Mini-Q's in World History
Volume 2, Unit 6

Samurai and Knights: Were the Similarities Greater Than the Differences?

MINI-Q™ LESSON PLAN

DAY 1 – 45 minutes

Step One: Hook Refer to the Step One teacher notes in the Mini-Q. Read the directions aloud. The purpose is to get students engaged, talking, and wanting to do the Mini-Q.

Step Two: Background Essay Refer to the Step Two teacher notes in the Mini-Q. Students can write out answers to the BGE questions or the questions can simply be discussed.

Step Three: Understanding the Question and Pre-Bucketing The task of recognizing and defining key words in the question is a crucial habit of mind. The second task of pre-bucketing based on clues in the question and in document titles is a huge categorization skill.

Step Four: Document Analysis Do Document A with the whole class, modeling the kind of detail you expect in student answers to the Document Analysis questions. Homework: Analyze the remaining documents and answer the questions that follow.

DAY 2 – 45 minutes

Step Four (continued): Discussion of Documents

Option One: Working in pairs or threesomes, have students discuss the answers to the first set of Document Analysis questions they did for homework. Using a different-colored pen than they used for homework, they may add to their answers. After five minutes, open the discussion of that document to the full class. Then proceed to the next document and repeat.

Option Two: Proceed as above, but have a volunteer group lead each of the three or four different document discussions. Students at their desks may add to their notes, again in a different pen.

Step Five: Bucketing and Chicken Foot Have students complete the bucketing and chicken foot work page. This step will help students clarify their thesis and road map.

Step Six: From Thesis to Essay Writing (For homework) Have students fill out the Outline Guide Sheet or write their multi-paragraph essay.

DAY 3 (Optional)

Step Six (continued): Conduct an in-class Writing Workshop.

MINI-Q™ LESSON PLAN: CLEAN VERSION OPTION

If students are ready, use the Clean Version of the Mini-Q, which requires them to handle more of the analysis on their own. Estimated time to complete is 1-2 class periods.
TEACHER DOCUMENT LIST (EV)

There are six documents in this Mini-Q. Students are provided with the same document list, but it is not divided into analytical categories or buckets. Students may develop categories that are different from these.

Social Position

Document A: Two Feudal Class Systems

Document B: Loyalty to the Feudal Lord in Japan and Europe

Military Role

Document C: Armor of Japanese and European Warriors

Document D: Military Training of Samurai and Knights

Ideas About Honor and Death

Document E: Codes of Honor

Document F: Feelings About Death
Samurai and Knights: Were the Similarities Greater Than the Differences?

Overview: More than a thousand years ago, a class of professional warriors arose, who swore oaths of loyalty to noble lords and fought to the death to defend them in battle. Interestingly, this happened at about the same time in both Japan and Europe, even though the regions were thousands of miles apart. The Japanese called their warriors samurai; the Europeans called their warriors knights. Study the documents provided and answer the question: Samurai and Knights: Were the Similarities Greater Than the Differences?

The Documents:

Document A: Two Feudal Class Systems
Document B: Loyalty to the Feudal Lord in Japan and Europe
Document C: Armor of Japanese and European Warriors
Document D: Military Training of Samurai and Knights
Document E: Codes of Honor
Document F: Feelings About Death

A Mini Document Based Question (Mini-Q)

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**Step One: The Hook**

**Teacher Note:** The purpose of this Hook is to get students talking amongst themselves, to consider the notion of honor in combat, and by considering this notion, to enter the world of the knight and the samurai.

We suggest reading the directions aloud to students and then have them pair up and discuss their Yes/No position and their rationale. If they disagree on their position, have them put a check in both Yes and No boxes. Below are sample responses. Of course, every answer is very open to discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does an honorable warrior ever...</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>retreat?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Often the warrior will need to retreat in order to have success in later battles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kill civilians?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>He should never kill civilians on purpose, though it is not dishonorable if it happens by accident while he is defending himself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disobey orders?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>The warrior must obey the orders of his commanders or all military discipline is lost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fight for money?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>It's OK if she gets some pay for fighting, but she should not do it just to get paid or get rich.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leave fallen comrades behind?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>If retrieving a comrade would definitely get him killed or endanger his platoon, it should be allowed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>torture a prisoner to get information?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Forced intelligence is often bad intelligence. Torture also encourages retaliatory torture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>act as a sniper?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>As long as a soldier doesn't shoot at civilians, it is honorable to be a sniper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>admit that they are afraid?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>It is normal and honorable to be afraid if one does not allow that fear to keep him from doing his duty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the question "Does an honorable warrior ever admit that they are afraid?" you may wish to mention the United States Marine Corps "Values That Define a Marine." With regard to courage the USMC notes, "Courage is not the absence of fear. It is the ability to face fear and overcome it. It is the mental, moral, and physical, strength ingrained in every Marine. It steadies them in times of stress, carries them through every challenge, and aids them in facing new and unknown confrontations."
**Hook Exercise: Traits of an Honorable Warrior**

