

The Samurai's Tale

Erik Christian Haugaard

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, prediction, classifying and categorizing, interpreting, applying, analyzing, evaluating, problem-solving, synthesizing

Literary Elements

Characterization, setting, dialogue, conflict, theme, mood, atmosphere, point of view, metaphor and simile, historical fiction

Vocabulary

Context clues, word-mapping, visual representations, multiple meanings, word sorting, expressions, synonyms, antonyms, Japanese expressions

Comprehension

Summarizing, paraphrasing, predicting, author's purpose, cause and effect, fact and opinion, comparing and contrasting, drawing conclusions

Writing

Personal, reflective, narrative, expository, persuasive, procedural, creative, research writing, writing from models, dialogue-writing, character sketch

Listening/Speaking

Discussion and cooperative groups, dramatic activities, debate, speaking before a group, reading to others, interviewing, guessing games

Summary of *The Samurai's Tale*

Set in 16th-century Japan, this is the story of how a young boy, orphaned when his father was killed fighting the forces of the mighty Lord Shingen, grew up to become a courageous samurai in Shingen's service.

About the Author

Best known for his children's books (predominantly historical fiction), Eric Haugaard is also a playwright, poet, and translator. (He enjoys reading the Icelandic saga and has translated several of the most widely read versions of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales as well as a collection of Eskimo poetry.) His first novel (*The Last Heathen*, unpublished) was written for adults, but an editor suggested that he write for young people. Haugaard read Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, and was inspired to write for young readers from that time on. He is currently working on a novel about pirates and doing translations of Japanese fairy tales.

Born in Denmark in 1923, Haugaard worked as a farm laborer in Fyn (Denmark). He moved to the U.S. as a teenager and worked as a sheepherder in Wyoming. He attended Black Mountain College and the New School for Social Research and served as a flight sergeant in the Royal Canadian Air Force. He now resides with his wife in Japan for part of the year and in Ireland (at "Toad Hall" in County Cork) the rest of the time.

Haugaard left Denmark at age 17 when his homeland was invaded by the Germans during World War II. Similarly, the protagonists of most of Haugaard's novels are young people uprooted by war. The wartime settings are diverse (from 17th-century England, in *Cromwell's Boy* to feudal Japan in *The Samurai's Tale*), but Haugaard's young central characters share common experiences and insights. Their lives are disrupted by the violence of war, but they find inner strength—often with the help of compassionate adults who teach and nurture them.

In addition to *The Samurai's Tale*, Haugaard's books include:

The Boy and the Samurai (sequel to *The Samurai's Tale*), *A Messenger for Parliament*, *Cromwell's Boy*, *The Revenge of the Forty-Seven Samurai*, *Hakon of Rugen's Saga*, and its sequel, *A Slave's Tale*, *The Rider and His Horse*, *Orphans of the Wind*, *The Little Fishes*, *The Untold Tale*, *Chase Me! Catch Nobody!*, *Leif the Unlucky*, *A Boy's Will*, *Prince Boghole*, *Prince Horrid*, and *The Story of Yuriwaka*.

Introductory Activities

Note: While it is important to help all students see connections between their own knowledge and experience and the story they are about to read, it is especially important to involve less-skilled readers in activities like those that follow. The list of activities is intended as a “menu” of choices.

Anticipation Guide

Have students rate and discuss their opinions of statements that tap themes they will meet in the novel. They should return to the guide after reading the story and discuss the statements in terms of the novel.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____
strongly agree strongly disagree

	Before	After
a. I would find fighting in a battle exciting.	_____	_____
b. Only the ambitious get ahead.	_____	_____
c. The best military leaders are compassionate.	_____	_____
d. You should accept your fate.	_____	_____
e. An enemy of my parents is an enemy of mine.	_____	_____
f. Humility is an important virtue.	_____	_____
g. There is no work not worth doing well.	_____	_____
h. Having prestige is important to me.	_____	_____
i. Your “dream” can hinder you.	_____	_____
j. Suffering builds character.	_____	_____
k. Killing is wrong.	_____	_____
l. Pride can be a fault.	_____	_____
m. Warriors and poets are very different types of men.	_____	_____
n. In the military, it is important to give your superiors unquestioning loyalty.	_____	_____
o. Love is for the young.	_____	_____
p. Young people are more resilient than older people.	_____	_____

