

Japan has always held an important place in modern world affairs, switching sides from WWI to WWII and always being at the forefront of technology. Yet, Japan never came up as much as China, Mongolia, and other East Asian kingdoms as we studied history at school. Why was that? Delving into Japanese history we found the reason; much of Japan's history was comprised of sakoku, a barrier between it and the Western world, which wrote most of its history. How did this barrier break and Japan leap to power? This was the question we set out on an expedition to answer.

With preliminary knowledge on Matthew Perry, we began research on sakoku's history. We worked towards a middle; researching sakoku's implementation, the West's attempt to break it, and the impacts of Japan's globalization. These three topics converged at the pivotal moment when Commodore Perry arrived in Japan and opened two of its ports through the Convention of Kanagawa. To further our knowledge on Perry's arrival and the fall of the Tokugawa in particular, we borrowed several books from our local library and reached out to several professors. Rhoda Blumberg's *Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun* presented rich detail into Perry's arrival in Japan, while Professor Emi Foulk Bushelle of WWU answered several of our queries and gave us a valuable document with letters written by two Japanese officials. Professor John W. Dower's website on MIT Visualizing Cultures offered analysis of several primary sources, including images and illustrations that represented the US and Japan's perceptions of each other. Though secondary sources were abundant, primary sources were difficult to procure, especially amidst the coronavirus crisis, but an online copy of Perry's official report (*The Official Narrative*) proved to be an excellent look into his perspective. With

feedback from regional and state judges, we reduced the amount of information on each page and replaced many secondary source quotes with primary quotations.

With the various treaties and illustrations, we felt that a website was the most effective way to display our research. We had prior experience in this category and knew how to effectively use visuals. A website was the optimal way to prove our effort in researching and sharing knowledge on the Matthew Perry Expedition.

Although not physical, sakoku was a solid barrier preventing the exchange of ideas to and from Japan and the rest of the world, tremendously impacting the development of Japan and its culture. Traditional Japanese art flourished in this era without foreign dilution. However, one cannot understate the significance of sakoku breaking. Matthew Perry was the breaking point for the fall of the Tokugawa, and as sakoku crumbled, progressive attitudes gained control of Japan. The country steered itself in a new direction under the reign of the Meiji Emperor. Rising to power, Japan became a major player in both Great Wars that followed within a century of its industrialization. The balance of power between Asia and Europe forever changed with Japan's entry into the modern world.