**Directions:** Throughout history, the warrior class in certain societies has been expected to follow a code of conduct on the battlefield. This was true of Spartan soldiers in ancient Greece, the Mongols in Asia, and the Arapahoe Indians on the Western Plains. It was also true of the knights in medieval Europe and the samurai in Japan. Below is a list of eight situations that could confront a modern-day soldier. In each case check “yes” or “no” and be ready to explain your thinking.

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Step Two: Establishing the Context

General Instructions
- Review the Timeline on the Background Essay Questions page and find a map of the world.
- Pre-teach the bold-faced vocabulary.
- Have students read the Background Essay or read it aloud.
- Have students answer the Background Essay questions on the next page.

Specific Considerations
The main purpose of the Background Essay is to create a context for the Mini-Q exercise. Its job is to provide a sense of time, place, and story, and to introduce important vocabulary and concepts. Doing this well gives all students a more equal chance to succeed with the Mini-Q.

**Time:** Be sure students review the timeline on the Background Essay Questions page. Have them compare what was happening in Japan and Europe. (Japan gradually became more unified than Europe.)

**Place:** On a wall map of the world, point out Japan and Europe. Make sure students understand that Europe was a region with diverse languages and cultures. It was divided into many small kingdoms and principalities. The one unifying force in the Middle Ages was the Roman Catholic Church. In contrast, Japan was a much smaller country (about the size of Sweden) with a homogenous population and culture.

**Story:** We suggest reading the Background Essay aloud. It is good for many students, even good readers, to hear the words as they see them. For many, it is important to hear the cadence of the language, to experience pauses and emphasis. Use the Background Essay questions to review the text.

**Vocabulary and Concepts:** You may want to pre-teach the seven bold-faced terms in the essay. Our feeling about vocabulary is that some pre-teaching is good, but keep the word list short. When reading aloud, see how much students can get from context. You might also suggest to students that they create a comparative word list in two columns, one for Japanese-related terms (samurai, shogun, bushido, Confucianism, Buddhism) and one for corresponding European terms (knights, Pope, chivalry, Catholicism, Christianity).
Samurai and Knights: Were the Similarities Greater Than the Differences?

You live in a country with a weak government and an even weaker army. During your ancestors’ time, an emperor ruled and kept the country together. Now, however, the central government has lost power, and dangers lurk beyond every moat and castle wall. Warlords fight each other to see who can control the most territory. Warriors from other lands threaten to invade and destroy your way of life. How can men, women, and children in your region protect themselves?

About one thousand years ago, people in two societies halfway around the world from each other faced this problem. In Europe, the mighty western Roman Empire had fallen in the late 400s, leaving a continent divided among weak kingdoms. A new western European empire arose briefly but it, too, soon fell apart. On the other side of the globe, Japanese emperors and the imperial court was challenged by the rise of clans. Like Europe, Japan found itself in pieces.

To keep order in the land, both regions developed a system that historians call feudalism. Lords acquired large estates of land. They granted some of their lands to lesser nobles who promised to fight for the lords when conflicts arose. In turn, these nobles trained warriors who, in exchange for farmland or food and lodging, swore to be loyal to the nobles and to defend them. The warriors of Europe were called knights. The warriors of Japan were called samurai. At the base of the feudal system in both Japan and Europe were peasants who farmed the land and provided food for the classes above them.

During the late 1100s in Japan, two large military clans called the Taira and the Minamoto fought to control the country. The Minamoto won the civil war and set up a new government headed by a powerful general called the shogun. It is fair to think of the shogun as the top samurai, the head man of the samurai warrior class. Over the next several hundred years, various shoguns rose and fell. Each ruled the country in the name of the emperor—yet the shogun really held the reins of power.

