

## 3.1 Japanese Samurai

fine art of samurai culture



**Main Idea** Samurai were part of a feudal system that continued in Japan for about 700 years.

Emperors ruled Japan for hundreds of years, but in the 1000s, they began to lose authority. Landowning lords who belonged to wealthy families expanded their estates and grew increasingly powerful. They formed private armies and hired warriors known as **samurai** (SAM uh ry) to protect their estates.

### Samurai Code and Culture

Samurai means “one who serves.” The relationship between lords and samurai was part of a Japanese feudal system similar to the one that arose in Europe during the Middle Ages. Like the knights of the Middle Ages, the samurai developed a code of behavior based on the values of honor, bravery, and loyalty to their lords.

The samurai were not only skilled warriors but also developed their own culture. They wrote poetry and created fine ink paintings. The samurai values of loyalty and hard work and the warriors’ artistic interests influenced Japanese society, art, and literature.

### Shogun Rule

Powerful families battled each other for control of Japan during the 1100s. In 1192, a lord from the powerful Minamoto family won and received the title of **shogun**, or “military ruler,” from the emperor. The shogun came to hold the true power in Japan. The Minamoto established a dynasty of shoguns that ruled Japan until the 1300s. After the Minamoto lost power,

rival families fought for control. Japan became divided into many warring states and experienced a long period of disorder.

Finally, in 1603, a shogun named Tokugawa Ieyasu (ee yeh yah soo) defeated his rivals. He united Japan and moved the capital from Kyoto to Edo, which is present-day Tokyo. The Tokugawa shoguns restored peace. However, they also isolated Japan from the rest of the world. In 1868, this isolation ended when the Japanese people persuaded the shogun to resign. Imperial rule was restored, and the new emperor put an end to the samurai class.

### Before You Move On

**Monitor Comprehension** What role did the samurai play in Japan’s feudal system?



Samurai armor

