

What Did It Mean to Be “Western”?

Handout 05-A, page one of one

According to historian John Dower, author of the *Yokohama Boomtown* Core Exhibit, Yokohama at this time in history (1860s–1970s) was Japan’s first-hand showplace of Western civilization. Yokohama was synonymous with “Western” in the minds of the Japanese artists capturing life in the treaty-port city through their woodblock prints.

Yokohama prints were mass-produced and distributed widely, so they were a powerful tool for introducing Japanese people to what it meant to be “Western.”

How would Japanese with first- or second-hand access to information about the West through Yokohama woodblock prints have defined “Western”? Your task is to construct a definition that answers the question:

What did it mean to be “Western” as perceived by Japanese living in Yokohama at this time?

1. Your teacher has divided the class into several groups and provided each group with one of the following categories of Westernization to research. Circle your group’s category:

Western = technology and science

Western = industry

Western = unique attitudes and ideologies

Western = specific ways of life (family, gender, social organization)

2. Go to a mini-database of images from *Yokohama Boomtown* (Lesson Five Mini-database). This will give you 24 images to work with.

3. As a group, look carefully at all 24 pictures in the mini-database and choose four images that you think relate to your group’s category of Westernization. Print the four images so that you can work with them offline.

4. Use the information in the four images you selected to write a definition of what it might have meant to be “Western” to Japanese interacting with the Westerners in Yokohama in the 1860s. Use a separate sheet of paper for your definition. Depending on the category for your group, your definition should answer one of the specific questions below.

What did it mean to be “Western” in terms of technology and science?

What did it mean to be “Western” in terms of industry?

What did it mean to be “Western” in terms of attitudes and beliefs?

What did it mean to be “Western” in terms of ways of life?