

A Dramatic Conflict: Korea, Japan, and China in the Age of Hideyoshi

In the 15th century, the countries of Korea and China experienced a time of relative prosperity. China was ruled by the Ming Dynasty, and enjoying a period of wealth and exploration. Korea was ruled by the Joseon Dynasty, and sent diplomats to both China and Japan. In Japan, however, the period was marred by internal disorder.

Toward the end of the 16th century, the tables had turned. The Ming Dynasty was experiencing renewed problems. The Joseon in Korea was also experiencing problems. In Japan, however, the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi had finally united the islands and was looking for more lands to conquer.

In 1592, Japan invaded Korea. This was meant to be a first step in a larger plan to invade China. The Joseon leadership in Korea had good diplomatic relations with both Japan and China, and had not expected an invasion. Consequently, the Korean army was small and weak. The Ming Emperor, therefore, sent troops and ships to help.

The Koreans were able eventually to repel the invaders, but not without considerable damage and hardship. The Joseon court fled to the north, leaving ordinary Koreans to fend for themselves and face a slave revolt alone. Thankfully, one brilliant admiral, Admiral Yi, decided to fight back. Using the world's first armor-clad warships, called a "Turtle Ship," Yi devastated Japanese shipping. China also assisted by sending in soldiers to help wage a guerrilla war campaign that forced the Japanese army down to the south.

The tough Hideyoshi, however, was not yet finished. In 1597, he launched another invasion into Korea. This time, Korea had strengthened its military, and China assisted them again. After a long, difficult fight, the Japanese forces were turned away in 1598.

The Japanese invasions did not succeed. But they left a long-lasting resentment in Korea directed toward Japan. In addition, the conflicts left a great deal of damage to Korea's land and finances. Over the next few centuries, both Korea and Japan entered a period of isolation. In China, the battles also drained the treasury. This helped further weaken the Ming and eventually led to the rise of the Manchus.

Instructions

In this activity, you will examine the conflicts between China, Korea, and Japan, and the impact of those conflicts on Korea. First, use the graphic organizer to help you better understand the reading. Then, select an important event from the wars to highlight in a documentary. Finally, use the worksheet to draft a documentary scene for this important event.

Reading Analysis

As you read, use the chart below to help you take notes.

Important Facts Relating to Korea

Important Facts Relating to China

Important Facts Relating to Japan

Screenplay

Imagine you are working on a documentary explaining the Japanese invasions of Korea in the late sixteenth century. Your job is to propose a single scene for the documentary that you believe is significant, entertaining, and conveys important observations about the conflict. Use the worksheet below to draft an idea for this documentary scene.

Scene Title:

Scene Characters:

Scene Events:

Important Observations that Viewers Should Understand from the Scene:
