

Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun Study Guide

Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun by Rhoda Blumberg

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Plot Summary

Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun is the story of Commodore Matthew Perry, the U.S. Navy Commodore responsible for forcing Japan to open its doors to Western nations not only for culture but for trade. At the time of Perry's arrival, Japan was in its Tokugawa Shogunate period, a period of time where the Shogun had frozen Japanese social norms from its medieval period. Into the nineteenth century, the Japanese had a class-stratified society with incredibly rigid social rules. While their culture flourished, they were technologically not well advanced and were wholly unprepared for the arrival of the Americans. The book explains the details of Perry's meetings with the Japanese, the various features of their deep cultural clash and the ways in which the Japanese ultimately conceded Perry's demands despite the complex social conflicts that arose as a result.

In 1853, Commodore Perry finally arrived in Japanese waters after a journey across the Pacific with four ships, the Mississippi, the Plymouth, the Saratoga and the Susquehanna at his command, two of which were steamboats. The Japanese had never seen such contraptions and were absolutely terrified at the site of them. There had been several American expeditions to Japan in the past but they had failed to establish contact. Only the Dutch had been able to establish trade relations with Japan and the trading conditions were incredibly stringent, with the Dutch trapped on a small island off of Nagasaki with a handful of families who coordinated the trading.

The first Japanese to meet Perry were minor officials who pretended to be officials far beyond their rank. They were desperate to prevent the Americans from landing. Should they fail, they would be forced to commit hari-kari, or Japanese ritual suicide. Perry refused their demands that he leave and pointed his guns towards the nearby town of Uraga and then asked to present the Japanese with a letter from President Millard Fillmore. The letter sent shockwaves through Japanese society, with the advisers to the Shogun interested in opening Japanese society and the Emperor's allies outraged and prepared to fight the Americans. The results of the negotiations were that the Japanese would help shipwrecked American sailors and not treat them cruelly (actually Perry's primary objective) and to establish some minimal trade relations. After leaving for a few months and returning, Perry negotiated the Convention of Kanagawa which lasted for several weeks until finally a treaty was signed. Once the treaty was signed, the Americans were allowed to land at two small village trade sites, Shimoda and Hakodate. The Americans gave the Japanese many fine gifts that shocked and fascinated them. The gifts the Japanese gave in return were treasures of their culture, but Perry and his men thought little of them.

While Perry's methods were aggressive, deceptive and militaristic, the book makes the case that his mission fundamentally revolutionized Japanese society. As a consequence of establishing contact and opening the door for cultural and economic exchange, many Japanese sprung at the opportunity to modernize. Most important among these individuals was Prince Mutsuhito, who followed his father, Emperor Komei, as Emperor of Japan. A new government was formed and the Tokugawa Shogunate was

overthrown. In 1868, the Meiji leaders established some democratic institutions, allowed all classes to be part of public affairs, abolished the class system by force of law, and the like. Japan's peaceful modernization was incredible and the author attributes part of the results to the shockwaves Perry sent through Japanese society.



Chapters 1-4, Aliens Arrive, The Black Ships of the Evil Men, His High and Might Mysteriousness, Landing on Sacred Soil (The Audience Hall)

Chapters 1-4, Aliens Arrive, The Black Ships of the Evil Men, His High and Might Mysteriousness, Landing on Sacred Soil (The Audience Hall) Summary

Chapter 1: One day, Friday, July 8th, 1853, to be exact, four enormous ships appeared off of the coast of Shimoda, a small fishing village in Japan. Two of these ships were streaming smoke. The people were terrified, calling them giant dragons full of smoke and alien ships of fire. They wondered if the enemy was mysteriously pushing active volcanoes towards the shore. They knew something awful was happening. The fishermen came into shore quickly. The ships were large and black. These people did not know steamboats existed and were terrified by the size of their guns. Temple bells rang across the area to warn the people.

Many heard rumors that devils with white faces would soon take over the country. The people panicked and their valuables. All children and women were sent away or hidden. Messengers rode quickly towards Edo (today's Tokyo), the capital of Japan, to tell the government what was going on. The city was then the largest in the world. Over one million people went there. The city fell into chaos. No one could control the chaos. The Emperor, Komei, was confined to his palace in Kyoto. Despite being seen as a child of the sun goddess, Amaterasu, he only presided over religious ceremonies, and was otherwise a mere puppet. It was illegal for him to leave his palace without government permission. All day-to-day decisions were made by those who had held power for seven hundred years in Japan, the shoguns, meaning "barbarian expelling generalism". The lead shogun of the day, Shogun Iyeyoshi, lived in the Edo palace, but he was weak and no one told him the news until three days later. He was depressed to know he had been ignored. The Shogun's councilors, known as the Bakufu, ran the country instead, but were too afraid to tell anyone, which was odd since they had received word of an American fleet's immanent arrival from their spies with Dutch traders. For whatever reason, they ignored the warnings.

Japan had been locked away from the world, existing as a feudal society. They still had lords and knights (samurai) and the like. The country had not been at war since 1597, but they still organized troops, quickly rallying seventeen thousand soldiers. They tried to surround the ships but they could not outrun them. By 5:00 pm, the ships anchored in Edo Bay. The people feared disaster.



Chapter two begins by noting that four ships and 560 United States' Navalmen were responsible for the chaos. Two steamboats, the Mississippi and the Susquehanna and two three-masted ships, the Plymouth and the Saratoga, were in the harbor. They were called "the Black Ships of the Evil Men" by the Japanese. The ships were commanded by Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry. He came to make peace and to bring Japan into the world of civilized peoples. He wanted to unlock Japan and was there to deliver a letter from President Millard Fillmore to the Emperor. He also wanted access to Japanese ports to gain coal and whale oil. Perry's intention was then to leave peacefully, though he was prepared to use force if attacked. He did not trust the "Orientals".

The Japanese initially tried to board, but Commodore Perry ordered his men to keep them away. His fear of letting the Japanese on board was based on previous experiences of other American commodores. He wanted negotiations to be successful. Until then, no more than three Japanese would be allowed on board. A translator was brought up first and then Nakajima, a vice-governor of the nearby village of Uraga, came up. But he was a minor official. Commodore Perry was inside of a cabin waiting for the most important emissaries. Nakajima said that the American ships must go to Nagasaki and use the Dutch there as go-betweens, but Perry refused unless the guard boats left. Nakajima sent the ships away and left for the day.

