



March 12-14, 1998

Feudal Japan and the Geography of Japan

Grade Level: 5

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Length of Unit: 9 lessons (10-15 days)

I. ABSTRACT

This 9 lesson unit for fifth graders covers, in detail, the Japanese history and Japanese geography topics listed in the Core Knowledge Sequence. During this unit, students will use atlases and other reference materials, read a variety of texts, both fiction and non-fiction, and develop prediction, summarization, and comparison and contrast skills. While learning the content and developing their skills, students will consider how Japan's geography influenced the lives of its people during the feudal period. Where applicable, students will also reflect on the effect of Japan's history and geography on modern Japanese life.

II. OVERVIEW

A. Concepts: In learning about the history of Feudal Japan and the geography of Japan, students will come to understand two main concepts.

First, students will develop an understanding of how the history of a place affects the behavior and psyche of its people. For example, in Japan today, many people have a very strong sense of honor and duty. These convictions come from the samurai, Shinto, and Buddhist traditions.

Second, students will develop an awareness of place. They will understand how the characteristics of a place affect what happens there. As part of the "Ring of Fire," Japan is threatened by several geological and meteorological forces. These forces, and Japan's relative isolation as an island nation, have played major roles in the history of Japan.

B. Content: The topics covered in this unit are outlined in the World Civilization and Geography strands of the Core Knowledge sequence for fifth grade. This unit contains 9 lessons, which will take approximately 10 and 15 class days to teach. The following is an outline of the daily lessons.

Lesson One: The Origin of Japan

Lesson Two: Geography of Japan

Lesson Three: Typhoons, Earthquakes, and the "Ring of Fire"

Lesson Four: Shintoism

Lesson Five: Buddhism

Lesson Six: Emperor and Shogun

Lesson Seven: Samurai and Bushido

Lesson Eight: Class System

Lesson Nine: Japan Closed to Outsiders

C. Skills: The following is a list of skills students will develop and practice during this unit.

Comparing and contrasting

Research reading

Using atlases and map skills

Identifying main ideas and supporting details

Paragraph writing

Drawing conclusions

Identifying cause and effect

Presenting information to an audience

Developing timelines

Summarizing

Note taking

III. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

A. For teachers:

1. Totman, Conrad. *Japan Before Perry: A Short History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981, ISBN 0-520-04132-1. This book provides an overview of Japanese history from prehistory through early-modern Japan. Section three, "Medieval Japan: An Age of Political Fluidity," is of particular importance because it focuses on Feudal Japan.

2. The World Book Encyclopedia, 1997 ed. "Japan." This article provides basic information on all of the subjects in this unit, as well as other important information about Japan and its history.

B. For students:

Students may be familiar with several topics that are included in, or have parallels to, the content of this unit. The following content areas are included in the Core Knowledge Sequence.

1. Grade 2: Buddhism

2. Grade 2: Modern Civilization and Culture: Japan

3. Grade 4: Europe in the Middle Ages

The economy and power structure of Europe in the Middle Ages is similar to that of Feudal Japan. There are also similarities between samurai and medieval knights.

IV. RESOURCES

Non-Fiction

Bartùk, Mira and Christine Ronan. *Ancient Japan*. GoodYear Books: Glenview, Illinois, 1993, ISBN 0-673- 36054-7.

Gilbreath, Alice. *Ring of Fire*. Minneapolis: Dillon Press, 1986. ISBN 0-87518-302-6.

Greene, Carol. *Enchantment of the World: Japan*. Childrens Press: Chicago, 1983, ISBN 0-516- 02769-7.

Hirsch, Jr. E. D. *What Your Fifth Grader Needs to Know*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1991, ISBN 0-385-31464-7.

MacDonald, Fiona, John James, and David Antram. *A Samurai Castle*. New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1995, ISBN 0-87226-381-9.

Pofahl, Jane. *Japan*. Instructional Fair: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996, ISBN 513-02380-1.

Fiction

Brown, Margaret Wise. *The Important Book*. New York: Harper, 1949.

V. LESSONS

A. Lesson 1: The Origin of Japan

1. Objective/Goal:

a. Students will use a Venn diagram to list the similarities and differences between the mythic and scientific versions of how the islands of Japan came into existence.

b. Using their Venn diagrams, students will explain why they think there are two different versions of the origins of Japan.