Europe never developed a position quite like the shogun. Instead, because most of Europe had converted to Christianity, the Catholic Church acted to unify the many kingdoms. The Pope, head of the Church, held power over rulers because he could excommunicate, or ban, them from the Church. On some occasions in England, France, and what is now Germany, lords gathered together a following of knights and answered the Pope’s call to go on crusade against the Muslims in the Holy Land. At other times, conflict was local, pitting lord against lord, or France against England. The important idea is that from roughly 1000 to 1600 CE in Japan and Europe, samurai horsemen and knight horsemen were the muscle and the soul of the warrior class.

The idea of soul, and its blood relative honor, was very important to both groups. European knights developed a code of behavior called chivalry, which blended Christian ideals with military values. In Japan, the samurai warriors developed a code of honor called bushido. Bushido blended the Confucian values of obedience and duty with the Buddhist belief that life is temporary and full of suffering. The way to avoid suffering was by giving up selfish desires.

In this Mini-Q, you will learn more about the society, warfare, armor, codes of honor, and beliefs of these two warrior classes. Then you will answer the question before us: Samurai and knights: Were the similarities greater than the differences?
Step Three: Understanding the Question and Pre-Bucketing

**Understanding the Question**

1. What is the analytical question asked by this Mini-Q?
   Samurai and Knights: Were the Similarities Greater Than the Differences?

2. What terms in the question need to be defined?
   "samurai" and "knights"

3. Rewrite the question in your own words.
   Were Japanese samurai and European knights more alike or more different?

**Pre-Bucketing**

**Directions:** Using clues from the Mini-Q question, create analytical categories and label the buckets.

![Diagram of comparison points]

- comparison point #1
- comparison point #2
- comparison point #3
Step Four: Document Analysis

Document A: Two Feudal Class Systems

Content Notes:

• After William the Conqueror won the Battle of Hastings and took the English crown in 1066, he sent seven or eight panels of commissioners to survey all of England, compiling accounts of the royal estates and the king's tenants. These records, compiled in a summary known as the Domesday Book (pronounced “doomsday”), provided a basis for imposing continental feudal structures on England. Those records have helped historians create a social pyramid for England (and France) like the one in this document.

• The word serf is derived from the Latin word servus, meaning servant or slave. Serfs were expected to pay taxes in cash to the lord in return for the land they rented, often falling into a kind of peonage if they couldn’t pay. Landholding knights often had their own serfs and were bound to provide protection when needed.

• In Japan, the first military leader to use the title of shogun was Minamoto Yoritomo, who won the Gempei War between the Minamato and Taira clans. This shogunate was established in the late 1100s and began a 150-year period of peace and stability. An even longer period of shogunate began during the 1600s.

• The feudal system of Japan ended when the emperor Meiji overthrew the shogunate and regained his imperial power in 1868. The government became centralized and major reforms followed, including forcing the daimyos to return their feudal fiefdoms to the emperor.

• In England, King John signed the Magna Carta in 1215, which revised the power of feudal lords and the rights of vassals. The Crusades also contributed indirectly to the downfall of English feudalism, because the introduction of money payments after the Crusades allowed authorities to pay their subordinates in cash, rather than grants of fief land.

Teaching Tips:

• Discuss the Document Analysis questions:

1. What is the purpose of drawing a social pyramid?

The purpose of the social pyramid is to show which groups of people have more power, wealth, and social standing than other groups. It gives you a quick picture of who is at the top, middle, and bottom of a society.

2. What group in Japan was like lords in Europe?

The daimyos

3. In Japan, what was the relationship between samurai and daimyos?

The samurai were the warrior class and the daimyos were the lords and landowners. The daimyos hired the samurai for protection and making war. In return, the samurai received land or an allowance to meet living expenses.

4. In Europe, what was the relationship between knights and lords?

Their relationship was similar to that of the daimyos and samurai. The knights were the warrior class and the lords were the wealthy landowners. The relationship involved an exchange of land to the knights for loyalty and military services to the lords.

5. Based just on this document, were the similarities between samurai and knights greater than the differences? Provide evidence that supports your answer.

Opinion. Possible answer: In terms of their place in the social structure, the similarities between the samurai and the knights are striking. Both were high-middle on the social pyramid. Both owed their loyalty and military service to the landowning social class above them. Both received land in return, which placed them above the everyday peasant beneath them.
Step Four: Document Analysis (continued)

Document B: Loyalty to the Feudal Lord in Japan and Europe

Content Notes:

- Catharina Blomberg is a history professor at the University of Stockholm in Sweden. She is a frequent lecturer around the world on Asian studies and her book, The Heart of the Warrior: Origins and Religious Background of the Samurai Feudal System is among the most detailed works on that subject.

