

Japanese Samurai

Samurai were members of Japan's warrior class. Early samurai protected local aristocratic landowners. In the late 1100s, however, the warrior class secured national power and dominated Japanese government until 1868.

Samurai warriors followed an unwritten code that emphasized honor, bravery, and loyalty. This code came to be known as Bushido. Their reputation as fearsome warriors has become legendary.



Helmets were made from iron plates to repel sword blows.

An iron mask was sometimes worn not only to protect the face, but to frighten the samurai's enemy as well.

Samurai swords were made by skilled artisans. The curvature of the blade makes the weapon more effective when slashing.

Individual iron plates provided protection and freedom of movement when in combat. As you can see, a samurai's armor was often richly decorated.



▲ Female Samurai

Samurai were not always men. Here, Lady Tomoe Gozen, a famous female warrior of the 1180s, enters bravely into battle.

◀ Samurai Warrior

In combat, a samurai's life depended on his skill and his equipment. Here you can see how the samurai's weapons and armor aided him or her in battle.

SKILLBUILDER:

Interpreting Visual Sources

- 1. Comparing and Contrasting** *What are some similarities or differences between Japanese samurai and European knights?*
- 2. Hypothesizing** *How might the code of the Samurai help them in battle?*