2. Materials

a. *Enchantment of the World: Japan*, page 17 (or other book that explains the mythic and scientific accounts of the origin of Japan). Note: If possible, it would be beneficial to own a class set of *Enchantment of the World: Japan*, or another book on the students' level that provides basic information about Japan.

b. Venn Diagram for each student (Appendix A)

3. Prior Knowledge for Students

a. Students may be familiar with myths as a method used by civilizations to explain the

unknown.

b. Remind students of previous myths they have studied, such as the myth that explains the beginning of Incan civilization.

4. Key Vocabulary

a. myth b. gods and goddesses

5. Procedures/Activities

a. Begin by telling the students that they are beginning a new unit on Japan. Ask them to share any information they know about Japan, either from relatives, personal experience, or the news. This will give you a good overview of the body of knowledge, true or untrue, that students possess.

b. Explain to the students that they will be hearing two different descriptions of the beginnings of Japan and then comparing and contrasting them. The first one will be a myth. Ask the students if they know anything about myths. Together decide on, or review, the definition of a myth. The second description is a scientific version of the origins of Japan.

c. Read aloud page 17 from *Enchantment of the World: Japan*. This page includes both the mythic and the scientific versions of the origins of Japan. When finished, brainstorm a list of words that students might need to use on their Venn diagrams. For example, students will probably want to use Izanagi and Izanami, volcanic, and mountains. Give the students time to work individually, or with partners, to complete their Venn diagram. When students have finished, compare ideas and create a class Venn diagram on butcher paper which includes all of the students ideas.

d. Ask the students to consider why there are two views of the origins of Japan. Students may conclude that before there was a scientific explanation for the beginnings of Japan, people came up with their own explanations, based on their views of the world. Through many retellings, the myth became part of the national identity.

6. Evaluation/Assessment

Each of the three sections of the Venn diagrams should be assessed for completeness and correctness of information.

B. Lesson 2: Geography of Japan

1. Objective/Goal: Students will

a. use their atlas skills to label a map of Japan with the names of the major islands, the bodies of water that surround Japan, important cities, and landmarks.

b. predict what effects Japan's geographic location might have on the way people there live.

2. Materials

a. *Japan*. Copy pages 7 and 9 of this reproducible book for the students

b. Classroom set of atlases, classroom maps, and/or globes

c. Chart tablet paper or other large sheets of paper

3. Prior Knowledge for Students

a. Students should be familiar with using an atlas, map, or globe for finding information.

b. Students may be familiar with the location of Japan, Tokyo, Mount Fuji, the Pacific Ocean, and the Sea of Japan from their studies in second grade.

4. Key Vocabulary

Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan

Four main islands of Japan (Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu)

Major cities (Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Nagasaki, Sapporo, Matsuyama, Hiroshima, Yokohama)

Landmarks (Mount Fuji, Japan Alps)

5. Procedures/Activities

a. Begin by locating Japan on a world map. Ask the students to describe Japan and its location. While looking at the world map, students should be able to explain that Japan is surrounded by water, it is mountainous, and it has a relatively small amount of land. Once students have discussed these characteristics ask them to consider how these characteristics might affect life in Japan. For example, since Japan is surrounded by water, fish might be a dietary staple. List these predictions on a large piece of paper. As the unit progresses, the class should occasionally stop to check if their predictions match the new information they have learned.

b. Once students have completed their own description of, and predictions about, Japan, hand out pages 7 and 9. Read page 7 together, assisting students with the pronunciation of unfamiliar words. Together find the maps in the atlas that will help the students complete the worksheet on page 9. Read over the worksheet with students, modeling proper pronunciation of the words, and answer any procedural questions.

6. Evaluation/Assessment: Assess the maps for accuracy and neatness.

C. Lesson 3: Typhoons, Earthquakes, and the "Ring of Fire"

1. Objective/Goal: Students will

a. demonstrate their ability to define and describe typhoon, earthquake, volcano, and "Ring of Fire" through the completion of their own Important Book.

b. demonstrate the ability to identify, and write, main ideas and supporting details as they complete the paragraphs for their Important Book.

2. Materials

a. *The Important Book*

b. **Ring of Fire:** This book serves as an excellent student resource on the Pacific Rim.