- Ideally, the bond between lord and samurai was absolute and unquestioned. Stories are plentiful of samurai who readily died to defend the honor or the lives of their lords. However, there were times, especially in the turbulence of the 1400s and 1500s, when samurai switched sides and allegiances.

- Although knights swore loyalty to their lord, it was possible for them to move on to serve another lord if the protection promised by the lord proved to be inadequate or if the lord died. These changes, however, did not occur very often.

- The most feudalized regions of Europe in the 13th century were England, northern France, the low countries (what today are Belgium and Holland), and Germany. In these areas at this time little, land was owned outright. Almost all land was held in fiel as described in this document.

Teaching Tips:

- Discuss the Document Analysis questions:

  1. Where was the relationship between lord and warrior hereditary? What does that mean?
     There was a hereditary relationship between lord and warrior in Japan. That meant that children born into samurai families were expected to carry on the feudal obligations of their their parents. There was, in effect, a samurai social class that was fixed.

  2. What evidence is there that the bond between lord and samurai in Japan was strong?
     The samurai's allegiance to the lord was said to last "three lives" -- the past life, the present, and the future life. This means the bond lasts forever.

  3. About how many acres might be required to support a knight in western Europe?
     600 acres

  4. Based on the document, what was an important similarity between samurai and knights?
     An important similarity is that in both Japan and Europe, the warrior class was bound to a lord by an exchange of land for loyalty and military support. Also, there is a strong sense that the allegiance of both samurai and knight was taken seriously in both regions.

  5. Based on the document, what was an important difference between samurai and knights?
     The samurai's bond to his lord was rooted in heredity. The knight's bond was sealed by a contract. The samurai child was a samurai and would always be a samurai. This was not necessarily true of a knight's child.
Document C: Military Training of Samurai and Knights

Content Notes:

- Included in the moral training of samurai was the concept of bun and bu, which meant "culture and arms." It emphasized the importance of balance. On the battlefield, this meant that aggression should stop short of excessive brutality while civility should stop short of weakness.

- Beyond the poetry noted in the document, samurai instruction reflected the broader Japanese interest in other intellectual and artistic pursuits. Hosokawa Morihito, a descendant of the 700-year-old Hosokawa clan that included many samurai, described this interest in the arts, saying in 2009, "Japanese generals have always had a high regard for the arts. They decorated their swords with elaborately ornamented mountings and went into battle in exquisitely designed armor. Because they put their lives on the line in battle, they emphasized a consciousness for living life as richly as possible, which led to a deep reverence for the arts and for literature."

- The knightly troubadour poet of 12th century France may have been a high class lord; he could also have been relatively poor. Some troubadours were illiterate and created their poems and songs orally. Others were well-read. As the document note says, many actually made their living from their poetry. Much of the poetry was about courtly love, especially infatuations with married women.

- While the document notes that some Japanese women received warrior training without actually becoming samurai, women in Europe also occasionally took some military training. They could become honorary members of knights' orders, but women were not actually knighted nor did they fight in the field as knights. However, some medieval women did take up arms. The most noted example was the French teenager Joan of Arc, who fought against the English in the 15th century.

2. What are three examples of the kind of training received by pages hoping to become knights?

- Pages learned to fight with wooden swords, they learned horsemanship, and received some spiritual training.

3. In what ceremony and at what age was a Japanese trainee inducted into the samurai class?

- Induction into the samurai class happened at age 13.

4. At what age did a European page become a squire? When did a squire become a knight?

- Pages became squires at about age 14. Squires became knights at about age 21.

5. Based on the document, what were the main differences between samurai and knights?

- Those training to be samurai in Japan studied subjects like poetry in addition to their physical activities and girls sometimes received warrior instruction.

- Unlike the samurai, there were clear levels to the knight's training, with pages moving up to become squires before advancing to knighthood.

- Finally, it is possible from the evidence that young samurai went into battle at a younger age than their European counterparts. Squires at age 16 might accompany their knight to war, but served only in a support capacity until they entered knighthood at about age 21.

6. Based on the document, what were the main similarities between samurai and knights?

- Both samurais and knights began their training in childhood.