In chapter three, the Americans awoke to see a ship of artists drawing the ships and the men. They were, in effect, war correspondents. The troops marched on the shores. At 7:00 am, Kayama, a local police chief, pretending to be a governor, boarded, but Commodore Perry saw through the lie and refused to see him. He remained hidden, leading the Japanese to see him as a holy man. Kayama wanted the Americans to go to Nagasaki. By Japanese law, they could not stay. The Commodore gave the letter to Kayama to give to the Emperor. He did not know the Emperor was a figurehead. Surveying boats went out on Saturday and then again on Monday, charting Japanese coastal waters. Over the next few days, most people calmed down. The Americans were impressed with how kind the Japanese people were. They were courteous and hospitable. The Americans were surprised to find Japan a cultured, civilized nation. On Tuesday, Kayama again asked Perry to go to Nagasaki, but Perry wanted his letter answered first. Kayama then spoke with other officials and said that a building would be created on shore for a reception. The officials then relaxed. On Wednesday, July 13th, Kayama presented Perry with a note from the Emperor authorizing officials to meet with Perry. But the officials that would meet with them were merely the governors of Uraga. The Commodore himself pretended to be an admiral.

Chapter 4: On July 14th, a Thursday, the Susquehanna and the Mississippi landed. Kayama came aboard as a host. The members of the crew were eager to go on shore. Everyone was dressed up. Perry was a first-class showman and had a dramatic entrance. They had black sailors, who stunned the Japanese. They had never seen black people before. The Japanese welcomed them with thousands of soldiers that looked like people out of King Arthur's kingdom, including knights and archers. The villagers were impressed with the Americans' strange clothes and hair. The men were giants.



The Commodore and his officers went in the temporary building. They did not know that ten samurai were underneath, waiting for the signal to kill Perry and his men should something go awry. Perry entered and "princes" Ido and Toda came in. Fillmore's letter was then given to the officials and given to Ido. The Japanese returned a note specifying that the letter will be received. The meeting lasted twenty minutes, and Ido and Toda said nothing, as speaking to foreigners was against the law. The fleet left on July 17th. They exchanged gifts of foreign goods. Perry was proud. At age sixty, it was another feather in his cap. Perry had hunted pirates and slave traders and had commanded the largest American naval force during the Mexican-American War and did well in peace talks. He also helped integrate steamships into the navy. But he knew this accomplishment was unique as Russia and England had tried to open relations with Japan but had failed. He was the first Western ambassador to be received in over two hundred years.

Chapters 1-4, Aliens Arrive, The Black Ships of the Evil Men, His High and Might Mysteriousness, Landing on Sacred Soil (The Audience Hall) Analysis

The first four chapters set up a minor plot line and resolve it. Together, they serve as an introduction to the main theme of the book, which is the interaction between the two distinct cultures of nineteenth century Japan and the United States. Many European nations knew of Japan and had known of it for hundreds of years. But in recent times, as worldwide trade expanded, many countries had wanted to establish trade relations with Japan. The problem was that Japan was in a period of isolation, still existing as a largely feudal society with no industrialization of any kind. They still had knights and feudal lords and peasants. Their culture simply resisted openness. Anyone who could successfully open trade relations with Japan would be an economic hero and given many honors for successful diplomacy. The task would be difficult. Men had tried before and failed. Some had been humiliated and degraded as a result.

Commodore Perry is arguably the book's main character. He is introduced in these four chapters. The reader learns little about his character but much about his accomplishments, which include helping to modernize the American Navy, as he waged successful battles in the Mexican-American war and rooted out piracy and slave trading. However, Perry considered the possibility of success with the Japanese one of the more important of his accomplishments.

The arrival of the Americans terrified the Japanese. They had never seen steamships and they quickly prepared for a battle. Perry knew that this might happen so he came armed as well, though he was outnumbered by overwhelming margins. The challenges of diplomacy arose due to the vast cultural differences between the two peoples. The slightest misunderstanding could produce bloodshed, and both sides were aware of this.



Nonetheless, the chapters resolve the tension quickly. Perry has only arrived to deliver a letter from President Millard Fillmore expressing friendship and asking to initiate a relationship between the United States and Japan. Through a number of minor officials pretending to be major officials, the Japanese get the letter to the Emperor. When Perry is satisfied the letter has been received, he departs, not even waiting for a response. He considered his trip a success and the Japanese people and officials were relieved. The Commodore was off to Nagasaki to await further contact from the Japanese rulers. Perry was not finished with his mission, but the first stage was complete: contact with the Japanese had been established.



Chapters 5-8, The Dutch Island Prison, Foreigners Forbidden, The Great Peace, Clouds Over the Land of the Rising Sun

Chapters 5-8, The Dutch Island Prison, Foreigners Forbidden, The Great Peace, Clouds Over the Land of the Rising Sun Summary

Chapter 5: The Dutch were the only regular trading partners of the Japanese and they basically lived like slaves. The island they lived on, Deshima, was only two hundred yards long and eighty yards wide. They maintained a small trading post there connected to Nagasaki, which was their trading post. Only around twelve families could live there at a time. The Japanese who served them had to swear a blood oath not to become friendly with them and the Dutch could not leave the island without special permission. Around the time of Commodore Perry's arrival, the Dutch made a trip to see the head Shogun in Edo. It took them a month of travel and a month of travel home, with a month in Edo in between. The Dutch were carefully guarded and were confined to their rooms in Edo for weeks until the Shogun would see them. The meeting was humiliating, but during the trip they had the room to dine Dutch-style. Nonetheless, they submitted to control in order to gain the enormous profits that came from Japanese trade. Commodore Perry knew about the Deshima Dutch himself.

