

Perry's Expedition to Japan: Opening Trade & Exchanging Culture

Matthew Goolsby
Molly Shannon
Senior Division
Group Exhibit

Student composed words: 444
Process Paper words: 497

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Matthew Perry and the opening of Japan was one potential topic on a list of many options. After doing some preliminary research to learn about what it was, we chose Perry and his expedition based on our interest in it and how well it fit this year's theme. Before beginning this project we had not heard of Perry or the opening of Japan, so we were interested in learning more about this topic and Japan's past as an isolationist. When we started researching, we found out it would take some digging to find out more about our topic.

To learn about Perry and Japan we read several tertiary sources that were overviews of our subject to find out some basic information as a jumping off point for the rest of our research. After that we used several different methods to find primary and secondary information. We went to the library at a local university, where we found more books and journals about the opening of Japan specifically as well as the context of the event. We searched online articles, websites, and databases to find pictures for our project and fill holes in our research. Furthermore, we emailed Dr. Marcia A. Butler, assistant professor in premodern and modern East Asia history at Missouri State, and she recommended a book to us.

Through our research we learned many surprising things that we had not considered beforehand, such as that the Emperor of Japan was merely a figurehead, second to the Tokugawa Shogunate who held the real power at the time. Ironically, Perry and the U.S. government did not know this either as their letter was addressed to the Emperor. Learning about how the Shogunate ruled was our first 'ah-ha' moment because it was the first real piece of knowledge we had to dig for. After we clearly understood this concept, the rest of our research came much easier. We also learned about how the U.S. strong-armed Japan into opening ports for refueling and trade with gunboat diplomacy. Our best source was the letter from Millard Fillmore to the Emperor; it is a key primary document because it has historical context that is extremely relevant to our topic.

Our group chose to do an exhibit board because we had experience with boards before and enjoyed it. We also liked the challenging prospect of summing up our analysis into so few words. After we acquired our board we bought materials and started adding information, picking out quotes to go on the board, and choosing pictures. Later we had to edit our analysis on the board to fit the word limit and more succinctly portray our thoughts.

The U.S. exploration of opening Japan to trade and further relationships with outside powers is a great example of the exchange of culture and ideas, since this was really the first substantial contact Japan had with the outside world. Further, it is an example of encounter between two different countries and the relations that followed.

Bibliography

Primary

Fillmore, Millard. "From Millard Fillmore, President of the United States of

America, to His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of Japan." 13 Nov. 1852.

Commodore Perry and Japan (1853-1854). Asia for Educators. Columbia University, 2013. 7 Dec. 2015. Web.

In this letter to the emperor of Japan, President Fillmore outlined his intentions in sending Commodore Perry to their land. He asks only for “friendship, commerce, a supply of coal and provisions, and protection for our shipwrecked people.” Fillmore’s letter helped us understand the intentions of the U.S. and to read for ourselves how Fillmore attempted to subtly intimidate.

Griffis, William Elliot. *Townsend Harris: First American Envoy in Japan*. Freeport, NY:

Books for Libraries Press, 1971. Print.

This book gave us insights into the negotiations for the Harris Treaty through the journal of the first American consul in Japan himself. His actions, which officially opened ports for trade in Japan, were the foundations for other treaties between Japan and western nations. While it does include an introduction and conclusion by Griffis, a majority of this source is Harris’ own words.

Heine, William. *With Perry to Japan: A Memoir by William Heine*. Trans. Frederic Trautmann. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990. Print.

This book is a narration of all the events surrounding the opening of Japan given by a member of his crew who was on the expedition to document it with artwork. It provides insight into the actual expedition that is useful to understanding the topic.

***Perry In Japan: A Visual History*. Brown University Library, 2011. Web. 15 Dec. 2015.**

This collection of primary sources was invaluable to our research because it provided everything from accounts of the expedition to scrolls and drawings from first hand witnesses of the event. This source specifically seeks to interpret the “different meanings attached to cultural exchange by the peoples involved,” helping us connect our topic to the theme.

Perry, Matthew C. "From Commodore Matthew C. Perry to His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of Japan." 7 July 1853. *Commodore Perry and Japan (1853-1854)*. Asia for Educators. Columbia University. 2013. 7 Dec. 2015. Web.

Like Fillmore, Commodore Perry also expresses a desire for peace and friendship with the Japanese. Perry describes the necessity of peace between the two nations if they hope to avoid war. The commodore is much less subtle than the president in his intimidations. This helped us understand Perry’s mindset as came into Japan.

---. "From Commodore Matthew C. Perry [Sent in Connection with the Delivery of a White Flag]." 13 July 1853. *Commodore Perry and Japan (1853-1854)*. Asia for Educators. Columbia University. 2013. 7 Dec. 2015. Web.

In this short note delivered with a white flag, Perry responds to the resistance he has met with the Japanese. He explains that he will not hesitate to “take up arms” and that “the

victory will naturally be ours.” This note is much more aggressive than his previous letter, and shows that Perry would not hesitate to use force to achieve his goal.

---. *The Japan Expedition 1852-1854: The Personal Journal of Commodore Matthew C. Perry*. Ed. Roger Pineau. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968. Print.

Perry’s personal journal gave us an account of the journey to Japan which aided us in connecting our project to the “exploration” aspect of the theme. It also provided a first-hand American perspective of the encounter which also benefited our project.