- c. Several student books that have basic information on the history of Japan
- d. Notebook paper
- e. Construction paper
- f. Hole punch
- g. Yarn
- h. Notes sheet (Appendix B)

3. Prior Knowledge for Students

Earlier in this unit, students learned about the scientific origins of Japan. Review this information now as an introduction to this lesson, which considers the specific geological and meteorological concerns for countries included in the "Ring of Fire."

4. Key Vocabulary

- a. Typhoon c. Volcano
- b. Earthquake d. "Ring of Fire"

5. Procedures/Activities

a. Using a classroom map as a visual aid, explain to students that the outer rim of the Pacific Ocean forms what is called the Ring of Fire. The Ring of Fire is where more earthquake and volcanic activity has occurred than any other place in the world. Ask the students to brainstorm what effects earthquakes and volcanic activity might have on a country.

b. Read *The Important Book* to the students. Discuss the format of the paragraphs in the book. Explain to the students that the book provides them with a model for paragraph writing. The paragraph starts, and ends, with the main idea and has supporting details in the middle. Explain to the students that they will write an Important Book on subjects related to Japanese history.

c. Pass out a notes sheet and a dictionary to each student. Have them find the definitions for typhoon, earthquake, and volcano. "Ring of Fire" may need to be defined for the students since it is not in most dictionaries. The definitions will become the first sentence of their Important Book paragraphs. The 2-4 middle sentences will describe how this geographic phenomenon affected Japan. Students can work in small groups, using a variety of books on Japan, to find the needed information. Once they are finished with the notes, students should use them to write their Important Book paragraphs.

d. For example, "The important thing about a typhoon is that it is a severe tropical hurricane that occurs in the Western Pacific. A typhoon may hit Japan in late summer or early fall. It can cause great damage to the southeastern coast of Japan. In the 1200's it sank Mongolian ships twice and thus kept them from attacking Japan. People in Japan call the typhoon, "kamikaze," or divine wind. But the important thing about a typhoon is that it is a severe tropical hurricane that occurs in the Western Pacific."

e. Once students are finished with their four Important Book paragraphs, they should

punch holes in two pieces of construction paper and bind the book together with yarn (or the pages can be stapled together). Students should title their book, *The Important Book*, and draw several related illustrations for the cover.

6. Evaluation/Assessment

The notes sheet and *The Important Book* should be assessed primarily on the correctness of definitions and the quality of the facts provided. Also consider whether or not the paragraphs have a main idea and supporting details as demonstrated in *The Important Book*. Additional attention can be paid to the neatness of the book and its cover.

D. Lesson 4: Shintoism

1. Objective/Goal:

- a. Students will create a pilgrimage book in which to record their learnings about Japanese culture.
- b. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the geography and natural phenomena of Japan and the development of the Shinto religion through the completion of a journal entry in their pilgrimage books.

2. Materials

a. *Ancient Japan*, page 15

b. For pilgrimage book each student will need: Pencil

2 pieces of colored paper, 8 1/2" by 11" Stencils

Markers, crayons, or colored pencils 2 paper clips 5 pieces of thin white paper, 8 1/2" by 11" Ruler

Darning needle Embroidery thread

Copy of the instructions on page 15 of *Ancient Japan* for each student c. Books showing pictures of Shinto shrines

3. Prior Knowledge for Students

Students should understand the unpredictability of Japanese weather in order to realize important it was for the people of Japan to try to find a way to control it.

4. Key Vocabulary

a. Shinto b. Kami c. Ritual

5. Procedures/Activities

a. This lesson will most likely take two days. The first day will be devoted to making the pilgrimage book. Page 15 of *Ancient Japan* has detailed instructions for making the book. Take the students through the procedure step by step and provide models for each major step.

b. On the second day, ask the students to describe the weather and geological events in

Japan. They should understand that both were unpredictable. Once students are reminded of this, explain that because the natural forces in Japan were so unpredictable, the Japanese people searched for a way to try to understand them. The result was Japan's oldest religion, Shintoism. Shinto means "way of the gods." Followers of Shintoism believe that there are nature spirits, called kami, who reside in all things in nature, including rocks, trees, lakes, rivers, mountains, etc. These spirits could be good or evil. The Japanese people believed in honoring and respecting these spirits through ritual and prayer. Shinto also includes worship of ancestors and great heroes.