In chapter six, the author notes that the Japanese were not always cut off from the world. Prior to the seventeenth century, their society was more open. They traded with China, Korea and even Europe. The Portuguese arrived in 1542. Spanish Jesuits settled there in 1549 and the first Englishman, Will Adams, arrived in 1600. Due to his knowledge of the outside world, the Shogun kept him in Japan and made him his advisor and a samurai. Due to Adams' advice about Portuguese and Spanish wars with England, the Shogun ended relations with the two nations and expelled all foreign priests and missionaries. But when Shogun Ieyasu died in 1616, being a Christian became punishable by death and Christians were persecuted en masse. The cross was stamped annually and even in the nineteenth century, the Dutch and formerly Christian Japanese families were force to stamp Christian symbols. Nonetheless, the Dutch and English could trade so long as they did not proselytize, but in 1623, the English stopped trading as it was unprofitable. Only the Dutch remained, and they were confined to Deshima by 1641. A series of laws were passed that required no Japanese to go abroad and that no foreigners would be tolerated or large ships built. Due to their isolation, the Japanese knew nothing of the United States or the Industrial Revolution. They were unaware of the steam engine, railroads and modern firearms. And Americans and Europeans knew nothing about Japan. Information gathering was an important aspect of Perry's mission. The Dutch helped Perry learn about them. Yet he still did not understand their cultural and social structure.



Chapter seven begins by observing that Perry arrived during Japan's Tokugawa period, when it was still ruled by the Tokugawa Shoguns. This had been the case since 1603. They had preserved feudalism deliberately, even centuries-old styles of dress. The period in Japan's history is often called The Great Peace, as there were few domestic revolts. Trade prospered and cities grew. Literacy rose, the arts flourished and the people were civilized and the government organized. However, the people had no freedom and lived under a social system of incredibly rigid rules. Social status was fixed and merchants were seen as unproductive. The people were stratified by class with untouchables at the bottom of society. The caste system included the emperor, the shogun, the daimyos or lords, the samurai, farmers and merchants and artisans, and then the untouchables, who were not even counted in censuses.

The Emperor was required to study classics and poetry and confer ranks. He was basically a prisoner of the Shogun. The Shogun protected the nation and was the real power behind the throne. The feudal lords, or daimyos, were under the Shogun's power and the number of vassals they had and the size of their domains were regulated. They were not allowed to socialize outside of their domain. They also had to spend part of each year in Edo and were required to leave their wives and children in Edo as hostages when they went home, so that the Shogun remained in control over them. Japan had 250 daimyos. When Perry arrived, Japan had 350,000 samurai. They were master farmers, artisans and merchants, grouped into units of five families that had to monitor one another's behavior. Each samurai had two swords, the smaller of which was sometimes used to commit Seppuku, or ritual suicide. The larger sword was used for war. They could kill commoners for disrespect on the spot. In fact, they were totally financially dependent on the daimyo and were not allowed to engage in commercial life. They mostly managed estates and enjoyed the arts. The Ronin were samurai with no Lords and were often thought to be ruffians.

Farmers were eighty percent of the population of thirty million Japanese in the mid-nineteenth century. Their rank was determined by their level of rice produce. They were not allowed to drink Saki or smoke. They had to wear cotton clothes and could not leave their districts without permission. They were also required to give forty to eighty percent of their crops to their daimyos and were impoverished as a result. The lower classes in cities were artisans and merchants, great craftsmen who often sold their wares in huge stores. Shopkeepers became rich but they had to act with caution, for if they lived in public luxury, they could lose their stores to the government. And yet, in many cases they were emancipated from the rules to help higher classes and could by higher status. By the mid-nineteenth century, the old social system was breaking down. Many scholars and activists wanted isolation to end, and as a result, Perry's proposals were seriously considered.

Chapter 8: Oddly, the Shogun's advisers distributed translations of President Fillmore's letter to the daimyos to ask for their opinions on what to do. They knew that they could not defend themselves against the Americans and feared war. As a result, they felt they could not maintain speculation. The daimyos consulted their samurai on their decisions. Few of the daimyos welcomed trade. Their slogan became "Revere the Emperor; Repel the Barbarian". They were isolationists opposed to the Shogun and wanted to restore



the Emperor's power as a result. Many believed that the West was inferior and that trade would lead to the victimization of Japan. Some wanted to fight to protect Japan against the Americans. But those who wanted interaction had their own slogan: "Eastern Ethics, Western Science". They wanted Western science, industry and wealth from trade. The Emperor was also given a copy of the letter, but Emperor Komei declared that the barbarians should not be allowed on Japanese soil again. So the Shogun was in a quandary. He could not war against the Americans, but signing a treaty with them could lead to a collapse of social support of the government. Meanwhile, the Shogun's advisers repealed the law against building large ships and bought warships from the Dutch.

In another quite unusual turn of events, the Japanese appealed to the advice of a man named Manjiro, a Japanese-American who went to America after shipwrecking on a desert island and being rescued by an American whaler. The ship captain adopted him and renamed him John Mung. He loved America but yearned for Japan, but when he returned he was imprisoned in Nagasaki and put on trial eighteen times. However, Manjiro was too valuable to kill. Instead, he was made a samurai and the Shogun sent for him. He was barred from speaking to the Americans directly, but he assured them that the Americans had no desire to take their land and said that the American people were sturdy, vigorous, warmhearted and capable. He also said that they could not be frightened by foreign weapons. Manjiro's stories entertained many and it took the mystery away from the "foreign devils". Many historians felt positively about Manjiro's influence. Perry's mission might have failed otherwise. Thereafter, Manjiro would take part in other negotiations with the Americans, though behind the scenes.

Chapters 5-8, The Dutch Island Prison, Foreigners Forbidden, The Great Peace, Clouds Over the Land of the Rising Sun Analysis

Commodore Perry's visit disturbed the Japanese government. They were unsure about how to respond. The author spends chapter five explaining how the Japanese government typically dealt with foreigners around the time. The Dutch could trade with the Japanese, but only from an incredibly small trading post. The Dutch were extremely limited in what they could do and often had to humiliate themselves before the Shogun. And yet, trading was so profitable that many families simply put up with it. Nonetheless, foreigners were met with enormous suspicion. This was due to the social circumstances of Japan outlined in chapters six and seven. Chapter six explains that Japan was once a relatively open society and traded with other Asian countries and even with Europe. This was true, in fact throughout the second half of the sixteenth century. Europeans started to arrive in the middle of the sixteenth century and the English arrived at the turn of the century. The Spanish and Portuguese brought Christianity and all nations brought trade. But due to the advice of Will Adams, an Englishman, the Shogun turned against the Spanish and the Portuguese and against the main Western religion, Christianity. He expelled all priests and missionaries and made Christianity illegal on pain of death. To even enter the country, Christians had to defile their own religious symbols. Trade



gradually ebbed away from the Spanish and Portuguese. The British quit trading as well, as trade proved unprofitable. Only the Dutch remained.

