# JAPAN: Places, Images, Times & Transformations

Suggestions for the Middle and High School Classroom

# Japanese Writing System I - Hiroshi Nara

* **Objectives:**
  + Understand how and why the kanji system was adopted in Japan.
  + Identify other writing systems used in Japan today and their historical use.
  + Analyze the development of Japan’s writing systems
* **Suggested Units for Inclusion:**
  + Social Studies or Japanese units that explore the relationship between Japan and China.
  + Social Studies units that explore the development of languages and their writing systems.
  + ELA units that explore the evolution of language, the development of writing systems or how meaning is conveyed through writing systems.
  + Japanese units that introduce hiragana, katakana, or kanji.
* **Lesson Ideas:**
  + 1. Individual Research Homework
    - Students can be assigned the *study questions* or *develop questions for the class to discuss*
  + 2. Writing System Project
    - Students could be tasked with creating their own writing system for English. Students should decide what kind of writing system they will make (Syllabic vs Logographic) and translate a predetermined passage into the writing system they development. Students should also justify the decisions they make through a paper or journal.
  + 3. Compare and Contrast
    - Students can compare and contrast the development of the Japanese writing systems to changes they see happening in the English language.
* **Study Questions:**
  + What is the significance of the Chinese gold seal found in Fukuoka?
  + According to the *Kojiki*, who brought kanji over from China? When? To whom was kanji taught?
  + Who were the kenzuishi and the kentoshi? Why did they need to study kanji? What did they bring back to Japan with them?
  + What happened to the meaning of Chinese kanji when they were first used to transcribe Japanese mora?
  + If you were to read the *Man’yōshū* in its original language, what difficulties would you have? What would you have to know to fully understand everything in this writing?
  + What two other writing systems were created in the Heian period?
  + Who originally used katakana? What was katakana used for? Who originally used hiragana?
  + What are these writing systems used for today?
  + Why do some kanji have more than one reading?