

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

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Anonymous Japanese artist, "First Contact"

<http://dl.lib.brown.edu/repository/repoman.php?verb=render&id=1073496978593750>

William Heine "First Landing of Americans in Japan"

<http://dl.lib.brown.edu/repository/repoman.php?verb=render&id=1073495795343750>

Art work can help to understand different views of a single event. Each side of the history of that event has it's own view on how and why something occurred. In 1853, President Fillmore ordered Commodore Perry and his section of the U.S. Navy to go to Japan and open the country to trade, forcefully or not. Art work was created by both an anonymous Japanese artist around this time and William Heine, an artist who traveled with the Americans.

Looking at the picture by the Japanese artist titled "First Contact," (Link to <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/repository/repoman.php?verb=render&id=1073496978593750>) you can see that there seems to be hostility between the American officer (in the blue) and the Japanese man (in the brown) because the officer is holding a gun. This is very interesting culturally because of the differences between the depiction of first contact between the anonymous Japanese artist and Heine. In Heine's "First Landing of Americans in Japan," (Link to <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/repository/repoman.php?verb=render&id=1073495795343750>) the Americans seem much less threatening. They are coming into the port in boats and lining up nicely on the shore, with no serious threat to the Japanese onlookers. Both of these pieces are slightly biased. In the case of the anonymous Japanese artist, the hostility

present could either be a serious, real life situation that was witnessed or heard about, or it could be a cultural difference.

The subject that each artist is trying to portray seems quite clear. In the case of the Japanese artist, the American officer is the 'bad guy' of the silent story, and the Japanese man in the boat is the person that needs to be saved. It seems as if the American officer is pointing to something, as if though the Japanese man was supposed to be showing him somewhere. They look as if they are out in the middle of the Ocean, which could be a source for the hostility as well. As for the William Heine painting, it would seem the almost opposite is true, at least for the role of the American troops. In this piece, the Americans seem very docile, and as if they will not be bothering the Japanese people. They line up nicely along the sandy shore of the water as more and more of them come. There are also Japanese ships in the water, which gives the feeling that the Japanese were helping them to shore. Many of the bystanders watching as the American ships unload are Japanese, and most of them look slightly happy, or at least intrigued, to see the men.

The historical information that we can learn from these pieces depends on which picture you look at. You could say that the first contact between the Americans and the Japanese was friendly, or you could conclude that it was hostile depending on which painting you were looking at. From these pieces we can also see the difference in dress. In the Japanese artist's painting, the American is dressed nicely in a blue suit, and the Japanese man is dressed in less colorful clothes, showing a lack of authority almost. In William Heine's painting, both Japanese and Americans seem to be dressed in the same type of clothing in the sense that they all look nice. Also by looking at the different pictures, the boats show a bit of cultural difference. In the anonymous Japanese artist's painting, the boat is small and is most likely the Japanese man's personal boat. In William Heine's painting, the American ships carrying the troops are the same size as those of the Japanese. Also in the anonymous Japanese painting we can analyze the advantage of technology. The American is holding a gun, and the Japanese man has nothing to defend

himself with other than his hands.

As for my personal opinion of the artwork, I believe that both of the artists portrayed their cultural views through their subjects. As for accurately or not, it depends on what side of the looking glass that you are seeing. Through the Japanese eyes, the anonymous artist portrayed many of the encounters correctly. An American in that time would look at that artwork and see nothing but lies, and then look at William Heine's work and see a mirror of the truth. The Japanese art is very simplistic, with a very easy palette of colors. The American's rendition is a lot more colorful, and a little more appealing to the eyes. There is more detail in the American's painting, but the simplicity of the Japanese painting is intriguing and leaves you thinking.