Chapter seven discusses Japanese history from the beginning of the Tokugawa period. The Tokugawa Shogunate basically froze Japanese social and economic life into the form practiced in the beginning of the seventeenth century. While Japanese culture flourished and literacy rose, the people were incredibly oppressed by a set of rigidly enforced social rules and social classes were sharply separated from one another with their status fixed across generations. Foreigners were banned from Japan and no Japanese could leave the country. As a result, Japanese society knew little about the rest of the world when Perry arrived. The internal political reaction is discussed in chapter eight. The Shogun's advisers feared the power of the United States and felt forced to make a trade treaty or risk being conquered. They asked the daimyos and the Emperor what they thought. They were largely opposed to interacting with the Americans, so the Shogunate felt trapped between causing civil war and foreign war depending on their decisions. Luckily, with the help of a Japanese-American named Manjiro, information about Americans was spread and this helped to make considering the American proposal for a trade treaty a live option. Thus chapters five through eight explain the situation of the Japanese with respect to the United States and reveal the tensions that were raised by Commodore Perry's arrival and President Fillmore's proposal.



Chapters 9-12, The Black Ships Return, The Treaty House, An Array of Gifts, The Grand Banquet

Chapters 9-12, The Black Ships Return, The Treaty House, An Array of Gifts, The Grand Banquet Summary

Chapter 9: The Shogun died ten days after Perry left and there was a concern that his death would prevent Commodore Perry from returning, since the people might resist receiving foreigners. But when Perry saw that the Russians and French were still approaching Japan, he moved forward, and on February 13th, 1854, he sailed into Edo Bay with 1,600 men and nine armed ships. His arrival initiated weeks of negotiations about where the Americans would land. The two sides often threatened one another, though in subtle ways. The Japanese felt particularly threatened by the Americans and wanted them to land somewhere that would keep them relatively safe. In the meanwhile, Perry's ships surveyed and charted the area. After ten days or so, Kayama returned to negotiate with them and they reached an agreement that the Americans would land at Kanagawa near Yokohama, a small fishing village. The Treaty House would be built there.

On March 1st, Commodore Perry sailed into Yokohama bay. He threw a party for the Japanese on his ship. When the two cultures confronted one another, they were amused by the other culture's odd ways. The Japanese found the American use of glass and utensils odd and the Americans were struck by the Japanese flamboyant styles of dress. Several parties followed this. When Kayama finally came to a party, a Japanese American ship member named Sam Patch was terrified because he feared banishment, but this did not occur.

In chapter ten, the Treaty House was completed on March 8th, 1854. Perry was upset by how enclosed it was and demanded the screens be removed. Five Japanese commissioners were at the Treaty House and the crowds bowed before the Americans. Colorfully dressed samurai awaited the Americans as well. Five hundred Americans and three ships' bands came to shore. All men had swords and pistols, and when they reached the shore they played the Star Spangled Banner and gave a twenty-one-gun salute to the Emperor. The Japanese were impressed. The Chief interpreter Yenosuke began the talks with Interpreter Portman. Yenosuke was a great scholar who spoke fluent Dutch. Communicating was very difficult and time-consuming.

A scroll that was a reply to President Fillmore's letter was handed to Perry. The American requests were forbidden by the laws of their ancestors but they would supply American ships with coal, wood, water and so on. They also expressed willingness to



open up a harbor after five years. Shipwrecked seaman would be treated well. Perry was not concerned about trade relations, though. He cared more about caring for shipwrecked sailors. He said that if they were treated cruelly there might be war. Hayashi, a Professor from Edo University, claimed that the Japanese did not treat Americans cruelly and that the Japanese had not fought a war for centuries and that therefore they respected the dignity of human life more. Perry was in no mood. He preferred a treaty and said that without one, the United States would send more ships, but that he wanted matters resolved in a friendly way. He wanted a treaty like that the US had with China. It opened ports and gave special privileges for Americans. He left the Chinese treaty to the Japanese to study.

Chapter 11: The Commodore sought to win over the Japanese with many gifts. He had spent months choosing and ordering them in the U.S. While the documents he gave were being translated, gifts were exchanged. Captain Joel Abbot was to deliver the gifts in a ceremony. The Emperor, the Empress and the five commissioners were the primary receivers. They included lifeboats, books, maps of America, whiskey, wine, clocks, cloth, rifles, swords, pistols, pictures, perfumes, mailbags, potatoes, seeds and agricultural equipment. The crowds were fascinated by the farm tools, like the grindstone. The hose and folding ladder impressed firefighters in a land where buildings were made of wood. A half mile of telegraph wire was strung and used as well. The Japanese waited for hours to send messages. The small railroad was the show's big attraction, however. American clothes also fascinated. The New Shogun kept many of the gifts. The Emperor never received the telescope, steam engine or telegraph set.

The Japanese provided their gifts which would be received from the Emperor. The gifts included scrolls, trays, porcelain tea sets, silks, garments, dolls, soy sauce, swords, umbrellas and seashells, along with three spaniels. The Americans were disappointed. They undervalued fine silks and porcelain, however. The Emperor also presented two hundred bales of rice and met fifty giant sumo wrestlers, who were sports stars in Japan. The Sumo wrestlers demonstrated their strength by lifting the bales and the Americans watched sumo matches while they were served Japanese food. The matches were fascinating.

In chapter twelve, the author explains that the Japanese were invited aboard the Commodore's ships. They were fascinated by the cannons and guns. The power impressed the Japanese. They thought for some time that a treaty with the Americans was the only way to survive. On the Powhatan, the Japanese saw the steamship's machinery and were seated for a feast. The Commodore put on a good show and wanted to upstage the Japanese presentation of small portions of "fish soup". Wines and liquors inspired toasts. Americans and Japanese danced together and the guests were encouraged to take leftovers home. The Japanese were then given a minstrel show. The Japanese were amused and knew nothing about African slaves in America. They were grateful for the festivities at the end of the night, but Perry seemed happy if they would just sign the treaty.



