

A Case Study of Tokugawa Japan through Art: Views of a Society in Transformation

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Introduction:

Teachers are encouraged to read “Tokugawa Japan: An Introductory Essay,” by historian Marcia Yonemoto, prior to conducting this lesson. The introductory essay may also be assigned to students with advanced reading abilities (grades 11-12). The essay provides context for this lesson by sketching the outline of Tokugawa history, touching on politics, economics, society, and culture and introducing some historical debates regarding the Tokugawa period. It also gives references for further reading on important topics related to Tokugawa Japan.

During the Great Peace of the Tokugawa era, many economic and societal changes occurred in Japan. While the shogunate sought to maintain political control and its view of an ideal society, a market economy, urbanization, travel, and publishing all played a role in changing society. While merchants were officially among the lower social classes, they were able to wield economic power over the highest social class, the samurai. The government's development and maintenance of roads provided a link between city and countryside, allowing information and ideas to spread and helping to shape a sense of Japan as a unified culture.

As noted in Dr. Yonemoto's essay, woodblock prints developed as a popular Japanese art form and source of information during the Tokugawa period, both reflecting and shaping the commoner culture that emerged during the era. Thus, they provide a useful case study for examining the changes that occurred in the period. Two series of prints by Ando Hiroshige provide focus for the lesson—*The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō* and *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. Writing of the *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, historian Henry Smith noted, “The cumulative portrait of Edo that Hiroshige paints in the 118 views in this series is rich and diverse, offering not only scenic beauty but countless references to history, custom and legend. It is at the same time, of course, a highly selective portrait, celebrating the beauty of the city, the prosperity of its merchants, the power of its ruler and the pleasures of its people.”

In this lesson, students examine woodblock prints as texts, looking for evidence of economic and societal changes, particularly changes in travel and urban life. Students then work in small groups to read about an aspect of the period and jigsaw with members of other groups to create a larger view of the dynamics of the Tokugawa Period. Finally, students return to the woodblock prints, using them as evidence to illustrate a narrative statement about the period.

Objectives: At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be better able to:

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1. Recognize woodblock prints as a reflection of the social and economic changes of the Tokugawa period.
2. Make inferences based on evidence in art.
3. Synthesize information about the Tokugawa period and form conclusions based on reading, discussion, and art analysis.
4. Use art to illustrate key concepts about the Tokugawa period.
5. Explain how Tokugawa policies, the arts, and travel shaped Tokugawa society.

Vocabulary:

daimyō: landholding military lords

sankin kōtai: policy whereby the shogunate required *daimyō* to spend alternate years living in the capital city, Edo

shogun: military rulers of Japan; in the Tokugawa period, this term refers to successive Tokugawa family members who served as hereditary rulers

shogunate: the government of the shogun

Materials and Advance Preparation: Download woodblock prints by Ando Hiroshige from two pages of a British website. Use the links in the Tokugawa Japan Online Image List to access the prints. Images 1-5 are from the series *The Fifty-Three Stations of the Tōkaidō (Tōkaidō Gojusan no Uchi)*, 1831-1834. Publisher: Takenouchi Magohachie (Hoeido). Format: Oban yokoye. Total 55 Prints. Images 6-9 are from the series *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo (Meisho Yedo Hiakkei)*, 1856-1858. Publisher: Uoya Eikichi. Format Oban tateye. Number of Prints: 120 (inc. Title Page and a replacement print by Hiroshige II). All of these prints are located at <http://www.hiroshige.org.uk>.

After selecting these nine images, make them available to students in one of the following ways: (1) if using an LCD projector, save the images to your computer and project them for analysis by students; (2) if multiple classroom computers are available, download the images and load them on the classroom computers for student use in pairs or small groups; (3) if classroom computers with Internet access are available, students can go directly to the URLs listed and use the Tokugawa Japan Online Image List to find the images; or (4) print several sets of hard copies of the images.

Have a copy of *Nihonbashi* from the Tōkaidō Road series displayed in a way that all the students will be able to see it, preferably projected on a screen.

