Samurai Values

Objectives: Identify samurai and bushido; describe and analyze the samurai ethic, loyalty and morality.

Read the following passage then answer the questions about the Samurai Warrior of Japan.

While the samurai warriors have long since been gone, their values are preserved in contemporary Japan. The Code of Bushido, the Samurai’s code of honor, upholds loyalty, discipline, total dedication, honor and valor, and numerous examples of these elements can be witnessed today or in recent history.

During World War II, for instance, Japanese Kamikaze pilots showed loyalty to their country by willingly accepting death. Today, as Japanese people have great respect for their bosses, some businessmen commit suicide when fired, in an attempt to spare their bosses and family the burden of shame or dishonor. Just as the samurai were fearsome once, the Japanese people of today continue the tradition of high integrity and "death before dishonor."

The Samurai Legacy

Today, with the dying out of Samurais, Bushido no longer have a military force in Japan. However Bushido’s ethical foundations still play a major part of Japanese culture and society. Bushido's stress on loyalty to the head of a group is still evident in the strong sense of loyalty workers have to their employers, students to their teachers, apprentices to their masters and to their country.

These bushido values of the samurai once again become familiar to these workers who are loyal, honorable and are willing to sacrifice everything for the company. The Japanese also have a term "Business is War" which relates to bushido.

BUSHIDO: THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR

DOCUMENT A

The samurai had an unwritten code of behavior that became known as bushido or “the way of the warrior.” The samurai code emphasized loyalty and family values. It placed great value on courage, honor, self-discipline, and samurais put the needs of others in front of their own. Capture or surrender were dishonorable.
**DOCUMENT B – Seppuku**

Rather than fall into enemy hands, samurai commonly committed suicide. This act was performed by stabbing a knife into the left side of the abdomen, drawing across to the right and giving a final upward twist to the chest. Samurai committed suicide in this fashion not only to avoid capture, but to make up for any unworthy behavior.

**DOCUMENT C – The Code of Bushido**

"The business of the samurai consists in reflecting on his own station in life, in discharging loyal service to his master if he has one, in deepening his fidelity (faithfulness) in association with friends, and with the due consideration of his own position in devoting himself to duty above all."

- Yamaga Soko (1622-1685)

"The way of the warrior (bushido) is to find a way to die. If a choice is given between life and death, the samurai must choose death. There is no more meaning beyond this. Make up your mind and follow the course. Someone may say, 'You die in vain if you do not accomplish what you set out to do.'"

"If the samurai misses his objectives and continues to live, he must be seen as a coward. If he misses his objectives and chooses death ... this must be a noble act. It is of utmost importance for bushido. Day and night, if you make an effort to think of death and at a moment's notice, you and the bushido will become one. In this way throughout your life you can perform your duties for your master..."

- Hagakure by Yamato Tsunetomo, 1716

**Directions:** Answer the following questions after reading the passages above.

1. What is the main idea of the samurai values?

2. Why might pilots and businessmen commit suicide?
3. How would you describe Samurai behavior?

4. What are some of the values of the Samurai?

5. Why would a Samurai commit suicide?

6. How would you describe bushido?

7. Why would a Samurai choose death?

Samurai Worksheet

DIRECTIONS: Read the scenarios below and then answer the questions that follow each one. Use the information from the documents to answer the questions.

SCENARIO # 1: While walking to your Social Studies class, you notice that a fellow classmate is being attacked by a group of students.

Q: What would a samurai do in this situation? Give support from the documents.
SCENARIO # 2: It is near the end of the year and you already know that you are getting an C for your final grade in the class. However, your teacher has offered you the opportunity to do an extra credit project that will require a lot of research and writing to earn a B or possibly an A for the year.

Q: What would a samurai do in this situation? Give evidence!

SCENARIO # 3: Due to a bad financial year, the company that you have worked for for more than seven years has decided to lay off people. As a result, you lose your job.

Q: What would a samurai do in this situation? Give evidence!