

**Lesson Title:** Samurai Shortstop and Meiji Japan

**Class and Grade Level:** Literature, Language Arts, 8<sup>th</sup> grade

**Goals and Objectives**

**The student will be able to:**

- Describe and identify Samurai ethics, loyalty, and morality
- Recognize the culture and traditions of Samurai
- Discuss how people their age dealt with change in Japan during the time of “Samurai Shortstop”

**Time required/class periods needed:** This is a three-week novel study.

**Primary source bibliography:**

Images from the Meiji period. <http://www.oldphotosjapan.com/en/period/Meiji>

Woodblock prints of foreigners in Japan at the time of *Samurai Shortshop*.

<http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/yokohama/index.html> and

**Other resources used:**

*Samurai Shortstop* by Alan Gratz, The Penguin Group, 345 Hudson Street, New York, New York, 2006.

Background videos on Samurai Warriors at

<https://www.history.com/topics/samurai-and-bushido/videos>

Further information on the samurai and the Meiji period:

<http://search.freefind.com/find.html?id=70726870&pageid=r&mode=all&n=0&query=samurai>

<http://search.freefind.com/find.html?q=samurai&id=70726870&pageid=r& charset =UTF-8&bcd=%C3%B7&scs=1&query=Meiji&Find=Search&mode=ALL&search=all>

Background reading about the changes westernization brought about in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century would also be good. See for instance:

<http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/yokohama/index.html>

[http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/black\\_ships\\_and\\_samurai/index.html](http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/black_ships_and_samurai/index.html)

[http://aboutjapan.japansociety.org/content.cfm/the\\_meiji\\_restoration\\_era\\_1868-1889?print=1](http://aboutjapan.japansociety.org/content.cfm/the_meiji_restoration_era_1868-1889?print=1)

**Required materials/supplies:**

Computer / Projector to watch background video

Copies of *Samurai Shortstop* for every student

**Vocabulary**

Yayoi

**Chapter 1**

*tatami*: woven straw mat

*seppuku*: ritual samurai suicide

*katana*: a long, curved sword

*wakizashi*: a short sword

*hai*: yes

**Chapter 2**

*besuboru*: baseball (Old word: called *yakyu* or “field ball” in contemporary Japan)

*sakura*: cherry blossom, national flower of Japan

**Chapter 5**

*bushido*: the samurai code; the way of the warrior

*shishi*: heir, lion, store, patriot

*shinto*: believer, follower, one of the major religions of Japan

**Chapter 6**

*ronin*: a samurai without an overlord

**Chapter 8**

*baka*: foolish, idiot

**Chapter 9**

*Zen*: Buddhist doctrine stating that enlightenment can be attained through meditation

*sensei*: teacher

*heimin*: commoner

**Chapter 11**

*cha*: tea; same word in Chinese

*wa*: harmony, oneness, also one of the words Japan uses to refer to itself

**Chapter 16**

*gaijin*: “foreigner” “outsider”, literally “outside person;” particularly used to refer to Westerners

*banzai*: hurrah, cheers, congratulations

**Chapter 20**

*tengu*: long nosed goblin, a braggart

## Procedure:

Note: This is a three- week novel study that is intended to introduce the student to the culture of Japan's samurai warriors during the Meiji period, a time when the feudal era was coming to an end in Japan and a time when Japan opened its doors to Westerners.

Background knowledge of Japan and the samurai warriors given below should be provided prior to reading the novel to increase student understanding.

### 1) History of Samurai:

Legend has it that Emperor Keiko was the first person with the title "Shogun." The word means "Barbarian-subduing General." Legend holds that Keiko had a son Prince Yamato. He was cunning, fearless, strong and a great martial artist. Many believe that Yamato was the role model for future samurai.

Ancient Yayoi ([https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/yayo/hd\\_yayo.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/yayo/hd_yayo.htm)) warriors developed weapons, armor and a code that became the centerpiece for the samurai. Early weapons included bows, arrows and swords. Armor included a helmet that protected head and neck, a breastplate that protected the chest, arms and shoulder protectors, and a belly wrap. Later armor included protection for the legs and thighs. Armor changed as the type of battles changed. A big change occurred in the 5th century when horses were introduced to Japan from the Asian continent. Another change occurred in the 15th century with the introduction of guns into Japan. The bushido code evolved from the Chinese concept of the virtuous warrior to the samurai code of chivalry which, in turn, evolved from *kyuba no michi* ("The Way of Horse and Bow") to *bushido* ("Way of the Warrior"). The samurai arose from three main clans: the Minamoto, the Fujiwara and the Taira. These three clans were engaged in a continual battle for land. The samurai eventually became a class unto itself between the 9th and 12th centuries A.D. They were called by two names: samurai (knights-retainers) and bushi (warriors). Some of them were related to the ruling class; others were hired men. They gave complete loyalty to their daimyo (feudal landowners) and received land and position in return. Each daimyo used his samurai to protect his land and to expand his power and rights to more land.

<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~malokofs/SCA/Persona/History/samurai.html>

Rather than be captured by the enemy and to save face and honor, samurai commonly committed suicide. This act was performed by stabbing a knife into the left side of the abdomen, drawing across to the right and giving a final upward twist towards the chest, effectively disemboweling himself. After that, a trusted friend would decapitate him--cutting off his head was seen as an act of mercy as it spared the dying man a great deal of pain. According to Yamaga Soko (1622-1685) who was a Japanese philosopher during the Tokugawa shogunate and an advisor to the samurai:

“The business of the samurai consists in reflecting on his own station in life, in discharging loyal service to his master if he has one, in deepening his fidelity (faithfulness) in association with friends, and with the due consideration of his position, in devoting himself to duty above all.”