You will also need to make copies of Handouts T1 through T4. You will need a copy of Handout T1 for each student and enough copies of Handouts T2 through T4 for one-third of the class to have each. You will also need to make a transparency from Transparency Master T1. If you are having the students work with the images directly on line, they can use the Online Image List.

Time Required: 2-3 class periods

Procedure:

1. Draw students' attention to the displayed copy of the woodblock print *Nihonbashi*, which literally means "bridge of Japan." Explain that it is an example of a woodblock print. Woodblock prints were first used in Japan as early as the eighth century, but they became a highly sophisticated and popular art form during the Tokugawa period (1603-1868). This print, one of a series of travel images from the Tōkaidō Road, was created by the artist Ando Hiroshige. (Note that Japanese names appear with family name first, given name second. Artists were most often known by their given names, so this artist is known as Hiroshige. He was also known as Utagawa Hiroshige, adopting the name Utagawa from the renowned Utagawa studio at which he studied.)

Located in the center of the city of Edo, Nihonbashi was the point from which all distances were measured in Japan. It was also the starting point of the Tōkaidō Road, a main highway linking the Tokugawa capital city Edo with the ancient capital, Kyoto. Along the highway were way-stations, where travelers could rest and buy meals and provisions. Ask students to describe what they see in the picture. (*A large group of travelers is coming across the bridge; there are many buildings in the background and on the sides of the print; tall ladders on rooftops could be fire lookouts for the city; inscriptions on the print could include the artist's name, the title of the print, or other information; in the left foreground is a group of people carrying baskets—probably fish-sellers; there are some animals in the right foreground. A large gate is open in the foreground, inviting the travelers to come through as well as inviting viewers to look within.*) Show Quote 1 on Transparency Master T1 and discuss what students can infer about the Tokugawa Period from this quotation. (*Travel was common and the government adopted policies not only facilitating travel by the building of roads but mandating it for daimyō; daimyō processions involved large processions of people, but others also traveled during the period; people profited by serving the needs of travelers; different classes and groups of people interacted through travel.*) Help students interpret what they observed in light of the quote; that is, what does this woodblock print show about Tokugawa Japan? You may want to do a "think-aloud" demonstrating to students how to bring meaning to their observations:

The people who are coming over the bridge look like they may be part of a large procession and two of the men are holding up what looks like some kind of a standard, suggesting this may be the procession of someone important. Given what the quote tells us, I would say this is a daimyō procession, traveling between the daimyō's local domain and Edo as required by the shogunate. The people in the foreground are probably selling goods to travelers. At least one person looks to be selling fish, but they may have other products as well. Thus, the print illustrates travel of the daimyō, and indirectly, the power of the shogun to require such travel; it also shows one way in which people profited from frequent travel in the Tokugawa Period.

2. Explain that Hiroshige also created a series of prints showing scenes in Edo. This series was called *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* and actually included 118 prints. Show Quote 2 on Transparency Master T1 and conduct a discussion of the points made in the quotation on the transparency. Some questions to guide discussion are provided below:

