

**CALIFORNIA CONTENT
STANDARD 7.5.5***Literature, Drama, and
Art in Japan*

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE: Study the ninth and tenth centuries' golden age of literature, art, and drama and its lasting effects on culture today, including Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji*.

Read the summaries to answer the questions on the next page.

Literature

Once the writing system from China came to Japan, the move from oral to written literature began. The first works, written in the seventh century, recorded Japan's history and mythology. In the eighth century, a collection of poetry was produced, entitled *Manyoshu*.

During the Heian period (794–1185), the golden age of Japanese literature, the world's first novel was written by Murasaki Shikibu, a lady-in-waiting at the court of Kyoto. *The Tale of the Genji* follows one character through many episodes in his life. The novel not only shows the values of the age in which it was written, but it also conveys universal themes.

Drama

Early Japanese drama was based on Chinese forms. Later, these forms combined with Shinto rituals to create a more complex drama.

By the 14th century, a type of drama called *No* was being performed. *No* has male actors who wear masks to show different characters and emotions. The plays are often based on legends and folktales and rely on symbolism. The theater in which *No* takes place is specifically designed for that purpose and cannot be used for any other type of performance.

Kabuki started in the 17th century. This is less formal than *No* but is also performed only by male actors. The dance and music are dramatic. Actors wear elaborate costumes and heavy makeup. *Kabukis* are often about common people.

Art

Brush painting began in the seventh century in Japan. Artists used animal-hair brushes and ink. Calligraphy, or beautiful writing, was a sign of artistic talent. Many of the paintings reflect the Japanese love of simplicity and nature.

Ikebana, the art of flower arranging, came from China but became Japanese in character. There are various styles of ikebana. Most reflect a love of harmony and appreciation for nature's beauty.



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DIRECTIONS: Choose the letter of the *best* answer.

- 1** The Japanese written tradition began when
 - A** Murasaki Shikibu wrote the first novel.
 - B** the first anthology of poems was produced.
 - C** the Chinese system of writing was introduced.
 - D** the golden age of literature occurred.

- 2** Which statement *best* expresses the significance of *The Tale of Genji*?
 - A** It was a novel written by a woman, and it showed what life was like during the Heian period.
 - B** It was the first novel ever written and helped to establish Japanese literary traditions.
 - C** It explored several themes and was not just a collection of tales.
 - D** It was the first work to be written using the writing system borrowed from China.

- 3** Japanese works of art often show
 - A** an appreciation of nature.
 - B** a focus on religious subjects.
 - C** an emphasis on material wealth.
 - D** strict imitation of Chinese styles.

“How lovely,” cried Genji, “are those distances half-lost in haze, and that blur of shimmering woods that stretches out on every side. How could anyone be unhappy for a single instant who lived in such a place?”

—Lady Murasaki Shikibu from *The Tale of Genji*, translated by Arthur Waley.

- 4** A theme conveyed by the excerpt is that
 - A** the beauty of nature can help raise people’s spirits.
 - B** more people should visit Japan.
 - C** it is important to help conserve nature.
 - D** new places are always more interesting than familiar ones.

- 5** What is a similarity between *No* and *Kabuki*?
 - A** They were both developed in the 14th century.
 - B** They are both performed by men and women.
 - C** They are both intended to entertain the upper class.
 - D** They are both enjoyed by audiences today.