**Procedure continued:**

The way of the warrior (*bushido*) is to find a good way to die. If a choice is given between life and death, the samurai must choose death. There is not more meaning beyond this. Make up your mind and follow the course. Someone may say, ‘You die in vain if you do not accomplish what you set out to do.’

In 1867, Japan’s ruling warlords were overthrown. Quickly, Japan transformed itself from a feudal society into an industrial nation and samurai lost their place in society.

Although Japan’s samurai warriors no longer exist, their values are preserved in contemporary Japan. The Code of Bushido, the samurai’s code of honor, upholds loyalty, discipline, total dedication, honor and valor. It emphasizes loyalty and family values. It places great value on courage, honor, self-discipline, and asks its followers to put the needs of others before their own. Capture or surrender is dishonorable. Numerous examples of the application of these elements can be seen today.

<http://www.kendo.com/themodernsamurai> Other websites can be found by googling “bushido code in contemporary Japan” or “Modern Samurai”

2) Students will read *Samurai Shortstop* with an eye to answering the following comprehension questions for each chapter:

Chapter 1:

Why did Toyo’s uncle, Koji, choose to commit seppuku rather than die at the hands of an executioner?

Chapter 2:

Describe First Higher School.

Chapter 3:

Describe the school’s system of discipline.

In Chapter 3, upperclassmen “storm” the first years. Explain what occurred.

Chapter 4:

What did Futoshi do that night? What were the risks?

Chapter 5:

What gift did Toyo’s father, Sotaro, give Toyo on his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday?

What was the significance of this gift?

Chapter 6:

Explain *bushido*; why had Koji been sentenced to death?

Chapter 7

After the dead mice were found in the rice, what happened in the cafeteria?

Why did Toyo’s father not want to teach him *bushido*?

What made him change his mind?

Chapter 8

What was Toyo’s reaction to the storming and the cafeteria food?

What actions did he persuade the other first years to take?

Chapter 9

In this chapter, Sotaro explains Zen to Toyo. What does he say that Zen does for the samurai?

Sotaro tells Toyo to ‘Listen for the sound of the wind in the sakura.’ Why?

**Procedure continued:**

Chapter 10

What was Sotaro’s occupation?

Chapter 11

Where did Toyo find the *besuboru*?

Chapter 12

What is the purpose of Zen meditation?

What was the purpose of having Toyo arrange flowers?

Chapter 13

What happens between Toyo and the cafeteria workers when he tries to supervise them?

How does Toyo gain their respect?

Chapter 14

What is Fuji’s response when Toyo asks him why he doesn’t participate in activities, such as *besuboru*?

Chapter 15

Why had Fuji been sneaking out of the dormitory?

What did Fuji do when he and Toyo saw a *gaijin* couple walking on a rope bridge?

Chapter 16

Who were the Shimbashi nine?

When Toyo began sword training, what type of sword did he use?

Chapter 17

Describe Fuji’s skills when Toyo persuaded him to join the game?

Chapter 18

Junzo says the executive council exists to do what?

Chapter 19

Where did Sotaro ask Toyo to spend the night? And why did he do this?

Chapter 20

Instead of taking his sword with him, what did Toyo take to the Shinto Shrine?

Chapter 21

What happened during Toyo’s lesson? Why did he stop?

Chapter 22

What was the outcome of the game between the Ichikos and Third Higher?

Chapter 23

Explain the ‘clenched fist’ ceremony. Who was the recipient at this ceremony?

Chapter 24

Why did Sotaro teach Toyo “the killing stroke?”

Chapter 25

Why did Toyo close his eyes when batting in the game against the School of Commerce?

Chapter 26

What happened to Fuji’s grandfather?

What was Toyo’s reaction to hearing that story?

What did Toyo's father have Toyo do when Toyo discussed Fuji's story with him?

**Procedure continued:**

Chapter 27

What lesson did Toyo learn from his trip to the village?

Chapter 28

How did Toyo offer to help the other players on his team?

Why did he ask the players to call him *sensei*? What is meaning of *sensei*?

Chapter 29

Why was Moriyama at the Shinto Shrine?

Who did the Mainstream Society find guilty and what was he guilty of?

Chapter 30

What happened during game between the Ichiko and the Meiji?

Chapter 31

Why did the headmaster require Toyo and Futoshi to go to the American consulate?

Why was it so important for the boys to do this?

Chapter 32

How did Sotaro describe *besuboru* in his newspaper article?

What did Toyo ask at the American consulate? How did the consulate respond?

What did the headmaster order the boys to do?

Chapter 33

What did Sotaro's note ask Toyo to do?

Chapter 34

What did Toyo say to Sotaro that made him reconsider his *seppuku*?

Chapter 35

What decision did Toyo and his teammates make regarding the game against the Meiji team?

Chapter 36

How did Sotaro's attitude toward *besuboro* change in this chapter?

Chapter 37

What did Moriyama give Kennichi right before the game?

Why was this gift significant?

Chapter 38

What happened to Toyo's bat when he was batting?

Who lent him a bat and why was this loan significant?

**Assessment/evaluation:**

The students will be required to answer 3 of the 5 essay questions below about *Samurai Shortstop*:

1. What conflict is prevalent throughout the story?
2. How does Toyo's friendship with Fuji challenge his feelings about samurai honor and tradition?
3. Discuss Toyo's values and beliefs and describe how they change over the course of the book.
4. Trace the change in Toyo's relationship with his father over the course of the book.
5. Although the samurai warriors no longer exist as a class, their values have been preserved in contemporary Japan. The Code of Bushido, the Samurai's code of honor, upholds loyalty, discipline, honor and valor. What are some examples of this code still being followed today in Japan? **SOME RESEARCH WILL BE ALLOWED ON THIS TOPIC.**