- According to the quote, who held economic power? (*The wealthy townspeople.*) Is this similar to or different from what we know about Japan in earlier periods? (*Different; in previous eras, merchants and tradesmen were not wealthy nor were they powerful.*)
 - How was the new urban culture reflected in the activities of the people? (*They went to festivals, the theater, and pleasure quarters; they purchased art.*)
 - Why were woodblock prints so popular? (*They were beautiful but also quite inexpensive; they also reflected popular aspects of the lively urban society.*)
 - Why are the prints of Hiroshige a good source for examining the Tokugawa period? (*They document what Edo looked like and what went on there at the end of the period; they also show travel, which was important in the period.*)
3. Explain that students will be viewing nine woodblock prints by Ando Hiroshige as visual evidence of the period. Distribute Handout T1. Students will be looking at prints from both the Tōkaidō Road (Set A) and Edo (Set B) series to gather information that supports the two quotes from the transparency master. Distribute Handout T1 and instruct students to make notes of what they see in the images as you project them to the class. Be sure students understand that they should fill in only the center column in the chart during the viewing. Using the downloaded images from the sites listed above, show students the nine images. (Suggested answers can be found in the Handout T1 Answer Key.) After students have completed their charts, show each image again, asking students to report what they have documented. You may use the notes in the **Teacher Background Information** to enhance or clarify students' observations.
 4. Ask students to consider the evidence they have seen in Hiroshige's prints in light of the two quotes on the transparency master. That is, what did they observe in the prints that provided support for the quotes? How did the prints expand their understanding of the quotes? They should write their interpretation of the evidence from the prints in the righthand column on Handout T1. When students have finished writing, ask a few students to report their interpretations. (Sample answers are provided in the Answer Keys.) As a large group, ask the class if a consensus about the period emerges from their statements.
 5. Inform students that they will be working in small groups to learn more about aspects of the Tokugawa period. Divide the class into groups of three. Distribute Handouts T2, T3, and T4 so that one-third of the groups have Handout T2, one-third have Handout T3, and one-third have Handout T4. Direct students to read the handout they have received. When they have finished reading, ask students to discuss the reading in their small group, with attention to the "Questions for Discussion" at the end of each reading. (Suggested answers can be found in the Answer Keys.) What does the reading reveal about one aspect of the Tokugawa period? Ask students to jot down the main ideas from the reading, and be ready to share them with another group of students, all of whom will have read about a different aspect of the period.
 6. Jigsaw the class into new groups of three, made up of "experts" about Tokugawa art, travel, and society. Ask students to teach the members of their new group about the reading they have done, allowing time for each student to share their knowledge.

7. After all students have shared, review their earlier observations about the period based on the quotes and prints and ask students to consider how the reading they have done affected their views about the period. Direct each group to work together to create a new two- to three-sentence statement about the Tokugawa period that includes new information from the jigsaw exercise. Ask students to report their new statements. *(Students may report that during the Great Peace of the Tokugawa era, many economic and societal changes occurred in Japan. While the Tokugawa government sought to enforce laws and regulations to maintain political control and an ideal society, a market economy, urbanization, travel, and publishing all played a role in changing Tokugawa society. While merchants were considered lowly, they ended up wielding economic power over the highest social class, the samurai. The government's development and maintenance of roads provided a link between city and countryside, allowing information and ideas to spread and helping to shape a sense of Japan as a unified culture.)*
8. When all groups have completed their new statements about the Tokugawa period, ask students to look again at the prints by Hiroshige they viewed at the beginning of the lesson. To assess student understanding of the lesson content, ask students to work within their groups to illustrate their statements about the period with one or more of the images by Hiroshige, selecting art that supports their viewpoint. Ask students to consider: How does the art help to illustrate key ideas about the period? How does the art reflect a society in transformation? *(Students may suggest that the woodblock prints help to visualize the forces of social change during the period. The image of fireworks over Ryōgoku bridge, for example, reveals that some urban dwellers had the money and time to pursue pleasurable activities; the scene at Surugachō and others show evidence of a market economy, and so on.)*

Optional Assessment Activity:

To further assess student understanding, ask students to create a classroom art exhibit of the Tokugawa period, assigning groups to select art focusing on one aspect each of societal change during the period. One group may display art reflecting travel, for example; another may choose to display art that focuses on commercial activity during the period, and so on. Students may use images found in this lesson, or choose images by other artists of the period, such as Hokusai. Appropriate art can be found online. Assign each group to write an exhibit catalogue explaining the main social, political, and cultural developments of the period depicted in the art in their display. You may invite visitors from other classrooms to attend an exhibit opening and assign your students to serve as docents, explaining the significance of the art on display and how it reflects societal transformation during the Tokugawa period.

Extension/Enrichment:

To extend the lesson, students may research the main roads and waterways of the Tokugawa period. Maps of the Tōkaidō Road and other main highways can be found online; students may want to compare Tokugawa-period maps with maps of present-day Japan to find similarities and differences between the past and present, and to compare how much Japan was linked by roads then and now.

To learn more about the process of woodblock printing during the period, students may want to explore the excellent Brooklyn Museum website, which includes information about how woodblock print artists, carvers, and printers worked to create the multi-colored print images (www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/online/edo/woodblock/aboutPrinting.php); students may also want to examine the section titled “How to Read a Japanese Woodblock Print,” which offers a guide to the inscriptions, censor seals, and other text found on prints (www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/online/edo/woodblock).

