

Journal Writing 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

Melissa Wu, 10<sup>th</sup> grade student

## *Journal of Sheiko Tanawa*

*July 8, 1853*

*I saw the strangest, most amazing thing today! This morning I went to spear some fresh fish for our evening dinner, since father is holding a meeting with the other government diplomats. When I came to the dock, there was a huge crowd all pointing at some black boats in the distance. As I got closer, I saw that there were four black ships in total and they were sailing right towards our Edo bay. However, the thing that amazed me was that they didn't use sails as all ships do, but they just sailed along on their own accord and puffed clouds of black smoke into the air. Many people were saying that they were haunted ghost ships or ships flying with ancient spirits. The atmosphere was tense in anticipation. Everyone was so scared, yet so curious. I totally forgot about my fishing duties and watched the ships as they came closer and closer to the shore. I didn't think those ships were ghost ships, and even if they were I certainly was not scared. These ships caused so much alarm that many officials came to the scene to calm everyone down, my father included. I was careful to stay near the back of the crowd because if father saw me, he would have sent me home. The ships were so fast. They cut through the sea at a tremendous speed. People at the front suddenly started shouting that these were Western foreigners' ships. We all felt a mixture of fear and excitement. I have never seen a Western person before. Many people believe that they*

*are barbaric and uncivilized. They arrived mid-morning. The leader looked very majestic and there was a Japanese person with him who was doing the translating. They talked with the officials for a while before being led away. The ships were very intimidating up close. The crew was busy moving big black round tunnels around so that they were aimed at us. This frightened many people and many people ran away. I have never seen this thing before, but I know that it is not friendly, most likely a weapon of some sort. I also ran home, not in fear, but I needed to tell my mother about what I saw.*

*This evening father did not return home as he was in a very important meeting with foreigners. Mother was very upset about what happened. She thinks that we are all in danger.*

*July 10, 1853*

*Our whole city is in danger! The black tunnel things, what they call canons, are in fact weapons, very dangerous and powerful weapons. The foreigners are aiming all of them at our city and now have control over our port. If we don't listen to them we will not be able to get any food as most of our food comes from the sea. Father was talking to me last night and telling me about what the foreigners want and why they have come here. The Westerners are saying that their mission is a friendly one and that they come in peace. But they are aiming canons at us. That is not peaceful at all. They are forcing us to accept them. Father told me that the ships come from a country far away called America and that the leader of the expedition's name is Matthew Perry. He has a letter to the Emperor telling him of his mission. They want Japan to help foreign shipwrecked sailors, open some Japanese ports so that they have access to trade with us and let them refuel and restock their ships from Japanese ports. They want to give us some time to think about the agreement, so they will come back in one year. Father says that there is*

*no way we can say no to the agreement. I just wish that the foreigners would leave us alone. They have caused such panic and alarm in the city.*

*July 15, 1853*

*The black ships left today. The crowd was even bigger than it was when they arrived. Many officials were there to see them off. Over the past few days, there were many demonstrations of the foreigners' power as they fired their weapons. I have come to notice that they have many weapons, ranging in size, from big to small. The most powerful one would have to be the canon. The most exciting thing was when they fired one off into the sea. It created a huge explosion of fire and water. It was the most magical and fearful thing I have ever seen in my whole life. If that canon was to be fired at people or at land, I wouldn't even be able to imagine the destruction it would cause. The next biggest according to my observations would be what they call the rifle, a long pole like weapon. The rifle can be carried by one person, instead of the bulky canon which needs a couple of people to move it. The pistol is a smaller version of the rifle. The crew of the black ships kept firing these weapons at the sky. I think they were trying to show us how powerful they are. The foreigners are so technologically advanced. Japan is so behind. I still wonder how the foreigners get their ships to go so fast without a sail. I am so amazed by these Westerners.*

*February 13, 1854*

*The black ships are back. They are here half a year earlier than expected. We were not yet ready for their arrival. This time there were more ships, nine in total. They are even more heavily armed than they were last year. Father told me that there are now 130 canons aimed at the city. He says that a lot of other foreign countries are also interested*

*in Japan, so the Americans came back earlier to get the best position. I wonder how many other countries there are out there. Father has been telling me of how we all need to support the Emperor's return to power if we want Japan to become a strong country again. I know that right now the Shoguns are in control of Japan and that they have outlawed contact with foreigners. This time however, the Shoguns have no choice but to allow them into the country. I want Japan to become as powerful as these foreign countries. I also learned that the way they made their ships go the way they want without using sails is through steam – steam ships. What an amazing invention!*

**February 31, 1854**

*The negotiations with the Westerners have been going on for weeks now. Finally, today they announced the signing of the Treaty of Kanagawa. This treaty will basically open Japan to the foreigners, enabling them to seek aid for shipwrecked sailors and to refuel their ships as 2 ports have been opened to them. Father was a part of the negotiations, so he has been very busy. This time the foreigners have come, the sailors have actually come onto shore. Their language is very harsh and unpleasing to hear. They have such a different culture to what we have. I was most surprised to find that the foreigners were learning about us as much as we were learning about them. I have never thought of that before. I found that they eat so much meat everyday. I would really like to learn more about these Westerners.*

*I think that with the signing of this new treaty that there will be more foreigners coming to Japan and that the Shoguns will lose their power. There has been increasing support for the Emperor in the past few months. This event will change Japan forever. Japan needs to become more modern and be more technological. Father has become more*

*and more involved in helping the Emperor to gain power. A lot is going to change in the next few years. Father wants me to go to the Western countries to study and bring these new technologies back to Japan. I think I would really like to do that. Maybe one day I will build my own steam boat.*