Chapters 9-12, The Black Ships Return, The Treaty House, An Array of Gifts, The Grand Banquet Analysis

Chapters nine through twelve build up to the climax of the book, the signing of the Treaty between the Americans and the Japanese. Chapter nine shows the circumstances of Commodore Perry's return to Edo Bay in order to negotiate with the Japanese about where they would land in Japan. The negotiations took weeks and the process of communication was slow as English and Japanese had to be translated into Dutch before communication could occur. The two sides argued for weeks about where the Americans would land until Kayama, an ambassador the Japanese knew, negotiated with the Americans to have them land near Yokohama. When the negotiations were complete, Perry held several parties on his ships while the Treaty House - the place where the treaty would be signed - was being built.

Chapter ten shows the Treaty House and the American arrival on shore. The Americans put on quite a display for the Japanese with their cannons and marching uniforms. The Japanese were impressed. This begins a series of attempts by both sides to impress the other. The Americans won the competition overwhelmingly. The Japanese were terrified by the American display of force. While in the Treaty House, Perry received a response from the Japanese that tentatively opened the door to some trade relations, but Perry was most focused on ensuring that the Japanese would treat shipwrecked Americans well.

Chapter eleven begins the display of gifts as the treaty was drawn up. Both sides exchanged many gifts intended to impress the other, but the Americans knocked the Japanese people's socks off with model trains, agricultural tools and tours of their steamships. The Japanese gifts left the Americans unimpressed. Chapter twelve continued the attempts by Perry to impress the Japanese when he brought them on board for a grand banquet. By the end, the Japanese were happy and impressed and Perry hoped he was closer to a treaty signing. In this way the build-up is relatively slow with the Americans trying to negotiate to their benefit and Japanese resistance being slowly worn down by the twin American displays of force and hospitality.



Chapters 13-16, The Treaty, Excursions on Land and Sea, Shore Leave, In the Wake of the Black Ships, Afterword

Chapters 13-16, The Treaty, Excursions on Land and Sea, Shore Leave, In the Wake of the Black Ships, Afterword Summary

Chapter 13: On March 31st, Commodore Perry and the Japanese signed their treaty. It produced: (a) peace between the U.S. and Japan, (b) trade in the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate, (c) help for American ships wrecked off of Japan and protection of them, (d) assurance that the shipwrecked would not be treated like the Dutch at Nagasaki, (e) consuls and agents from the US could live in Shimoda, (f) Japanese officers would give ships coal, water and general necessities, (g) the US will get any privilege that other nations get in the future and (h) promise that the ratification will take place within eighteen months of signing the treaty. The treaty came after weeks of talk and the Japanese negotiators felt that they had "saved face" by not allowing ships or consuls into Edo but they did not expect the US to send a consul and were surprised when he arrived. Perry was happy with the treaty because it protected castaways and because he had a foot in the door to bring Japan into the community of nations.

After the treaty signing, the Japanese invited the Americans to a banquet, though the food was not suited for American tastes, but they were impressed by the courtesy and politeness of their hosts. The Japanese were horrified at American table manners as they were too loud and informal. But they had a good time. It is surprising that the Japanese were so tolerant after so much isolation.

In chapter fourteen, the Commodore and some staff were asked to tour nearby villages and were entertained by one of the mayors. Perry did not like the appearance of the women, though, as they painted their gums and teeth black, a fashion they had practiced for one thousand years. Some members of the squadron were permitted to walk around Yokohama. Some collected flowers and plants, seaweeds and the like. On April 10th, 1854, Perry turned sixty and was allowed to travel as close to Edo as the water would allow. Japanese interpreters came to say goodbye. The ships avoided going closer because the interpreters and negotiators would bring dishonor on the city and they would be pressured to commit suicide. Perry never entered Edo, but he was happy.

Chapter 15: Eight days following his trip towards Edo, Perry decided to visit the ports, first Shimoda and then Hakodate. Shimoda was remote, isolated by rugged mountains. Perry was still pleased because the harbor had room for lots of ships. He was also pleased that it was very clean and had an excellent sanitation system. The villagers



were terrified, though. Some hid. Streets were deserted. The Commodore complained and so the people came back out. The people were friendly and curious and they arranged a bazaar so the Americans could buy souvenirs. The Americans took pictures and the Japanese were amazed. Botanist Morrow searched the countryside, were amazed by the Japanese irrigation system and exchanged seeds with them.

Hakodate was an outpost on Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's four main islands. It was bleak. The Americans were initially ordered to leave, and when the Commodore presented them with the treaty, they acted like they knew nothing about it. During the confusion, the women and children were shipped out of the village. The Commodore again complained and the people again relented. But women were not allowed to mingle with them. From then, the American experience was similar to Shimoda. They bought souvenirs, for instance. They also presented the Americans with a granite block for the Washington Monument to honor the American "king".

Chapter 16: While Perry was still in Japan, a small whaling ship arrived at Hakodate in May, 1854. They were now permitted to land. A woman, Abigail Jernegan, was the first foreign woman the Japanese had ever seen, and they were fascinated. She was enchanted by their manners. Fifteen days after Perry left, the first American tourists arrived. They were welcome, despite not knowing about the treaty. When news of the Treaty of Kanagawa reached Hawaii, American merchants started traveling to Japan. These six Yankee merchants were called the "American Pioneers". They stayed in Shimoda for three months but were still unable to establish a trading post. But within two years, Britain, Russia and Holland made similar treaties with Japan.

Afterword: Two years after Perry left, Townsend Harris, the first American consul, arrived at Shimoda to establish a consulate and create a trade treaty. The Japanese were upset, but for sixteen months he weathered their rejection of him. He used clever diplomacy to get his objectives met nonetheless. He pretended secret knowledge of a British plot against Japan and tried to get permission to go to Edo. After a year, he was allowed. In 1857, he was given an audience with Shogun Iesada. The Shogun was pleased with the offer of a trade treaty from American President Franklin Pierce. But negotiating the treaty was difficult. By the end of February 1858, a treaty permitting full trade was signed and an American representative was allowed to live in Edo.