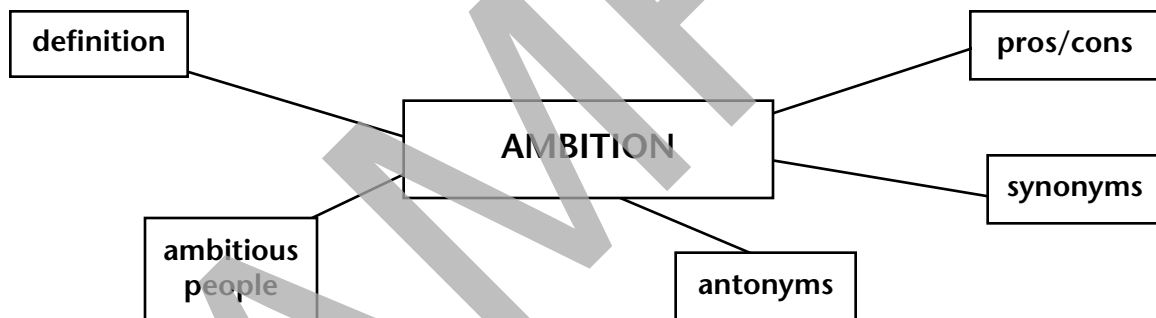
Verbal Scales

After students finish a section of the novel, have them rate their feelings/judgments about Taro, Lord Shingen, other characters, or the story in general, using the scales below. Students should discuss their ratings, using evidence from the story.

Like	1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6	Dislike
Trustworthy	1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6	Untrustworthy
Resourceful	1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6	Helpless
Selfless	1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6	Self-centered
Ambitious	1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6	Unambitious
Fearless	1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6	Frightened
Kind	1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6	Cruel
Brave	1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6	Cowardly
Quick-witted	1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6	Slow-witted
Humane leader	1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6	Brutal leader
Fast-paced	1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6	Slow-going

Brainstorming

Have students generate associations with a theme that is central to the story—such as AMBITION—while you or a student scribe jots the free associations around the central word or statement on a large piece of paper. Help students “cluster” the ideas into categories. A sample framework is shown below.



Role Play

Have small groups of students improvise skits about the following situations.

- Your first job as a waiter/waitress is not exactly the one you would have chosen. You’ve never had to wait on anyone before in your life. Now you find that if you want to keep your job—and get promoted later—you not only have to serve others, but also remember that even the rude customer is “always right.”
- You are working at a Baskin-Robbins. Every time you turn around people you know come in and try to bribe you into giving them some free ice cream.
- You are saying good-bye to your best friend—whom you know you may very well never see again.

Tell students to read on and see how characters in the story react in similar situations.

Using Predictions in the Novel Unit Approach

We all make predictions as we read—little guesses about what will happen next, how a conflict will be resolved, which details will be important to the plot, which details will help fill in our sense of a character. Students should be encouraged to predict, to make sensible guesses as they read the novel.

As students work on their predictions, these discussion questions can be used to guide them: What are some of the ways to predict? What is the process of a sophisticated reader's thinking and predicting? What clues does an author give to help us make predictions? Why are some predictions more likely to be accurate than others?

Create a chart for recording predictions. This could be either an individual or class activity. As each subsequent chapter is discussed, students can review and correct their previous predictions about plot and characters as necessary.

Use the facts and ideas the author gives.

Use your own prior knowledge.

Apply any new information (i.e., from class discussion) that may cause you to change your mind.

Predictions:

Attribute Web

The attribute web below will help you gather clues the author provides about a character in the novel. Fill in the blanks with words and phrases which tell how the character acts and looks, as well as what the character says and what others say about him or her.

Acts

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Feels

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Character

Looks

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Says

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Writing Idea

Murakami enjoys hearing Aki's father mention her, although he probably wouldn't ask about her directly. Imagine (or remember) a conversation you have had where you have tried to get information about a third party—or some other subject—without asking directly. Write the **dialogue**.

Chapters 26-30, pages 182-211

Summary

Murakami sent Aki-hime love poetry, though she was much more high-born than he. Her father Lord Zakoji, implied that someday a match might be made between the two. Murakami was invited on some hunting parties by Lord Akiyama, who seemed a changed man since his marriage. Lord Zakoji became a priest and Aki was expected to spend her time in prayer, but Lord Akiyama promised to talk to Zakoji as Murakami's go-between. Murakami was saddened to learn that his friend Yoshitoki had been killed in battle. Lord Shingen died and his opponents made their move on Iwamura Castle. Lord Akiyama asked Murakami if he were willing to try to escape from the castle, now under siege by Oda's army, and go to Kofuchu; Murakami agreed, saying he was not afraid to die.