c. Show students several pictures of Shinto shrines and ask them to describe what they see. Explain to the students that they are going to have the opportunity to pretend they are a Japanese person in feudal times going on a pilgrimage to a Shinto shrine. They will write a journal entry in their pilgrimage book explaining why they are at the shrine and what they see, hear, etc. while they are there.

d. Ask the students what such a person might write in a journal. Together, come up with a format for the journal entry. For example, the first paragraph might explain the reason for the visit. The second paragraph might give a vivid description of the shrine. Students should also create an illustration, in their pilgrimage books, of something they might see at the Shinto temple.

e. Conclude the lesson by talking about Shintoism in Japan today. Explain that today in Japan very few people practice traditional Shinto. Many people, however, include some Shinto rituals in their lives. People may make offerings at shrines or ask for a special favor such as good health. Shinto priests may also be asked to preside at weddings, offer blessings for the new year, or for the construction of a building.

6. Evaluation/Assessment

Assess the pilgrimage book entries for their validity and completeness. Evaluate the illustrations on their neatness and on their connection to Shinto shrines.

E. Lesson 5: Buddhism

1. Objective/Goal: Students will demonstrate

- a. the ability to identify main idea and supporting details in a paragraph.
- b. an understanding of the basic beliefs of Buddhism through the completion of a journal entry in their pilgrimage book.

2. Materials

- a. *What Your Fifth Grader Needs to Know*, pages 146-147
- b. Pilgrimage book (created in Lesson 4)
- c. Chart tablet paper, or other large sheets of paper

3. Prior Knowledge for Students

In second grade students may have studied:

- a. Prince Siddhartha
- b. The growth of Buddhism

c. King Asoka

4. Key Vocabulary

a. Buddha: the enlightened one b. Enlightenment

5. Procedures/Activities

a. Students should read pages 146-147 from *What Your Fifth Grader Needs to Know* to learn basic facts about Buddhism. Ask the students to pick out the main idea of each paragraph on Buddhism. Write these main ideas on paper, the board, or on the overhead projector, so that students can refer to them as they complete their journal. After each main idea is decided upon, ask the students to find the supporting details for each paragraph, and write them down for student reference.

b. Show the students several pictures of Buddhist temples and ask them to describe what they see. Students can also be asked to imagine what they might hear, smell, feel, etc., if they were transported to the temple.

c. Once students have the background knowledge, ask them to pretend that they are a Japanese person visiting a Buddhist temple in the thirteenth century. Brainstorm a list of reasons a person might decide to go to a temple. For example, people might want to ask the Buddha to help them choose "right speech," "right behavior," or "right effort," during a difficult time in their lives. Students should write a journal entry describing their imaginary trip to a Buddhist temple in their pilgrimage book. The first paragraph might explain their reason for being there and the second paragraph might explain what they see, hear, smell, etc. when they arrive. They should also create a colored illustration of something they might have seen at the temple.

d. Conclude the lesson by explaining to the students that in Japan today few people strictly follow Buddhist teachings, but many include some aspects of Buddhism in their lives. Buddhist priests may be asked to preside at funerals or other occasions that commemorate the dead. Students may realize that this is very similar to Shintoism. Ask the students why this similarity might exist. Students might realize that just as Japanese people today do not follow their religion as strictly as their ancestors, many people in the United States are not as pious as people 700 years ago.

6. Evaluation/Assessment

Assess the pilgrimage book entries for their validity and completeness. Evaluate the illustrations on their neatness and their connection to Buddhist temples.

F. Lesson 6: Emperor and Shogun

1. Objective/Goal: Students will

a. understand the complex power structure in Japan, in which the Emperor was said to have the power, but in reality the Shogun had the real power.

b. demonstrate the ability to identify cause and effect relationships in the information they read.

2. Materials

- a. Background information (Appendix C)
- b. Cause/effect worksheet (Appendix D)
- c. Answer key, for teachers (Appendix E)
- d. *What Your Fifth Grader Needs to Know*, page 146

3. Prior Knowledge for Students

Students may see similarities between the power structure in Feudal Japan and that of England in the Middle Ages, which they studied in fourth grade.