Signing the treaty created a major rift between the Shogun's followers and the Emperor's. Emperor Komei said the treaty blemished the country and that the treaty spelled doom. Activists who opposed the Shogun became more powerful, and in 1867, Shogun Keiki resigned. A year later, a fifteen-year-old ruler was made Emperor, and in 1868, Emperor Meiji's reign began. He moved his palace to Edo and Edo was renamed Tokyo. He brought Japan out of the feudal past, foreign advisers were welcome. In five years, castes were outlawed and daimyos gave up lands and rights they had for one thousand years. The Emperor gave them generous pensions. The samurai class was ended. They were not allowed to wear swords. The government gave them pensions and they protested little. The people could decide the type of work they wanted to pursue and could live where they wished. After 1872, the Emperor wore Western clothing. The jump to modern society occurred with incredible speed and ease. Perry



broke down the barriers that kept Japan and the world apart. The Japanese still celebrate his expeditions.

Chapters 13-16, The Treaty, Excursions on Land and Sea, Shore Leave, In the Wake of the Black Ships, Afterword Analysis

Chapters thirteen through sixteen and the Afterword display the climax and denouement of the book, along with a general conclusion that explains the historical significance of the events described in the book. Chapter thirteen describes the signing of the treaty between the United States and Japan, which was the climax of Perry's career and indicates a complete social change in how Japan would engage the rest of the world. The chapter also describes the terms of the treaty. Perry was able to get precisely what he wanted out of the treaty, particularly the protection of shipwrecked sailors and their being treated in a humane fashion. The Japanese, however, were in a more complicated position due to the differing attitudes among different groups in Japanese society about being open to the outside world.

Chapters fourteen and fifteen lead into a kind of denouement at least from the perspective of Perry and those who accompanied him. In chapter fourteen, Perry tours several villages and in chapter fifteen, he travels to the two agreed upon trading posts, Shimoda and Hakodate in order to tour them and has a generally favorable trip. The Japanese were initially frightened but were later pleased with the American arrival.

But the most significant chapter is chapter sixteen, because it shows how Perry's visit to Japan quickly changed the country. Traders quickly arrived, and despite initial difficulties, established permanent trading posts. Treaties were signed with Holland, England and Russia as well. And then the first American consul arrived in Japan, and through some dishonesty, was able to visit Edo. The afterword expands on this theme, discussing the new Emperor, Meiji, and how he modernized Japan peacefully over a single generation. The significance of chapter sixteen is to explain that the entire story in the book was not isolated to establishing a connection with the United States. The author maintains that Japan would have been forced into the open if it had not been for Perry. Whether the author is correct, Perry's impact on Japan still seems momentous.



Characters

Commodore Matthew Perry

The book's protagonist is Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry (1794-1858). Perry was a U.S. Navy Commodore and the son of Navy Captain Christopher R. Perry. Matthew Perry joined the Navy in 1809. He was quickly assigned to a ship and changed ships several times. He fought little in the War of 1812, but he did fight in the Second Barbary war. After patrolling the shores of Liberia from 1819-1820, Perry was assigned to the West Indies with the task of suppressing piracy and the slave trading. From the 1820s to the 1840s, Perry commanded the USS Shark and helped to open Key West to the United States. He was also the leader of the move towards steam ships in the United States Navy. In 1840, he became Commodore and was captain of the USS Mississippi during the Mexican-American War.

But Perry's most significant accomplishment was his negotiating the Treaty of Kanagawa, which he prepared for over eight years by studying Japanese culture from a Japanologist. He followed a number of other expeditions to Japan that had been unsuccessful. His first visit lasted from 1852 through 1853, when he arrived in Uraga Harbor near Edo and used the threat of force to motivate Japanese officials to consider negotiating a treaty with the Americans and distributing a letter from President Millard Fillmore and receiving a response he left and returned in 1854 with twice as many ships. When Treaty negotiations began, Perry drove a hard bargain and secured his main goal, protecting shipwrecked Americans from poor treatment. After the treaty was negotiated, he left largely in triumph.

The Tokugawa Shogunate

While there is no one major second character in Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun, there is a group of characters who arguably form a second character group. This was the Tokugawa Shogunate and its officials. The Tokugawa Shogunate or Tokugawa Bakufu was the ruling body of Japan from 1603 to 1868. It was created by Tokugawa Iyasu and froze Japan into its then present feudal practices with the Emperor as a figurehead and the Shogunate the ruler of the daimyos, 250 provincial rulers. Japan was deeply class stratified and its economy rigidly controlled with a whole host of rules. Under the daimyos was the samurai warrior caste and under them farmers, artisans and traders of various types.

The Tokugawa Shogunate's major officials largely wanted to establish a treaty with the Americans in response to Commodore Perry's demands. They realized the danger of American technology which was superior to their own in many respects. But Emperor Komei and many in the Samurai Class thought that allowing foreigners on Japanese soil somehow desecrated Japan and would bring the wrath of the gods. This created a class conflict, though the Shogunate eventually prevailed. But it had been significantly



weakened as the trading ports it secured, no matter how seemingly small and insignificant, still allowed too much contact with foreigners for the taste of many other Japanese. Eventually the Shogunate would fall and the Emperor and the beginning of Japan's Meiji period.

Emperor Komei

The Emperor of Japan during Perry's interactions with the Japanese.

Uraga Government Officials

The first officials to meet with Perry upon his arrival.

Kayama

One of the more important negotiators who established good relations with the Americans.

Manjiro

The Japanese-American who helped negotiations with the Japanese.

Ido and Toda

The first two officials who met with the Americans.

Yenosuke

One of the major translators during treaty negotiations.

The Villagers of Shimoda and Hakodate

The villagers of the two trading cities established by the treaties were fascinated by the appearance, technology and cultural practices of Americans.

Meiji the Great

The son of Emperor Komei who, partly as a result of Perry's expedition and the Treaty of Kanagawa he established, decided to modernize Japan with the help of his allies.



Objects/Places

Uraga

Part of present-day Yokosuka, Uraga was the city where the Americans first arrived.

Edo

Now Tokyo, Edo was the largest city in Japan and one of the largest in the world. Foreigners could not be permitted to enter.

Shimoda

One of the two small villages that would become trade cities with the United States, the Dutch and others.

Hakodate

The second of the two small villagers established as trading cities by the Convention of Kanagawa.

Deshima

The incredibly small island where the Dutch were permitted to trade with the Japanese. Perry was concerned to avoid such humiliating trade conditions.

The Treaty House

The house constructed by the Japanese where the negotiations were held.

Perry's Ships

Perry initially brought four ships to Japan, the Mississippi, the Saratoga, the Susquehanna and the Plymouth. Two of these were steam boats that terrified the Japanese.

