

## A Window into Modern Japan: Using *Sugoroku* Games to Promote the Ideal Japanese Subject in the Early 20th Century

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### Introduction

*Sugoroku*, Japanese board games printed and published on newsprint, have been popular since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier. This style of game is thought to have originated in China in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and later been imported to Japan. Starting in the Meiji period, *sugoroku* games were mass produced and distributed free in magazines and newspapers, serving as informal and social education to the masses of Japanese people who were witnessing, and adjusting to, rapid change and modernization in all aspects of life. According to the Princeton University Digital Library website:

A wide range of topics and themes can be found in the heavily illustrated game boards, which served not only for recreation but also for the dissemination of information, commercial advertising, literacy education, moral and political socialization, and militarist propaganda targeting children and adults alike ([Japanese Prints 2010](#)).

Like public service announcements (PSAs) today, select *sugoroku* during Japan's Modern Era, 1900s-1930s, served a purpose: to educate people about desired behaviors. With a positive tone and colorful graphics, "educational" *sugoroku* demonstrated behaviors that exemplified "good subjects." They thus benefitted the nation by showing players what they needed to know to become good subjects who were a credit to modern Japan. The games conveyed national goals or messages like "Learning about the world is important!" or "Look at the battles our soldiers are winning against countries much larger than ours!"

While PSAs may also tell American viewers what they need to know about a particular situation or how to act in their own or the nation's best interests, PSAs seem to function as cautionaries, such as "Texting while driving may be the last thing you will ever do!" Unlike most PSAs, many *sugoroku* from early modern Japan (1880s-1930s) were meant to be enjoyed while inculcating values in both children and adults who enjoyed playing the games.

In this lesson, students will examine a sampling of *sugoroku* games used to convey societal ideals and offer informal education in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Japan. Students will apply their analysis of these sample games to identify and compare the underlying messages to those of historical and contemporary American PSAs. Initially, the class will work together to analyze one *sugoroku* that focuses on imperial troops fighting during the 1940s. Students will practice the skills of reading visual data in this collective example. (Note: This *sugoroku* was selected for ease of visual analysis as it dates to WWII, a period with which students and teachers may be more familiar.) Next, working in small groups using a collection of *sugoroku* games available online, students will analyze additional games focusing on varying groups of Japanese subjects (men, women, children). The groups will collect and share information learned from the games to further develop their understanding of roles and goals for Japanese subjects during Modern Japan, 1900-1930s.

**Grade Level/Subject Area:** High School/Modern World History, Asian Studies, Art History, World Literature

**Time Required:** 2 class periods

**Materials:**

**For Students:**

Computers with Internet access

Handout 1: Public Service Announcement Homework

Handout 2: Visual and Content Analysis of *Sugoroku*

Handout 3: Graphic Organizer for Small-Group Presentations

**For Teachers:**

Projection system

One exemplar *sugoroku* game: *Imperial Troops Fighting (Kogun funsen sugoroku)*, available online at <http://pucl.princeton.edu/objects/kd17cv151> (c. 194?)

Six *sugoroku* games for group activity, all available online:

- *World's Number One Board Game (Sekai dai ichi sugoroku)*, Princeton University Digital Library, <http://pucl.princeton.edu/objects/zs25x976z> (1920)
- *New Design Modern Women (Gendai fujin sugoroku: Shin'an)*, Princeton University Digital Library, <http://pucl.princeton.edu/objects/t722hb119> (1913)
- *Development of National Prosperity (Kokuun hatten sugoroku [picture])*, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn4731143> (1931)
- *Chores (Hataraki sugoroku [picture])*, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn4698498> (1921)
- *Japanese Young Boys Going on a War in the Area of Russia (Shōnen shingun sugoroku [picture])*, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn4981035> (1919)
- *Home Education Around the World (Katei kyoiku sekai isshu sugoroku [picture])*, National Library of Australia, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn4731156> (1926)

Handout 1 Answer Key

Handout 2 Answer Key

**Objectives:** At the conclusion of this lesson, students will better be able to:

1. Analyze a selection of *sugoroku* from the 1900s-1930s to determine the messages being promoted through the graphic representations.
2. Use visual literacy skills to gather information from visual historical sources.
3. Synthesize an understanding of what a person needs to know and be able to do in order to be an “ideal” subject of Modern Japan, 1900s-1930s.
4. Evaluate the use of *sugoroku* as a method of educating the population and promoting behaviors practiced by the “ideal” subject of Modern Japan, 1900s-1930s.

## Essential Questions

- What did it mean to be Japanese in the rapidly changing Japan of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century?
- How did *sugoroku* games, as one form of public advertising, demonstrate and promote the norms and ideals of “being Japanese” in the modern Japan of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century?

