

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  
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# さんぱち の にっき

Sampachi no nikki.

## The Diary of Sam Patch

By Nicole Bieber

# 舟

Dear *ja-naru*,

July 8,

1853

As our long journey across the Pacific Ocean draws to a close, I am now finally able to catch a glimpse of my beloved homeland for the first time in several years. For ever since I was shipwrecked on the California shores, I have hoped that I might see Japan again yet have known in my heart that I would not. This plight was due to the widely held fear of the *gaijin* in my native country, a fear which I too shared in until circumstance allowed me no choice but to abandon it. Considering it is the very *gaijin* I once feared who have now provided me with the means to return to a nation which otherwise might have rejected me, I suppose I must conclude that we have not much to fear after all. On the other hand, with great black ships like this which glide across the water without sails, it is easy to understand why my people might be afraid. Perhaps it would be best if I began my tale with a brief explanation of who I am and how I came to be a Japanese sailor on an American ship.

*Watashi wa Sampachi desu.* That means "My name is Sampachi" in Japanese, my native language. However, everybody I've met since I was shipwrecked long ago has called me Sam Patch; I suppose they find it easier to say. At first that bothered me a bit, but I soon learned that the issue of name pronunciation would be the least of my concerns in this strange new land. For the land in which I have spent the last several years in my life appeared very strange indeed when fate first brought me to its shores.

I was born nearly thirty years ago in the bustling port of Edo, where I knew from a young age that I wanted to sail upon the open seas. As soon as I was old enough I began my career as a sailor, and made many a successful journey before the fateful day when a dreadful storm cast me and a few of my crewmates adrift upon the vast Pacific waters. We were very frightened, and many of my close friends were lost that day, a fact that saddens me still, but a few of us were washed up onto the shores of an unfamiliar land. As the people attempted to communicate with us in a foreign tongue and did not bow in greeting, we quickly began to realize what had occurred. We had landed in the forbidden West, and our people would never accept us into our homeland again. I was distraught at this prospect, but I eventually came to accept what I had to do: I would become *Amerika-jin*.

I was without any alternative, alone in a strange new land, where I did not speak the language or hold knowledge of the customs. I knew that my only chance of survival would be to adapt completely and totally to my new environment; to assimilate myself into American society. Ironically enough, it is this decision to become *Amerika-jin* that has now permitted me to return to my homeland, something I never believed possible on that fateful day when I awoke upon the California shores.

The situation came about quite unexpectedly; I was conversing with a few of my American sailor friends when I heard mention of a journey being commissioned by President Fillmore to my long-forgotten home. I doubted such a voyage would succeed, but my curiosity soon got the best of me. Naturally, I volunteered to assist the voyage with both my sailing skills and knowledge of the Japanese language. It is because of this good fortune that I now sit on the deck of the flagship Mississippi, catching my first glimpses in many years of the land of the rising sun.

Sayonara,  
さんばち

陸 Dear *ja-naru*,  
1854

April 1,

Half a year has passed since our voyage first arrived at my homeland with the intent of "opening" it to the possibility of trade with the *gaijin*. After we docked near my birthplace at Edo Bay, I accompanied Commodore Perry and several of the other men who sailed with us in an attempt to deliver a letter from President Fillmore to the Emperor. However, the Commodore refused to go to Nagasaki to deliver the letter, as much as I would have liked to go, and so our party never did have a chance to see the emperor in person. Instead, we delivered Fillmore's *gansho* to Toda Izu, the governor of Uraga. I was somewhat disappointed at not being able to see the emperor, but at the same time I was overjoyed at being permitted to return to my homeland and leave again with my life intact. Had I arrived alone, without a large party of *Amerika-jin* backed by intimidating black ships that moved like ghosts across the water, I would have never been permitted to return home again.

Yet return and leave I did, as I was originally only permitted to remain in Japan for a short time. After delivering our important *gansho* to the trusted messenger, we vacated the area and remained near China for several months in order to allow the Emperor to make up his mind. Those months were filled with great anticipation for me and my few fellow Japanese crewmates, as we waited anxiously to return to our homeland once more. Originally, Commodore Perry had planned to give the Emperor a year to consider the President's requests, but rumors of foreign missions similar to our own motivated us to return sooner, a decision which pleased me very much.

We set sail again in February, and since our arrival many negotiations have ensued between my new people and my old people. Yesterday was a particularly momentous day in history, as the Treaty of Kanagawa was finally signed by both parties involved. This treaty provided for the opening of the port at Shimoda to the *Amerika-jin*, which hopefully means that I shall be permitted to come and go as I please. I am looking

forward to visiting Shimoda very much, which is fortunate because we are to travel there soon.

Sayonara,

さんばち

町 Dear *ja-naru*,  
1854

April 18,

Now that the port of Shimoda has been opened, we are free to enter the country as long as we do not approach Edo again; it seems my people are still determined to keep their capital city free of *gaijin*. However, that issue has not stopped the Americans and Japanese from mingling here in Shimoda, and many interesting interactions have occurred between the two cultures. For the most part, my people have seemed very intrigued by these newcomers with their strange ways, and the American sailors I arrived with seem to be enjoying Japan. At times, the cultural exchange has been a bit difficult - I saw one of my fellow sailors attempting to ingest hair oil because he thought the Japanese vendor was telling him a drink! But, for the most part things have gone relatively smoothly, perhaps more so than I expected.

I must still make the decision as to whether I shall return to America or remain in Japan. I would like to stay very much, but I feel that my long stay in America has almost made me more *Amerika-jin* than *Nihon-jin*. With my knowledge of English and American customs, I am not sure that my fellow Japanese will accept me once the presence of Commodore Perry and his fleet is but a mere memory. Surely the Americans will continue to send ships to Shimoda, but should I choose to return to Edo, the city of my birth, I might face discrimination or even death, just as I would have before the Treaty of Kanagawa was signed. However, it does one no good to dwell upon sad things, so I think I shall attempt to put this issue out of my mind until the time comes to make a decision. Until then, I shall enjoy my stay in Japan, my homeland: the land of the rising sun.

Sayonara,

さんばち

## Glossary of Japanese Terms

*Amerika-jin*  
*gaijin*  
*gansho*  
*ja-naru*  
*Nihon-jin*

American  
foreigner  
letter  
journal  
Japanese

sayonara  
Watashi wa Sampachi desu.  
舟 (fune)  
陸 (riku)  
町 (machi)  
さんぱち (Sampachi)

goodbye  
My name is Sam Patch.  
ship  
land  
town  
Sam Patch