

## Bell Work

Based on this picture and caption, what assumption can you make about Japanese life in the Nara period? Explain your answer.

**\*Don't forget!  
Your map test is  
tomorrow!**



The 15-metre-high giant statue of Buddha in Nara, Japan was completed in AD 751. This photo, taken in 2004, shows cleaning work in progress before a festival.

# Japan Lesson 4

I can trace the emergence (why something became important/significant) of Japan during the Nara period.

7.29 Trace the emergence of the Japanese nation during the Nara, 710-794, and the Heian periods, 794-1180. (H, P)

# Essential Questions

- When was the Nara period?
- What significant changes happened in Japan during this time?
- What was life like during the Nara period?
- What did Japan borrow from China during the Nara period?

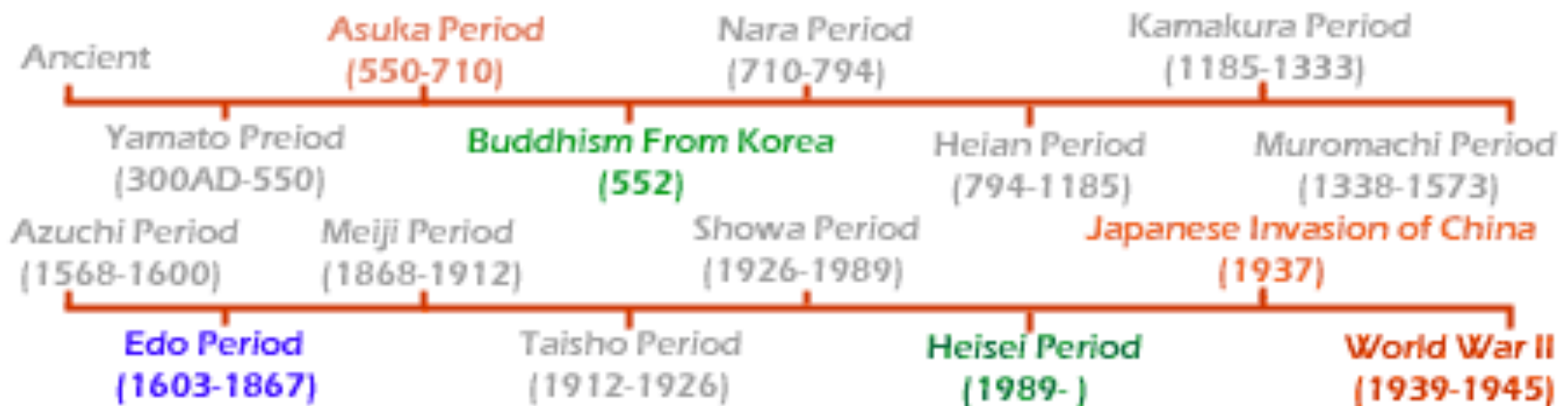
# What Mastery Looks Like

- Explain how China influenced life in the Nara period.
- Explain what happened during this time to make Japan emerge as an important nation.

# When was the Nara period?



## Japanese History Timeline



# Predict!

- What do you think life was like during the Nara period?



Todaiji (東大寺, Tōdaiji, "Great Eastern Temple") is one of Japan's most famous and historically significant temples and a landmark of Nara. The temple was constructed in 752 as the head temple of all provincial Buddhist temples of Japan and grew so powerful that the capital was moved from Nara to Nagaoka in 784 to lower the temple's influence on government affairs.

# What was it like in the Nara period?

- Nara period in Japanese history was a period in which the imperial government was at Nara.
- Buddhism was most highly developed, (but spread slowly outside the capital area).
- Nara artisans produced refined Buddhist sculpture and erected grand Buddhist temples. A network of roads connected the capital with remote provinces.
- [Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara](#)



# Nara Government

- Until the eighth century, the capital usually moved each time an emperor died.
- Then, in 710, a new capital, intended to be permanent, was established at Nara.
- It was laid out on a checkerboard grid like the Chinese capital at Chang'an.
- But then, it moved again—some say to escape the meddling in politics of powerful Buddhist temples.

## **Who Ruled at the Nara and Heian Courts**

710–856	Emperors and nobles
856–1086	Fujiwara nobles
1086–1156	Retired emperors



# People, Land, and Taxes

- The life of the common people of Japan remained harsh during the Nara and Heian periods.
- Estimates of the early Nara population suggest slightly more than 5 million people; by the end of the Heian period, almost half a millennium later, the number had increased to only about 6 million.
- **Why had population not grown more during these fairly peaceful centuries?**
  - One reason is that agricultural technology improved only slightly. Wooden plows were still in use.
  - Another was the frequency of droughts, which caused frequent famines.
  - A third was the effect of continental germs—introduced by embassies or trade—on a previously isolated Japanese population that had not yet developed immunities. Periodic epidemics swept the court and village communities alike.

# People, Land, and Taxes

- Taxes were a heavy burden on village populations.
- In the Nara and early Heian periods, the problem for **peasants** was to obtain land.
- The problem for the **government**, imperial family, nobles, and temples was to find labor to work their extensive landholdings.
- **What do you think the result was?**
- The solution was the “equal-field system” of Tang China.

# Equal-Field System

- Chinese land-distribution system, AD 485–8th century. Borrowed by Japan in 646, it lasted about a century there.
- Under the system, all adults were assigned a fixed amount of land; a portion of its produce was paid as taxes.
- On a person's death, most of the land was returned to the government.
- Increases in population and a tendency for the land to come to be held permanently led to the system's collapse in China; tax-free status and additional allotments for nobles and monasteries resulted in its demise in Japan.
- **Why wouldn't this system work?**

# Rise of the Samurai

- Japan faced no powerful nomadic armies on its borders.
- **Hmm, why?**
- Its military had only to police Japan.
- During the Nara period, Japan followed the Chinese model and conscripted (drafted) about a third of all able-bodied men between the ages of 21 and 60.
- The conscript army proved inefficient.
- **Why do you think the army wasn't successful?**

# Rise of the Samurai

- In 792, two years before the Heian period began, the court decided to recruit, instead, local mounted warriors.
- In return for military service, they paid no taxes.
- The Japanese verb “to serve” is *samurau*, so those who served became *samurai*—the noun form of the verb.
- Then, from the mid-Heian period, the officially recruited warriors were replaced by nonofficial bands of local warriors.



# Nara Religion

- After the death of Prince Regent Shotoku, Buddhism continued to flourish among court nobles, monks, and artisans.
- National Buddhist temples were built by the Emperor Shomu in every province, the headquarters of which was at Todai-ji temple in Nara.
- Buddhist scriptures were introduced from China and were studied by the Japanese monks.
- Buddhist images and ornaments were made by the Japanese artisans, some of which can still be seen in the older temples in Japan.
- Buddhist temples in those days were the center of culture; they were not only used as places of worship, but also as schools, hospitals, dispensaries, orphanages, and refuges for older people. The monks were also school teachers, physicians, engineers, and developers of many construction projects.
- Therefore, the Japanese government encouraged and supported the Buddhist institutions and monks spiritually and materially, so that they could work with the government and the people more effectively.

# Education in Nara

- From the Nara period until the nineteenth century, most philosophical and legal writings as well as most of the histories, essays, and religious texts in Japan were written in Chinese.

# Exit Ticket

- Choose one of the following questions to answer with a paragraph.
  - Explain how China influenced life during the Nara period in Japan.
  - How did leaders spread Buddhism during the Nara period in Japan.
  - How were common people treated during the Nara period?
  - Why did Japan become an important nation during this time?

**Don't forget! Your map quiz is tomorrow!**