- Both trained many years before actually becoming warriors.

- Both trained with "toy" weapons (bamboo and wood).

- Both received some religious and moral instruction.

- Both samurai, and especially French 12th-century knights, were versed in poetry.

Teaching Tips:

- Discuss the Document Analysis questions:
  1. What are three examples of the kind of training received by young samurai hopefuls?

- Samurai training included poetry, learning to fence with bamboo sticks, and Zen Buddhism. In other words, it involved training the mind, the body, and the spirit.
Step Four: Document Analysis (continued)

Document D: Armor of Japanese and European Warriors

Content Notes:

- Samurai were famous for carrying both a short sword and a long sword. The making of a samurai sword was a complex process. The swordsmith often began by welding two or more different types of steel. The welded steel blanks were then heated, hammered, folded, and reforged. This created steel that was very strong. This process was repeated as many as 30 times. These layers were the secret of the sword's strength and the finished steel could be honed to a very sharp edge.

- In general, a samurai’s sword, with its slightly curved blade, was designed for slashing and slicing blows. The samurai’s armor was designed to facilitate this type of fighting and also to protect warriors from it. In contrast, a knight’s sword was intended to be used with a shield and was designed both to hack at armor and stab at weak points. European plate armor was designed to deflect the points of swords and lances.

- In addition to paying close attention to their dress and armor, samurai also had a particular style for their hair. They pulled their hair back into a topknot called a “chómsé.” For battle, samurai warriors shaved the tops of their heads, which kept their heads cooler inside their helmets.

- Today, knights in full armor are often shown as they appeared in jousting competitions. These tournaments typically took place during times of peace outside a castle or town that would include the same weapons used in warfare. Early jousting tournaments in the 12th and 13th centuries sometimes resulted in death. Criticism by the Catholic Church led to rules and jousting weapons that were less lethal.

Teaching Tips:

- Discuss the Document Analysis questions:

  1. What is the main purpose of suits of armor? The purpose for these suits of armor was to protect the warrior in battle.

  2. Both the samurai and knights generally fought on horseback. Who would have been in the most trouble if he was knocked from his horse or his horse was killed? Explain your thinking.

  The knight would have been in the most trouble. His armor weighed 40 to 50 pounds. He depended upon his horse for mobility. On the ground he was almost like a turtle on its back. By contrast, the samurai’s armor, with its plate coiled together and its free right arm, permitted hand-to-hand fighting.

  3. Military historians speak of the difference between shock warfare (striking the enemy with weapons like swords, lances, or axes) and projectile warfare (shooting or throwing arrows, javelins, and bullets). Judging from the armor, which kind of offensive warfare was fought by samurai and knights? In each case, explain your thinking.

    The armor of the knight was better adapted to shock warfare, but the armor did not allow for throwing a javelin or shooting a bow and arrow. The armor protected against arrows but was especially designed to allow a knight to gallop towards an enemy and make direct contact with a weapon held in the hand.

    The armor of the samurai was better suited for projectile warfare. With a free right arm, a samurai warrior was able to pull a bow string and launch an arrow. Indeed, this is how samurai fought.

  4. Based on the document, what was an important similarity between samurai and knight armor?

    It is striking that two warrior classes on opposite sides of the world were wearing iron plate armor that was generally quite similar in appearance and purpose. In both cases, the armor was nearly full-body.

  5. Based on the document, what was an important difference between samurai and knight armor?

    Probably the most significant difference was the free right arm on the samurai armor. It enabled a projectile-based, arrow shooting style of warfare that was different from the bash-and-slash warfare of the medieval knight.
Document E: Codes of Honor

Content Notes:

• Both samurai and knights shared the dilemma that killing violated religious teaching against taking a life. Christian knights had two consolations to ease their conscience: First was their belief that they fought to uphold virtue, and second was the knowledge that, if they confessed and repented their sins, a priest could grant them absolution. The samurai had no such escape hatch. Neither Shinto (Japan’s traditional religion) nor Buddhism offered a justification for the taking of life. However, for a samurai, the importance of doing his duty to his lord outweighed any concern he might have over what killing would do to the fate of his soul. That is, the Confucian teaching of loyalty to master outweighed all other considerations.