Teacher Background Information on Woodblock Prints by Ando Hiroshige:

Set A: The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road

Nihonbashi: *Nihonbashi* translates as “the bridge of Japan.” Located in the center of Edo, it was the location from which all distances were measured in Japan. It was also the starting point of the Tōkaidō Road, a main highway linking Edo with the ancient capital, Kyoto. In this scene, a *daimyō* procession is coming into view. In the foreground, a group of fish vendors is getting out of the way.

Shinagawa: Shinagawa was the first stop outside of Edo on the Tōkaidō Road. The road in this print is lined with teahouses, restaurants, and entertainment quarters. The viewer can see the end of a *daimyō* procession passing through the street.

Goyu: This station on the Tōkaidō highway was lined with inns and restaurants. In this scene, serving women from the teahouse at right are attempting to drag travelers inside. The large circle on the wall bears the name of the print series publisher.

Okazaki: In this scene, a *daimyō* procession is crossing the bridge over the Yahagi River towards the village and castle on the opposite bank. The founder of the Tokugawa shogunate, Tokugawa Ieyasu, was born in the castle shown in the distance.

Seki: This inn along the highway served upper class travelers such as shogunate officials and *daimyō*. A *daimyō*'s attendants can be seen preparing to continue their journey.

Set B: One Hundred Famous Views of Edo

Clearing Weather after Snow at Nihonbashi: This Edo view looks down on Nihonbashi, the bridge of Japan, to Edo castle in the upper right and Mt. Fuji on the left. At the bottom right is the Edo fish market; the street is filling with buyers and sellers. Fishing boats in the river are bringing in the day's catch. The opposite bank of the river is lined with tile-roofed warehouses, which would resist fire in the mostly wood-framed city.

Surugachō: This scene depicts shoppers and delivery men in the street outside Edo's leading dry goods store. In the distance towers Mt. Fuji, heightened by cloud forms often seen in traditional Japanese painting.

The River Bank by Ryōgoku Bridge: Hiroshige described this bridge as “the liveliest place” in Edo, with “side-shows, theaters, story-tellers, and summer fireworks; day and night, the amusements never cease.” Cargo and passenger boats can be seen on the Sumida River; tea stalls line the bank.

Fireworks at Ryōgoku: Elegant restaurants along the Sumida River sponsored firework displays in the hot summer and fall evenings. Wealthy merchants hired the larger pleasure boats seen in this image for firework-viewing parties on the river. Because of the danger of fire in Edo, fireworks were restricted to the Sumida River.

Teacher Resources:

- Guth, Christine, *Art of Edo Japan: The Artist and the City 1615-1868* (New York: Henry Abrams, 1996).
- Kobayashi, Tadashi, *Prints by Utagawa Hiroshige in the James A. Michener Collection, Volume I* (Honolulu: Honolulu Academy of Arts, 1991).
- Parisi, Lynn, Sara Thompson, and Patterson Williams, *Tokugawa Japan: The Great Peace and the Development of Urban Society; A Humanities Approach to Japanese History* (Boulder, CO: Social Science Education Consortium, 1995).
- Smith, Henry D., et. al., *Hiroshige: One Hundred Famous Views of Edo* (New York: George Braziller, Inc, 1986).
- Takeuchi, Melinda, “City, Country, Travel and Vision in Edo Cultural Landscapes,” in Robert T. Singer, ed., *Edo: Art in Japan 1615-1868* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1998).
- Yonemoto, Marcia, *Mapping Early Modern Japan: Space, Place, and Culture in the Tokugawa Period (1603-1868)* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