“The Treaty of Kanagawa, 1854 (English Version).” *Featured Documents*. Record Group 11. General Records of the United States Government. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. 10 Dec. 2015. Web.

This was the first treaty between the U.S. and Japan, signed on March 31, 1854. This source was valuable in that it let us read the original text of the treaty and see what Japan agreed to, or was forced into agreeing to.

Williams, S. Wells. *A Journal of the Perry Expedition to Japan (1853-1854)*. Ed. F. W. Williams. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1973. Print

This is journal of the first interpreter of the Japan expedition. Williams covered all aspects of the journey, from landing in Japan to the signing of the treaty. This source helped us understand the opening of Japan from a perspective other than Perry’s.

Secondary

"Commodore Perry and Japan (1853-1854)." *Asia for Educators*. Columbia University, 2009. Web. 20 Oct. 2015.

This brief article was one of our first sources and gave us enough information to begin asking questions and looking for more specific information. This source sent us in search of the treaties Japan agreed to and what they contained. It also had us questioning why the Tokugawa regime fell after Perry's mission.

Dower, John W. "Black Ships and Samurai: Commodore Perry and the Opening of Japan." MIT Visualizing Cultures. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010. Web. 04 Feb. 2016.

The most valuable part of this essay is probably the section outlining the encounters between the Japanese and Americans, "Facing 'East'" and "Facing 'West.'" We especially benefited from reading about the Japanese perspective because many of our sources did not cover their view in depth. This essay was also filled with striking pictures that add a lot to the visual appeal of our project.

- - -. "Yokohama Boomtown: Foreigners in Treaty-Port Japan (1859 - 1872)." *MIT Visualizing Cultures*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008. Web. 04 Feb. 2016.

This article describes the relations and the forming of treaties between the U.S. and Japan. It later talks about how this led to Japan's trade agreements with four more countries and discussed some consequences of the United States opening relations.

Duus, Peter. *The Rise of Modern Japan*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976. Print.

In this book, Duus helped us gain an understanding of the events that led up to Perry's expedition into Japan. How the Tokugawa regime was established and the nature of the bakufu government were some of the things that helped us understand what Perry was sailing into when he entered Japan.

Gordon, Andrew. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Print.

This source provided a lot of information about the Tokugawa Shogunate and the culture in the country under their rule. We learned that the way the shoguns kept their rule so well for so long was by convincing the people it was a legitimate rule. The shoguns treated themselves as divine and built temples to themselves.

History.com Staff. "Tokugawa Period and Meiji Restoration." *History.com*. A+E Networks, 2009. Web. 19 Oct. 2015.

We came across this article while looking for information on the rulers of Japan during the Perry expedition. This article described the Tokugawa Shogunate's rise to power and how they wielded their influence throughout Japan. It also briefly covered their fall and the return of the emperor's power in the Meiji Restoration.

"Japan's Modern History: An Outline of the Period." *Asia for Educators*. Columbia University, 2009. Web. 04 Feb. 2016.

This article helped us get an idea of the big picture in terms of the Tokugawa period and the Meiji Restoration. It covered these points in time briefly, giving us information that we could then begin digging deeper into. It also provided details beyond Meiji into the 20th century and present day.

Pyle, Kenneth B. *The Making of Modern Japan*. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Co., 1978.

Print.

This source was successful in making the connection between Perry's arrival in Japan and the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate. It was beneficial in that it provided support for the consequences of the Perry expedition in Japan, like the expansion of the world view and the transfer of power.

"The United States and the Opening to Japan, 1853." *1830–1860 - Milestones - Office of the Historian*. U.S. Department of State; Office of the Historian, n.d. Web. 19 Oct. 2015.

This article was one of our first sources, and it provided a brief overview of Perry's expedition as well as the history of westerners in Japan. This was a great starting point for our research because it gave us the general idea of the events and timeline, but also left room to ask questions and begin searching for more specific information.

Walworth, Arthur. *Black Ships off Japan: The Story of Commodore Perry's Expedition*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1966. Print.

This book was especially helpful in that it outlined clearly events from American expeditions before Perry to the negotiations for a treaty and beyond. This source helped us to fill some holes in our research and tell the story completely.

Webb, Herschel. *The Japanese Imperial Institution in the Tokugawa Period*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968. Print.

Webb goes into great depth how the role of the emperor changes throughout the Tokugawa regime and into the Meiji Restoration. The Meiji Restoration is one of the consequences of Perry's opening of Japan, so this information helped us better understand its impact on Japan.

Wiley, Peter Booth, and Korogi Ichiro. *Yankees in the Land of the Gods: Commodore Perry and the Opening of Japan*. New York: Viking, 1990. Print.

From this book we were able to get a very specific and detailed picture of Perry and his mission to Japan. It helped simultaneously to understand and to tell the story both for Perry and the Japanese. This source also included several maps which helped us get a better picture of the areas being discussed.

Wilson, Robert A. *Genesis of the Meiji Government in Japan 1868-1871*. West Port, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978. Print.

In this book we learned more about the fall of the Tokugawa and gained information that would help us support our analysis of Perry's expedition as an important event in history. Wilson helped us understand Japan's transition from a secluded country to a modern nation.