The Shogunate

The ruling body of Japan led by the Shogun who had only the Emperor above him in political rank, though the Emperor was largely a figurehead.



The Convention of Kanagawa

The treaty the Japanese and Americans eventually signed which secured care for shipwrecked Americans and established some trading posts with the United States.

Japanese Gifts

When the treaty was signed, in celebration the Japanese offered the Americans many gifts which were among their greatest cultural treasures. The Americans were unimpressed.

American Gifts

The Americans gave the Japanese an enormous number of gifts including many valuable pieces of technology, such as a steam engine.

Feudalism

Japan was a feudal society when the Americans arrived. Partly as a result of Perry's negotiations and interactions with the Japanese, Japanese feudalism would end.



Themes

Imperialism

The challenge of Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun is that it presents Commodore Perry's visit to the Japanese in an almost entirely positive light. Regardless of whether Perry's interactions with Japan were morally justified or not, it seems to be at least partly an instance of imperialism, where one political power imposes itself upon another for its own gain. Many historians see Commodore Perry's successes in Japan as the direct result of an economic drive to expand trade routes and an attempt to change Japanese society. But the author has a different view. She argues that Commodore Perry was primarily interested in protecting the safe passage of Americans into Japanese waters and securing some minor trade routes. Perry's tactics are left not criticized unknown reasons. Blumberg admits that Perry was forceful and sometimes deceptive, but nonetheless his role is seen as largely positive in Japanese life.

The ultimate impact of Commodore Perry's activities in Japan may well have been positive. Blumberg argues that without them, the Meiji Restoration and the ensuing modernization and openness would not have followed; or, that if it did follow, it would have occurred via violence rather than the real-world peaceful transition. The Meiji Emperor is presented as having been introduced to the rest of the world in part due to the intervention of the United States and the actions of Commodore Perry and those who immediately followed him.

Cultural Conflict

While the primary theme of Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun is how Japanese society changed as a result of the presence and actions of Commodore Perry, a major feature of the book is its careful attempt to explain the cultural conflicts between the Americans and the Japanese. One difficulty they faced was the fact that very few people spoke both English and Japanese. Consequently, two translators, both of whom knew Dutch, had to speak and translate their messages. This made communication difficult and often confusing. Major cultural clashes included the traditional Japanese conception of honor as opposed to the American conception. The Japanese system of honor was considered brutal by the Americans and excessively elaborate. The Japanese found American manners revolting. Of course, both found the others' styles of dress bizarre. The Americans did not much care for Japanese food and were amused by Japanese attempts to dance with them.

One of the most important examples of cultural clash was in the exchange of gifts between the Japanese and the Americans. The Americans presented high tech gadgets and devices to the Japanese, which impressed them enormously. But the Japanese gifts were largely cultural and decorative, which left the Americans unimpressed. Perhaps more important than the cultural conflict between the Americans and Japanese



was the cultural conflict among the Japanese themselves, who were divided about Commodore Perry's terms.

The Opening of Japan to the World

The single most important theme of Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun is the opening up of Japan to the world, in cultural and economic terms. Blumberg paints Japanese society in the Late Tokugawa period as historically primitive. Despite their elaborate and flourishing culture, they were technologically and social stagnant. Their lives were suffused with rigid social rules and distinctions that held them in the feudal period, long after European nations had abandoned that form of social life. Perry, in Blumberg's view, was not intent on forcing Japanese society to fundamentally change, however. He simply wanted to establish basic trade relations with the Japanese and safe passage and rescue for shipwrecked sailors. Perry was a diplomat and a military man, but not much a man of commerce.

However, Blumberg spends a lot of time explaining how Japanese society was threatened and destabilized by Perry's presence. She outlines, for instance, the rising tension between the Emperor and the Shogun, the Emperor who wished to maintain Japanese social life as it was, and the Shogun and his advisers who wished to take some modest steps towards modernization. Blumberg attributes to Perry's exchange of technology and interaction with the Japanese to the Meiji Emperor's decision to revolutionize Japanese social life. Castes were abolished and the many rigid rules of Japanese society destroyed. Trade was opened as were culture and scientific endeavors. Japan industrialized as well.

Style

Point of View

The author of *Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun* is Rhoda Blumberg, an award winning children's book writer and historian. She has written a number of similar books, such as one covering the history of Lewis and Clark's expedition and a book about Captain Cook. The point of view of the book is entirely third-person. Blumberg writes about historical event in as detached a manner as she seems able. The challenge of writing such a book for children is that historical interpretation is unavoidable when doing history of any kind. As a result, Blumberg's biases fill the text. The book is clearly written from an American perspective and seems to take a particularly pro-American approach to Commodore Perry.

It must be remarked that many historians have regarded Perry as a representative of American Imperialism who forced radical social change upon the Japanese, who were basically threatened into changing their social practices. In Blumberg's mind, Perry largely aimed to protect shipwrecked Americans and was less concerned about the structure of Japanese society or even about trade. She also paints his strong-armed negotiation tactics in a positive light, showing him to be a masterful but not unfair negotiator. She also paints those Japanese that would maintain their social structure and traditions as somewhat backward, as those happy to continue a system of oppression. Whatever one thinks of this judgment, it is important to recognize it.

Setting

The setting of *Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun* occurs between 1852 and 1854 A.D., into Perry's late fifties and early sixties. The setting is almost entirely that of Japan and the water off of Japan. While the setting will often describe differing periods of time in Japan and close regions and American politics events, for all intents and purposes, the setting is mid-nineteenth century Japan towards the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate, several years prior to the beginning of the Meiji Restoration. Several cities and locations are significant. First and foremost is Edo, the capital of Japan, now Tokyo. It was in Edo where the Emperor and the Shogun were located and from there that the country was ruled. Uruga is the city where the Americans first were allowed to step foot on shore. In one chapter, the author discusses Deshima, an incredibly small island where Dutch traders were permitted to live in order to trade with Japan. Two other major locates in the book are the villages of Shimoda and Hakodate, the two areas where the Americans were permitted to trade with the Japanese.

There are more local settings, as well. One important setting is The Treaty House where Perry and the Japanese negotiated their treaty. But perhaps the most important settings are on Perry's ships where many festivities and negotiations were held. Towards the



end of the book, the setting shifts forward in time as Japan develops and modernizes which the author attributes in part to Perry's visit.

