their section and preparing to present their section of the scrolls to the whole class.
 - *Option 2:* For middle school students, distribute the **Scrolls Organizer** handout and show students that the Bowdoin College site displays the scrolls (the 19th-century version) in five parts. Demonstrate the Bowdoin College site displaying the 19th-century scrolls, which includes translations of the text that accompanies the images. Be sure to show students how to make the translations “pop-up” on the screen. Analyze the first section of the scrolls with the class, modeling notes that students may write on their **Scrolls Organizer**. Divide the class into four groups corresponding to the remaining four parts of the 19th-century scrolls. Assign each group responsibility for examining and analyzing the images and texts in their section and preparing to present their section of the scrolls to the whole class.
14. When groups have finished their analysis, have each group report out to the class. Students should add information about each section to their **Scrolls Organizer** as the groups present their information. After all groups have presented, have students compare Suenaga’s account of the invasions to previous accounts they have read. Encourage students to think about why the accounts might differ and what accuracy problems may exist with the different sources.
15. Remind students to update their lesson organizer, timeline, and map with information from Takezaki Suenaga’s scrolls.
16. Show students the **Mongol Wall in Hakata Bay** PowerPoint. Use the notes with the slides to explain what students are seeing. Be sure to emphasize that the wall was built after the 1274 invasion and before the 1281 invasion. At the end of the slide show, have students discuss, in pairs, how they could use this evidence to answer the central question. Have each pair share out their thoughts to the whole group. After groups have had a chance to share and the class has had a chance to come to some consensus as to the meaning of this evidence, students should complete the **Lesson Organizer for Mongol Wall in Hakata Bay**.
17. From the online resource, “**Relics of the Kamikaze,**” by James Delgado, which appeared in the journal *Archaeology*, share with students images of some artifacts and discuss what new information they contribute to historical interpretations of the Mongol invasions of Japan.

The article is available at: <http://archive.archaeology.org/0301/etc/kamikaze.html>. Students should complete the **Lesson Organizer** for “**Relics of the Kamikaze.**”

18. *Option for high school:* Have students read “**Relics of the Kamikaze**” for homework. Students may want to print out the article so they can annotate it (underline/highlight key ideas or information, circle words that affect perception of the invasions, add margin notes making connections to other information). Students should pay particular attention to how the information in this article compares with the information from the earlier secondary sources and from Suenaga’s scrolls. Students should identify in their annotations (or notes) which information is new, what information agrees with the secondary sources, and what agrees with Suenaga’s scrolls. Students should complete the **Lesson Organizer** for “**Relics of the Kamikaze.**”

Day 6

19. Have students update their note-taking tools individually or as a class:
- *Option 1:* For high school students, allow time for students to update their organizers, timelines, and maps to reflect information from the article read as homework. Briefly discuss as a class what new information the students gained and how the article compared to the earlier sources.
 - *Option 2:* For middle school, with contributions from the students, update the class copy of the **Timeline of Mongol Invasions of Japan** and **Map of Kamakura Japan**.
20. Encourage students to reflect on the information they gathered based on the different sources (secondary and primary written, visual, and archaeological). Ask: *Are there discrepancies in the information that still trouble you?* (Possible answer: The numbers of troops on both sides) *Are there aspects of the historical explanations about which you remain skeptical?* (Possible answer: The *amikaze*, or divine wind explanation)
21. Share the following information with students:
- In his book, In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Takezaki Suenaga’s Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan (2001), scholar Thomas Conlan analyzed Kamakura/Yuan-era sources to suggest that numbers such as the figure of 140,000 Mongol troops in the 1281 invasion are inflated by a factor of ten or more (pp. 261-264). Based on his interpretation of Japanese and Mongol sources, Conlon suggests that in 1274, despite their initial inroads to low-lying territory along Hakata bay, the Mongols couldn’t hold their position and a northeasterly wind (not of typhoon-strength) was a “convenient excuse” (p. 266) for the Mongols to retreat to their boats. He suggests that in 1281 the fortified walls of Hakata Bay kept the invasion to outlying islands for six weeks. At sea the Mongols could not re-supply or reinforce with new troops and the typhoon was a final blow in their defeat.*
22. Ask: *Why would historians inflate numbers and adopt the “divine wind” myth? Why is this historical encounter remembered differently than the Kamakura/Yuan-era sources relate it?* (Inflated numbers of Mongols troops, from a Japanese perspective, exaggerate the threat, while from a Mongol perspective, exaggerating the number of Japanese troops would make the defeat less crushing. Explaining the defeat due to “divine wind” or typhoon, in the case of the Japanese, proved their power as a nation that could summon the gods. In the case of the Mongols, the explanation saves face. It allowed blame to fall on nature rather than the strategy of the seemingly undefeatable Mongol force.)

23. Review the **Day 1** list showing what students knew about the Mongol invasions at the beginning of the lesson. Ask: *How do the different sources (secondary and primary written, visual and archaeological) answer the central question—Did typhoons save Japan from the Mongol invasions?*
24. Draw a line on the board showing the opposing answers to the central question:

Only the typhoon saved Japan.

Japan needed no help.



- Tell students they will be writing an essay addressing the central question. Give each student a self-adhesive note. To preview what they will write, students should review information on their organizers, timelines, and maps; write their names on their sticky notes; and place their sticky notes on the board showing where their answers will fall on the continuum. For example, if they believe unequivocally that Japan would have fallen to the Mongols, they should place their sticky notes at the left end; if they think the evidence is inconclusive, they should place their sticky notes somewhere in the middle.
25. Pair students from different points on the continuum and have each student try to convince the other to move toward their spot on the continuum. Remind students to use specific evidence from the sources to support their arguments. Pairs should share the results of their discussion to the whole class, including the evidence used to support their positions.
 26. Distribute the **Essay Assignment** and **Essay Rubric**. Explain the assignment: Each student is to write a brief essay (1.5 to 2 pages) presenting their own historical interpretation. The essays should present students answers to the central question based on their evaluation of the lesson's sources and their assessment of the various interpretations. The essays should be presented in standard essay format: thesis, supporting arguments with evidence, conclusion. Allow time for students to begin planning and organizing their essays. This could be done individually, in small groups, or as a whole group.
 27. Assign students to finish their essays as homework.

Resources and References:

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