Japan
Introduction to Japan

Japan is a powerful and wealthy country in Asia. It is made up of four major islands and several small islands. The capital of Japan is Tokyo. Over 127 million people live in Japan, making it one of the most densely populated countries in the world. To the Japanese, Japan is called Nippon, meaning source of the sun. It is also known as the land of the rising sun. Japan’s national flag is a simple red circle on a white background. The red circle represents the rising sun.

Japan’s history began around 300 B.C. It wasn’t until 645 A.D., however, that Japan’s first government was formed. A man named Kotoku proclaimed himself Japan’s first emperor. In 794, Kyoto became the capital city of Japan. For centuries, Japan was closed off from the rest of the world. The island nation kept to itself, except for when it waged war on the neighboring countries of Korea and China. Japan refused to trade with foreign countries, especially western countries. In 1853, a man named Matthew Perry traveled to Japan from America. His goal was to encourage Japan to open up its ports to the world and begin trading. Perry was successful. Japan became a powerful member of the world’s trading community.

The land in Japan is hilly and beautiful. Most people live in and around the coastal cities. But nature hasn’t always been kind. Two major natural forces have plagued the Japanese people for its entire history: earthquakes and tsunamis. Small earthquakes occur in Japan on a daily basis. Every few years, a major earthquake strikes causing thousands of deaths and unbelievable destruction. A tsunami is a huge ocean wave brought on by earthquakes. Some waves have been so large they have wiped out entire Japanese cities.

Japan is a nation jam-packed with art, culture, and industry. Japanese cuisine is popular throughout the world. Japanese architecture and art can be found in homes in Asia, Europe and North America. Many home electronics and cars are made in Japan. Toyota, Nissan and Honda are all Japanese brands.

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1 densely – closely packed together
2 proclaimed -- made known publicly and officially
3 emperor – a man who is the ruler of an empire
4 industry – manufacturing companies and other businesses
These days, Japanese cartoons are all the rage. Although Japan may be a world away, its influence\(^5\) can be felt everywhere, even where you live!

\(^5\) influence – effect on someone or something
1. Japan is part of which continent?
   a. North America
   b. South America
   c. Australia
   d. Asia

2. All of the following describe Japan, except
   a. hilly.
   b. old.
   c. a group of islands.
   d. very dry.

3. In the past, Japan’s relationships with Korea and China have been
   a. harmonious.
   b. troubled.
   c. based on trade.
   d. co-dependent.

4. Tsunamis are caused by
   a. hurricanes.
   b. tornados.
   c. earthquakes.
   d. floods.

5. Which word best describes how Japanese feel about their country?
   a. proud
   b. indifferent
   c. ashamed
   d. disloyal
6. How has Japan and its art, culture, or industry played a role in the United States?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

7. Why would Matthew Perry want to convince Japan to open up their country and trade with the rest of the world?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

_______ over 127 million people live there, Japan is one of the most densely populated countries in the world.

a. Because  
b. Although  
c. Until  
d. Unless

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

A man named Kotoku proclaimed himself the first emperor of Japan in 645 A.D., forming the country’s first government.

Who? Kotoku

(did) What? ______________________________________________________

When? __________________________________________________________

Where? _________________________________________________________

10. **Vocabulary Word**: influence: effect on someone or something.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: ________________________________

________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________
Passage Reading Level: Lexile 750

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: The passage describes the country of Japan, including a brief history, geographic features, and its influence on the rest of the world.

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6. How has Japan and its art, culture, or industry played a role in the United States?

**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary but could include things like Americans have seen Japanese art in a museum, eaten Japanese food, Americans drive Japanese cars, own Japanese electronic equipment, or enjoy watching Japanese cartoons.

7. Why would Matthew Perry want to convince Japan to open up their country and trade with the rest of the world?

**Suggested answer:** Perry may have seen that Japan had resources that other countries would want to buy, especially in America. He also may have wanted to sell products to the Japanese people, which would give another market to America, and help American businesses profit.

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A man named Kotoku proclaimed himself the first emperor of Japan in 645 A.D., forming the country’s first government.

Who? Kotoku  
(did) What? **proclaimed himself the first emperor**  
When? **645 A.D.**  
Where? **Japan**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** influence: effect on someone or something.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.