

Background for students:

The Perry expedition to Japan in 1853 and 1854 was documented through a publication entitled *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan*, written by Francis L. Hawks and published between 1856 and 1858. This three-volume publication recorded, in exacting detail, the impressions of the American sailors of what they saw, heard, and learned in Japan.

In this activity, you will first read a first-hand account by an American eyewitness and then compare the American written description with the American artistic representation of the same event, as shown at the exhibit.

Read the description of a Japanese sport ("Sumo Account Excerpt") provided with this Handout. This description is taken from the eyewitness accounts recorded in *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan*. Answer the questions below about this account.

1. The author relies heavily on several adjectives to describe the wrestlers. Circle in your reading adjectives that you see used more than once in this excerpt. List the adjectives below.

2. What is the effect of repeated use of some adjectives to describe the wrestlers?

3. How do you think that the use of adjectives in this particular description reflects the writer's attitude about what he is seeing?

4. What does the author compare the wrestlers to?

How does this comparison reflect the writer's attitude about what he is seeing?

5. Now, go to the "Encounters: Facing West" section of the Core Exhibit. Read this entire section. Pay special attention to the discussion of the sumo wrestling performance. The Core Exhibit contains several artistic depictions of sumo wrestling. Select the 1853-54 picture that best illustrates the scene you have just read about.

A. In the space below, write a sentence to describe the image you have selected.

B. If there is a title for this artwork, write it in the space below.

6. In the space below, compare and contrast the artwork to the written description of the wrestling, using the questions below.

A. The *Narrative* description of the wrestler used some adjectives repeatedly to create an impression on the reader. Does the artwork create a similar impression for the viewer? Describe at least three specific items in the picture that support your answer.

B. What, if anything, did you see in the artwork that you did not expect to see based on your reading of the same sports event in the *Narrative*?

C. What aspects of the sumo wrestling came across the same in both the text and art?

D. What aspects of the sumo wrestling came across differently in the text and the art?

7. List eight adjectives that describe the action and feeling of the sumo wrestling tournament, as reflected in the artwork shown in the Core Exhibit. Try to use different adjectives than those used in the *Narrative* description that you read.

8. Consider the several American and Japanese visuals on sumo in the "Encounters: Facing West" section of the Core exhibit altogether.

A: What captures the most attention for the American artist?

B: Does the American lithograph convey the same impression of sumo as the *Narrative* excerpt? How are they similar and how different?

C: Now consider the American and Japanese images together. Be sure to concentrate just on the 1853-54 images, not the later Japanese woodblocks created in the 1860s. Compared to the American lithograph, what seems to capture the attention and provide the focus for the Japanese woodblocks?

D: What differences do you notice in the American vs. Japanese images?

9. Why do you think that the Japanese chose sumo wrestling as an aspect of their culture to show to the foreign visitors in 1853?

10. From what has been written and illustrated about the American reactions to Japanese sumo wrestling, it seems that the American sailors were quite surprised with their introduction to this sport and the men who played it. The unfamiliarity and curiosity about this encounter was not limited to the Americans or the introduction of Japanese sumo wrestling. Japanese were similarly surprised by customs of the Americans.

Go to the TV section of the *Black Ships and Samurai* Web site. View the Black Ship Scroll and identify three examples of American customs or habits introduced to Japanese by Perry's sailors that seem to have startled Japanese viewers to a degree similar to that of the sumo wrestlers. Describe the customs below. For each one, explain how you know from the Black Ship Scroll illustrations that the Japanese were startled or intrigued by the custom. Imagine that you are a Japanese encountering this American custom for the first time. List eight adjectives that you would use to describe what you are seeing.