Handout 1: Answer Key

Image Title	What Do I Observe in This Image?	How Do These Observations Help Me Understand the Tokugawa Period?
<i>Nihonbashi</i>	<i>rooftops, bridge, various carrying baskets, procession moving over bridge; fish vendors walking in foreground</i>	<i>Students may report that Hiroshige's prints reveal a period during which travel—by boat and foot—was happening with regularity; the prints reveal city dwellers engaged in peaceful and pleasurable pursuits: watching fireworks, shopping, having conversation in wide boulevards; commercial activity (buying and selling of goods) seems to be widespread in city and country. Students may report that the Tokugawa period revealed in these prints was a peaceful and prosperous time.</i>
<i>Shinagawa</i>	<i>ships in bay; buildings; boxes strapped to backs of people; procession walking through village; women in tea stalls watching procession</i>	
<i>Goyu</i>	<i>inns; restaurants; comic scene: women struggling to pull customer into teahouse</i>	
<i>Okazaki</i>	<i>wooden bridge spanning river; castle in distance; baskets and bundles for carrying items; walking in formation across bridge</i>	
<i>Seki</i>	<i>low building with fabric covering; poles; lanterns; saw horses; saying goodbye; preparing for the journey ahead</i>	
<i>Clearing Weather after Snow at Nihon Bridge</i>	<i>bridges, warehouses, castle, fish market buildings, boats; fishing; rowing boats; crossing bridge; carrying items to market</i>	
<i>Surugachō</i>	<i>large structures: department store buildings; wide street; walking in street; shopping; carrying goods</i>	
<i>The River Bank by Ryōgoku Bridge</i>	<i>bridge; market stalls; sail boats; fishing boats; crossing bridge; rowing boats; shopping in market stalls</i>	
<i>Fireworks at Ryōgoku</i>	<i>row boats and pleasure boats; bridge; fireworks; watching fireworks from boats and bridge</i>	

Handouts T2 through T4: Answer Key to Questions for Discussion

Handout T2:

1. How did the demands of travel impoverish the *daimyō*?
The Tokugawa government required that daimyō travel to and from Edo every other year to pay tribute to the shogun. Daimyō traveled with large groups of attendants, staying in inns along the way. This lavish travel was expensive. In addition, daimyō maintained homes in the capital and in their domains.
2. Why were common people also traveling more during this period?
Workers were needed in Edo to provide services to the daimyō and their attendants, so builders, craftspeople, and others traveled to the capital from the countryside to provide labor. Also, the development of a system of roads allowed common people to visit shrines and other religious sites in other parts of Japan.
3. How did travel during the Tokugawa period contribute to economic and social change in Japan? Think about the development of a sense of shared culture as you answer the question.
Travel, by commoners and elites alike, helped link Japan in ways that had not previously existed there. Travelers brought news, art, information, and souvenirs from the capital city to the countryside, spreading a sense of common culture throughout Japan. In addition, travel helped commerce develop in villages along the main highways, linking towns with cities through market activity.

Handout T3:

1. Who might have purchased woodblock prints during this period? For what purpose?
Members of all social classes purchased these inexpensive artworks. Woodblock prints served as advertisements as well as souvenirs of Japanese urban life.
2. How did woodblock prints help link the city and countryside during the Tokugawa period?
Purchased by visitors to Edo and other cities, woodblock prints traveled home with travelers as souvenirs of city life. Woodblock prints conveyed to a rural as well as an urban audience the vibrant social scene of the big cities. In addition, they built markets for goods and services available in the city and vice versa.

Handout T4:

1. How did life change for samurai during the Tokugawa period?
While officially of high status, samurai became increasingly poor during the Tokugawa period. Rather than serving their lords as warriors, samurai shifted to bureaucratic positions in Japan's urban centers. Because they were paid in fixed amounts of rice, samurai had to exchange their rice for money with the merchant class. They eventually became indebted to the merchants.
2. To which social class in Tokugawa society would you prefer to belong? Why?
Student answers may vary, but many will report preferring to be members of the increasingly powerful and wealthy merchant class, because they seem to be having the most fun during this period, with the most money to enjoy life and the pleasures of urban society.

Transparency Master T1

Quote 1

The flourishing of the Gokaidō [five major highways] was largely supported by the alternate residence system (*Sankin kōtai*) whereby feudal lords (*daimyō*) were compelled to travel annually to Edo, where they kept their families and residences. The formal travelling procedure required many followers and a display of wealth demonstrating their high status. Various categories of inns . . . were built at each station to accommodate the *daimyō* processions. Many local merchants and carriers were employed to serve them. Consequently, the regions close to the roads benefited economically from the flow of people and trade. The Gokaidō, and especially the Tōkaidō, became sites of social diversity, where people from different classes and regions met.

