

# Japan and the Gun

Japan has a long history of fighting wars. Most of these wars were civil wars – wars between people in the country. About 10% of Japanese people were soldiers. These soldiers were called samurai.

The samurai worked for a lord. A lord was like a small king. There were many lords in Japan. Lords decided the taxes, the laws, and other important decisions. There were lords in Europe, too. (This is where we get the word “landlord.”) The lords often made their samurai fight other lords’ samurai. The samurai fought with swords (see picture).



A samurai with a gun

In 1543 some *traders* from Europe brought the first guns to Japan. They were not very good. The guns were expensive, heavy, and didn’t work in the rain. But it was easy to kill people with them. Soon they were making guns all around Japan. They also *improved* the guns. By the 1600s, Japan had more guns than all of Europe. Japanese guns could also shoot in the rain.



A samurai sword

There was a big civil war in Japan. Thousands of Japanese people killed each other with guns. But now it wasn’t only samurai. The farmers used guns to fight in the civil war. Sometimes a poor farmer killed a famous samurai. This made the samurai very unhappy.

It took samurai many years to learn to fight with a sword. It took just a few hours to learn to shoot a gun. With a sword, you had to be very close to someone to kill them. You also had to be a better fighter. With a gun, you could be far away from the person you fight. And you didn’t have to be very good. You could kill someone if you were lucky – or if they were unlucky.

Soon there was a new king of Japan. He used to be a lord, but he used guns to kill other lords’ farmers and samurai. The new king wanted to destroy all the guns. He didn’t want other lords to kill him. The samurai also wanted to destroy all the guns. They wanted to go back to killing people up close with swords. They weren’t afraid of getting killed by a samurai’s sword, but they didn’t want to get killed by farmers with guns.

The new king said he wanted to build a giant statue of Buddha (see picture). Buddha was an important person to Japanese people. The king said he needed the metal from everyone’s guns to make the statue. He took almost all the guns away. After that, Japan went back to swords for hundreds of years.



A statue of Buddha

## Vocabulary

1. *traders* – noun – People who buy, sell and trade things.
2. *improve* – verb – To make something better.

## Questions

1. How are guns different from swords? How are they the similar to swords?



2. Who were the samurai? Why did guns make them unhappy?

3. Why did the king want to destroy guns? What did he do?

4. Was life with guns better for the farmers?

5. Is it possible to get rid of guns in America today? Would it be a good idea?

6. In Japan, many farmers worked to pay for the samurai. The samurai could kill farmers if they wanted to. Was there anything like this in your country?