Vocabulary

deigned (184)
consternation (199)
vanquished (205)
foray (210)

soothsayers (187)
harassed (202)
repose (207)
crucify (211)

impropriety (195)
zither (202)
impregnable (208)

ambitious (195)
hermitage (203)
bushi (209)

Discussion Questions

1. Do you have any questions about the decisions any of the characters have made—e.g., Zakoji's decision to become a priest, or Murakami's decision to try to escape from the castle?
2. Why did Murakami write poetry for Aki-hime? (*He was in love with her and wanted to explain something about himself and his feelings; direct conversation would not have been acceptable.*) Do you think the poetry had the intended effect? Would you ever write a poem for someone?
3. Who supported a match between Murakami and Aki-hime? (*Yoichi encouraged it; Wada Kansuke seemed tolerant; Lord Zakoji implied that a future match was possible.*) What obstacle stood in the way of such a match? (*Aki-hime was more high-born than Murakami.*)
4. How did Lord Akiyama change? (*He grew "mellower"—arranged hunting parties, engaged in youthful pursuits.*) What were explanations various people had for these changes? (*Many said he was acting like a man in love.*) What did Murakami and Wada Kansuke mean by all of their talk about flaming houses and trees (p. 197)? (*They were bantering about relative merits of being old and being young; Wada Kansuke felt that older people in love were usually more sensible and enduring—but that maybe Akiyama's behavior could be explained by his understanding that many of the young men who served him would die soon.*)
5. How did Yoshitoki die? (*in battle at Nagashino, aiding Katsuyori*) How did Murakami react? (*He couldn't speak, held back tears.*) Why do you think the author had Murakami's best friend die?
6. What was the immediate effect of Lord Shingen's death? (*His son took over and started an attack on his enemies.*)

-
7. Why didn't the Oda army, which outnumbered Akiyama's, simply attack the castle at Iwamura? Didn't their guns put them at an advantage? (*The guns weren't very accurate and Akiyama's best archers were in the castle.*)
 8. How and why did Lord Akiyama ask Murakami to risk his life after the castle fell under siege? (*Akiyama asked Murakami to leave the castle and deliver letters to his father and to Katsuyori, asking for help.*) Do you think Murakami made the right decision when he said he would go to Kofuchu?
 9. Murakami said he was not afraid to die. Do you believe him?
 10. **Prediction:** Will Murakami have any "close calls" as he makes his way to Kofuchu? Will he bring back help?

Literary Analysis: Simile

Explain that a **simile** is a figure of speech in which a similarity between two essentially unlike objects is directly expressed, using the words *like* or *as*. For example: "red *as* blood." Direct students to the simile on page 187: "...his face was pale like a winter moon." How does this simile help the reader imagine Lord Akiyama's appearance? What other similes has Haugaard used throughout the story?

Writing Idea

Have students write their own versions of similes they find in the story. For example:

- p. 19 hair as green as...
- p. 27 voice as soft as...
- p. 33 he swelled like a...
- p. 72 tired as a couple of...
- p. 144 everyone running around like...

Chapters 31-34, pages 212-234

Summary

Traveling in the dark, allowing himself no rest, Murakami delivered the messages to Akiyama's father and to Katsuyori, who denied the request for aid. Meanwhile, the castle fell and Murakami returned to find that his master, Lord Akiyama, had been crucified, but his servant Yoichi and his beloved Aki had survived. Together Murakami, Aki, and Yoichi made their way to safety in Kofuchu.

Vocabulary

ramparts (212)	kimono (213)	cumbersome (216)	engulfed (217)
stark (218)	countered (221)	disdainfully (222)	beacons (222)
itinerant (223)	furrowed (227)	aspen (227)	grotesque (231)
humiliate (232)	gullible (232)	dilapidated (233)	

Discussion Questions

1. Do you have any questions about what motivated the characters in this part to act as they did?
2. When did Murakami and Aki-hime first speak to each other? (*right before Murakami left the castle*) What did they say? (*He told her of his love; she said she would pray for his success.*) Have you ever known someone through letters or e-mail before you actually spoke to them?