From Jilly Traganou, "The Tōkaidō—Scenes from Edo to Meiji Eras," *Japan Railway and Transport Review* No. 13, http://www.jrtr.net/jrtr13/f17_tra.html.

Quote 2

In this prospering commercial center [Edo], economic power resided with the wealthy townspeople. Artistic patronage and production no longer belonged only to the ruling elite but reflected diverse tastes and values. A new urban culture developed, valuing the cultivation of leisure that was celebrated in annual festivals, famous local sites, the theater, and pleasure quarters. The rich urban experience and the landscape of the time were documented by *ukiyo-e*, or "pictures of the floating world," including woodblock prints like Hiroshige's *One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. Since they could be purchased inexpensively—one print cost the same as a bowl of noodles—refined images became accessible to a wide audience.

. . . The series, actually comprising 118 prints, remains not only the last great work of Japan's most celebrated artist of the landscape print but also a precious record of the appearance, and spirit, of Edo at the culmination of more than two centuries of uninterrupted peace and prosperity.

From *Exhibitions: Hiroshige's One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*, Brooklyn Museum, <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/online/edo/places/>

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Retrieval Chart: Woodblock Prints by Ando Hiroshige

As your teacher shows each image, record what you observe in the center column of the table below. As you study the images, make notations about structures and technology, human activity, and trade and commerce.

Image Title	What Do I Observe in This Image?	How Do These Observations Help Me Understand the Tokugawa Period?
<i>Nihonbashi</i>		
<i>Shinagawa</i>		
<i>Goyu</i>		
<i>Okazaki</i>		
<i>Seki</i>		
<i>Clearing Weather after Snow at Nihon</i>		
<i>Surugachō</i>		
<i>The River Bank by Ryōgoku Bridge</i>		

After you have studied all nine images, think about how your observations support and extend the ideas about the Tokugawa Period provided in Quotes 1 and 2. Write two or three sentences in the righthand column of the table explaining how evidence from the prints helps you better understand the Tokugawa Period.

Quote 1

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Tokugawa Period Travel

At the end of a long period of civil war, the Tokugawa clan emerged in 1603 as the pre-eminent political family in Japan. The Tokugawa ruled Japan from 1603 to 1868, a period known as the Great Peace. The first Tokugawa ruler, or *shogun*, established a new capital in Edo (today's Tokyo). Edo was the Tokugawa family's traditional domain. To centralize power and assert authority over rival regional lords, or *daimyō*, the Tokugawa shogunate issued and enforced social laws. These laws were based in part on Confucian ideals of the well-ordered society, in part on shrewd political strategy. Some of the laws had unintended consequences.

The Tokugawa government required *daimyō* to travel from their domains to Edo every other year to pay tribute to the shogun. The *daimyō* thus lived in their domains one year, and in Edo the next. Their wives and children were required to stay in Edo. This tactic, known as "alternate attendance," helped keep the peace and control the *daimyō*'s wealth and power. Because the *daimyō* never stayed for more than one year in their domains, they were unlikely to unite with neighboring *daimyō* against the Tokugawa government. The *daimyō*'s attendants, samurai who traveled with him, were required to leave their families in the domain. The costs of maintaining two elaborate homes, one in the country and the other in Edo, and of traveling back and forth to Edo, with a large retinue of samurai attendants, diminished the *daimyō*'s wealth.

The continual movement of *daimyō* and their attendants from the countryside to Edo required a network of highways and waterways linking the main cities of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka, as well as smaller cities and towns along the way. The Tokugawa government maintained five major highways. The Tōkaidō Road, which linked the ancient capital, Kyoto, with the new capital, Edo, was one such highway. As they traveled the highways, the *daimyō* processions, often numbering in the hundreds of people, stopped to eat and rest at teahouses, restaurants, and inns that catered to the travelers. Thus, the *daimyō* processions helped to foster the growth of local markets and regional specialties of food, drinks, arts, and crafts. Travelers from the domains brought information, souvenirs, and regional artwork to Edo. They also spread information, art, and souvenirs of Edo on their return journey to the provinces.

