

What your child will learn in Grade 8 Social Studies

From Isolation to Adaptation: Japan

Your child will explore how Japan's geography, beliefs and values shaped the way the country developed over centuries. Japan's location as an island nation and its choice to limit contact with the outside world during the Edo period (1603 to 1868) created a unique society with its own customs, government and way of life. Your child will learn how the shogun, a military leader, used a feudal system with strict social classes to keep control and maintain Japan's isolation. [See the curriculum: 1, 2, 3.](#)

After Japan's long isolation ended in the mid-1800s, the country entered the Meiji period (1868 to 1912), during which everything changed rapidly. Your child will examine why Japan decided to modernize so quickly and how the country adapted its government, economy and society to compete with Western nations. Your child will also think about the challenges Japan faced: how do you keep your traditional culture and values while changing so dramatically? [See the curriculum.](#)

Origins of a Western Worldview: Renaissance Europe

Your child will learn about the Renaissance, a period in Europe roughly from the 1300s onward when art, science, philosophy and trade flourished. During this time, thinkers and artists became fascinated with human potential and achievement, a way of thinking called humanism. Your child will see how geography helped: Europe's coastlines and rivers made trade easier, which brought wealth to cities like Florence, Venice and Genoa, and these cities became centres of learning and creativity. [See the curriculum.](#)

Your child will explore how the Renaissance sparked the growth and spread of new ideas in astronomy, mathematics, science, politics, religion and the arts across Europe. Your child will also examine how this period led to the Age of Discovery, when European explorers set out to find new lands and resources, often with the goal of expanding their own power and wealth. Your child will think about how this expansion changed the way Europeans saw themselves and their place in the world. [See the curriculum.](#)

Worldviews in Conflict: The Spanish and the Aztecs

Your child will study two very different civilizations and what happened when they met. The Aztec civilization had its own beliefs, values and ways of organizing society that guided their choices and customs. Spain, meanwhile, was driven by a desire to expand its power and territory across the world. [See the curriculum.](#)

Your child will examine how technology (like Spanish weapons and ships) and disease gave Spain an advantage over the Aztecs. But your child will also think deeply about whether the biggest factor was the clash of worldviews themselves, how the Spanish and Aztecs saw the world so differently that they could not understand each other. Your child will learn that when two societies with very different beliefs come into contact, both can change dramatically and sometimes one society's way of life is lost. [See the curriculum: 1, 2, 3.](#)

How to help at home: Japan

Ask your child to explain why Japan chose to stay isolated for so long and what changed that decision. This helps your child think about how geography and beliefs shape a nation's choices. [See the curriculum: 1, 2.](#)

Look at a map of Japan together and talk about how being an island affected trade and contact with other countries. Your child is learning to connect physical geography to how societies develop. [See the curriculum.](#)

Ask your child to compare Japan before and after the Meiji period: What stayed the same? What changed? Why was the change so fast? This helps your child understand that societies can adapt their beliefs and values when circumstances demand it. [See the curriculum.](#)

How to help at home: Renaissance Europe

Ask your child what the Renaissance was and why it mattered. Your child should be able to explain that it was a time when new ideas in art, science and thinking spread across Europe. [See the curriculum.](#)

Look at pictures of Renaissance art or architecture together (online or in a library book) and ask your child why artists and thinkers were so interested in human achievement and potential during this time. This helps your child see how beliefs shape what a society values and creates. [See the curriculum.](#)

Talk with your child about exploration: Why did European explorers set out to find new lands? What were they looking for? This helps your child understand that a society's worldview, its beliefs about power, wealth and the world, drives its actions. [See the curriculum.](#)

How to help at home: The Spanish and the Aztecs

Ask your child to describe the Aztec civilization and what the Spanish civilization valued. Then ask: How might these two groups have misunderstood each other? This helps your child see that worldviews shape how people make decisions and interact. [See the curriculum.](#)

Talk about the tools and weapons the Spanish had and the diseases they brought. Ask your child: Did Spain win because of these things, or because of different beliefs? This helps your child think critically about cause and effect in history. [See the curriculum.](#)

Ask your child what happened to Aztec beliefs and values after contact with Spain. Your child is learning that rapid change can transform a society's entire way of life. [See the curriculum.](#)