• One important difference between Japanese and European codes of honor was their attitudes toward suicide. Because of the teachings of the Church, Europeans regarded suicide as an act of despair and therefore morally wrong. In contrast, the samurai of Japan often committed seppuku, a ritual form of suicide that was viewed as a way of keeping one’s honor. The traditional method of seppuku was to plunge a short sword into the left corner of the abdomen, slash across to the right, and then turn it and slash upward. The resulting slow, painful death was considered a demonstration of courage, self-control, and determination.

• In 1020, Bishop Fulbert of Chartres outlined the feudal obligations of a vassal to his lord: “He who swears fealty to his lord ought always to have these six things in memory: what is harmless, safe, honorable, useful, easy, practicable. Harmless, that is to say that he should not be injurious to his lord in his body; safe, that he should not be injurious to him in his secrets or in the defences through which he is able to be secure; honorable, that he should not be injurious to him in his justice or in other matters that pertain to his honor; useful, that he should not be injurious to him in his possessions; easy or practicable, that that good which his lord is able to do easily, he make not difficult, nor that which is practicable he make impossible to him.”

Teaching Tips:

• Discuss the Document Analysis questions:

1. What are the main characteristics of bushido? What are the main characteristics of chivalry?

   The main characteristics of bushido include loyalty to master, devotion to duty, upholding moral principles, and upholding the ways of peace but being ready to use weapons when necessary.

   The main characteristics of chivalry include loyalty to the king, mercy, courtesy, helpfulness, fighting for the right, honor, strength, and bravery.

2. Which code of honor was written first? What is the difference in years between the writing of these codes?

   The knight’s code was written about 1470, at least 130 years before the Way of the Samurai.

3. What should a samurai do if there is a conflict between dealing with a family problem and one involving the people he serves?

   The primary responsibility of the samurai is to serve those he protects and he should deal with those duties even ahead of issues involving his family and loved ones.

4. Based on the document, what was one important similarity between samurai and knights?

   Both the Code of Bushido and the Code of Chivalry emphasize loyalty to master and living a moral, honorable life. Each has what might be called its soft side – the samurai keeps to the ways of peace in his heart; the knight grants mercy to those who ask for it.

5. Based on the document, what was one important difference between samurai and knights?

   The code of the samurai has one overarching idea – loyalty to one’s master and the duty to serve one’s master.

   Loyalty to one’s lord is also important in the code of chivalry, but it takes a more equal place with matters of courage, honor, fighting no wrongful quarrel, and doing right by the ladies.
Document F: Feelings About Death

Content Notes:
- Battle deaths usually occurred swiftly and unpredictably. Those samurai who had the time to write a death poem usually did so shortly before committing seppuku, ritual suicide.
- The two poems shown here are written in the format known as tanka. A tanka is a 31-syllable poem arranged over five lines. It is the basic unit of Japanese poetry. (These poems each have 31 syllables in the original Japanese, but not in translation.) As is true of the more familiar haiku, these poems are very economical and frequently express a single insight or emotion, often using nature imagery.
- Many samurai were followers of Zen Buddhism. Zen stresses austerity, discipline, and obedience to a master, which made Zen appealing to the samurai. The ideas expressed in the death poems may well have reflected an understanding achieved after years of meditation.
- During the Middle Ages, tales of knights were prominent in European literature. The French “Song of Roland” and the Spanish “Song of My Cid” are examples of epics about knights and their adventures. The English stories of King Arthur and his knights are better known to Americans.
- “The Song of Roland” is based on a real historical battle. In 778, the forces of Charlemagne fought a small battle against Basque forces in Spain. The resulting poem glorified the encounter and became famous as an expression of chivalric ideals.

Teaching Tips:
- Discuss the Document Analysis questions:
  1. What is the main idea of the first samurai poem?
     Death is no more remarkable than an autumn breeze at twilight. Both are simply part of the rhythm of all things. Death is nothing to fear.
  2. What is the main idea of the second samurai poem?
     The idea seems to be that life and death are one and the same. A samurai warrior steeped in Zen has a sense that life cannot be lost or death found because there is no divide between them. What is, is, and it is a seamless whole. Death is no big thing; it fact it is a non-thing.
  3. How would you describe the French knight’s view of life and death?
     Roland beats his chest and is overcome by the sins he has committed in his life. He is afraid of death and how God might judge him. He begs for mercy. Although the poem does not say so, Roland was certainly Catholic and death meant going to Heaven or Hell. The second possibility was frightening.
  4. In general, were the responses to death of the samurai and the knight similar or different? Explain.
     The document shows that their beliefs were very different. The samurai were more stoic. They accepted death as part of the flow. The knight saw death as a great divide. He was very worried about his sins and wanted God’s forgiveness before crossing the divide. Death was not part of the flow but an abrupt end to life and a time for judgment.
Step Five: bucketing – getting ready to write