## Teacher Background

***Setting the Context: Creating a Modern Emperor for a Modern Japan.*** On the surface, the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate and restoration of Emperor Meiji suggests a momentous transformation of power within Japan. However, according to Andrew Gordon, scholar of Japanese history at Harvard University:

The “restoration” of the young Emperor Meiji in 1867-1868 was little more than a *coup d’etat*...carried out in the name of the Meiji emperor. But once in power, they held no consensus on what to do with him (Gordon 2014, 61, 68).

Organized and carried out by disgruntled members of the former Tokugawa Era samurai class, the coup symbolically reinstated the power of the emperor while writing the revolutionaries behind it into positions of power in the new Meiji government. As Japanese leaders created a modern nation-state between 1880 and 1930, they also consolidated the idea of the emperor as the “father” of the nation-state as a way of gaining obedience and loyalty of the Japanese people (Garon n.d.). During these pivotal decades of creating a modern national identity, the emperor and his position were molded into symbols of the state: the emperor revered as divine, his position within Japanese society as sacred. However, true power rested with the elites who ruled the government. Unifying the people through a strong sense of identity, national interest, and pride was a goal of the Meiji government in the late 1800s and continued into the 20th century. The emperor was one critical piece of this identity and unity.

***Crafting a National Identity.*** Japan was certainly not the only country promoting nationalism or glorifying its leaders at this time; one only need to look to Europe or the United States at the same time to witness a similar model playing out. Creating national identity was a major project of nation-state building in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as it is today. In Japan, two of the most important apparatuses through which the government worked to build a new national identity were the education system and the military (Yonemoto 2014). Through the Meiji period, education throughout the country was centralized and standardized; textbook content was controlled by the state. In schools, the day began with a reading of the “Imperial Rescript on Education.” Through this recitation, students were continuously reminded of their responsibilities and loyalties to the nation and the emperor, not unlike the Pledge of Allegiance, which was promulgated for a similar purpose in 1892.

A conscript army was established for the purpose of building military strength and also as a way of building allegiance to the nation. In 1889, Japan adopted its first Western-style, written constitution, modeled heavily on the German constitution of the time. In the “Rights and Duties” section of that document, the constitution formalized the Japanese people’s relationship to the state. The constitution emphasized the Japanese individual’s duties to the nation, while outlining

individual rights that must be kept in balance with, and could be sacrificed to, the greater needs of the country as a whole.

***Sugoroku Games as Conveyors of National Identity.*** As noted in the **Introduction**, the Meiji period was a time of rapid transformation of every aspect of Japan. People both wanted and needed to know about the many changes their country was undergoing and their roles in this changing nation. In the Meiji period and beyond, into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the media played an important role in conveying to the Japanese people what it meant to be a member of modern Japanese society—what it meant to “be Japanese.” Like the colorful, vibrant woodblock prints that captured the dynamic life in Meiji Japan, *sugoroku* were distributed free or at minimal cost as paper inserts into magazines and newspapers. They could be cheaply produced and both widely and quickly distributed, making them effective means of informal public education. *Sugoroku* on a vast array of topics, from proper family roles to student responsibilities to the countries of the world, taught norms of behavior, social relationships, geography, history, and much more as they engaged players in the fun of gamesmanship.

## Preparing to Teach the Lesson

1. Print out and read through the entire lesson, paying special attention to the **Introduction**, **Teacher Background**, and **Lesson Plan**.
2. Because Internet links change and close continuously, check that the URLs link to the correct *sugoroku* game images.
3. For several of the *sugoroku*, the online site allows the viewer to zoom in for detail and to move the viewer over different areas of the image. Practice using this option for the first *sugoroku* game, so that you can show the students this feature as you move through the whole-group analysis of the exemplar.
4. Because students will be accessing several *sugoroku* games online, you may wish to link to all the URLs listed under **Materials** on your website. It is also possible to print a color copy of each game board if not using computers, but the zoom feature that enables careful, detailed viewing will be lost.
5. Familiarize yourself with the gameboards; refer to these by number, by their Japanese names, or by the English translation.
6. The day before the lesson, make copies of Handout 1 and assign for homework.
7. Print back-to-back copies of Handouts 2A and 2B for each student in the class.
8. Print a copy of Handout 3 for each student in the class.
9. Arrange computer and Internet access for small-group work (6 groups).

## Lesson Plan: Step-by-Step Procedure

### Day 1

1. Begin the lesson with a “pair and share” focused on the following questions: What is a public service announcement? Why are they made? What purpose do they serve?

