

DBQ: The Changing Relationship between Japan and the West

Teacher Background Notes, page one of one

Bullet Points for Introducing the “Opening” of Japan by U.S. commodore Matthew Perry:

- Japan, under the Tokugawa Shogunate (government of the national ruler, called a shogun), had been largely closed to trade with Western nations from the early 1600s. However, limited trade did take place with the Dutch (through Nagasaki) and with other Asian nations.
- China had recently been forced to negotiate treaty ports and generous trade terms with Western nations through its defeat in the Opium Wars.
- The United States, motivated by a philosophy of Manifest Destiny at home, was anxious to establish a foothold in Japan and gain an advantage in the Asia trade.
- Perry’s fleet arrived off the coast of Japan in 1853. The sight of the fleet, which included two coal-burning, steam-driven warships, was a shock to Japanese living around the fleet’s landing site, who had had no contact with foreigners. Perry’s fleet was labeled the “Black Ships” by Japanese.
- Perry delivered an ultimatum for establishing relations with the shogun’s government. In the weeks that Perry’s men spent in Japan, Japanese people living around the fleet’s landing site in Uraga, near the capital of Edo (Tokyo), received a first intense introduction to Westerners.
- Perry promised to return to Japan the following year to receive a response to U.S. requests. He returned in 1854 with a larger fleet.
- Faced with eroding control, domestic problems, and the knowledge that China was suffering the consequences of the disastrous Opium Wars, the Japanese government of the Tokugawa Shogun granted trade and other concessions to the United States upon Perry’s return.