Task One: Bucketing

**Teacher Note:** The Mini-Q is organized around four buckets. You may want your students to develop only three.

A, B  
Social Position

C, D  
Training and Armor

E, F  
Honor and Death

Task Two: Thesis Development and Road Map

On the chicken foot below, write your thesis and your road map. Your thesis is always an opinion and answers the Mini-Q question. The road map is created from your bucket labels and lists the topic areas you will examine in order to prove your thesis.

- **Samurai and Knights were more similar than different in three broad areas:**
  - Social position
  - Training and armor
  - Honor and death (the exception)
Bucketing – Getting Ready to Write

Bucketing

Look over the documents and organize them into your final buckets. Write labels under each bucket and place the letters of the documents in the buckets where they belong. Your bucket labels are going to become your body paragraphs.

Thesis Development and Road Map

On the chicken foot below, write your thesis and your road map. Your thesis is always an opinion that answers the Mini-Q question. The road map is created from your bucket labels and lists the topic areas you will examine in order to prove your thesis.
**Document A**

**Source:** Charts created from various sources.

**Document Note:** Historians and other scholars use social pyramids to show how societies were structured. The people with more status, power, and wealth are at the top of the pyramid. Usually, the less status, power, and wealth a group has, the lower they rank on the pyramid.

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**Social Order in Feudal Japan**

- Emperor: symbolic power only
- Shogun: military dictator, more power than emperor
- Daimyos: Feudal lords who often fought each other; Est: 250 in 1600
- Samurai: warriors who owed loyalty and military service to daimyos for land or regular payment; with families, made up about 10% of Japan's population
- Peasant farmers: about 80% of population
- Artisans/trades people
- Merchants: low in social status, quite high in wealth

**Social Order in Feudal Europe**

- Pope: head of Catholic Church
- King
- Lords: received land from king and owed military service
- Lesser lords: received land from wealthier lords and owed military service
- Knights: warriors who owed loyalty and military service to lord for land; estimated 12,000 knights in England and Normandy France in 12th century
- Artisans/Merchants
- Peasant serfs: bound to the land, owed part of crops to knights or lord; most of population

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Loyalty towards the feudal lord in Japan was hereditary. Service of a feudal lord went from father to son, so that the relations of lord and samurai existed between many families for generations. This arrangement ... was at the same time a voluntary one, in that there was no (legal) binding agreement between the two parties. The European feudal contract, which was a legal document spelling out the obligations of lord and vassal respectively, never existed in Japan.

...It became common to speak of the samurai’s allegiance to his lord as lasting the duration of three lives... his past existence, his present one, and the next life.... The life of a samurai was not his own but belonged entirely to his lord, and it was the duty of a (samurai) to consider this at all times.... Not only the life of a samurai was at the disposal of his feudal lord, but also those of his wife and children....

Note: To receive a grant of land, an English or French nobleman knelt before his lord and pledged loyalty and military support. In return, the lord swore an oath of protection and granted a fief, or piece of land. This vassal thus became a lord and, if his landholding was big enough, could grant pieces of his new estate to vassal knights for the same oath of loyalty. (It took a fief of about 600 acres to enable a knight to support himself, his horses, his armor, his squire, and his family if he had one.) Unlike Japan, this feudal arrangement was usually not hereditary. The son of a knight was not obligated to become a knight and could discontinue the contract.
Document C

**Source:** Adapted from the PBS series "Japan: Memoirs of a Secret Empire," 2004.

The rigorous training (of samurai) ... began in childhood ... (S)chool was a unique combination of physical training ... poetry and spiritual discipline. The young warriors studied Kendo (the art of fencing with bamboo sticks), the moral code of the samurai, and Zen Buddhism. (At about age 14 the trainees officially became samurai in a ceremony called *genpaku.*) Samurai were expected to live according to Bushido, a strict ethical code influenced by Confucianism that stressed loyalty to one's master, respect for one's superior, ethical behavior in all aspects of life and complete self-discipline. Girls also received martial arts training.... [Though samurai women] did not fight on the battlefield, they were prepared to defend their homes against invaders.