2. Allow several minutes for students to discuss the questions. Then ask them to describe to their partners one of their favorite examples from the homework assignment, explaining what they like about the PSA. The pair/share should take 10 to 15 minutes.
3. Ask for volunteers to share their favorite PSAs with the entire class.
4. Explain that today the class will examine a selection of *sugoroku*, Japanese paper board games. Convey to the students several pieces of information they will need to understand the context of these games:
  - These board games have been very popular in Japan for more than 100 years and are still available today.
  - The class is going to be looking at some of the games that were actually played in the early 1900s, during Japan's Modern Era.
  - While *sugoroku* games covered almost every topic and were often played just for fun, some were developed expressly to teach the public about what it meant to be good members of Japanese society. These *sugoroku* with an educational purpose were typically distributed free in magazines and newspapers.
  - In their purpose and their wide distribution to the public, *sugoroku* with educational messages had some similarities to the PSAs that the class has just discussed.
5. Pass out copies of Handout 2 to each student. Project the exemplar *sugoroku* entitled *Imperial Troops Fighting* and, working aloud as a group, guide students through the questions on Handout 2. Reassure students that no knowledge of written Japanese is necessary to complete the analysis handout. Instead, they must use their visual skills to determine meaning. Be sure to show students how they can zoom in on features of the game to look closely at portions to better “read” the images and understand what is going on in the illustrations. Spend 15-20 minutes on this group analysis.
6. Tell students that, having worked through a sample analysis, they will now work in small groups to examine some *sugoroku* on their own. Explain that students will have to work carefully to “read” the images and take clues from the pictures in the game they have been given in order to figure out what is happening and what messages are embedded in the games. Have students count off by six to form six groups. Assign each group a specific *sugoroku* from the list of online *sugoroku* provided in the **Materials** section.
7. Make computers available to each group and have students access their assigned *sugoroku*. If computers are not available, color print copies of the *sugoroku* game boards can be substituted. For students to see the detail of these games, quality color copies are essential.
8. Ask students to look at their game board and to find two Japanese characters, 出 and 上. Inform students that the Japanese character that contains 出 indicates the starting place of the game and 上 is completion of the game, the winner's spot.
9. Have students work cooperatively in their small groups to complete Handout 2 for their assigned *sugoroku*. Alert students that each member of the group should complete his/her own graphic organizer. Students work in groups until the end of the class. If technology is available, they should complete what is not finished for homework.

## Day 2

1. Begin with a brief review of what was accomplished during the previous class, explaining that today groups will be presenting their analyses and the class will be discussing the messages in the *sugoroku*.
2. Have students return to their groups, access computers, retrieve their assigned *sugoroku* image, review their findings from the day before, and complete Handout 2 if unable to do so for homework. Allow time as needed.
3. Have each group select one or two spokespeople and prepare a three-minute report on their findings. Their presentations should include information from both the visual and content analyses on Handout 2.
4. Be prepared to project each *sugoroku* game on the board or provide the URLs so that other groups can see each game as it is discussed. Prior to the presentations, have students return to their regularly assigned seats and distribute Handout 3, Graphic Organizer. As the students listen to each group's spokesperson, every student in the class should fill in his/her own graphic organizer handout.
5. Debrief by facilitating a guided class discussion. Some possible questions include the following:
  - Who do you think is the target audience for each of these *sugoroku*? Why would these people be targeted? (*Possible answers: men, women, children, families*) Are the roles of the target audience being expected to change? (*In some cases, yes*)
  - What are some of the messages being conveyed/promoted by these *sugoroku*? (*Answers will be specific to the games examined. For example, modernization means changing steam locomotives, telegraphs, a modern navy. Young boys should aspire to join the Japanese army so that they can contribute to the victory over Russia. A modern Japanese boy will grow up and visit foreign countries and be aware of the larger world. The role of a modern girl is to enjoy her childhood, play with other girls, dress in kimono, and grow up to marry. Modern boys and girls should have pride in Japan, help their elders, obey their parents, and do chores such as laundry and polishing shoes, and at the end of the year Santa may come.*)
  - Thinking about the group of six games as a whole, what seem to be some of the characteristics of the ideal modern Japanese subject? (*Men's and women's roles are clearly different, with men taking more role in society, national protection, and the world and women taking important roles in the home supporting husbands and raising children. Males are expected to be aware of the world around them and to aspire to learn about the wider world in order to strengthen Japan as a modern nation. Males are also expected to be aware of and contribute to Japan's growing military strength.*)
  - Why would these board games be a good vehicle for the messages being conveyed? Do you think they are an effective vehicle? What are the advantages? Any drawbacks? (*Answers will vary but might include: Sugoroku were inexpensive, fun, and an easy way to reach people. The visuals were colorful and engaging and helped to sell the messages. Visuals provided clear messages without words. One drawback might be that not all Japanese would necessarily have access to the newspaper. People in rural areas might not have access to these.*)

- How are the messages of these *sugoroku* similar to or different from the modern public service announcements in the United States? (*Answers will vary. Modern American PSAs often use cautionary or “scare” tactics whereas none of these sample sugoroku did. From the sample provided, sugoroku seemed to focus on positive outcomes, i.e., “this is how you should be” not “this is how you shouldn’t be.”*)
- Why were these messages important to the Modern Era? (*Answers will vary. During the late Meiji/early Taisho, Japan was industrializing and modernizing at a rapid rate. These games helped the people understand how Japan was changing and what their role should be in this new Modern Era.*)

## Assessment

As a culminating activity, students may be assigned the task of writing a reflective paragraph or essay. The following instructions can be used:

Based on these selected *sugoroku* and your own analysis from the worksheets, describe and explain some of the general attributes and/or roles of the ideal modern Japanese subject, 1900-1930s. Use specific examples from three different *sugoroku*.

