

YOKOHAMA BOOMTOWN CURRICULUM

(From *Visualizing Cultures*)

Foreigners in Treaty-Port Japan (1859–1872)

John W. Dower Lynn Parisi, and Meredith Changeux
Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002–2009

Reviewed by Alejandro Echevarria

The creators of the *Yokohama Boomtown* Web site, John W. Dower and Shigeru Miyagawa, describe *Visualizing Cultures* as units that wed “images and scholarly commentary in innovative ways to illuminate social and cultural history.” To date, twenty units are online for students and scholars to explore topics that range from the Canton trade system to Hiroshima’s “Ground Zero” and the atomic bomb.

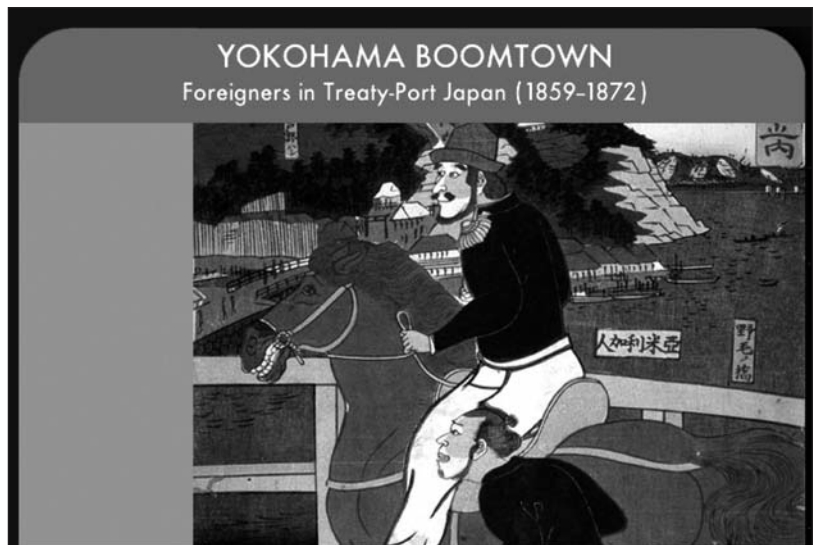
To get a grasp on the *Yokohama Boomtown* unit, first visit the “Black Ships and Samurai” unit. This unit provides fascinating visual images of two cultures making first contact. These two cultures, Japanese and American, each created images portraying the other from the subsequent encounters when Commodore Perry brought his Black Ships to Edo Bay. *Yokohama Boomtown* can be seen as part two of this encounter when both cultures, and the other nations that followed, began to interact and assume a sense of familiarity with each other. *Yokohama Boomtown* is different from the Black Ships unit, as it only gives the visual images from Japan’s perspective. The medium used for all of the images is woodblocks. To understand the medium in its historical context, read the essay entitled “Boomtown” by Dower.

The prints from *Yokohama Boomtown* came out at a time of civil unrest when the phrase *Sonno Joi* (“expel the foreigners, revere the emperor”) was used by rebel samurai who opposed the reigning government of the shogun. However, these prints do not portray the foreigners as objects of contempt, but rather as curiosities with amusing habits and customs. Japanese culture during this period shows that political unrest was seemingly disconnected from the lives of the common people who consumed these prints.

Using *Yokohama Boomtown* or other units from *Visualizing Cultures* may initially seem daunting, but it is worth the time to learn to navigate through the extensive essays and image database. Most of the units are constructed similarly, making it easy for the user to become familiar with navigation quickly.

Yokohama Boomtown is a remarkable unit that can enhance a world history course in secondary and post-secondary settings. I have used many of these units in my classroom, and the students have found that the images provide visual anchors that reinforce the curriculum. It is best for students to interact with the images through a guided lesson that allows them to go more deeply into the images than they would by merely viewing and discussing them.

Lynn Parisi and Meredith Changeux, curriculum developers and outreach coordinators from Teaching East Asia (TEA), created seven lessons to accompany *Yokohama Boomtown*. Parisi is also responsible for developing other curriculum units in *Visualizing Cultures*. Each of



Yokohama Boomtown at <http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/yokohama/index.html>.

the seven lessons provide an introduction, objectives that can be linked to the National Center for History in the Schools Standards, time requirements, materials and preparation, and easy to follow procedures. Each lesson provides teacher’s notes, printable directions for students, and printable worksheets. Look under the top toolbar for “curriculum” to access these lessons. Any teacher who has worked with curriculum materials created by TEA under the guidance of Parisi will know that they are easy for the teacher to plan, yet sufficiently challenging for the students.

The *Yokohama Boomtown* curriculum is meant to challenge students and stimulate reflection. It provides Document-based Questions (DBQs) for analysis, organization, and synthesis to support AP, IB, and world history curricula at the secondary level. Group and individual lessons help students reflect and share knowledge they gain. Most importantly, the lessons guide students toward introspection by questioning how they view others and themselves in the context of cultural interaction. My two favorite lessons are “What Did It Mean To Be “Western?” (Lesson 5) and “An Investigation into the Historiography of *Yokohama Boomtown*: How Does History Change When New Perspectives Are Discovered?” (Lesson 6). The titles of both tell you that the students will reach a deeper understanding of perspective and historical awareness.

Before picking your favorite lessons to use with *Yokohama Boomtown*, either summarize the essays written by Dower to the class, or better yet, divide the six essays into jigsaw groups and/or presentations. Be sure to have an LCD projector for each group to show the images in Dower’s essay to the class. To conclude and assess the student’s knowledge, I recommend using Lesson 7, “DBQ: The Changing Relationship between Japan and the West.” Finding extensive documents for “first contact” and the interaction that follows is very rare for the historian. *Yokohama Boomtown* provides the documents and supporting lessons that are invaluable for the teacher. It is available online at <http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/yokohama/index.html>. ■

ALEJANDRO ECHEVARRIA is a History teacher in the International Baccalaureate Program at Rampart High School in Colorado Springs. He was a 2007 recipient of the Elgin Heinz Outstanding Teaching Award from the US-Japan Foundation.