

# JAPAN

## Lessons for Mission Minded Kids

### Lesson 3

### *An Ancient Land*



# Japan

## Lesson 3: An Ancient Land

### Goals for Lesson 3:

- Students will form an understanding of the ancient traditions that have shaped modern-day Japanese culture.
- Children will understand that a human can never be God, even if other humans worship him.
- Students will remember that it is not human effort, but God Himself, who gives life and breath to every living thing.

### Verse for Japan:

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.” Acts 17:24-25 (NIV)

### Before Class:

- Read through lesson and decide what you will use according to your age group and time allotted.
- Prepare the animal pictures and the emperor picture from the cover as power point slides or print them and back them with cardstock for stability.
- Using blue construction paper or cardstock, make 6 blank cards of a size to cover the word “and” on your verse poster. Use sticky tack to attach these blue cards to the verse poster, covering all six “ands”. You will make other cards later to cover other words. It is important to use the colors mentioned, as they will play a role in helping to memorize the verse.
- If possible, make about a quart of green tea by steeping two or three decaffeinated green tea bags in 3-4 cups of hot water for several minutes. Remove tea bags and stir in a little honey to make it mildly sweet. Cover it and take it with you to class. By the time you serve it, the tea will only be

slightly warm; just the right temperature for kids to drink. Serve in paper cups during the story part of the lesson.

- Make copies of the Japanese Lantern on white cardstock so it will be more sturdy, and so the kids can decorate it with the colors they choose. Make one as a sample to show the kids, and so that you can help them put together their lanterns. Collect scissors, markers, string and tape.
- Make copies of the traditional Japanese home coloring page and gather crayons and markers if you will be using it in class.
- Prepare the Prayer Bingo activity as directed. If possible, choose a place where the cards can remain undisturbed in their grid so that you can use them again in Lesson 4.

### **Lesson Plan:**

- Open your time together with a welcome, announcements and a brief prayer. (5 min.)
- Show the students the verse poster with the “ands” covered by blue cards. Explain that there are six of the word “and” in this verse, so it will be easy to simply say “and” every time you see a blue card. Read the verse out loud together, inserting “and” every time you see a blue card. Then tell them they will say it again, only this time, the girls will say the verse and every time they come to a blue card, the girls will be quiet and the boys have to jump to their feet and say “and”. The next time, the boys will say the verse and when a blue card comes up, the boys will be quiet and the girls have to clap three times. If your students are enjoying this and you have time, invent a few more crazy ways to say the verse with or without the “and”. (8-10 min.)
- Read or tell the story part of the lesson, showing the pictures where indicated and discussing as necessary. If possible, serve little cups of decaffeinated green tea during the lesson. (15-20 min.)
- Have students sit at a table and pass out the Japanese lantern craft pages. Lay out scissors, markers, string and tape. Show students the sample and help them complete their own lantern. Tell them that before electricity

was available, the Japanese used decorative lanterns (not paper) with candles as light for their homes and gardens. Today, although electricity is easily accessible all over Japan, the ancient tradition continues in the use of decorative lanterns (usually with electricity) to add beauty to outside gardens and to special events and festivals. As students finish with their lanterns, you can choose to hang them in the room to decorate, or send them home with the kids. Hand out copies of the traditional home coloring page to work on while others finish. (15-20 min.)

- When everyone is finished with their lanterns, play a few rounds of “Prayer Bingo” with the time you have left. (8-10 min.)

### Lesson 3 Story: An Ancient Land

Thousands of years ago, long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the Japanese civilization was advanced and thriving. The Japanese people loved and revered their leader, the emperor, and worshipped him as a god. They believed that their very first emperor was the grandson of the sun goddess and had been appointed to lead the Japanese people by the sun goddess herself. Every emperor in the history of Japan had been a direct descendent of that first emperor, so the people continued to pass along the story of where he had come from, and continued to believe that their emperor was a god. **(Show picture of Japanese Emperor from lesson cover)**

The ancient Japanese Samurai were a group of highly trained, fierce and dedicated warriors whose job was to defend the emperor and their country. This group of men originated in ancient times as well, through the influence of Buddhism, which was introduced into the Japanese culture from Korean and Chinese traders. Through the generations, the traditional training, warfare methods and honor code were taught and passed down from the older warriors to the new warriors.