4. Key Vocabulary

- a. Emperor
- b. Daimyo
- c. Shogun

5. Procedures/Activities

- a. Read aloud and discuss the paragraphs on page 146 in *What Your Fifth Grader Needs to Know* that describe the Emperor and the Shogun. Ask the students what powers the shoguns had and what powers the emperor had. Students should understand that the emperors were mainly concerned with religion and culture in feudal Japanese society. The shoguns were concerned with the military and political aspects of life, and thus had more power.
- b. Ask the students to consider what kind of events might cause a government to lose its power. Students may realize that if a government does not meet the needs of its people, people will stop supporting it. A government that does not have the support of its people has a difficult time maintaining power.
- c. Hand out the background information sheet to each student. Have the students read it silently or together as a class. When the students have finished reading, they should complete the cause and effect worksheet.
- d. To conclude the lesson, ask the students to describe the events that caused the emperor's government to lose power. Next, ask the students to consider whether this could ever happen in the United States. Because this is speculation, all reasonable answers should be accepted.

6. Evaluation/Assessment

Assess the worksheets based on whether the students have found the correct answers for the objective questions and whether or not they have found factually correct cause/effect relationships.

G. Lesson 7: Samurai and Bushido

1. Objective/Goal: Students will

- a. develop an understanding of the complexities of samurai life and demonstrate this understanding through a class presentation.
- b. develop research and presentation skills.
- c. understand the a samurai's life: the training of a samurai, the arms and armor of

samurai, the importance of the samurai castles, and the life of samurai women. and demonstrate this understanding through the writing of a summary of a class presentation.

2. Materials

a. A Samurai Castle.

Samurai castles, pages 10-16 Arms and Armor, pages 28-29

Women's Lives, pages 24-25 A Day in the Life of a Samurai, pages 30-31

Training of a samurai, pages 26-27

b. Notes sheet, Appendix F

c. Construction paper, poster board, etc. for visual aides

3. Prior Knowledge for Students

Students may draw connections between the samurai and the medieval knights studied in fourth grade.

4. Key Vocabulary

a. Samurai b. Bushido c. Daimyo

5. Procedures/Activities

a. Since students have read previously the information in *What Your Fifth Grader Needs to Know* they should have a general knowledge of what samurai were and about, Bushido, their code. Review this information now, so that students have basic knowledge before beginning their group projects. Students should remember that samurai were professional warriors, who were trained from a young age, like medieval knights in Europe. They were trained to follow a code, called Bushido, which called for bravery, self-control, and loyalty to their daimyo, or clan leader.

b. For this activity, students should be broken up into groups of 3-6 depending on class size. Explain that for this activity, each group of students will research, become experts in, and share their knowledge about, one aspect of samurai life. List each of the categories on the board and have students roll a die or pick a number from a bag to determine which area each group will research.

c. Groups will most likely need to share copies of the A Samurai Castle. Each student should also be given a copy of the note-taking sheet. On this sheet they will take notes for their presentation, and later take notes on other presentations. For the rest of the class period, students should research and prepare for their presentation. Every presentation should have a visual aid, and all group members must have a speaking part during the presentation.

d. On the second day, give the groups 5-10 minutes to coordinate their presentation and practice. As the presentations are being given, the other students should be taking notes. After all of the presentations have been given, students should have notes on all of the areas of samurai life.

e. Students should pick the area of samurai life (other than their own) that interests

them the most and write a short summary of what they learned from the presentation.

6. Evaluation/Assessment

Evaluation can be based on several areas: group work, participation and quality of group presentation, participation as audience members, quality and completeness of notes from the presentations, and on the quality and completeness of their summaries.

H. Lesson 8: Class System

1. Objective/Goal: Students will

- a. be able to identify the 7 main ranks of the feudal Japanese class system. They will demonstrate their understanding of the 7 ranks through the completion of a flip book.
- b. Students will demonstrate the ability to read and summarize information from a non-fiction book as they write their paragraphs for the flip book.

2. Materials

- a. *A Samurai Castle*, pages 8-9

Note: If possible, it would be beneficial to own several copies of *A Samurai Castle*, so that students can refer back to the information on the class system in feudal Japan as they write their paragraphs for the flip book.