Language and Meaning

Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun is a brief historical work that covers the events of Commodore Perry's interaction and negotiation with the Japanese. The language is straightforward. No hidden meaning is intended whatsoever. In fact, if anything, the language is intended for a young adult audience and so is explicitly committed to explaining the events in question in concise, clear prose. The book contains a number of pictures, much of which is Japanese art depicting the events described in the book. The language of the book, as a result, remains easy to comprehend and remember. That said, the text is far from boring. The author manages to tell an engaging narrative despite the short amount of space she has to tell her story. If anything, the language has a natural ebb and flow which interweaves subplots and tangential information with the main storyline quite well.

In general, the meaning of the text is entirely clear. The purpose of the book is to teach a history lesson about a brief but very influential period of time in the history of Japan and the United States. The author often implies a certain sort of assessment of the period, however. She appears to see Perry's impact on Japan as largely positive and, as a result, the language is relatively friendly when it describes him. Some might consider this something of a whitewashing.

Structure

Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun is a short introductory history to Commodore Perry's interaction with the Japanese in the mid-nineteenth century. It is not a work of fiction, but instead focuses on communicating actual historical events according to a narrative. There are two broad parts. Part I, "The Coming of the Barbarians" contains the first eight chapters, Part II, "The Return of the Barbarians" contains the remaining eight. This guide is divided into four parts, dividing each part in half. The story itself has a basic plot which begins with the arrival of Commodore Perry, climaxes with the signing of the Convention of Kanagawa and ends as the political ramifications of the treaty work their way through Japanese society.

Chapter one, "Aliens Arrive", explains the immediate social impact of the arrival of Commodore Perry and his ships on the Japanese shoreline. Chapter two, "The Black Ships of Evil Men", discusses the backstory of the Americans and their intentions upon arriving in Japan. Chapter three, "His High and Mighty Mysteriousness", explains the mystique that Perry created around himself to increase his ability to bargain with the Japanese. Chapter four, "Landing on Sacred Soil", explains some of the first negotiations and landing of the Americans. Chapter five, "The Dutch Prison Island", explains the kind of harsh treatment the Japanese imposed on Dutch traders and that Perry wanted to avoid for Americans. Chapter six, "Foreigners Forbidden", explains the



treatment of foreigners in Japan in the past few hundred years up to the mid-nineteenth century. Chapter seven, "The Great Peace", explains the structure of Japanese society during the Tokugawa Period and how different social classes reacted to Fillmore's letter. Chapter eight, "Clouds Over the Land of the Rising Sun", covers the challenges presented to Japanese society by Perry's arrival.

In Part II, the Americans had left Japan to wait for the response to President Fillmore's letter. Chapter nine, "The Black Ships Return", explains the return of Perry and his upgraded fleet. Chapter ten, "The Treaty House", explains the building of the house where the treaty would be negotiated. Chapter eleven, "An Array of Gifts", covers the gifts that the Japanese and Americans exchanged. Chapter twelve, "The Grand Banquet", elaborates on the structure of the post-treaty banquet held by the Americans. Chapter thirteen, "The Treaty", outlines the structure and signing of the Convention of Kanagawa. Chapter fourteen, "Excursions on Land and Sea", reviews the Americans' trips to tour nearby villages, whereas in Chapter fifteen, "Shore Leave", Perry and his men tour the two new trading posts, Shimoda and Hakodate. Chapter sixteen, "In the Wake of the Black Ships", covers the effects of Commodore Perry's interactions with the Japanese.



Quotes

"Giant dragons puffing smoke. Alien ships of fire."
Chap. 1, p. 13

"His mission was to unlock Japan's door."
Chap. 2, p. 18

"Perry stated that if the President's letter was not answered soon he would 'consider his country insulted and will not hold himself accountable for the consequences'."
Chap. 3, p. 28

"This achievement of mine I consider an important event in my life."
Chap. 4, p. 36

"Although the Dutch were permitted to run a 'factory' (trading station) near Nagasaki, they lived like prisoners."
Chap. 5, p. 37

"The Japanese hadn't always been cut off from the rest of the world."
Chap. 6, p. 41

"The price paid for this productive peace was complete loss of freedom."
Chap. 7, p. 45

"Revere the Emperor; Repel the Barbarian."
Chap. 8, p. 54

"On February 13th, 1854, the Americans reentered Edo Bay and anchored near Uruga. They had nine heavily armed ships, with approximately 1,600 men."
Chap. 9, p. 64

"Perry remarked that a treaty similar to the one made between the United States and China would be satisfactory."
Chap. 10, p. 77

"A junction of East and West ... epaulettes and uniforms, shaven pates and nightgowns, soldiers with muskets and drilling in close array, soldiers with petticoats, sandals, two swords ... exhibiting the difference between our civilization and usages and those of this secluded, pagan people."
Chap. 11, p. 86

"Japan and America, all the same heart."
Chap. 12, p. 91

"On March 31st ... Perry received his greatest treaty—a treaty with Japan."
Chap. 13, p. 92



""The city of Edo can be destroyed by a few steamers of very light draft, and carrying guns of the heaviest caliber."

Chap. 14, p. 99

"Eight days after his cruise toward Edo the Commodore decided to visit Shimoda and Hakodate, the ports specified in the treaty."

Chap. 15, p. 100

"Foreigners became commonplace on the sacred soil of the Land of the Rising Sun."

Chap. 16, p. 110

"The jump from feudalism to a modern industrial society took place with astounding speed and ease. Historians still marvel at the quick change that took place without foreign or civil war."

Afterword, p. 117)

"They commemorate the Commodore who brought them peacefully into a world that never would have permitted them to continue their isolation."

Afterword, p. 119



Topics for Discussion

What were Commodore Perry's primary aims in his negotiations with Japan?

How did the Japanese react to Perry when he arrived? Explain the cultural tensions produced by negotiating with him.

How did Perry's visit to Japan create social conflict within Japanese society? What were the results of this conflict, in the author's view?

Who were the parties of the social conflict in Japanese society? What were their arguments against one another?

Explain some of the gifts that were exchanged between Perry and the Japanese. How did they react to each other's gifts? Explain in detail.

Discuss the negotiations of the Treaty of Kanagawa. What were the major demands of each side?

How did the Treaty negotiations end? What were the treaty's terms? Who got the most out of the treaty?