One of the traditions the Samurai passed down was the ancient tea ceremony. This was a special secret way of preparing and serving the green tea that is still highly prized in Japanese culture today. The tea ceremony consisted of one Samurai warrior inviting another warrior into a tiny house with a tiny doorway. The doorway was so small that no sword could enter through it, so both warriors had to leave their swords outside, which meant that they were agreeing to join together in peace. The first warrior would use a prescribed set of actions to prepare and serve the precious green tea, using the simple elements of fire, water, the traditional tea whisk and the simple ceramic tea bowls used to drink the tea. After drinking the tea together, the warriors would bow to each other and then leave the little house together in peace. This ceremony was meant to symbolize harmony and unity between the fiercest men in the land. It was also meant to show reverence and respect for the beauty of simplicity and the natural world.

Eventually, the Samurai tea ceremony became an elegant special way for women to practice the art of preparing and serving green tea. The ancient style of warfare changed to modern methods and the highly trained Samurai were no longer effective in protecting their emperor and their country. After World War II, when all of the modern world was changing rapidly, Japan changed its government to a constitutional monarchy, with a parliament (like England). Although there is still a Japanese emperor, descended from the same ancient family (the longest unbroken line of rulers in history), the Japanese people no longer call him a god. They respect and honor him and see him

as an important part of their culture, but he no longer has absolute authority and power.

A reverence for everything in the natural world has always been a high priority for the Japanese people. The Shinto beliefs that spirit-gods (called kami) live in things like water and rocks and trees, reinforces the worshipful attitude the Japanese people have always taught their children to hold toward nature. Even some rare sea animals from ancient times are still found off the coast of Japan. **(show picture of Frilled Shark)** Other animals, like the shy mountain Serow, **(show picture of Serow)** are protected and honored by the Japanese people, and some animals, like the fox and the snake are still thought to have spirit-gods living in them.

Do you think that worshipping someone or something turns them into a god? If someone started worshipping you, would you turn into a god? If I draw a picture and start praying to it, will it become something other than a picture? Do you remember that the word god spelled with a little “g” can be anything like a picture or a statue or a person or animal that someone else calls a god? **(Write the word “god” on a chalk or dry erase board)** This type of god does not have any power other than what it was made to do.

The Japanese people worshipped their emperors and called them gods. Each one still only had the normal abilities of every human, and each one died, just like every other human. The Japanese people worship Mt. Fuji as a god, but it is still just a mountain, like every other mountain in the world. They say that spirit-gods live in trees and rocks, but worshipping them doesn’t give them any power to hear or answer prayers.

It is only the One True Living God **(write the word “God” on the board)** who can give life and breath to every living thing. It is God with a capital “G” who made the world and everything in it. He cannot be contained like a statue in even the largest temple built by human hands. He doesn’t need anything like flowers or food that we could bring to him as gifts to try to make Him happy.

The Japanese people have loved and admired and worshipped God’s creation for thousands of years. They have tried hard to make their emperors into gods by worshipping them. They are worshipping the created things instead of acknowledging the One who is the Creator of all things. They have built a strong, modern, stable society, but they have overlooked the One who made the beauty they love, and they have chosen to send their prayers to objects that cannot hear them or help them.