**Source:** Adapted from the PBS series "Warrior Challenge," 2003.

[A] prospective knight's training [began at age four or five] with learning to ride a pony. By the age of seven or eight, he would be sent to serve as a page to his father's overlord or to a powerful relative. There [he ran errands and practiced] with blunted or wooden swords ... refining his [horse] skills and receiving some religious instruction.... (B) by the age of 14, pages were eligible [to become] a squire. Squires continued with weapons training ... but were already considered to be fighting men. [They would accompany] their master knight into battle, dress him, feed him ... care for his horses and hope ... they would be deemed worthy. If a squire [gained approval from] an examining knight, he would usually [become] a knight at around the age of 21.

**Note:** A knight's training, especially in 12th-century France, produced knights who were skilled poets. Called *troubadours* because they traveled the country, a number of French knights made their living reciting poetry to an audience.
In samurai armor (left), small iron scales were tied together, lacquered, and then bound into armor plates with silk or leather cords. The helmet bowl was made of 8 to 12 iron plates, and below it was a 5-piece neck guard. The body of the armor had four parts. Samurai did not wear armor on their right arm so they could easily draw their bow. One disadvantage of samurai armor is that when it became wet, the silk cords absorbed water and became very heavy.

During the 1200s, knights wore armor made of chain mail: tiny metal rings linked together. As more powerful weapons such as crossbows and longbows became common, chain mail was no longer sufficient protection. In response, knights began to wear complete suits of plate armor, constructed from metal. Not only was the entire body covered, but knights also wore helmets, gloves, and shoes of steel. Even horses wore armor. A knight’s armor could weigh 40 to 60 pounds. The development of guns ended the use of armor. Any armor thick enough to stop a bullet would be too heavy for a person to wear.
**Document E**

**Sources:** Yamaga Soko, *The Way of the Samurai*, 1600s;  
*Le Morte d'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory, circa 1470.

**Note:** Both Japanese samurai and European knights were expected to abide by a code of honor. In Japan, this code came to be called bushido. In Europe a similar code developed that is generally called the code of chivalry.

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**The Code of Bushido**

The business of the samurai consists...in discharging loyal service to his master if he has one,* in deepening his fidelity [loyalty] in associations with friends, and in devoting himself to duty above all. However, in one’s own life, one becomes unavoidably involved in obligations between father and child, older and younger brother, and husband and wife.... The samurai confines himself to practicing the Way; should there be someone...who transgresses [does wrong] against these moral principles, the samurai summarily punishes him and thus upholds proper moral principles in the land.... Outwardly he stands in physical readiness for any call to service and inwardly he strives to fulfill the Way.... Within his heart he keeps to the ways of peace, but without he keeps his weapons ready for use.

* Not all samurai had masters. Masterless samurai were called ronin and could be a problem.

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**The Code of Chivalry**

With great ceremony each [knight] took the vows of true knighthood, solemnly promising to do no wicked deed, to be loyal to the King, to give mercy to those asking it, always to be courteous and helpful to ladies, and to fight in no wrongful quarrel for worldly gain, upon pain of death or forfeiture [loss] of knighthood and King Arthur’s favour. Unto this were all the knights of the Round Table sworn, both old and young. To dishonour knighthood was the greatest disgrace; to prove themselves worthy of knighthood by strong, brave, courteous, loyal bearing under great difficulties was the highest end [goal] of living.
Document F

Sources: Poems written by Samurai circa 1400s; “The Song of Roland,” circa 1100.

Note: Japanese samurai and European knights had different views of death. These samurai poems, written just before death, show the influence of Zen Buddhism. “The Song of Roland,” a heroic epic poem about a French knight, shows the influence of Christianity and is the oldest surviving major work of French literature.

Samurai Death Poems

One day you are born
you die the next —
today,
at twilight,
autumn breezes blow.
— Chikamasa (c. 1400s)

Had I not known
that I was dead
already
I would have mourned
my loss of life.
— Ota Dokan (1432–1486)

A Knight’s Death

Now Roland feels that the end of his life has come. He has lain down on a steep hill with his face toward Spain and with one hand he beats his breast:

“God, I acknowledge my guilt and I beg for Thy mercy for all the sins, greater and lesser, which I have committed from the hour of my birth until this day when I lie here overcome by death!”

He has held out his right glove to God.
Angels descend out of heaven and come to him.

— The Song of Roland, author unknown.