**Note:** You may want to provide students with links to the six games so that they can refer to the primary sources as necessary.

## Standards Alignment

**Common Core (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>):**

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.*

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.*

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.*

**National Standards for World History (<http://www.nchs.ucla.edu/history-standards/world-history-content-standards>):**

*Era 7, An Age of Revolutions, 1750-1914, Standard 5: Patterns of global change in the era of Western military and economic dominance, 1800-1914.*

Standard 5D: The student understands transformations in South, Southeast and East Asia in the era of the “new imperialism.”

Grades 7-12: The student is able to analyze Japan’s rapid industrialization, technological advancement, and national integration in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. [Formulate historical questions]

*Standard 6:* Major global trends from 1750-1914.

Standard 6A: The student understands major global trends from 1750 to 1914.

Grades 9-12: The student is able to assess the importance of ideas associated with nationalism, republicanism, liberalism, and constitutionalism on 19<sup>th</sup>-century political life in such states as Great Britain, France, the United States, Germany, Russia, Mexico, Argentina, the Ottoman Empire, China, and Japan. [Identify issues and problems in the past]

***National Core Arts Standards: Visual Arts***(<http://nationalartsstandards.org/>):

*Standard 6:* Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Achievement Standard: Make, explain, and justify connections between artists or artwork and social, cultural, and political history.

*Standard 7:* Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Achievement Standard: Evaluate the effectiveness of an image or images to influence ideas, feelings, and behaviors of specific audiences.

***Standards for the English Language Arts*** (<http://www.ncte.org/standards/ncteira>):

*Standard 1:* Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

*Standard 3:* Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

*Standard 7:* Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

*Standard 12:* Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

## References

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Japanese Prints and Drawings in the Cotsen Collection (1800-1950). Princeton University Digital Library, 2010. <http://pucl.princeton.edu/collections/pudl0118>

Yonemoto, Marcia. "Crafting National Identity: Theory and Practice in the Making of the Modern Japanese State." Lecture for summer institute *on Reading Japan: Modern Japanese History, Informational Text, and the Common Core*. Boulder, CO: Program for Teaching East Asia and National Consortium for Teaching about Asia, July 15, 2014.

## Additional Resources

Abe, Sueo. *Sekai dai ichi sugoroku (World's Number One Board Game)*. 1920. Japanese Prints in the Cotsen Collection (1800-1950), Princeton University Digital Library. <http://pucl.princeton.edu/objects/zs25x976z>.

Arimoto, Hosui, and Shuji Nakano. *Shonen shingun sugoroku* [picture] (*Japanese Young Boys Going on a War, in the Area of Russia*). 1919. Japanese Backgammon Board Game Collection, Digital Pictures Collection, National Library of Australia. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn4981035>.

Kaneko, Shigeji. *Kogun fussen sugoroku (Imperial Troops Fighting Sugoroku Game)*. [c. 194-?]. Japanese Prints in the Cotsen Collection (1800-1950), Princeton University Digital Library. <http://pucl.princeton.edu/objects/kd17cv151>.

*Katei kyoiku sekai isshu sugoroku* [picture] (*Home Education Around the World Board Game*). 1926. Japanese Backgammon Board Game Collection, Digital Pictures Collection, National Library of Australia. <http://www.nla.gov.au/apps/cdview/?pi=nla.pic-vn4731156>.

*Kokuun hatten sugoroku* [picture] (*Development of National Prosperity*). 1931. Japanese Backgammon Board Game Collection, Digital Pictures Collection, National Library of Australia. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn4731143>.

Nobechi, Tenma, and Shotaro Honda. *Hataraki sugoroku* [picture] (*Chores*). 1921. Japanese Backgammon Board Game Collection, Digital Pictures Collection, National Library of Australia. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-vn4698498>.

Saito, Shoshu, Kiyokata Kaburaki, and Eiho Hirezaki. *Gendai fujin sugoroku: Shin'an (New Design Modern Women Sugoroku Game)*. 1913. Japanese Prints in the Cotsen Collection (1800-1950). Princeton University Digital Library. <http://pucl.princeton.edu/objects/t722hb119>.