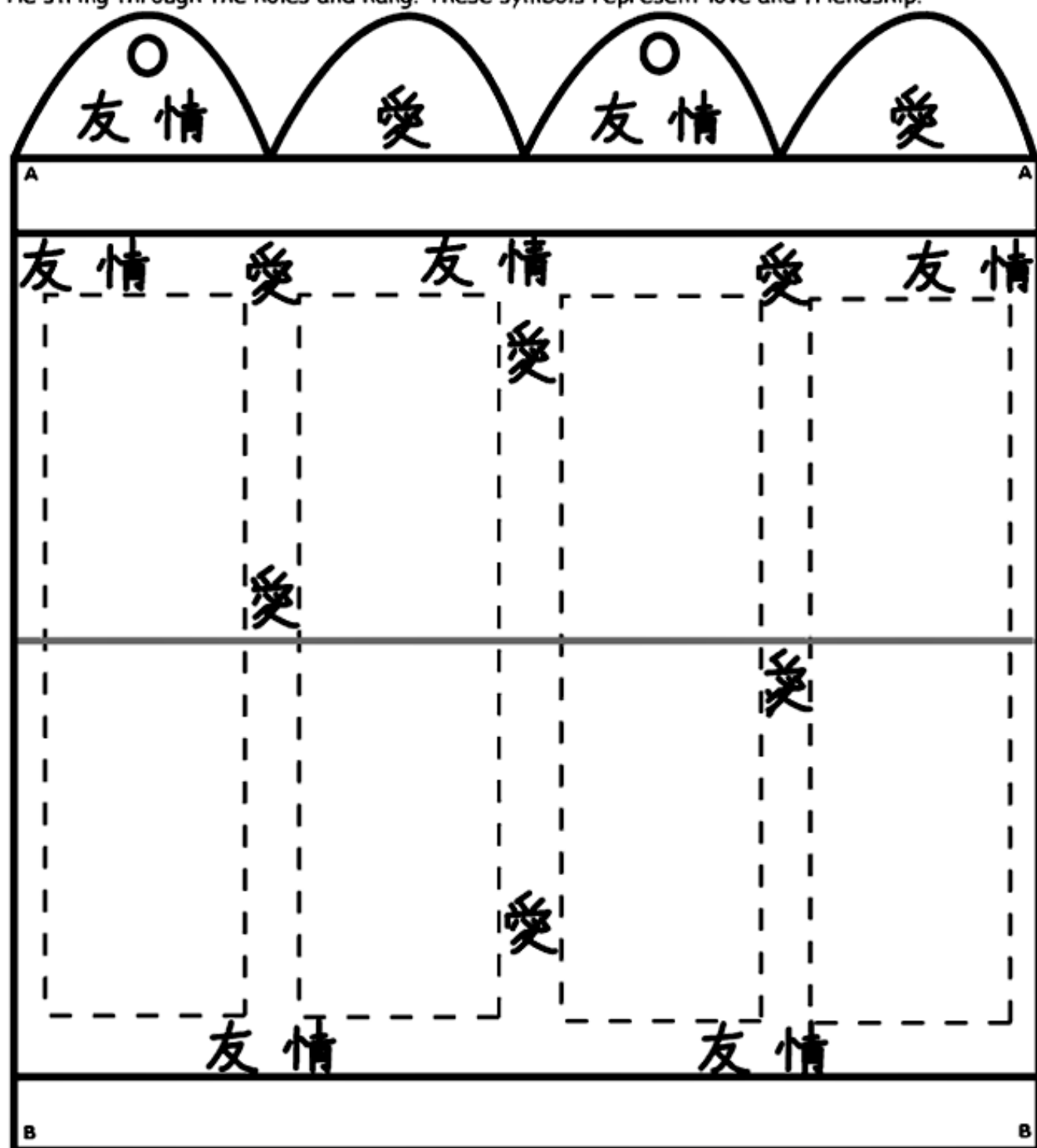


**Rare Frilled Sharks live in the waters around Japan.  
The goat-like Serow lives in the dense mountain forests on the island of Honshu.**



# JAPANESE LANTERN

Cut, color and decorate the lantern. Fold in half lengthwise along gray line. Cut along the dotted lines. Unfold. Wrap around to connect A to A and B to B. Glue or tape the top and bottom closed. Tie string through the holes and hang. These symbols represent love and friendship.



This lantern is for decorative purposes only. Not to be illuminated with lights or candles.





## Prayer Bingo

**Before Class:** Decide on a space on a white board or wall where you will arrange the prayer cards. You may want to use a piece of foam board that could be easily moved and stored behind something to be kept and reused in another lesson. Using a small piece of sticky tack, attach all 24 prayer cards to the area in rows by color, with the words facing the wall or board. One row of six yellow cards, one row of six green cards, one row of six red cards, and one row of six purple cards will be placed to make a large 4x6 grid of cards. Make sure to place the grid within arm's reach of most of your students. Print the color-page on white cardstock for stability and laminate it if desired. Gather one die to use in class.

**During Class:** Take a volunteer to go first. With the color page lying on the table, the player rolls the die onto the page. The color the die lands on or closest to will be the color of prayer card he selects. The number on the die will be the number of that colored card, 1 through 6, he will take from the wall. If the student rolls a 4 that lands closest to the yellow color, he will go to the prayer card grid, and counting from the left, remove the fourth card from the yellow row. He will read the prayer idea and offer a brief prayer for that item.

You may continue to allow as many volunteers as you have time for to take a turn. Any adult leaders can take a turn as well. Once a prayer is prayed, keep the cards in a pile without returning them to the grid. If a yellow 4 is rolled again, that player gets to roll the die again until an unused card is rolled.

You may either replace the prayer cards onto their color grid to play the game another time, or remove the sticky tack and return them to their baggie for storage.