By the middle and late Tokugawa period, common people also traveled the network of roads linking the cities and countryside. Because of the demand for skilled builders, craftspeople, and courtesans to provide services to the *daimyō* and their attendants in Edo, people moved along the system of roads from the countryside into the capital. Agricultural and other goods produced for sale in the countryside moved along roads and waterways into Edo and other cities. In addition, common people traveled along the major roads to visit shrines and places of religious importance all over Japan.

One result of the increasing travel throughout the Edo period was the creation of a more linked and integrated culture and society. People who had formerly been isolated in villages and small towns had chances to travel and to interact with travelers. Changes taking place in cities were transmitted to other areas via travelers. In turn, people across Japan began to feel their association with other Japanese and to recognize commonalities of culture.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How did the demands of travel impoverish the *daimyō*?
2. Why were common people also traveling more during this period?
3. How did travel during the Tokugawa period contribute to economic and social change in Japan? Think about the development of a sense of shared culture as you answer the question.

Publishing and the Arts in the Tokugawa Period

At the end of a long period of civil war, the Tokugawa clan emerged in 1603 as the pre-eminent political family in Japan. The Tokugawa ruled over Japan from 1603 to 1868, a period known as the Great Peace. The first Tokugawa ruler, or *shogun*, established a new capital in Edo (today's Tokyo). Edo was the Tokugawa family's traditional domain.

As the arts of war gave way to the arts of peace during the Tokugawa period, a publishing industry flourished in Edo and other major cities. In an increasingly urban, literate society, the demand for printed information—novels, poetry, maps, guide books, and woodblock prints—was high. The famous poet Matsuo Bashō published poems and prose about his travels around Japan. Jippensha Ikku's novel *A Shank's Mare Tour of the Tōkaidō*, a comic story about two traveling samurai, was a best-seller in 1802. The popularity of Bashō and Ikku's works prompted painters and print artists to illustrate the places made famous by their writings. One example is Hiroshige's print series of the 1830s, *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road*. Another celebrated print series of the time, Hokusai's *Thirty-six View of Mt. Fuji*, depicted Japan's revered mountain from many viewpoints and in a variety of weather and light conditions.

Woodblock prints depicting the vibrant urban culture of the period, as well as the landscape of the countryside and the open road, depended on a sophisticated publishing industry for their production and distribution. Woodblock prints were mass produced. Production involved four people: the artist, who drew the design on paper; the carver, who carved the design onto cherry wood blocks, one for each color of ink; the printer, who applied color to each block and transferred the print to paper; and the publisher, who financed the production of the prints and advertised and sold them to the public. Color woodblock printing as developed in this period was a major technological innovation, producing prints that were more advanced than anything available in Europe at the time.

People from all walks of life bought and collected woodblock prints, which were very inexpensive. A woodblock print cost about as much as a bowl of noodles. Travelers to Edo bought prints as souvenirs of the city, returning with them to the countryside and other parts of Japan. These prints helped to advertise what was popular in Edo: famous actors, department stores, women's makeup, courtesans, restaurants and teahouses, boating and viewing fireworks along Edo's main waterways, and other aspects of the "floating world," the shifting urban scene. Woodblock prints depicting this world were known as *ukiyo-e*, or "art of the floating world."

Toward the end of the Tokugawa period, large series of prints by Hokusai and Hiroshige of famous places and scenes of Edo, Mt. Fuji, and the Tōkaidō and other roads were hugely popular. Because of their popularity, the publishers of these series produced them in large runs of 500 or 1000 prints per image. Sometimes, second and third editions of these series were printed.