- b. Light colored construction paper (4 pages for each student).
- c. Worksheet, Appendix G
- d. Chart tablet paper or other large sheets of paper

3. Prior Knowledge for Students

The information on the emperor, shogun, and samurai from the two previous lessons should be reviewed at this time.

4. Key Vocabulary

- a. Emperor d. Daimyo
- b. Shogun e. Ashigaru
- c. Samurai

5. Procedures/Activities

- a. First, students should read pages 8-9, or have it read to them. These pages detail the Japanese hierarchy, emperor, shogun, samurai (daimyo and lower-class samurai), ashigaru, peasants, Buddhist priests and monks, and craftworkers and merchants. Together the class should come up with the list. Write the list on a large sheet of paper so that students can refer to it as they work on their flip books.
- b. Next the students should take notes on each of the ranks of Japanese society. Use Appendix G for this.

c. Once the students have finished their notes, the students will use 4 pieces of construction paper to make a flip book. The title of the book should be Class System in Feudal Japan or something similar. There will be 7 sections to the book: Emperor, Shogun, Samurai, Ashigaru, Peasants, Buddhist Priests and Monks, and Craftworkers and Merchants. For each one of the 7 sections, the students will write a paragraph describing what the life of a person of that rank. They should also provide an illustration for each rank, using examples from *A Samurai Castle*.

6. Evaluation/Assessment

Assess each book based on the correctness and completeness of the facts provided in the paragraph on each person.

I. Lesson 9: Japan Closed to Outsiders

1. Objective/Goal: Students will

- a. develop sequencing skills and demonstrate an understanding of cause/effect by completing a time line on the closing of Japan to outsiders.
- b. demonstrate the ability to decide on main ideas in non-fiction writing during a class discussion.

2. Materials

- a. Chart tablet paper or other large sheets of paper
- b. Notebook paper
- c. *Enchantment of the World: Japan* pages. 58-59
- d. White paper for timeline

3. Prior Knowledge for Students

In previous lessons, students have learned the importance of Japan's isolation as an island nation. That information will help students understand how it was possible to "close" Japan to outsiders.

4. Key Vocabulary

- a. Missionary
- b. Conquer
- c. Humane

5. Procedures/Activities

a. Ask students to speculate on an imaginary situation. Ask them to pretend that one day the President and Congress decide that they will not allow any people who are not citizens of the United States to enter into our country and no citizens of the United States are allowed to leave. Ask them to think about what effects this decision might have on our country. List these effects on a sheet of paper.

b. Next ask the students to think about why this decision might have been made. Students should list their speculations on a piece of notebook paper. Once students have come up with their own list, allow them time to share their ideas with a partner. This "think-pair-share" time will encourage more students to share their ideas with the class. Once students have come up with their own list and compared ideas with a partner, ask

them to share with the whole group. List their ideas on a separate piece of paper. Students should be able to realize that such a drastic decision must have been made because of great concerns. Maybe people who came into the country were hurting the United States in some way.

c. Explain to the students that a very similar series of events happened in Japan in the seventeenth century. Read together pages 58-59 in *Enchantment of the World: Japan*. Once students have finished reading, ask them to list the most important events from the section, along with the dates they happened. This information should be listed on a large sheet of paper so that students can refer to it as they complete their timelines.

d. Next, students should arrange their events, in order, on a time line. Each of the events can be accompanied by a small illustration.

e. Once students have completed their timelines, they can use their pilgrimage books to write a short summary explaining why Japan was closed to outsiders and why it was opened again in 1858.

6. Evaluation/Assessment

Assess the timelines for accuracy of sequencing and relevance and neatness of the illustrations. Summaries should show that students are able to go from a list of facts, like those on a timeline, to a more complex paragraph structure.

VII. HANDOUTS/WORKSHEETS

Appendix A: Myth and Science Venn Diagram

Appendix B: Geology and Weather in Japan Notes Sheet

Appendix C: The Emperor and the Shogun Background Information

Appendix D: The Emperor and the Shogun Cause and Effect Worksheet

Appendix E: The Emperor and the Shogun Cause and Effect Answer Key

Appendix F: Samurai and Bushido Notes Sheet

Appendix G: Class System Notes Sheet

VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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