

Art Analysis Assignment: Commodore Perry and the Black Ship Scrolls  
Niskayuna High School, Niskayuna Central School District, Niskayuna, New York  
World Connections: An Interdisciplinary 10<sup>th</sup> grade class  
February 2005

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Anonymous Japanese artist, "Military Exercises"

<http://dl.lib.brown.edu/repository/repoman.php?verb=render&id=1073497589265625>)

William Heine, "Exercises of Troops in Temple Grounds, Simoda, Japan"

<http://dl.lib.brown.edu/repository/repoman.php?verb=render&id=107349647993750>)

When Commodore Perry landed in Japan in 1853 to open Japan to trading with other countries, history was changed forever. Perry was commissioned by President Millard Fillmore in 1853 to deliver a letter to the Emperor of Japan from the President. After much negotiation, the treaty of Kanagawa was signed finally opening Japan to free trade after about 250 years of *sakoku* or "closed country." Because of what Perry did for not only Japan, but also the world, everyone has benefited economically since.

The first painting is by the anonymous Japanese artist. The painting is titled "Military Exercises" (Link

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and it shows the US soldiers in formation. They are very orderly and under strict command. There are quite a few American flags; however, it does not look like there are any Japanese people or soldiers in the painting. The artist is trying to show how organized and neat the Americans are. Either he could be trying to show the Japanese people what they should be like or show them how good America is. The subject the artist is trying to portray is the US army in their "glory." This means that they were in

Japan doing something good that would come to benefit many people. By looking closely at the painting, one can see that the army was organized at this time. Everyone had the same uniform color, blue, except for a few people; some of them look like children, at the far right-hand side of the painting. Also, everyone in this picture is a nationality other than Japanese and there seems to be some type of large fence like object around the American “camp.” This painting shows what the Americans did in their spare time and that they didn’t want the Japanese to be able to join them. I think that the artist exaggerated some of the facts in this painting. I think that some Japanese were allowed in to see what the Americans were doing. However, I do think that this is what the Americans did—marching and doing everything in a strict orderly fashion. To me, the artwork does appeal visually. The orderliness of the troops is one thing that I like. I also like how almost the entire picture is the same color—a light blue and brown or white, and then there is the American flag in the center to capture your eye.

The second painting is by William Heine and it is titled “Exercises of Troops in Temple Grounds, Simoda, Japan.” (Link to

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The painting focuses on many things. It is very different from the other painting. All of the American soldiers of the same “group” are wearing the same uniform, there are no fences, and many Japanese people are watching and cheering for the soldiers. There is also more color used in this painting and the scenery is much more beautiful. Heine is clearly trying to make it look like the Americans are greatly appreciated and they are given much praise, while the Japanese artist makes it look like the Americans are there, they do what they need to, and do not pay any attention to the native people. Heine

shows that the Japanese are astounded by this technology and in awe of what the American military can do. I think that the artist may have exaggerated the scene. I think that there may have been fewer people and that not all of them would have been happy. This piece of artwork is also visually attractive. The use of colors is very appealing, and the scenery and everything that is happening make it even nicer to look at. Both paintings were exaggerated, one negatively, one positively, in order to make the event look either good or bad, and I think that you have to look at something in between the two to get what the military drills actually looked like to both the American soldiers and the Japanese people.

Because of what Commodore Perry did in Japan in 1853, when he was sent by President Millard Fillmore, the Japanese economy, and the world's economy, were both changed forever. He opened Japan to free trade after 250 years of *sakoku* or "closed country." Between the two paintings, the one by the Japanese artist and William Heine, it can be seen how there was a difference of views about the Americans coming to Japan. Because of these paintings we are able to see what people from each country thought of this event and how it changed history.