Because woodblock prints were purchased and distributed widely throughout Japan, they served an important and unexpected role in unifying the Japanese people. On one level, woodblock prints spread information about the country of Japan among Japanese people,

wherever they lived. People in small villages could learn about life in the larger cities through the detailed prints. Because prints often included place names, names of publishers and artists,

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as well as other written tidbits about contemporary life, the increasingly literate commoner population, both urban and rural, could read prints for clues about their changing society. In this way, the prints both shaped and reflected the growth of literacy during the period. On another level, the woodblock prints contributed to the viewers' knowledge of Japan's geography. Geographic landmarks—the most obvious being Mt. Fuji—were repeated in woodblock prints so often that they formed a core identification for Japanese people: these images became clearly recognizable symbols of their country. In these ways, woodblock prints contributed to a sense of a shared culture and country called Japan.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Who might have purchased woodblock prints during this period? For what purpose?
2. How did woodblock prints help link the city and countryside during the Tokugawa period?

Tokugawa Period Economy and Society

At the end of a long period of civil war, the Tokugawa clan emerged in 1603 as the pre-eminent political family in Japan. The Tokugawa ruled over Japan from 1603 to 1868, a period known as the Great Peace. The first Tokugawa ruler, or *shogun*, established a new capital in Edo (today's Tokyo). Edo was the Tokugawa family's traditional domain. In order to centralize power and assert its authority over any rival regional lords, or *daimyō*, the Tokugawa shogunate issued and enforced social laws. These laws were based in part on Confucian ideals of the well-ordered society, in part on shrewd political strategy. Some of the Tokugawa government's rules and regulations regarding the four social classes—the samurai, farmers, artisans, and merchants—had unintended consequences.

The hereditary samurai class was officially the highest social rank in the Tokugawa class system. During the preceding era of civil wars, the samurai had served their regional lords, or *daimyō*, as warriors. Now in the “Great Peace” of the Tokugawa period, the government required samurai to move off of the land and into castle towns. There, they served their *daimyō* as bureaucrats and attendants. To show their elite position, the samurai were permitted to carry swords and wear luxurious fabrics, such as silk. By law, however, they could not engage in trade or farming. Thus samurai found it difficult to profit from peacetime pursuits. As a result, many samurai, though high in status, grew poor during the period.

With the movement of *daimyō* and samurai into regional castle towns, Japan underwent a period of rapid urbanization. Building roads, houses, and government structures required skilled labor; workers required housing, food, and other services. Businesses sprang up to supply the needed materials and goods. Castle towns grew dramatically during the period, as they became regional centers of trade and government administration. To aid economic growth, the Tokugawa government established a monetary system, with standardized coins. This system greatly simplified trade among regions of the country. By 1700, Osaka, a port city and commercial center, had a population of 400,000; by the same year, Edo's population had grown to 1 million, making it one of the largest cities in the world.

Meanwhile, the three lower classes profited handsomely from a growing population and growing urban centers. Farmers, who made up 90 percent of the population, became increasingly well-off during the period, as more land was made available for agriculture, farming techniques improved, and food production grew. As cities developed and expanded, the urban demand for goods other than food allowed farmers to produce silk and other products in small-scale rural factories. Artisans supplied the skilled labor to build the great castle towns and to maintain and build the roads, bridges, buildings, and infrastructure of an urbanizing society.

The merchant class, officially at the bottom of the Tokugawa social structure, benefited greatly from the period's economic growth and rapid urbanization, growing prosperous and powerful during the period. The samurai, whose incomes were still paid in fixed amounts of rice, had to trade their rice for cash with the merchants, who controlled this exchange. They became increasingly indebted to merchants, whom they borrowed from to maintain an upper class

lifestyle they could no longer afford. During the Tokugawa period, merchants grew wealthy selling the products and services desired by commoners and samurai alike. The merchant class

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created a new style of life and art, flaunting their wealth and power, enjoying the theater, hosting boating parties on city waterways, and frequenting restaurants and teahouses. Their lavish lifestyle was celebrated and recorded in woodblock prints of the period.

The Tokugawa shogunate established policies and practices that allowed for a remarkable period of peace and prosperity. Its policies also undermined the power of the samurai class and unintentionally provided an opportunity for the lowly merchant class to emerge as a dominant force in the shaping of Japan's urban culture.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How did life change for samurai during the Tokugawa period?
2. To which social class in Tokugawa society would you prefer to belong? Why?